

HISTORY MAKER

JOHANN LUDWIG EBERHARDT

Born: May 17, 1758, Thuringia, Germany

Died: April 10, 1839, Salem, N.C.

Known for: The “most prolific clockmaker” in North Carolina, silversmith and jeweler in early Salem.

Ludwig Eberhardt was not the first clockmaker in Salem, but more of his clocks are known to survive than any other for the time.

Salem, established for trade and business, not agriculture, relied on mechanically precise time-keeping more than most communities in the region at the time.

In 1801, Ludwig moved the town clock from its stand-alone tower to the gable of Home Moravian Church.

At the same time, he added the minute hand to the clock, which had only measured hours until then. Later, he adjusted the clock's works to strike the quarter hours as well as each hour of the day. A metalworker and jeweler as well, he created five chandeliers for the Salem church.

Born to clockmaker Johann Gottfried Eberhardt in Aim, Schwarzburg-Rudelsstadt in Thuringia in the southeastern section of Germany, he followed his father's occupation, training with him from the age of 14.

Though the family was devout Lutheran, he and at least one of his siblings became members of the Unitas Fratrum, today commonly known as the Moravians.

Seeking to expand his training, he lived in various towns, including the Moravian villages of Gnadau in 1783 as the community clockmaker and locksmith and Gnadenfeld in Silesia (part of today's Poland) where he was master of the Single Brothers' clockmaking shop.

In July 1799 he answered a call from the Salem Aufseher Collegium, essentially the board of supervisors that oversaw the “material and financial” aspects of the Wachovia settlement. The town diarist recorded his arrival on Nov. 29 that year.

For the next 37 years, Ludwig served the residents in the region, married and raised a family.

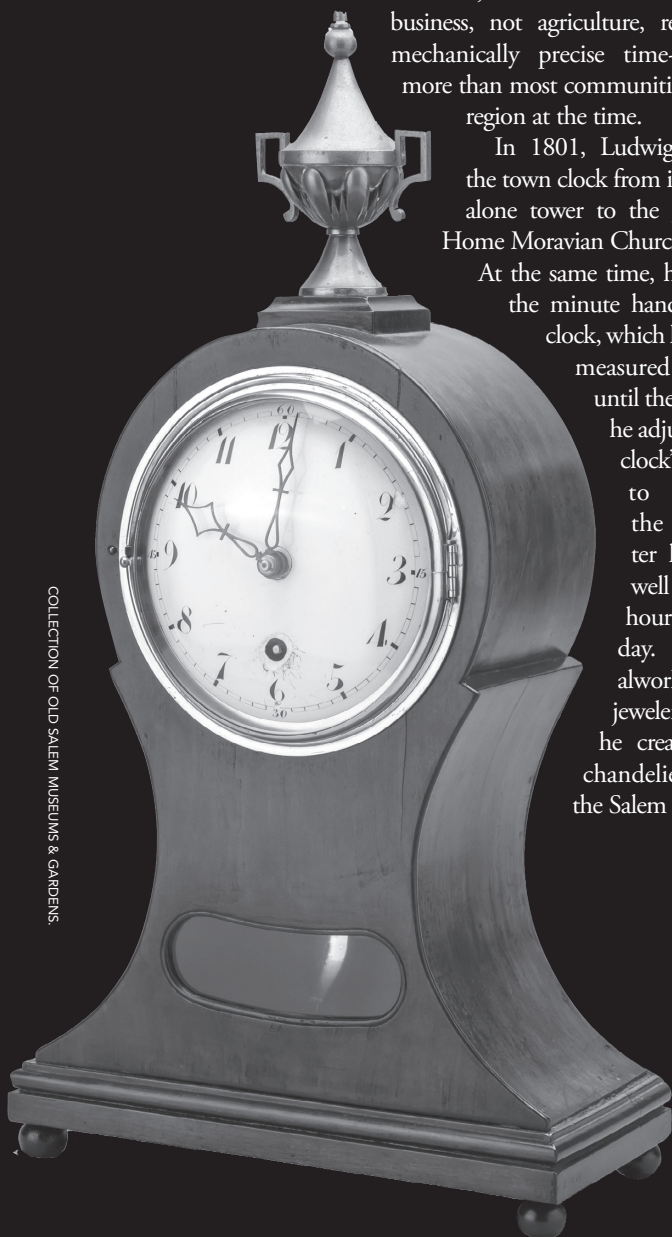
He also frustrated the leadership of the town for much of that time. The community diaries record concerns of his “showey boasting” and “disorderly way of life.” Though there are only hints at the cause of the problems, two constant themes were his frequent drunkenness and his financial mismanagement.

His skill with clockworks, however, was never in question.

Frank Albright, former director of Old Salem, detailed most known Eberhardt creations in his exhaustive study “Johann Ludwig Eberhardt and His Salem Clocks.” Included was a musical clock made for a Quaker in Randolph County in 1805. A small organ played a variable selection of hymns on the hour and could be adjusted to repeat up to six times so the family could sing all verses of the hymn.

— KATE RAUHAUSER-SMITH

One of only two known mantle clocks by Johann Ludwig Eberhardt. The body of the clock was made by Edward Ackerman.



COLLECTION OF OLD SALEM MUSEUMS & GARDENS