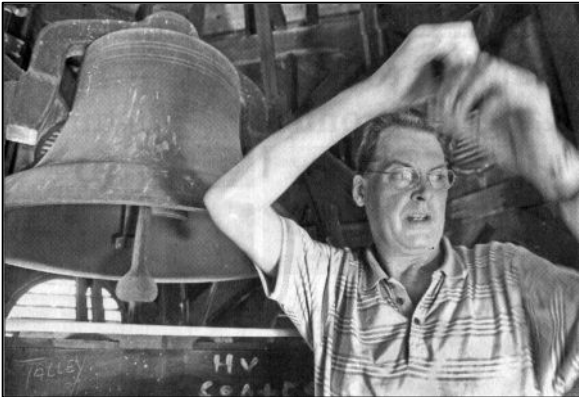


CLOCK REPAIRMAN TENDS TO TOWERING TIMEPIECES

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — It's said that Father Time inexorably marches on.

In the rare instances that it doesn't, Knoxville's Mike Carpenter is available to get it moving again.

Carpenter, a 1983 graduate of Farragut High School who went on to play college basketball at Arkansas and Minnesota, is one of only 80 certified master clockmakers in the country.



(Pictured: Mike Carpenter, with Carpenter's Clock Repair, works in the bell tower of the old County Courthouse in Knoxville).

At 7 feet, 2 inches, Carpenter is also likely the tallest clock repairman on the planet.

"There may be one (taller) — over in Switzerland," said Carpenter, half joking.

But Carpenter, who owns Carpenter Clock Repair in Bearden's Colony Square Shopping Center, takes his work seriously.

His specialty is repairing fine mechanical timepieces, and he's among the last of a thinning breed.

On a Monday morning, Carpenter scaled three steel ladders and negotiated a maze of wooden attic planks leading to the Knox County courthouse tower downtown.

His prize, which has ticked and chimed for about 125 years, awaited him at the top.

Perched in the courthouse tower is a rare 1886 Seth Thomas clock - considered a Cadillac of existing mechanical timepieces.

Carpenter, who has worked on the courthouse clock for the last 15 years, was there to perform routine maintenance on the masterpiece.

But Carpenter said there's nothing routine about the Seth Thomas clock, which he said was installed in the courthouse between 1887 and 1888.

Seth Thomas was considered a pioneer mass production clockmaker at his Connecticut factory from 1807-1859

"It's a serious clock. How they got that bell up there, I have no idea," said Carpenter, who was exposed to the business when his mother, Mary Carpenter, opened a timepiece shop on Kingston Pike in 1975.

"It's a four-ton bell with a 13-foot pendulum that weighs 300 pounds. The time weight is 600 pounds."

Once plentiful, the courthouse Seth Thomas clock is one of the few mechanical timepieces of its ilk that's still operational, said Carpenter.

The clock has been hand-wound twice a week for the last eight years by Public Building Authority maintenance worker Joe Harris.

"Historically, every town once had them," said Carpenter.

"This is the last one in the area. That's why it's important to keep it in its original state. We're trying to keep this last historical clock from getting electrified."

The courthouse clock is just one of many unique timepieces that Carpenter, a graduate of the American Watchmakers-Clockmakers Institute in Ohio, has worked on.

Carpenter has worked on clocks at the Mabry-Hazen House, the University of Tennessee Faculty Club, Ramsey House and the Fontana Dam visitors center.

The oldest clock that Carpenter has worked on was built in 1680.

He worries where the next generation of mechanical clock repairmen will come from. And obviously, he's concerned if anyone will be around to fix venerable timepieces like the courthouse's Seth Thomas.

That's one reason that Carpenter had 16-year-old Michael Hayes in tow on Monday.

Hayes has just started a six-year apprenticeship under Carpenter to learn how to fix clocks.

"Mike loves it and he learns quick," said Carpenter.

"The way things are going, clock repair is a dying profession. Every year, it seems the membership of the guild diminishes. My goal is to teach the profession to someone younger. They (clocks) are gonna be around a lot longer than we are."



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