

Life and Times of the GMK-Fancher Clock Company

by Randy Jaye (FL)

1979–1987



I purchased a beautiful Torrington Model 107 floor clock (left) made by the GMK-Fancher Clock Company (hereafter GMKF) for my personal collection because I was impressed with the craftsmanship of the case and the quality and accuracy of its movement. I searched for information about the company, but it was soon apparent that very little information exists about GMKF. I did discover that it was no longer in business, which made me even more determined to find information. Fortunately, I was able to contact a former GMKF vice-president, L. Bruce Erickson, and he provided valuable information and answered several questions about the company. I learned that GMKF was a North American company that specialized in the design and manufacture of quality handcrafted clocks, but they were only in business for eight years, from 1979 to 1987.

A Business Idea Comes to Fruition

GMKF started in the mid-1970s as a business venture that would specialize in designing and building handcrafted grandfather, grandmother, wall, bracket, mantel, and regulator clocks in North America. This plan focused on making heirloom quality clocks with the same attention to detail that only master craftsmen of past centuries possessed. The only way this idea could develop into a successful business was to provide

high-quality handcrafted clocks that would appeal to admirers of fine furniture, the public, and clock collectors.

Two major competitive forces during the 1970s challenged this business idea. (1) There was emerging competition from inexpensive, lesser-quality clocks made abroad in Korea and Japan and imported into North America. (2) There were several established, well-known clock companies (e.g., Howard Miller,¹ Seth Thomas,² Ridgeway,³ and Sligh⁴) already in the marketplace. A new clock company starting up in the 1970s was an arduous effort. After several years of preparation and negotiation, GMK-Fancher Clock Co., Inc., was founded on November 23, 1979. The company was co-owned by the GMK Clock Company,⁵ located at 428 Gage Avenue, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, and the Fancher Chair Co., Inc.,⁶ located in Falconer, NY. Both companies owned 50 percent of the shares. The company founding officers were: C. Leonard Erickson, chairman; George Mueck, president; John Elsen, secretary/treasurer; Bruce Clark, vice-president of finance; and Brian Erickson, vice-president of sales. GMK stands for George-Gottfried-Mueck-Kieninger (Figure 2).

GMKF operated from the plant and office facilities of the Fancher Furniture Co., Inc.,⁷ 100 Rochester Street, Salamanca, NY. The clock cases for GMKF were made by Fancher Furniture, which had about 180 employees. GMKF also shared a showroom with the Fancher Furniture Company, at 200 North Hamilton Street in High Point, NC. The Fancher Furniture Co., Inc., was established as a fine furniture maker.

Handcrafted Clock Cases and Kieninger Movements

Quality clock movements were imported from the Kieninger Clock Company GMBH,⁸ located in the Black Forest region of Germany, and fitted into the intricately designed and manufactured wooden clock cases made by the Fancher Furniture Co. GMKF and Kieninger executives made a commitment to high standards of workmanship and superb quality. The combination of handcrafted clock cases with intricate designs and quality Kieninger movements made the new GMKF company a force to be reckoned with in the clockmaking industry.

The company completed its first 800 clocks by June 15, 1980. Projected sales in October 1981 were 1,200 clocks for the United States, 1,200 clocks for Germany, and 1,000 clocks for Canada.⁹



Figure 2, above. GMKF and Kieninger partnership, standing from left to right: Brian F. Erickson, GMKF vice-president of sales and director; George Mueck, GMKF president and director; Freider Kieninger of the Kieninger Clock Company. Seated is Joseph Kieninger (Freider's father), who was managing director of the Kieninger Clock Company at that time GMKF was in business. Note: Freider later succeeded his father as managing director.

Figure 1, above. GMKF floor clock Torrington Model 107.

GMKF designed and marketed new clock models with features that they believed could fit into any home or office. Examples of fine GMKF floor clocks include the Auburn (Figure 3) and the Essex (Figure 6) models. A nice example of a small bracket clock built by the company is the Claridge model (Figure 8).

GMKF's Collection of Twelve Heirloom Floor Clock Models

Leicester Model 101-C: Cherry veneers and solids with "Olive Ash Burl Accents"

Eastbourne Model 102-C: Cherry veneers and solids with "Olive Ash Burl Accents"

Salzburg Model 103-C: Cherry veneers and solids with "Olive Ash Burl Accents"

Oxford Model 104-C: Cherry veneers and solids with "Olive Ash Burl Accents"

Shenandoah Model 105-C: Cherry veneers and solids with "Inlay and Brass Accents"

Lafayette Model 202-O: Oak veneers and solids

Innsbruck Model 203-O: Oak veneers and solids

Melrose Model 301-M: Mahogany veneers and solids with "Inlay and Brass Accents"

Devon Model 302-M: Mahogany veneers and solids with "Burl Overlays"

Diplomat Model 304-M: Mahogany veneers with "Brass Accents"

Beaufort Model 401-W: Walnut veneers and solids with "Inlay and Brass Accent"

Canberra Model 601-R: Rosewood veneers and cherry solids with "Inlay and Brass Accents"

Special paint finishes were added in the subsequent years. Other special features available on the following models were sold in limited numbers (mostly to collectors):

Model 102: "Gold Trim"

Model 103: "Marble"

Model 104: "Hand-Painted Raised Chinoiserie"¹⁰

GMKF's Limited Edition Floor Clock Models

Considering examples of the high standard of craftsmanship during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Marty Pratt, Brian Erickson, and George Mueck teamed up and designed the "The Victoria Registered Limited Edition—MC-MLXXX." This clock's production run of 500 units quickly sold (many prior to their official release).

Other limited edition models included the Imperial Model 305M and The Prince Albert Registered Limited Edition. GMKF also made two models of Vienna Regulators.

Early 1980s

Company Reorganization

By February 1982 Bruce Clark had resigned as a director and was replaced on the board by L. Bruce Erickson. On September 7, 1982, L. Bruce Erickson was also elected vice-president of sales and replaced Howard Schickendanz, who had resigned. By 1983 the Fancher Chair Co., Inc. became the sole shareholder of GMKF. On March 16, 1984, the company meeting minutes record shows the following were elected officers: C. L. Erickson, chairman; Brian F. Erickson, president; L. Bruce Erickson, vice-president; and John F. Elsen, secretary and treasurer.



Figure 3. Auburn floor clock from the 1986 GMKF catalog. No. GMKF-209-0. Width 25-1/4", depth 14-1/4", height 82-1/4". Oak veneers. Beveled glass. Solid brass moon dial. Kieninger KSU Movement with the 270 Lyre. Style available only in oak. GMK-Fancher Clock Company, Inc. Salamanca, New York.

The Mid-1980s

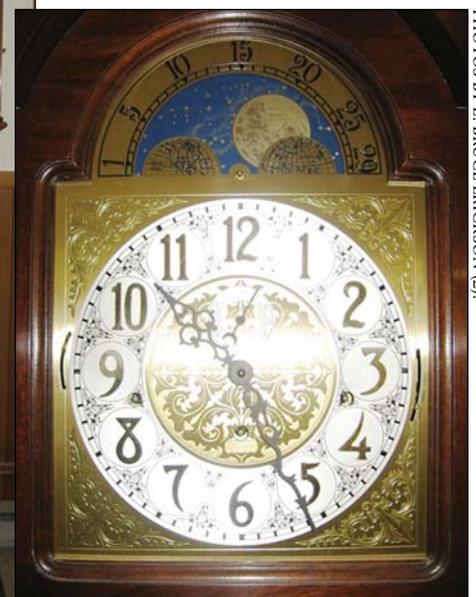
By the mid-1980s the market became increasingly soft for fine clocks, including tallcase, mantel, and bracket clocks. GMKF was unable to compete with larger competitors. A lack of business growth potential for clocks, economic conditions of the times, a lack of capitalization, and continued financial losses created a bleak outlook. As a result, a certificate of dissolution was filed on September 18, 1987, and this fine North American clock company officially went out of business.

Although sales records are no longer available, GMKF probably made more than 5,000 clocks. I've seen some of them online, at estate auctions and sales, and at NAWCC marts in recent years.



Figure 4, left. The last GMKF clock.

Figure 5, below. Dial closeup of the last GMKF clock.



PHOTOS BY L. BRUCE ERICKSON (2)

1986 GMFK CATALOG (2)



Figure 6. No. 112 Essex floor clock. Width 26-1/2", depth 14-1/2", height 84-1/3". 1986 GMFK catalog. Cherry veneers and solids. Beveled glass front and sides. Solid brass moon dial. Etched pendulum and weight shells. Kieninger KSU movement with the 270 Lyre. GMK-Fancher Clock Company, Inc., Salamanca, New York.

GMKF's
Last Clock

When the company went out of business, all of the remaining clocks were sold to dealers except the last one. This last GMKF clock¹¹ was built with leftover and mismatched parts. It does not have the

"GMK-Fancher" logo on the dial and has a different lyre and other oddities that were not part of a typical GMKF clock. L. Bruce Erickson owns this clock and currently it stands in his office, Figures 4 and 5.

APPENDIX

GMKF Clock Features as Listed in Company Literature

- The cases are oak or cherry with the cherry cases featuring burl ash overlays. All cases have coordinated brass hardware and four panels of beveled glass.
- The cases are hand rubbed.



- All Kieninger movements feature the "Automatic Beat Adjustment," from the triple chime-cable wound KSU movement to the large KSU-Nine Bell movement.
- The moving moon dials feature a "Second Bit" and "Front Shut Offs" and are of solid brass. The lyre pendulums are of solid brass.
- There are no options available; all are standard and included except for "Special Finishes" as per the Fancher Furniture Co., Inc. chart of wood and paint finishes.

"Automatic Beat Adjustment"
What is it? What does it do?

An automatic beat adjustment is an aid to reduce the setup procedures of a grandfather clock. Each movement features a slip clutch on the escapement that eliminates the past requirement of completely leveling a grandfather clock prior to starting it. (In the past if the clock was not completely level, the movement would stop running.)

Each grandfather clock is leveled only for appearance and to compensate for any unevenness in the floor. The setup is accomplished as follows:

1. Hook pendulum extension leader carefully onto the suspension spring.
2. Hang the pendulum onto the automatic pendulum extension leader. (The pendulum extension leader no longer has a thumb screw adjustment since the automatic slip clutch eliminates the need for these adjustments.)
3. Hang the three weights, always

Figure 8, left. Small bracket clock, No. 17 Claridge (14-1/4" x 7-1/4" x 11-1/4"), olive ash burl, Swiss escapement, 11 jewels, beveled glass front and side, solid brass dial, triple chime with second hand).

Figure 7. The GMKF logo was engraved on all floor clock dials.

ensuring that the cable is firmly inserted into the brass plate under the seat board.

4. To start the movement and to ensure a proper engagement of the automatic beat adjustment, move the pendulum bob within half an inch from case, either left or right, and let the pendulum fall freely. The automatic beat adjustment is now engaged.

These steps and the automatic beat adjustment do not guarantee that the clock will not stop. A stoppage can occur if the case settles into a corner of a carpet that lies on an uneven floor. If this situation should occur, the movement is again started by moving the pendulum to within half an inch from the case and letting it fall freely to reengage the automatic beat adjustment.

Movements and Dials

The Kieninger movements, the finest on the market today, are individually hand assembled. The factory maintains checking procedures after every ten parts have been hand assembled. Two qualified watchmakers make a final check of the assembled movement. The movement is then put into a test stand where it remains for 48 hours before being cartoned for shipment to the customer.

The plate size is large and thick. The thickness of the plate is important since it represents the bearing surface of the movement.

The shafts are rolled at the ends to accurate size to fit the bearings. The rolling of the shaft produces a harder and smoother finish, which in turn reduces friction during operation of the movement.

- All gears are machined and not punched out mechanically.
- There are no plastic parts in the

movements. Besides steel shafts the movements are made of solid brass.

- The KSU and the KSU-Bell movements have a front plate that is hand brushed, making it one-of-a-kind and giving it an antique and collectors' value. On the back plate they feature the year of production.

- The suspension springs are extra strong to handle light abuse. If broken, they can be replaced by removing a brass screw.

- The cams on the quarter chimes are of solid brass and nearly twice the thickness of any other movement.

- The shutoff levers for the quarter and chimes are firm and easy to set.

- The dials are especially selected by GMKF from the leading quality dial manufacturer in the Black Forest. They are of solid brass with a predrilled backplate. The dial rings are etched and include raised brass numerals. There is no plastic or silk screening on the dials. (The GMKF logo was engraved on the clock dials of all floor clocks [Figure 7].)

Styling

Styling is based on heirloom grandfather clocks produced in the United States and Europe.

Workmanship

The cases are individually hand-crafted.

- Hand-selected hardwoods with burlled overlays.

- Hand-fitted front and side doors with deep molding designs with wooden glass retainers.

- A 3/4" hardwood dial plate with deep molding depth and matched door contours to create a three-dimensional look and a touch of quality.

- Coordinated solid-brass hardware to enhance the heirloom quality and value.

- The clock crowns are of a double hardwood thickness to avoid any possible warpage or the checking of wood and finishes.

- The large side doors are mounted with brass hinges for easy access to the clock movement.

- The base box has been veneered for a perfect grain pattern and to avoid any possible warpage or the checking of wood and finishes.

- Special large foot levelers are installed from inside the case to ensure easy setups in the customers' home.

Finishes

Most furniture finishes consist of a one-step mechanical operation where stains, fillers, and finishing coats are sprayed on in one operation and roll through a drying center.

The GMKF clock cases pass through the following hand operations. They are hand sanded, filled, stained, glazed, and hand rubbed during various stages of applying coats of satin finish. The final step consists of applying a wax coat, which together produces the finest furniture finish known as "French polish."

Notes and References

1. Howard Miller Clock Company, April 14, 2006, Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howard_Miller_Clock_Company (accessed January 9, 2010).

2. Seth Thomas (Clockmaker), January 9, 2010, Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seth_Thomas_\(clockmaker\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seth_Thomas_(clockmaker)) (accessed January 9, 2010).

3. "The Ridgeway Grandfather Clock Tradition," <http://www.grandfather-clock-info.com/ridgeway-grandfather-clock.html>, 2008.

4. "What's New at Sligh?" http://www.clocksnmore.com/grandfather_clocks_sligh_main.asp, 2009.

5. George Mueck, "The GMK-Fancher Clock Company," www.fancherchair.com/GMK-FANCHER-CLOCKCOMPANY-1975to1985.pdf.

6. Jeff Linville, "Fancher Chair: Little known, 200 years old," *Furniture Today* (July 22, 2007).

7. Bruce L. and Brian F. Erickson, "A History of Fancher Furniture Co., Inc., Salamanca, New York," <http://www.fancherchair.com/FancherFurnitureCompany-History.pdf>, 2005.

8. "The Kieninger Clock Company History," <http://www.horology-stuff.com/clocks/makes/kieninger.html>, 2009.

9. George Mueck, "The GMK-Fancher Clock Company," www.fancherchair.com/GMK-FANCHER-CLOCKCOMPANY-1975to1985.pdf.

10. Chinoiserie, 2010, in Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Chinoiserie> (accessed January 9, 2010).

11. Bruce L. Erickson, "Re: A few questions for you regarding the GMK-Fancher Clock Company," personal email, December 4, 2009.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to L. Bruce Erickson, former vice-president of the GMK-Fancher Clock Company, for photographs, information provided, and questions he answered for me during the writing of this article. All photographs are courtesy of the author unless otherwise noted.

About the Author

Randy Jaye has master's and bachelor's degrees from the California State University and currently owns and operates an independent business systems consulting company. In the mid-1990s he became interested in wristwatch collecting after inheriting a vintage 1930s Benrus tank watch from his grandfather and restoring it. The wristwatch-collecting hobby led him directly to the NAWCC, and soon afterward he became actively involved with the organization and is currently serving as president of Chapter 154 in Daytona Beach, FL. After he was introduced to antique and vintage clocks at various NAWCC meetings and marts, he attained an appreciation and interest in all kinds of clocks. He is now an avid collector of both wristwatches and clocks. He was also the co-chair of the 2011 NAWCC Mid-Winter Regional and is currently conducting research on several horology-related subjects and preparing other articles that will be contributed to the *Watch & Clock Bulletin*.