

Bookreview

Allgemeines Journal der Uhrmacherkunst, Volumes 1888 to 1898 – CD-ROM edition

Published 2005 by the Library of Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Chronometrie (DGC), Nuernberg (Germany), Dr. Bernhard Huber, Editor & Publisher. e-mail: bibliothek@dg-chrono.de. Circa 500 pages per volume; Euro 12.50 per volume, plus postage.

While there is an obvious advantage to further one's horological knowledge by studying the leading modern horological monographs, with their often gorgeous pictures and well documented texts, there is to the diehard student of horological history no substitute for the unique pleasure of going back to the contemporary accounts from the time horological history was made. Reading books on horology written hundreds of years ago gives a unique perspective on the issues confronting the practicing horologist – or the owner of these timepieces – at that time. The longer we go back in time the scarcer these testimonies are. However towards the second half of the 18th century there is an explosion of contemporary source material, not only of books, but now also of documents originally intended to be of more ephemeral nature, including the first periodicals dedicated to horology.

The *Horological Journal* in the United Kingdom, the *Journal Suisse d'Horlogerie* in Switzerland, the *American Horological Journal* in the USA, the *Revue Chronometrique* in France, and the *Allgemeines Journal der Uhrmacherkunst*, as well as the *Deutsche Uhrmacher Zeitung* in Germany, all date back to that time, and for the most part were published for decades. However, studying these historic documents, which offer unique insights into the daily detailed issues concerning horologists at that time, has been the privilege of a select group up to now. To start out, not all that many copies were printed, and periodicals were always meant as temporary reading and thus discarded relatively soon in greater proportion than books. Most were never gathered into a more durable bound form. In addition, in some locations, particularly Germany, the two big wars of the 20th century took a huge toll on surviving copies. Most horological enthusiasts have been limited to acquiring an odd issue or single volumes, or have to do their browsing in one of the very few libraries that have complete sets. It turns out that e.g. there was not a single complete set of the *Deutsche Uhrmacher Zeitung* in any library in North America, and it is uncertain if any one of the sets in German libraries is really complete. (Since then the NAWCC has filled the gaps in its set primarily with microfilms from the incomplete set of the Library of Congress, but also with photocopies of selected volumes procured from various German libraries through their academic interlibrary loan system.)

Of course, one of the great pleasures of leafing through these old magazines is the serendipitous nature of the discoveries made by unsystematic browsing. This is much more difficult to achieve in one's limited time in a library reading room than in the comfort of your study. The Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Chronometrie deserves great credit and praise for being the first of the learned horological societies to start tackling this issue. Under the leadership of its library chairman, Dr. Bernhard Huber, they have decided to act rather than to complain. The result is the world's first series of historical horological periodicals reissued in CD-ROM format.

The *Allgemeines Journal der Uhrmacherkunst (AJU)*, started in 1876, is the oldest, but not the longest running, German horological magazine (the German longevity crown belongs to *Deutsche Uhrmacher Zeitung*, 1877 to 1945, the global record goes to BHI's *Horological Journal*, 1858 to the present). In the 1890s, AJU was undoubtedly the leading horological periodical of its day, as it was also the official publication of the Central-Verband der Deutschen Uhrmacher. It was a logical choice to start the electronic publishing venture of the DGC library.

The Germans chose a low cost but high quality technology, which was manageable with a volunteer labor effort with limited IT skills. They were greatly helped by the cooperation of the library of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuernberg, which had good quality original copies, and a high speed, large format scanner that it was willing to make available during fringe hours. Volunteers spent countless hours scanning 5400 newspaper-sized pages, and electronically enhancing the images to get rid of the underlying grayness of the pages. This took several minutes per page. They ended up with 5400 jpg-images at 200-dpi resolution. From the beginning it was clear that an index was needed, so every article, in every issue was catalogued into a simple excel table with 5600 entries. (In a later phase they hope to index the advertisements as well). The resulting index and image files fit onto one CD-ROM per yearly volume. They have decided to make the CD's available for a ridiculously low "cost sharing" contribution of Euro 12.50 (DGC members Euro 10.-) per volume (plus postage).

For anybody with even a smattering of reading ability in German this must be the best value in horological publications this year. The material covers technical articles on horological subjects, association news, new product announcements, market analysis for horological products and services, obituaries, and much more, not the least interesting being the various 1890's advertisements for horological goods. Authors include such luminaries of the time as Dietzschold, Gelcich, Grossmann, Lange, Rieffler, Saunier, and Strasser. A later on-line access to all this data, possibly using a fee for use scheme, is a possible future step for DGC.

The chosen format is easy to use, and while it lacks the page flipping convenience of a fully formatted electronic book, it offers the user great flexibility of what to do with the raw data. Besides just reading and browsing, one can further process the material with optical character recognition software, crop out and copy sections or individual illustrations as needed, etc.

The best news is, however that, encouraged by this initial project (DGC has raised Euro 3000 for their library acquisition fund from CD sales in just a few months), the DGC has decided to go ahead and to scan the AJU volumes for 1876 to 1887, and to later attempt to do the same with the whole 68 year run of *Deutsche Uhrmacher Zeitung*. That presents an obvious challenge to the horological societies in other countries: The early periodical horological literature of Britain, of the USA, of Switzerland, and of France, is just as rich in content, and it is this reviewer's sincere hope that other players around the world will pick up the ball and run with it. Horological scholars owe great gratitude to those who volunteer for these kinds of projects. Thank you Bernhard Huber, and thank you DGC.

Bookreview by Fortunat F. Mueller-Maerki, Sussex, New Jersey (USA)

