

Why Alarm Clocks? Time as a Theme of Frank Guittard's Life

By Charles F. Guittard



Why are mini alarm clocks given to Fellows in connection with recognition as Fellows? The reason is they are intended as tangible reminders of the struggles of Professor Francis (“Frank”) G. Guittard to complete his college education and pursue his life goals in a timely manner, all the while running behind prominent peers. Time was in fact a central theme for many years in Guittard’s life and the pocket-watch and doubtless later the alarm clock were not merely useful to him in the ordinary way but had special significance because of the delays he experienced in reaching his goals. A second theme of Guittard’s life, related to the first theme and viewed from his last years when he and his wife Josie created the Guittard Fellowship Fund, was his desire to help graduate history students with the costs of their educations and thereby achieve their educations and their life goals in a more timely fashion than he had been able to himself.



Charles Guittard presenting the alarm clock to a Fellow.

Born to a large Ohio farming family, his physician-farmer father strapped for cash during hard times, Guittard, in 1886 at nineteen years of age and at the urging of his parents, took the train to Texas with the clothes on his back and a few dollars in his pocket. Although obtaining a college education was his paramount objective, he was not financially able to enter any Texas college until 1890 when he entered Baylor. Thereafter he was always running behind his Baylor peers time-wise, including notably Samuel Palmer Brooks and Patrick Morris Neff, in obtaining an education and entering a profession, as well in accomplishing his other life goals of marriage and family. He periodically had to leave school, unlike Brooks and Neff, to earn tuition money to go back to school. Brooks, who had had a problem early on himself in getting his pre-college education timely, nevertheless had gone through college steadily once he finished up his pre-college work. And Neff was always on time. Guittard started Baylor late and departed early because of lack of tuition money and was delayed thereafter in resuming his college education, taking sixteen years to work his way through college, finishing up at the University of Chicago which had a reputation for providing jobs for students who needed to work.

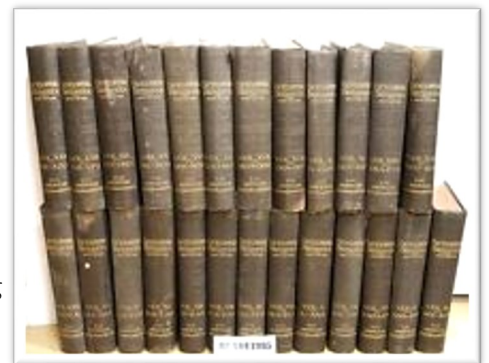


The Elgin pocket watch.

Time is also suggested as a theme by the fact that in 1894 Guittard, who had dropped out of college to earn money, had in competition with other summer salesmen won an Elgin pocket watch for selling the most books (Talmage’s *Trumpet Blasts*). Thereafter Guittard traded his valued Elgin time-piece priced at seventy-five dollars in 1894 to Pat Neff for Neff’s half interest in a set of *Encyclopedia Britannica* they had purchased together while teachers and roommates in Magnolia, Arkansas. This trade meant Guittard had to trade his most valuable possession (his time piece) for another, knowledge represented by the encyclopedia, and thus in one sense pitting the value Guittard placed on using his time wisely vs. the value he placed on books and knowledge. And of course the particular watch he traded to Neff wasn’t simply a valuable time-piece, but a recognition of the significant effort

he had made, not being a natural salesman by any means, to sell the most books among a number of student salesmen, i.e. a hard-earned badge of accomplishment. Seventy-five dollars would have represented a very substantial amount in 1894, perhaps as much as almost two thousand dollars in 2013 dollars according to one inflation calculator.

Finally, that Guittard, as a history teacher at Baylor for more than forty years, was ever mindful of the inexorable passage of precious time is shown by his habitual practice of taking out his pocket watch and placing it on a cushion at the beginning of each class, class thus beginning and ending promptly without delay and with systematic precision. According to one student observer in a Round-Up, Guittard “was the guy who put ‘sys’ in ‘system.’”



An Encyclopedia Britannica collection similar to the one owned by Guittard and Neff.

Footnote: President Brooks hired Guittard at age 35 for the Baylor Preparatory Department in 1902. President Neff returned Guittard’s award pocket-watch to the Guittards more than a half century after it had been awarded to Guittard in 1894.