



## The Boy Who Built An Empire

by Henri Bonnet

### Editor's note:

*Henri Bonnet is a charter member of Chapter 190, and a major contributor to our newsletter. Publishing a monthly newsletter, with an all volunteer writing staff, can be a very daunting experience to say the least. I have been blessed with the support of a great group of writers and Henri is at the top of that list. His timely articles and easy writing style has made him a favorite for many years.*

*Henri will be giving his pen a rest, and we won't have the pleasure of his writing after this article. (Even Hemingway had to take a break occasionally.) Henri is an editor's dream and a pleasure to work with. I will miss his articles very much. Thank you Henri, for your dedication and hard work.*

To say that Hans Wilsdorf was a self-made man would perhaps be the biggest understatement of the horological world. The empire he created from scratch has now reached global proportions. The symbol of his empire, a stylized emperor's crown, today adorns tens of millions of wristwatches. Many of these timepieces are worn by some of the most distinguished personalities in the world, monarchs included. Hans Wilsdorf was born in March of 1881 in a small Bavarian town near Nuremberg, Germany. Orphaned at the age of 12, he was sent to a nearby boarding school. In fact, life at the boarding school wasn't exactly a bed of roses for this orphaned youngster. However, Hans made the best of it and devoted most of his time and energy to intensive study, especially of math and languages. As soon as he was able to, he left the boarding school to seek his fortune abroad, never to live in Germany again. His destination was Geneva, Switzerland where he arrived practically destitute, in search of a job. He first found employment with a pearl merchant and later on with the Cuno Korten Company, a watch exporter in La Chaux De Fonds.

Thanks to his knowledge of English, Wilsdorf was charged with the task of corresponding with the firm's foreign clients, most of who were in the British Empire. It is in that position that Wilsdorf made numerous business contacts both in Switzerland and overseas, and most importantly, learned the marketing end of the watch business. In addition to that, Wilsdorf spent some of his free time learning what he could about watch making itself. By the time he left Cuno Korten, Hans Wilsdorf was determined to somehow make his future and his fortune in the watch industry. In 1903, at the age of

twenty two, he moved to London, and two years later went into business for himself together with a British partner, named Alfred James Davis. They opened up an office in the heart of London's watch and jewelry district, and named their company Wilsdorf & Davis. They imported Swiss movements from the Aegler Company in Bienne, and mounted them into cases made by Dennison and by others. Initially, Wilsdorf & Davis sold their finished watches to third parties who put their name on the dials. In the early 1900's wristwatches were just then becoming popular, mostly with the ladies as well as with the military. Hans Wilsdorf quickly realized their potential when most other watch manufacturers considered them a passing fad. Hermann Aegler, Wilsdorf & Davis' main supplier in Switzerland, already produced small movements readily adaptable to wristwatches.

So, Wilsdorf & Davis found a niche that could be profitably exploited, and now they needed an appropriate trademark to place on the dials of their timepieces. "Wilsdorf & Davis" would not do, and they decided on the totally made up name of "Rolex." Unlike "Movado," "Omega," or "Zenith," for example, the name Rolex meant absolutely nothing but could be easily pronounced in most languages. At the start of World War One, due to anti-German riots in Britain, notwithstanding the fact that Hans Wilsdorf was now a British citizen, the company decided to relocate its operation to Bienne, and its main office to Geneva. Another worrisome situation that arose was the newly imposed high import tariffs in England, which made profitability questionable. In 1919 Rolex joined forces with Aegler and formed the Aegler Rolex Watch Co. Rolex became firmly established now, with a credible trademark and office location, as well as with its own factory.

Meanwhile, wristwatches were by now worn practically everywhere by everybody, and Rolex's goal was to produce them fast enough in order to meet ever increasing demand.

Given Rolex's initial experience with military wristwatches, a logical improvement to its timepieces was now to make them waterproof. The result of these efforts culminated in the "Oyster" case, initially made by Dennison which already possessed considerable experience in manufacturing threaded cases for railroad watches which featured milled edges on their bezel and back. The purpose of those milled edges of course, was to allow a better finger grip for opening and closing the front and back of railroad watches. The "Oyster" case would thereafter, and till today still keep its milled edge, but now requiring a special tool to open or tighten the back.



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## PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

By Mike Schmidt

This coming weekend is the “NATIONAL CONVENTION” in Pasadena. The last report is that close to 600 tables have been sold for the “MART.” There will be an Auction, workshops, displays, and many other events at the NATIONAL. You can go to the NAWCC website to download the complete schedule of all of the events. It takes a lot of people and a lot of work to put on a convention of this scale. I want to personally thank all the Chapter 190 members who volunteered to work at the convention. You all make me proud to be a member of 190.



Our Chapter will have a table at the “CONVENTION” amongst several other 190 member tables. The Chapter has sponsored many educational opportunities and we will continue to promote horological education. We will present information at the table regarding the NAWCC (FSW) Field Workshops and Chapter workshops. We believe the growth of the NAWCC is going to come from presenting new and continuing educational opportunities for membership and for building an education bridge to the general public.

One of my monthly tasks as president is to help our Editor and Vice President Ken McWilliams gather articles from our membership for the monthly newsletter. Thank goodness our membership always comes through with some excellent material for Editor Ken to artfully put together in the “CHRONO TIMES.”

There is a contributor to our monthly newsletter who deserves special recognition. Every month, without being asked, Ken McWilliams receives an article from our Santa Barbara member, Henri Bonnet. Henri has contributed over 45 articles during the past five and a half years. The articles are concerned mostly of wrist watch collecting, and articles on watch repair, pocket watches, car clocks, and many general interest subjects. A very special *thank you* goes to Henri Bonnet from all his readers who have enjoyed and learned something from his expert writings. All of Henri's articles, as well as other contributor's articles, are available on the Chapter website.

Our Chapter will not meet in the month of June; we will all be at the National enjoying the great clock and watch show. If you show up at the Ventura College Cafeteria on June 17th it means that you did not read the newsletter or the emails that I sent out.

Happy Fathers Day! And I will see you all at the NATIONAL.

*Mike Schmidt*



## Happy Birthday

**Matt Bonaccorso, Darrell Jones,**

**Harry Larson, Tom McKnett,**

**Jean Markevich, Chris Martin**

**Giorgio Perissinotto, Kurt Triffet, and Glen Webb**



Continued from page 1

The obvious remaining problem to be solved now was to make the winding crown watertight. The case-maker Baumgartner manufactured a screwed-in crown which was later on substantially improved by Rolex itself, as well as by the acquisition of patent rights from others. As a result, Rolex was now able to display its wristwatches suspended in small fishbowls in store windows. In October of 1927, Wilsdorf gave a "Rolex Oyster" wristwatch to a 26 year old secretary named Mercedes Gleitz who wore it while swimming across the English Channel. No damage to the wristwatch was reported. Rolex capitalized on the ensuing publicity to help launch the "Rolex Oyster" wristwatch. The next challenge was to make winding a wristwatch unnecessary by including a self winding mechanism into the timepiece. The reason being, that without the need for daily winding, the water tightness of the crown could thus be guaranteed. Rolex managed to improve on existing attempts at self winding mechanisms previously invented by others. Thus the Rolex "Oyster Perpetual" was born and became an instant best-seller, later-on featuring a calendar as well as other complications.

By the mid 1900's, Rolex had opened branch-offices in major cities all over the world. Thanks to clever and relentless advertising in the press, Rolex made the "Oyster Perpetual" wristwatch a "must have", especially among wealthy sportsmen and affluent society. Further profitable advertising for Rolex occurred when a Rolex "Deep-sea" timepiece, went to the bottom of the Mariana Trench (35,000 feet deep) fastened to the hull of the bathyscaphe Trieste, and when a Rolex "Explorer" wristwatch went to the top of Mount Everest (altitude 29,000 feet) with Sir Edmond Hillary, all with no adverse effects to those timepieces. Hans Wilsdorf's personal philosophy has been decisive for the runaway success of Rolex. He was convinced that a successful timepiece should feature an accurate chronometer quality movement, totally secured into a sturdy case, impervious to water, dust, and shocks and to all adverse conditions likely to be encountered by various wearers, especially sportsmen. Only then, he believed, would a wristwatch maintain its performance, reliability, beauty and value over time. The result was that Rolex wristwatches were being worn by people who believed that if the wristwatch was good enough for sportsmen, it would certainly be more than good enough for less extreme usage. Rolex wristwatches were priced so as to distinguish them from everyday timepieces, and to symbolize a measure of personal achievement for those being able to afford them. Wilsdorf saw to it that Rolex wristwatches maintain their subdued classical appearance and be recognizable at first glance everywhere. When Hans Wilsdorf died in 1960 at the age of 79, he had by then acquired the Aegler factory, and was the sole owner of Rolex. The company's annual revenue today is, reportedly, in excess of \$3.0 billion. Rolex wristwatches are now manufactured by the millions and sold in every country around the world. Through courage, perseverance, and confidence in his own judgment, Hans Wilsdorf built an empire that will remain a symbol of outstanding personal accomplishment for decades and perhaps centuries to come. ■



## CHAPTER 190 NEWS



In October, Chapter 190 will hold its regular monthly meeting at the Santa Barbara courthouse. Private tours of the Courthouse and the Clock Gallery will be provided, as well as lunch. All at no charge. This will be a special day, by invitation only, for chapter members, family and invited friends. Please mark Sunday, October 21st on your calendar for this special event.

Space is limited, and RSVP is a must so that we can plan seating and lunch. Contact Mike Schmidt to reserve space. Phone: (805) 988-1764  
E-mail: EagleCreekClocks@msn.com



Welcome New Members

John Darby, from Ventura  
Neil Kuns, from Camarillo





# A Reading Of A French Figural Clock

by *Giorgio Perissinotto*

As clock collectors or repairers we are often drawn more to the movements than to the case or the figure or figures adorning it. When it comes to the well known French clocks made by the millions in the 19th century and up to the 20th, there is probably more variety in cases than in movements. The cases mirror the architectural and decorative styles in vogue, and though today we exhibit our clocks not really thinking of pairing it with the piece of furniture upon which it stands or with the painting in the near wall, the clock, when made, was in consonance with the trends of the time. Let us look at this clock and imagine it placed on an elegant buffet, a Boulle bureau, a sideboard or a chiffonier.

This rather stunning figural clock is just begging to be admired and “read.”

But we should bear in mind that there is no “correct” interpretation. One can simply see an elegant woman dressed in a classical Greco-Roman robe holding flowers in one hand and resting a foot on a clam shell or scallop, which comes from the French word “escalope,” meaning, not surprisingly, “shell.” But the bunch of flowers is actually a “Horn of Plenty,” overflowing with diverse fruits and symbolizing abundance and fertility. This theme is also restated on the lower part of the case, or frieze. But in order not to tax your eyes, let us just focus on the shell. A foot resting on a large shell-scallop? Clearly the artist could have picked a more common foot rest, but he did not and thus we are invited to speculate.



The clam shell has symbolic value in many cultures, from India (Vishnu carries a shell) to the moon god in Aztec culture. Its main reference is to vulva and matrix as life receiving and giving organ. It is in this context that the clam shell symbolically refers to divine conception and is prominent in



Italian Renaissance, especially in representations of Mary and child standing below the symbol of the clam shell. Also well known and poorly understood is the Birth of Venus by Botticelli. Venus was born of sea-foam, and was also the mother of Aeneas, of Trojan fame.



*The Birth of Venus*

But we can go back more than 1000 years before the Renaissance and find the Pompeii Venus, 1st century CE (Common Era, or Anno Domini, AD), also lying on a shell, and thus throwing a 2000 years bridge on the notion of “woman in a shell.” Clearly past generations had a better grasp of symbolic representations.



*Pompeii Venus*

Yet all this about divine conception does not sufficiently explain our richly clad lady with a foot on a clam. We have to find another link, one that would connect conception with abundance and fertility. Closely related to divine conception, hinged shells have symbolized fertility in a much wider sense.

The Roman deity Ceres was a goddess of agriculture, grain crops, fertility and motherly relationships. It is perhaps superfluous to point out that when we eat “cereal” we should thank her for being the provider, as the word comes from her name. Her Greek counterpart was called Demeter and was also the goddess of crops. Ceres is believed to have discovered and given spelt wheat to humankind, as well as the yoke for oxen, thus enabling the transition from nomadic to sedentary civilization.

I do not own this clock, nor do I know what it is labeled. I have “read” it and I am confident that it is indeed a fusion of Venus and Ceres, leaning towards Ceres because of the Horn of Plenty, but also to Venus because of the clam shell. I did not forget the right arm holding something that I cannot make out. But I would venture to say that it is wheat. So my reading is now firmly footed (cannot resist the play on words) on Venus/Ceres, a bit beyond “French lady Holding Flowers.”



# Tales From the Bench

by Ferdinand Geitner

## Replacing Platform Escapements

I was discussing the replacement of a broken cylinder platform escapement with a jeweled lever platform escapement on a French clock movement with a fellow horologist and realized that there was a need to inform collectors and the public about the method involved in fitting the different shapes & sizes of new Platforms.

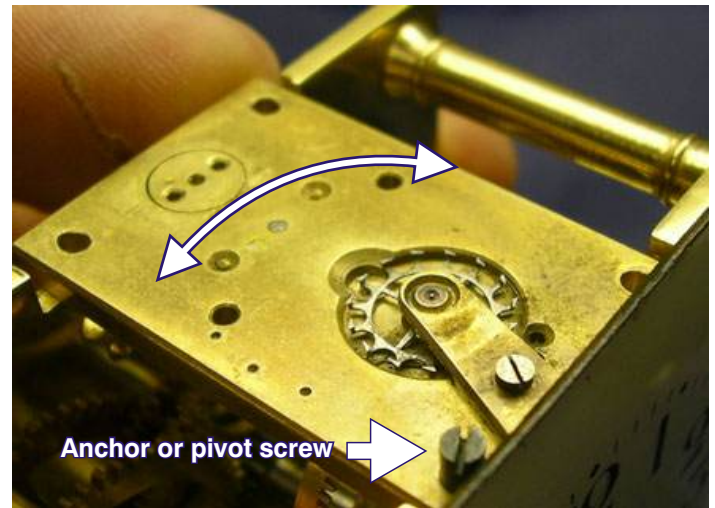
Modern jeweled lever platforms are designed to fit modern movements and older movements need some modifications to attach them correctly. The precise depthing of the escape wheel pinion into the corresponding drive wheel has to be established first to determine the final (exact) position of the platform.

For the escapement to function correctly the placement is extremely important. Another factor is the shape (pitch) of the teeth to mesh smoothly, otherwise the amplitude of the balance is badly affected due to the fact that the power from the mainspring will be constantly changing due to the varying friction between the pinion & corresponding wheel. The number of teeth on the escape wheel pinion has to be considered too. If one can find the same tooth count, great. Otherwise one has to change the weight of the balance wheel (if too fast) or pull in (shorten) the hairspring (if too slow). It's all possible and is part of the replacement job!

It is quite a simple procedure to align the platform with the contrate wheel correctly, but many people are reluctant to apply it as it involves the dismantling of the platform, drilling, and cutting threads. In the long run, it is still the only correct procedure to satisfy the repair and the customer.

First, remove the balance with the balance bridge and place it somewhere safe. Next, remove the pallet and escape wheel bridge and remove the pallet. Replace the bridge on the escape wheel and place the partly stripped platform onto the movement. Align the escape wheel pinion with the crown wheel (approximately and not too tight) and check for any screw holes on the movement that may be in alignment with a hole in the platform. If you find one (I usually do,) you're in luck and can secure the platform to the movement with one screw only. If no holes align you have to mark the position of one hole, drill and tap it to fit a screw.

Now comes the tricky part! Tighten the screw just enough so one can rotate the platform around it, place a toothpick or sharpened pegwood onto the upper escape wheel pivot to provide some friction (not too hard) and turn the contrate wheel (it drives the escape wheel pinion) with your finger. It should turn smoothly, like a knife through warm butter. If it feels like a ratchet, rotate the

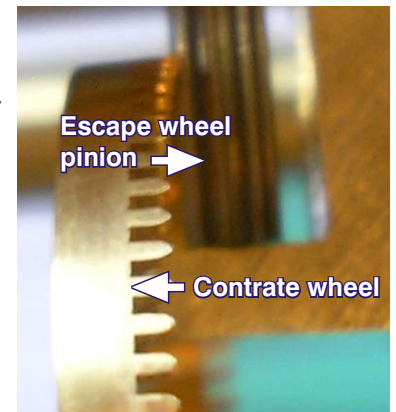
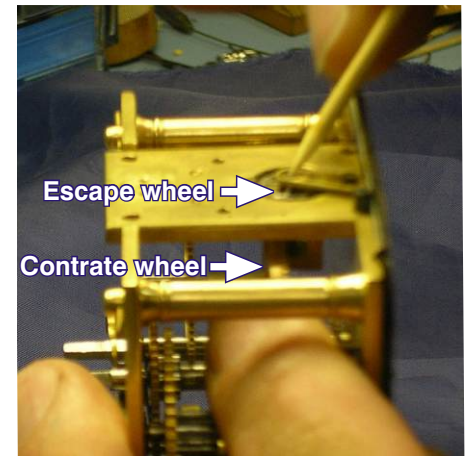


platform on it's screw, moving the pinion into or out of the contrate wheel, changing the depth until you feel an (almost) frictionless operation. That is the correct depth between the gears.

Now tighten the screw holding the platform without moving it out of alignment and check for other holes that (hopefully) line up. If some do, secure the platform and thank your lucky stars. Most of the time, one has to mark the other platform holes onto the movement, drill holes in the plate, and cut the thread for the remaining platform screws to complete the fitting. If two screws line up diagonally I usually leave it at that. Two screws along one side of the platform is not enough as that often does not secure the platform flat and the pinion could engage at an angle which is not acceptable.

That's it, I have done this procedure many times. There are other methods available, too. There are specialists who can manufacture and replace broken cylinders on antique platforms and it will keep the precious timepiece original. The cost in time and money may not be that different except that jeweled lever platforms tend to keep better time and wear much better.

I hope this article helps in understanding platform escapement replacement. ■



## Chapter 190 People

by Ernie Jenson

*Chapter 190 has a number of members that live in other states but find ways to contribute to our club. Dan Weiss is one of those members. He produces the "NAWCC Calendar Timepieces", that many of our members have obtained. All the proceeds go to the NAWCC. After reading his Bio, you will conclude that he is an amazing person. We are proud to have him as a member of our club.*



**Dan Weiss**

As a life-long resident of Philadelphia going into my 97th year of life, I am the last of eight sons. One sister also remains, going onto her 94th year. In my younger years, I started running errands for the print shop across the street from our home and naturally gravitated to the graphic arts industry. I always tried to learn more about this intriguing industry, and I went from job to job, never being dismissed from any of them, just trying to learn more.

Fast forward to the early 1960's. My employer's brother showed me a picture in a wood-workers magazine of a homemade English Bracket Clock and asked if I could build a similar one. Little did I realize that a picture would lead me into my 47th year as an NAWCC member (#8331) of Chapter #1 and later as a member of a number of other Chapters.

Evelyn, my wife, and I were married May 22, 1959 and it thrived until Evelyn passed away on May 8, 1997, two weeks short of 39 years of marriage. It was a good, happy marriage. We had no children...but we had a china calico cat and a china floppy-eared dog sharing the living room. In one of our many travels, we picked up a doorstop, a cast iron black and white bulldog that stands guard alongside the door to the den.

The house, after her passing, echoed with emptiness and loneliness for about 6-7 months until I adopted two adorable cats. The tortoiseshell, I named Frankie Weiss, the tabby was named Johnnie. Both were females and I became a father, a Mr. Mom at age near to 83. Through a mishap in the NAWCC, rules about Associate family members, Frankie Weiss became the only non-human member (#167825) ever in the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors rolls. She was also the focus of a book "Frankie Weiss and Her Magic, six years in the making." Never in actual print, it was published along with many short stories on three continents through the Internet.

My many years in this horological adventure started as a person building and hearing the tic and tock of a clock. I had found an interest that involved both my wife and me. Over the years, the collecting of clocks became overwhelming and many were sold, saving a few for our home.

As mentioned in the first paragraph, I built five Bracket clocks. Four were given to family and extended family

members. Oddly, two of these clocks found their way to San Diego and Carmichael, CA. Unfortunately, I will not have time to visit them when I come to the Convention in Pasadena this month.

I built five Grandmother Clocks following the Bracket clocks. Sold three, the first one is in my living room, the last Grandmother clock (not quite finished with the backing) I gave to my good friend and super watch mechanic Bruce Aldo of Sun City, AZ. I still have the horologic passion, but I have started disposing of my collection, it is just too much work to maintain and my heirs have little interest in these things...except for a few of the clocks, and pocket watches, which will be passed on to them.

Along, with my many, happy and fruitful years in the NAWCC, I collected innumerable friends, sadly many of whom are no longer with us. Since I had sold many of the clocks, my interest turned to pocket watches. Along the way, I accumulated some rarities and wrote articles about them as well as some of my clocks. A number of these articles are in the NAWCC Bulletin archives.

The following are some projects that I am proud to have initiated.

I am responsible for Stuttering Awareness Week, celebrated the 2nd week of May each year. It was signed into law by President Reagan in 1988. (It is far too long a story to get into details here.)

The NAWCC plaque honoring our 52 Founders, dated November 7, 1943, now hangs in the Museum, as will a plaque honoring our 50-year members (about 120.) It is being worked on as I write this piece.

The NAWCC Calendar, of timepieces from our members, was another brainchild of mine, and is totally produced by me, sold to NAWCC members and by the Museum Gift Store to visitors. All proceeds from sales go to helping our NAWCC general fund.

I would be remiss if I did not say, one of the smartest things that I have ever done, after I lost Evelyn, was adopting the three cats that helped me through the dark days that followed. The love of these wonderful, furry, four-legged animals was, and is, unrestricted. Only Johnnie II remains to share each day with me now. Not a day goes by though, as I look at their photos all over the house, that I don't pause to think that perhaps my greatest accomplishment (after marrying Evelyn) was adopting Frankie Weiss, Johnnie #1, and Johnnie II...and their adopting me!

I often smile in realization of the unbreakable bond between animal and human. Where would I be today...without these wonderful memories and my beautiful, loving Johnnie II jumping onto my lap wanting my company?



**Johnnie Weiss II**

*Thank you Dan, for the information on your life, and for being a part of our club. ■*



# CLASSIFIED PAGE

This page is dedicated to advertising for Chapter 190 members. It is, of course, free to members.

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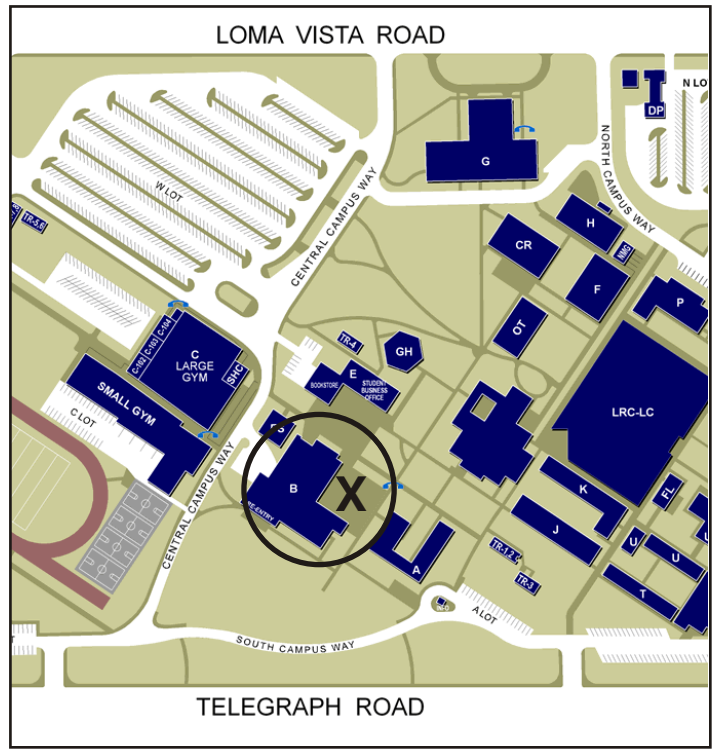
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inner box and gimbals; outer box not essential.

Please contact: Giorgio Perissinotto

E-mail: [giorgio@spanport.ucsb.edu](mailto:giorgio@spanport.ucsb.edu)

The Chapter 190 meetings are held the third Sunday of each month. (No meeting in December)  
 We will meet in the cafeteria on the Ventura College campus. The cafeteria is located in building "B", east of the gym and athletic field.



June 2012 Issue

# NO JUNE MEETING

NEXT MEETING  
**JULY 15**



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