

***A Collector's Choice Of Select  
Rockford Watch Co. Watches...  
...and why!***

By  
Darrah G. Artzner  
Copyright 2019

Collecting Rockford watches was not my main intent but was a result of wanting to find out about the company.

## *My Excuse*

The company produced good quality movements that responded well to repair. And, after collecting 3 or 4, one more didn't hurt, and so.....

The company's history was scattered in bits and pieces and needed additional research. I liked that and got hooked!

My excuse for collecting Rockford watches I also wanted to research the company history.

## *Plan Of Attack*

- Brief history of the company
- Define what watches I consider 'Select' and why. A few cases and dials will be included.
- Examples with explanation for choice

Let me start off by giving a brief account of the company history. I will then show what I consider are some of the more unique watch movements produced. There are some cases and dials that are also worth collecting.

### *Brief Company History*

- 1850 - John C. Adams investigated Rockford, Ill. as potential site. (3 railroad lines)
- 1866 - Community disapproved and Adams left for good.
- Dec 1873 - Investors finally convinced of project.
- 1874 - Local Investors led by Levi Rhoades and Hiram R. Enoch organized Company in Jan. and was officially licensed in March.
- 1874 to 1876 - Former Cornell Watch Co. employees supervised construction and purchase of machinery.

John Adams organized several watch companies around that time (Elgin National Watch Co. in 1864, Cornell Watch Co. (1867), the Illinois Watch Company (1869). Rhoades was local businessman (paper, cooperage) and Enoch (Rockford Journal editor) Cornell = PH Wheeler and CW Parker or George D. Clarke supervised construction and getting machinery

### *History cont.*

- Feb 1876 - Cornell Watch Co. employees (57) provided initial expertise. Production began (10mvts in 5grades/day).
- 1888 - Producing 150 mvts daily with 350 employees.
- 1891 – Largest watch company in region. Price cutting.
- 1896 - Receivership due to depression in watch trade.
- 1899 - Thirty employees remained working while in receivership. *(specific orders from existing stock)*
- 1901 - Principals of Illinois Watch Case Co. (Jacob Franks and Max C. Eppenstein) bought and reorganized as Rockford Watch Co. Ltd.
- 1915 - Discontinued (remaining stock marketed by The Illinois Watch Case Co. of Elgin, Ill.)

Production numbers (NAWCC Bulletin, Dec 1986, D.J. Summar). Employees worked on specific orders while the company was under receivership (Belvidere Daily Republican, May 17, 1904). Thirty employees worked and used existing stock during receivership (Jewelers Circ, Feb 1899)

### *History cont.*

- 1917 Building sold to Am. Telegraphone Co. Springfield, Mass
- 1918 Address 15 Maiden Lane, NY City
- 1919 Name transferred to Elgin, Ill.
- 1922 Address 904, 29 E. Madison, Chicago
- 1976 (Dec 14)The “Rockford” name trademark acquired by Bennett Brothers, Inc. Chicago
- 2008(ca) Jeffrey A. Cohen became 4<sup>th</sup> owner

1917 Machinery v2 p96; 1918 White-Orr's Reference Register; 1922 Chi Central Bus & Office Bldg Directory; 2008 PBS



Post cards showing rear and front of Rockford Watch Co. building that still exists but is undergoing renovation for modern use.

### *Conventional Jeweled Watches*

	1880	1900	1930
• Elgin	700,000	9,000,000	33,000,000
• Waltham	1,500,000	9,000,000	27,000,000
• Illinois	190,000	1,000,000	5,300,000
• Hampden	200,000	1,300,000	4,600,000
• Hamilton	-	100,000	2,500,000
• Rockford	50,000	100,000	1,000,000
• Howard	50,000	100,000	250,000
• Lancaster	50,000	150,000	150,000
• U.S. Marion	20,000	-	20,000
• Newark	13,000	-	13,000

Source M.C. Harrold, 1984

Chart shows Rockford ranking among the major companies of its day.

<i>Production</i>				
Size	Models (types)	Grades	Production*	Runs
18	10	65	514,933	631
16	7	62	207,663	339
14	?	?	?	?
12	2	17	49,700	79
8	2	0	13,100	1
6	2	8	18,800	26
0	3	14	48,800	60
3/0	?	?	?	?
?	?	?	85,004	?
* = approximate			Total 938,000	

Chart showing what Rockford produced by size, model, grade and runs. Production is total by size only. Over half total production in 18 size. Highest number movement recorded to date is 937424 (16s 17j hunting). I have 937262 (16s m4 17j g572)

## *Emphasize Only Select Watches*

1. Rockford products considered to be out of the ordinary are those having “special or unique criteria” that set them apart from items normally produced on a routine basis.
2. “special or unique criteria” are features that define products having one or more of the following attributes:
  - a. relatively low production number (keep an open mind about totals)
  - b. unique or custom plate design or finish
  - c. more jewels, adjustments, etc. than standard production.

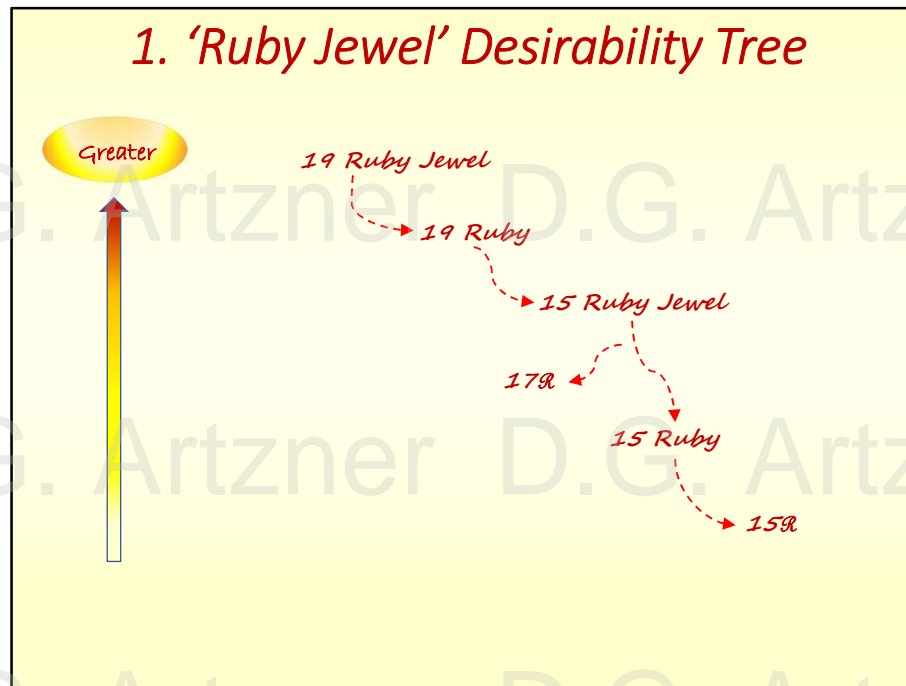
Note: Collector value is not a consideration here, however, one cannot rule out that it tends to increase with scarcity and uniqueness.

Explanation of what Rockford watches will be presented. Please note that production estimates may vary with continued research.

## *Confine To Following Categories*

- 1. Ruby jewels**
- 2. Higher jewel count and up-jewelling**
- 3. Plate finish, markings and unique features**
- 4. Plate design**
- 5. Cases and dials**  
(‘production numbers’ will be noted throughout)

Unique features = for example Indicators. Let's start with the Ruby Jewel mvts and how collectors tend to categorize them.



Top Of The Line Hierarchy of early 18s models. 19 Ruby Jewel is probably equivalent in quality to 19 Ruby and 19 with stylized R but collectors don't always see it that way.

## *19 Ruby Jewels and Ruby (Adjusted)*



Pre 1882

Prod: M1 and M2 ~290

Both Adjusted. First 19 RJ 1876 No longer offered between 1880-1882. I was not able to separate the 19 RJA and 19RA when determining production. Low production shown in red

## 15 Ruby Jewels and Ruby (Adjusted)



Both Adjusted. Rec circle showing relatively low serial number. 15RJ (1876) and offered in ni and gilt in M1 only by 1882. Shown is M2. (June 2, 1874 Pat. Pinion) My estimate on M1 ~40 and M2 ~200 (includes both gilt and nickel)

## 17 R (*Adjusted*)

Source: Jones & Horan Auctions, Roger Weiss Jr. and unknown internet source



Prod: **100**

R = described as Old German, Old English Gothic, stylized and fancy



Grade 40 241901-242000 only. Earliest 17j and earliest two-tone.

15 R nickel mvts. are also in the grade 40 in run (241801-241900). About 1884.

## 15 R (*Adjusted*)



Model 2 Prod: ~200

~1876



Model 3 Prod: ~200?

~1876

(Model 5 has not been found with this marking)



Model 4 Prod: ~50

1885



Model 6 Prod: ~360

~1883

All are marked Adjusted. (American Jeweler Sept 1885 = first M4) M6 ~360 (seldom seen even though more produced)

## 2. Higher Jewel Count

24 Jewels



18s m10 g800

Prod: 500



18s m9 g900

Prod: 1600

Highest jeweled movements known to have been made in significant quantity.

## 2. (cont) Up-Jeweled



Prod: est. 40

18s models 7 and 8 jewel count bounded by -> <- (Private Labels are an exception.)

Originally 17 and upgraded to 21, and 22 jewels. 21J in ranges 351xxx, 425xxx, 4378xx and 439xxx

Upgraded grade 61 (M7 17j p850) and 81 (M8 17j p1600) (Was this a time when Rockford experimented to determine the feasibility of high jeweled movement production or customer request?)

## *Up-Jeweled (22J)*

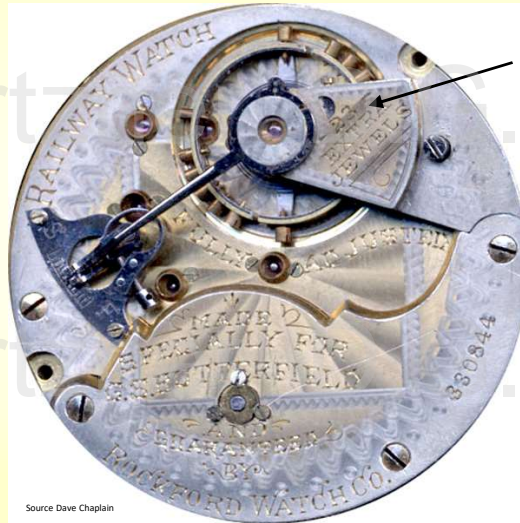
Identified in  
ranges: 4307xx  
and 4308xx  
4347xx  
4371xx and  
4377xx  
Some private  
labels  
throughout.



The range  
437xxx dates to  
approximately  
the mid 1890s.  
Prod: **50**  
**(estimate)**  
Note: raised  
jewel settings.

Found as models 7 and 8 and appear to have been upgraded from 17j grades 61 and 81. It is not known how many were up-jeweled but suggest 50 based on a run of 10 per SN.

### *Up-Jeweled Private Label*



Source Dave Chaplain

This Railway Watch was made for G.S. Sutterfield (original g88). 1890? Rockford accommodated dealers and customers having special requests (Private Labels).

### 3. Plate finish, markings and unique features



23j g300 Prod: 300

***High Grade 12s***



23j g305 Prod: 300

These are unique as being the highest grade watches made in size 12 with low production, and beautiful design.

## *Named Grades*

0 Size



### **Iroquois 17j**

0s m1 g185 P1000

0s m2 g p?

12s m1 g350 p300

12s m2 g355 p2100

16s m4 g630 p1500

16s m5 g635 p100

12 Size



16 Size



### **Pocahontas 21j**

#### **Adj 5pos**

12s m1 g340 p100

12s m2 g345 p100

16s m4 g620 p250

16s m5 g625 p400



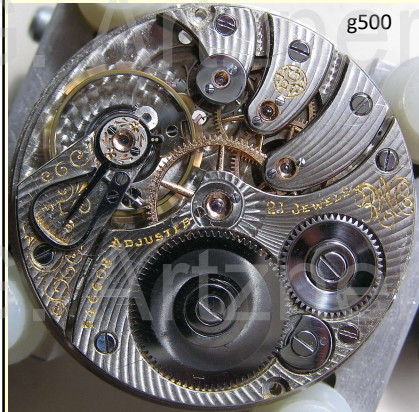
A couple of Rockford's named grades. Some other named grades include: Indicator, Prince of Wales (Plymouth), King Edward (Plymouth), Winnebago, Winona



Total of 17j unknown. (353404) Known to have been upgraded from 15(16) to 17 in 1890s.  
Closeup of another g100 mvt (384477).

## 16s RailRoad Grades

500, 505, 510, 515



Prod: 240



Prod: 1170

Gold train; Adj temp, 5 pos and Isochronism

Grades 500 through 545 are all considered railroad grade. (Grades ending in zero = Hunting case movements, Those ending in a 5 are open face) Grade 500 546608 (originally described as 23j); 505=230 lowest production of series with steel disk on upper escape jewel. Grade 510=p500. Grades 500, 505, 510 and 515 have gold train. (Isochronism=keeps same time regardless of balance swing)

## *Rail Road Grade cont.*

520, 525, 530, 535, 540, 545

525



Prod: 1300

535 with RG



Prod: 520

545

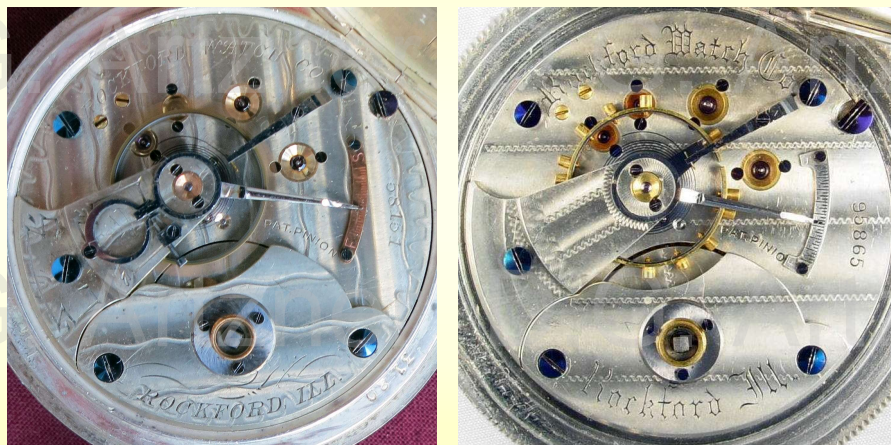


Prod: 4000

Adjusted temp, 5 positions and isochronism with red (brass) train

Grades 520 – 545 have brass time train; (Some marked Adjusted 5 positions = observed 505, 515, 525; mdl 5) Grade 520=p600, 530=p700; 540=p~400. Note the higher production numbers.

## *18s Model 1 Nickel Movements*



Many early movements have attractive top plates with different damascene patterns and are highly collectable and worth seeking out. Avoid washed out (lacking crispness) finishes if possible.

## *Unique Damascening*



One off or very few

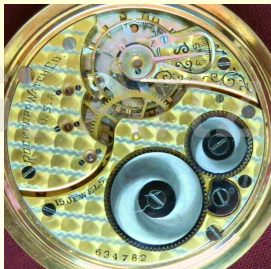


More common with varied damascening

54929 is the only gilt movement I have seen damascened. I am sure there is another one out there somewhere.

## *Special Finishes*

John Brenner



J.P. Waither



Prod 50?

L.F. Hussander



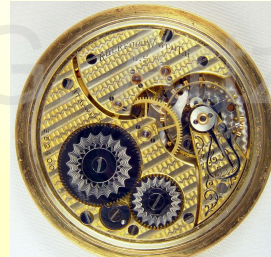
Prod 50?



?

Rockford utilized a three step method of producing two tone plate finishes.

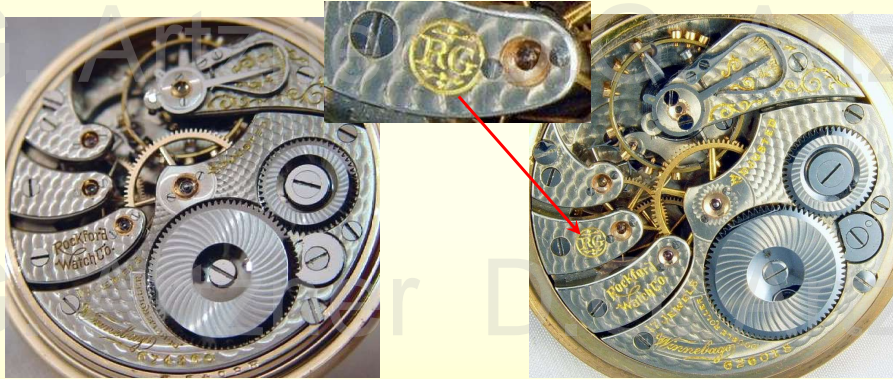
1. Damascene nickel plate(s).
2. Gild.
3. Damascene complimentary pattern over gilt surface.



J. Brenner

PL John Brenner of Youngstown Oh. Joseph .P. Waither (249150 – 249199) wholesaler of Chicago (1884 – at least 1889) 249172 and L.F. Hussander of Chicago ILL, (249100 – 249149) 249142;  
Lower left might have been a private label with signed dial but has standard Rockford dial now..

## *It's All In The Details*



Winnebago M5 g405 Prod: 4500 (4700)  
(Hunting M4 grade 400 Prod: 900)

Early Winnebago g405 with **RG** stamp Prod: **~200**  
(Hunting M4 grade 400 Prod: **small fraction**)

Only early production Winnebagos had RG stamp. Hunting model 4 grade 400 with RG is only a fraction of 900

## *'Bare Bones' Finish*



Rare and great condition



Great condition

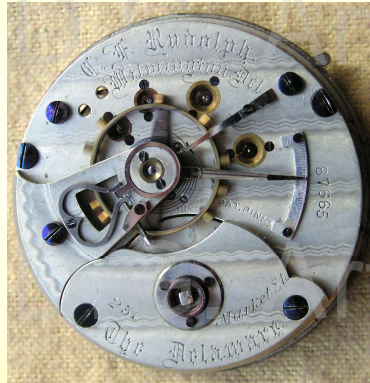
Superb gilt or any finish is getting difficult to find and should be considered unique. The frosted example on the left might be a 'one off' specimen.

### *Oops, No Factory Markings*



There is no Rockford stamping on this movement, just a serial number. I have seen one mvt with even the SN absent. Just interesting or unique, a true collector's specimen.

### *For A Little Bit Extra....*



When ordering a movement, for an additional 50 cents, Rockford would include a windowed balance cock.

Speaking of Extra, the next slide defines how Rockford used the word to indicate special jewel placement.

## 'EXTRA'



Standard 9 Jewel movement



EXTRA = 9J has jewels positioned on escape and pallet.

(11J & 13J EXTRA have paired escape and pallet jewels.)

Note the jewel placement (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> wheels) on the standard movement shown on the left.

## Early Grading

18s M1 grade A (9J)



18s M1 grade B (11J)



18s M 1 grade C (15J)



Some found stamped 'EXTRA' and have jewel positioning stated on previous slide.

I have found mvts with script letters that might suggest both grade and jewel position, however, this is unconfirmed and might just be equivalent to those having lettering in block font..

## *Low Production Within Model*



16s model 2 g537 21J Adj 5 positions Two Tone  
Prod: 100

This is the only grade within the 16s model 2 with two-tone damascening.

## 16s Indicators



Model 5, grade 655, 21j Adj Prod ~2,750

Model 5, grade 665, 17j, Adj Prod ~2,250

*Made for public consumption*

The Rockford Watch Co. is the only US company that made an indicator for the public.  
Production figures are approximate but ratio the same when comparing the two mvts.

## *18s Indicator*



Model 9 21J Adj 5 pos Grade 950  
Prod: 200

This watch is highly sought after due to it's size and rarity.

## 4. Plate Design And Adaption

### *Straight Finger Top Plate*

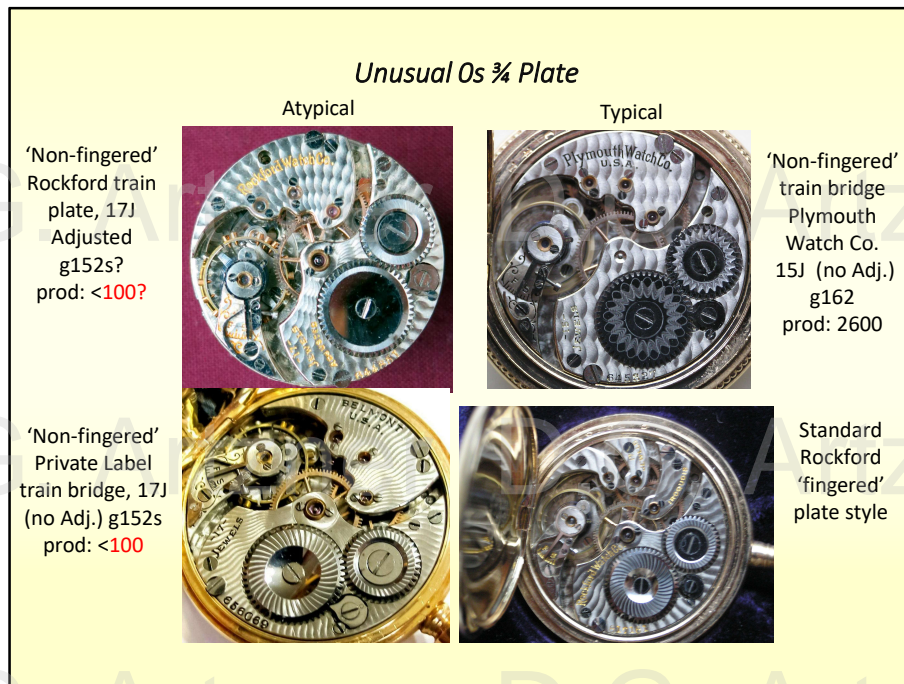


Uncommon plate style



Standard plate style

It differs from a Prince Edward mvt (not shown) by having a finger **plate and 17J** instead of a finger **bridge, 21j Adjusted**. The straight finger mvt is a grade 115 with production of 50.



Absence of finger cut-outs on train plate; marked 17j Adjusted . Also PL (g152s: Brenner 644861) as 17j (not marked Adjusted). Differs from the 'Plymouth Watch Co.' labeled movements that have a train bridge and only 15 jewels. Rockford are plates (3 screws) while Plymouth Watch Co. and PL are bridges (2 screws).



Doll might have up-jeweled these movements to 23j Adjusted or done by Rockford employees while in receivership (1896-1901). W.F. Doll worked in Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada then to New York. Wild and crazy guy (based on some legal court documents). Estimate based on run of 10. A model 2 17J Doll has been recorded, quantity unknown.

## 5. Cases And Dials



18s OF coin, 16s - 0s in gold fill. Iroquois and Pocahontas were sold as complete watches in Rockford cases but not sure if it was 100% of them.

*More Marked Cases*



Most are found in the 16 size.

*Muckle Case For 18s and 16s*



Patented Apr 1883. NW Watch Case Co. was acquired by, or merged into, the Rockford Watch Case Co. and became a department within the Rockford Watch Co. around Sept 1885. (H. Muhr's Sons & Co. acquired rights to Climax case Of NW Watch Case Co. and made them with gold fill, Excelsior grade (lower left).

## Dials

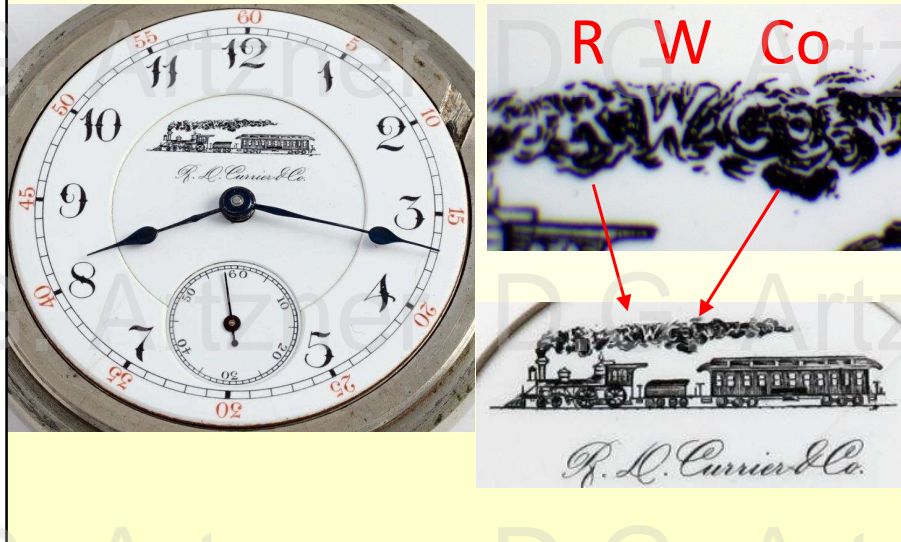


Courtesy F.  
Hansen

(6181 and 8161)

Always look for undamaged dials. Here are some of the more exotic dials that include a Railroad King, runic, fancy, Ferguson 18 and 16s, Order Of Railway Conductors, black and another fancy.

*Dials cont*



Very special dial. Here is shown a private label but also with company name (one word block font 'Rockford'). I have seen three in last 20yrs so not common.

*Dials cont*

**BETTER QUALITY EARLY DIALS**



Double sunk two line script



Single sunk two line script

These dials are usually found on higher grade early 18s higher grade movements. Double sunk, single sunk

## 25 Ruby Jewels

*One Of The Best*



Prod 12

Rockford made twelve of these stunning Pennsylvania Specials but not sure how many have survived. Four or five have been recorded by others. (Note: The number 1 Rockford went for 91,000 in August 2018 and is considered primarily a watch for investors.)

## *Summary*

The Rockford Watch Company produced not only normal runs of quality watch movements but significant numbers of movements in lesser quantities having unique and varied plate finishes, jewel counts and markings to suit their customers needs. Product quality never suffered throughout the company's history, even when faced with financial failure, and that provides a great resource for a collector to acquire, appreciate and study their watches.

The watches, cases and dials presented above should in no way be considered to represent all of the Rockford Watch Company's 'select' watches but, instead, should be taken as one collectors view of a good sampling.

*Thank You*

*Questions?*

*Comments?*

*[darragh@aol.com](mailto:darragh@aol.com)*