

THE HISTORY OF THE BULLETIN'S CLOCK

In 1943 I came to Chicago from Saint Louis with my husband Alexander Langsdorf, Jr., who was invited to join the Manhattan Project by Enrico Fermi. We were able to get Edward Teller's apartment when the Tellers moved to Los Alamos.

The Publication known as the BULLETIN OF THE ATOMIC SCIENTISTS came into being as a pamphlet in December 1945. It was published as a direct response by concerned scientists to the social implications of the bomb. Since I knew most of the scientists, famous and not-so-famous, and was friends with H.H. Goldsmith, a founder of the BULLETIN, he asked for my help in designing it for a magazine format with a suitable cover. There was no money available for different monthly covers or any art work at all. By this time I had had numerous exhibitions of my drawings and paintings around the United States, Goldsmith thought me the logical one to help launch the BULLETIN as a full-fledged magazine.

There followed some sketches and ideas; the most significant of all was a sketch of a clock, which I made on the 8" X 11" back of a bound copy of Beethoven's Piano Sonatas. I visualized the cover by drawing a clock in white paint on the black binding of the Sonatas. It was a rather realistic clock but it was the IDEA of using a clock to signify urgency. My idea was to repeat the clock every month on a different color background...the first color being bright orange to catch the eye.

I had a friend, Egbert Jacobson, chief of design for the Container Corporation of America. I got his advice one evening at his house, on how to graphically carry out my idea of superimposing a clock, a table of contents and other pertinent information on the cover with style and clarity. His suggestions and know-how, were very helpful in designing the simplest possible form for a repeat cover. The June 1947 issue was the subsequent result and the clock became the logo of the BULLETIN. We moved  forwards and backwards the clock's hands

as the times indicated.

Goldsmith was delighted with my results as were the rest of the board as far as I knew. The same design ran on the cover for decades, only the contents and color changing. I also drew the end pieces and illustrations for articles from 1947 until sometime in the 1970s.

Many years later, Eugene Rabinowitch, a founder and editor of the BULLETIN confessed to me he never knew that H.H. Goldsmith asked me to design the cover. Rabinowitch lived in Urbana and there were gaps in the exact sequence of events...he confessed having thought the idea of the clock so brilliant that it surely must have come from Edward Teller.

Therein is the true birth of the BULLETIN CLOCK...designed by Martyl Langsdorf
1947