



Thomas Harland of Norwich, Connecticut

(1735-1807)

by **Silvio A. Bedini**

There was no steady and constant market for surveyor's tools in the early eighteenth century. So there were few, if any, who were able to make their living solely by the production of surveying compasses. Instead, many of the earliest makers of surveying compasses in the American colonies were clockmakers and silversmiths who applied their skills to provide the tools of the surveyor as the need arose. Notable among these clockmakers was English-born Thomas Harland

(1735-1807), who proved to be one of the most important craftsmen in the history of clockmaking in Connecticut, producing timepieces of consistently superior workmanship.

A highly educated and well trained business man, Harland traveled in Europe after serving an apprenticeship in clockmaking in London. The poor economy in England during the period just prior to the American Revolution caused Harland to emigrate to the colonies in 1773.

Family tradition relates that he arrived in the American colonies on one of the ships bearing the tea that was destroyed by patriots in Boston. Although he had intended to settle in Boston, the prevailing political excitement in the city convinced him that it would be wise to settle elsewhere. Within a year of his arrival, he traveled to Norwich, Connecticut, where he established a clock shop with the tools he had brought with him from England.

He advertised for the first time on December 9, 1773, in the *Norwich Packet*, informing the public that "he makes in the neatest manner and on the most approved principles, horizontal, repeating, and plain watches in gold, silver, metal or covered cases, Spring, musical and plain clocks; church clocks, regulators, &c. He also cleans and repairs watches and clocks with the greatest care and dispatch, and upon reasonable terms." Among his early patrons were Nathan Hale, for whom he re-

Continued on page 67

Thomas Harland

Continued from page 60

paired a watch when Hale was on a visit to a young lady in town.

A Colonial government policy against importing English goods increased Harland's business considerably, and within the next year he employed several jewelers, adding considerably to the success of his business. In 1778, he purchased land on which he built a homestead, and the next year he married Hannah Clark. Harland continued to prosper, and in 1788 was commissioned to build a fire engine for the town. A dispute arose with a coachmaker who had constructed the wooden parts of the equipment and then claimed credit for the entire project, but Harland's claim was readily supported.

It is said that by 1790, Harland was employing as many as 10 or 12 apprentices at a time, who turned out clocks, watches and silverware. His shop produced as many as 40 clocks and 200 watches each year. In 1794, he advertised that he sold "Bailey's new and much approved Patent Steam Jack's executed under the direction of Joseph Pearsall in New York... so simple in its construction as

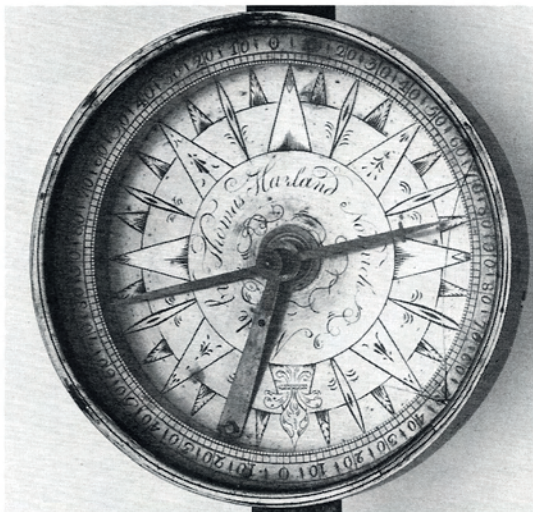
to be very little liable to injury or decay." In December of 1795, Harland's shop was totally destroyed by fire, "that destructive element was raging with such fury before it was discovered as to render all exertions for preserving any part of the building totally abortive." The loss "at a low evaluation is computed at 1500 dollars!" Although of advanced years—he was 60 at the time—he immediately re-established his shop in another building stocked chiefly with imported timepieces and silver "and American Watches."

In an advertisement in the *Norwich Courier* of February 10, 1802, he advertised his stock of clocks, watches and silverware for sale, adding for the first time that he also made and sold "Surveyors' Compasses, with agate centre needles; chains and Protractors—main springs, dial plates, fuzee-chains, pinion-wire, &c. . . .

Any of the above articles will be sold for cash, most kinds of country produce, tow-cloth, chek'd or white flannel, or a reasonable credit, as low as they can be procured elsewhere."

When Harland died in 1807, at the age of 72, the inventory of his tools was most impressive. In addition to numerous incomplete timepieces, it included "1 case mathematical instruments" valued at \$1.25. The tools were valued at \$1500, an enormous figure for that period.

Harland's importance lay in large measure in the number of apprentices he



Detail of compass dial of surveying compass made by Thomas Harland.

trained in his shop, who later were to be found in the forefront of the craft in Connecticut. Among them were Daniel Burnap, William Cleveland, Jedediah Baldwin and Benjamin Hanks.

Although many of the clocks, watches and silverware produced in Harland's shop have survived, only one of his surveying compasses has come to notice presently—a brass instrument, with an elaborately engraved compass dial having a lifting pin for the compass needle. The remainder of his legacy is impressive, for it not only includes a wealth of finely crafted clocks and other instruments, but includes as well the training of young men who later went on to make their own substantial marks on instrument making in the new nation. PS

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