

An Historical Introduction to the Sale :

Louis Cottier

A Watchmaking Genius Ahead of his Time

Louis Cottier, 1950 :

The first World Time wristwatch ever with two crowns, which he invented, produced, and presented that year to Patek Philippe. It inspired the famous "World Time" with two crowns, Ref. 2523, one of the most appreciated and sought-after

wristwatch models in the world.





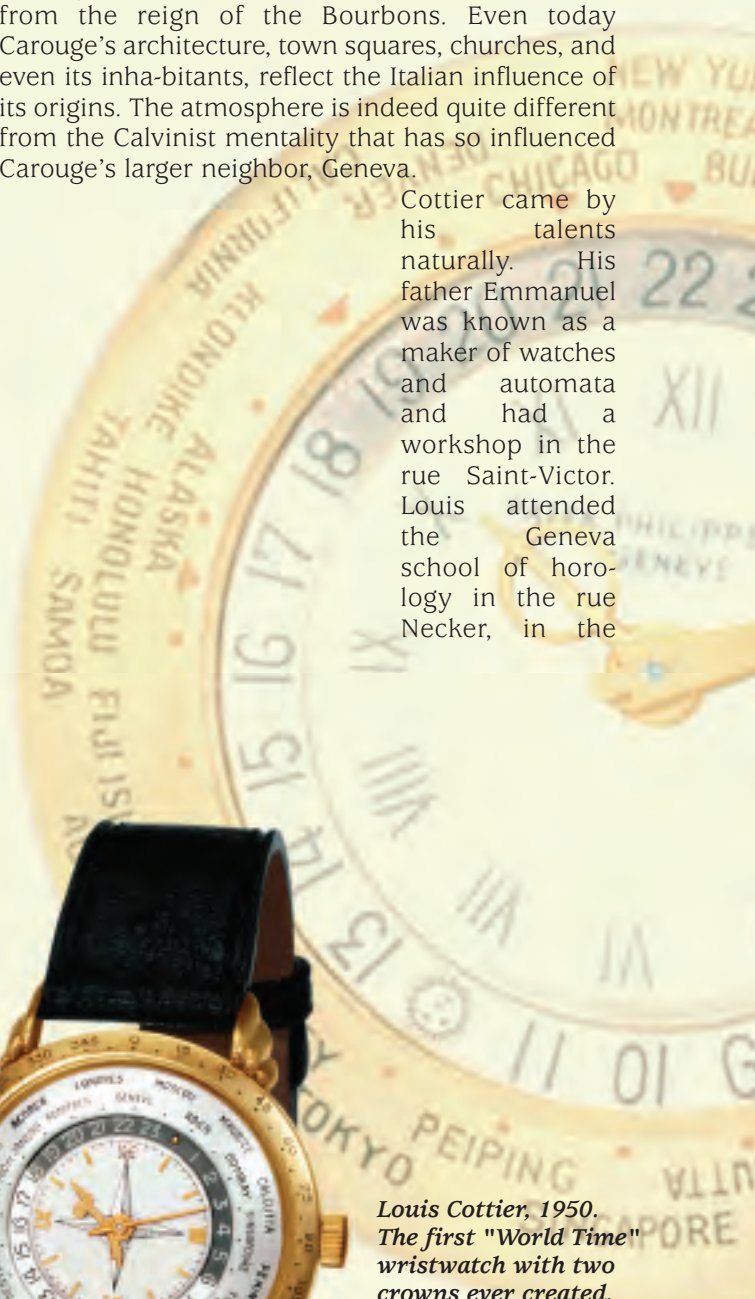
*“Exceptional Horological Works of Art”
Geneva, October 19 & 20, 2002*

This seems to me the ideal occasion to introduce not just the work but also the man. Louis Cottier was an extrovert, a kind man, a “Sunday painter” as he called himself, a constructor of automata and singing birds and of the shadow theaters called “ombres chinoises” in French, a lover of mechanical music, and a restorer of clocks and watches so talented that Alfred Chapuis, the well-known horological historian, recommended him to Hans Wilsdorf, the founder of Rolex, who entrusted him with the

restoration and maintenance of his collection of antique watches.

Louis Cottier was born on September 28, 1894 in Carouge, a small Sardinian enclave which dates from the reign of the Bourbons. Even today Carouge’s architecture, town squares, churches, and even its inhabitants, reflect the Italian influence of its origins. The atmosphere is indeed quite different from the Calvinist mentality that has so influenced Carouge’s larger neighbor, Geneva.

Cottier came by his talents naturally. His father Emmanuel was known as a maker of watches and automata and had a workshop in the rue Saint-Victor. Louis attended the Geneva school of horology in the rue Necker, in the



Patek Philippe & Cie, Genève, Ref 542, made in 1938. The smallest “World Time” wristwatch in the world; only four pieces in yellow gold are known today. Invented by Louis Cottier in the early 1930’s. Production of this reference started in 1937.

Louis Cottier, 1950. The first “World Time” wristwatch with two crowns ever created. Invented by Louis Cottier and made for himself in 18K yellow gold. This model, Patent No. 270085, was presented to Patek Philippe in 1950 and inspired the famous two-crown “World Time” series Ref. 2523, produced from 1953.

class of another important figure in Genevan horology, Henry Hess.

The teaching of this master profoundly influenced the young man and proved to be of great help to him in later years, particularly during the difficult time of the Great Depression. Once his training was completed, he worked as master horologist in several local factories. The economic crisis forced companies to drastically reduce production, certain of them closing down entirely. It is at this time that Louis Cottier decided to go into business on his own, working for 13 years in the back room of a book and stationery shop which his wife operated at rue Vautier 45 in Carouge. In this modest atelier he began his activity as a maker of desk clocks, pocket watches, wristwatches and hand-made prototypes. In the beginning, he made wristwatches without hands, and watches with jumping digital hours, as well as watches with automata and jacquemarts. It was in this workshop that his first World Time pocket watch was made in 1931 for Beszanger, a well-known local jewelry and watch shop. Cottier became a specialist in World Time time-pieces, constructing hand-made models for the largest Geneva firms, all with similar characteristics. Among his best customers was Patek Philippe, the firm which entrusted him with the development and fabrication of the greatest number of complicated watches. Companies such as Vacheron Constantin and Agassiz also turned to him for World Time watches, as did Rolex, when they mandated him in the early 1940's with the production of a small series of pocket watches with World Time indication, Ref. 4262 – one of these will be offered in our October 19 and 20 sale.

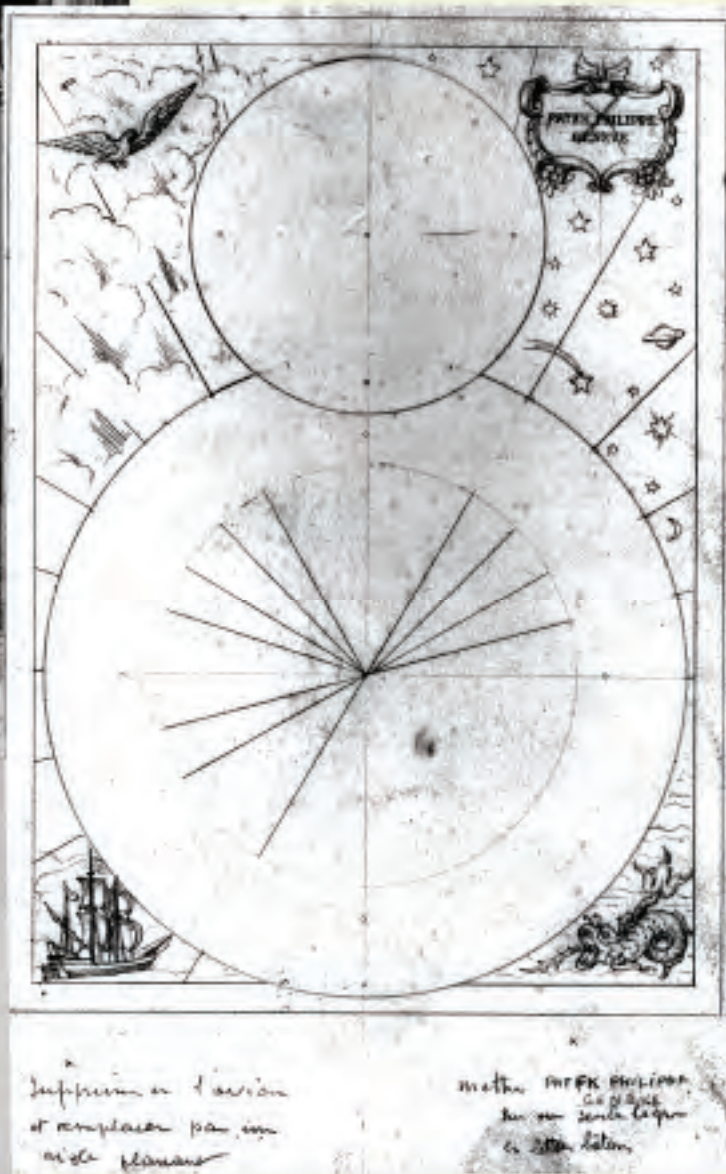
In 1937, Cottier created a World Time wristwatch with rectangular movement. That same year, for Patek Philippe, he made the smallest World Time wristwatch in the world. (Also included in the October sale, see illustration). That same year and the following year, in 1937 and 1938, Patek Philippe asked him to produce a World Time desk clock with *Grande and Petite Sonnerie*, and with a three-dimensional moon, a black and white agate rotating sphere (see Antiquorum sale April 1997, lot 601), today exhibited in the Beyer Museum in Zurich. A one-of-a-kind piece was made by Cottier for Patek Philippe in 1940, for one of their clients, a doctor in Paris. This was a World Time watch with chronograph and pulsometer. (see the Antiquorum October 1994 sale, lot 516). In 1946, at the request of a group of Genevan



◁ *The enamel dial of a World Time clock made for Gübelin in the 1940's.*

citizens who wanted to express their thanks to the Allies at the end of the Second World War, Louis Cottier produced four World Time dress watches for the Agassiz firm, with gold and enamel-decorated cases which were designed and made by Wenger. They were given to Winston Churchill, President Harry Truman, Joseph Stalin and General De Gaulle (see lot 92 of Antiquorum's October 14, 1990 sale). A World Time desk clock, also made by Cottier, was given to President Franklin Roosevelt's widow.

By the year 1946, his fame as an inventor and skilful watchmaker had won him many commissions. An ever-greater number of firms turned to him for complicated or out of the ordinary clocks and watches. At this time, he moved to the number 20 of the rue



△ *Drawing by Louis Cottier of a dial for a small Patek Philippe World Time clock*

◁ *Drawing for a World Time watch without hands, by Louis Cottier*

Ancienne in Carouge. There he continued his activities, while also continuing to take care of the Wilsdorf collection and to write many articles on horology and on his native city.

It was in 1950 that Cottier invented and realized what many people consider one of the most practical innovations of modern horology: the World Time system with two crowns. In addition to a greater security and precision in the choice and maintenance of the city of reference, it offered greater protection against shocks and wear on the bezel bearing the city names. The possibility of printing the city names rather than incising them, thanks to the protective glass, resulted in greater legibility.

Louis Cottier invented and produced a few models of a watch with two dials and only one movement for Patek Philippe in 1954. This solved the problem of synchronizing the minute hand, a problem which existed in twin-movement watches by other manufacturers.

In 1958 he made a linear hour watch for Patek Philippe. This model eliminated the use of hands and dial, as the passing time was indicated within two graduated openings on the case, the hour and minute indications being printed helicoidally on