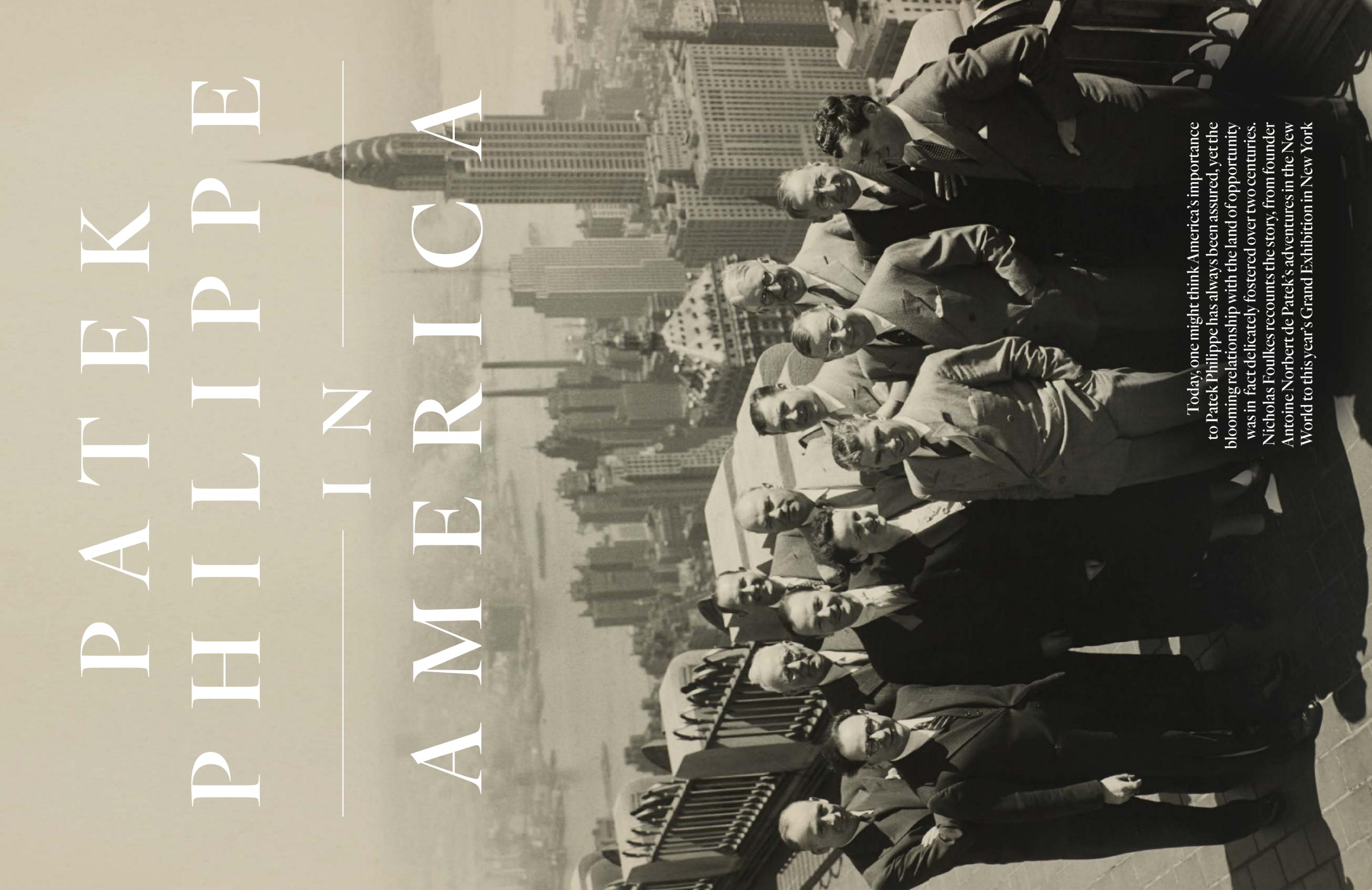


PATEK PHILIPPE — IN — AMERICA



Today, one might think America's importance to Patek Philippe has always been assured, yet the blooming relationship with the land of opportunity was in fact delicately fostered over two centuries. Nicholas Foulkes recounts the story, from founder Antoine Norbert de Patek's adventures in the New World to this year's Grand Exhibition in New York

“This badly organized country is crawling with dangers,” observed Antoine Norbert de Patek. It was not an auspicious beginning to what would become the most important relationship in the long history of Patek Philippe. A few days before Christmas 1854, the 42-year-old arrived in New York. He was lucky to be alive.

Three years earlier, at the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, Patek had presented a highly expensive pocket watch decorated with a portrait of George Washington. The same year, he had concluded an agreement to sell his watches at a New York jeweler called Tiffany, Young & Ellis. And so, in 1854, he decided to visit the far-off land that was developing a taste for fine Swiss watchmaking. It was a decision that he was regretting long before he set foot on the island of Manhattan...but at least he had lived to regret it.

On his voyage across the North Atlantic he had encountered such savage storms that the 10-day crossing took a fortnight. It was but the overture for an opera of misery. The city that he arrived in made Sodom and Gomorrah look like the quiet mountain villages of Switzerland. This was the lawless, corrupt, and dangerous home of Boss Tweed and countless bands of ruffians: a city liable to burst into flames or riots, or both, at the drop of a battered top hat. The middle-aged watchmaker had landed in the city imagined by Martin Scorsese in his 2002 film *Gangs of New York*...and he did not like it one bit.

After his arrival, Patek checked into the St. Nicholas Hotel at noon and dined at 5 P.M.: “During that time the doors to four bedrooms were picked, including mine; the locks to our trunks were broken, our bags were cut open, everything made of gold was stolen.” Three days later the hotel’s gas tank exploded. Patek’s letters to his colleagues read like crime reports: “Twenty-five thousand dollars in gold were stolen from one of the leading banks in New York, ten thousand dollars’ worth of diamonds were stolen from Mr. Tiffany.”

When five houses near his hotel burned down on Christmas Eve, he had had enough. At the beginning of the new year he took to the road. The trip was an epic that Homer himself might have enjoyed recounting. Patek had to contend with a derailed train and with foolish riverboat captains who raced and sank their steamboats without regard for their passengers. En route to Chicago he spent four days stuck in a 15-foot snowdrift. He wasn’t even doing good business. “The financial crisis which has just exploded here is awful.”

But once back in the calm of Geneva, upon reflection he was convinced that the future belonged to America. It did not take long for that future to arrive in Europe – in 1872 Tiffany opened a state-of-the-art, steam-powered watch production facility in central Geneva.

However, within four years Tiffany’s expensive attempt at globalization had failed. In the event, Patek Philippe took over the

factory, disposed of the machinery, and sold the building. It did, however, retain Tiffany’s gigantic safe. A fine trophy of the New York jeweler’s failed attempt at manufacturing timepieces in Geneva, it can still be seen in Patek Philippe’s historic Geneva Salons, beautifully restored, with the American eagle clutching two American flags; the only difference is that the words “Patek Philippe & Cie” replace Tiffany’s name above the words “New-York, Genève, Paris, London.” And the relationship between the two companies continues to this day.

From the 1870s, an increasing number of Americans were making the trip to Geneva. As an established stop on any comprehensive American tour of Europe, Patek Philippe kept a special “American Register” in which these visits were recorded in elegant copperplate script. By 1878 the company was receiving, on average, one hundred transatlantic tourists a month.

In fact, so important did the American trade become that in 1882, the year that Joseph Emile Philippe joined the firm to succeed his co-founder father, Jean Adrien, it was decided that a visit to the U.S. should be an annual event. Moreover, a period spent working in America was to become a rite of passage for those who intended to lead the company – a tradition that the Stern family continues today.

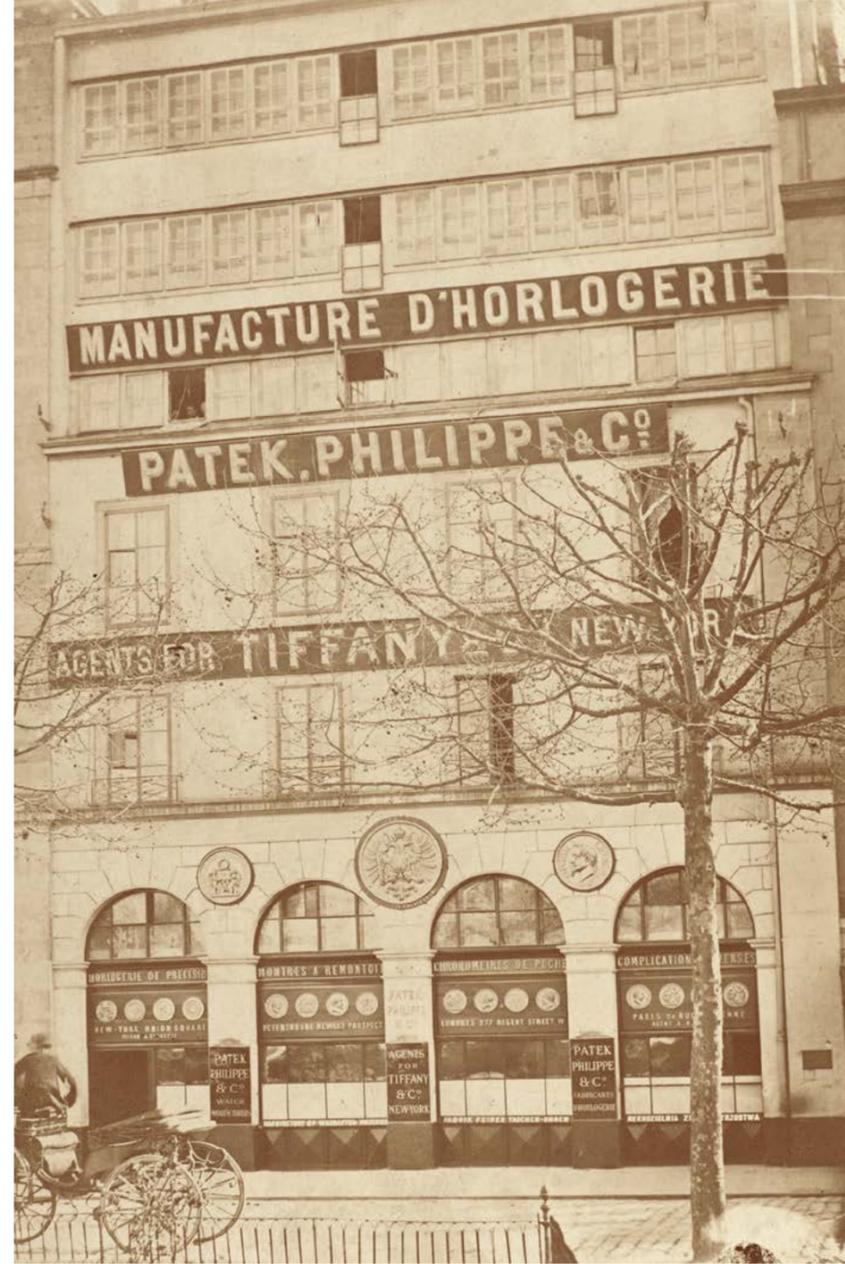
In 1895, Patek appointed a representative in the U.S. By then the country was well into its Gilded Age – an era celebrated in the novels of Edith Wharton and Henry James – in which boundless wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few tycoons who were richer than the royal families of Europe. For

these plutocrats, possession of a Patek Philippe watch was one of the axioms of success. Much more than a status symbol and reward, it was the crystallization of European culture and savoir faire; an object that required of its owner a scholarly understanding at once technically advanced and yet rooted in centuries of history.

Typical of the timepieces favored by these merchant princes is a handsome minute repeater with split-seconds chronograph, Movement No. 90 455. Made in the early 1890s, it was owned by the liquor magnate Jasper Newton Daniel and engraved with the name “Jack Daniel” (after the whiskey product on which his fortune was founded). Then, as now, the Patek Philippe habit was passed down through the generations; in 1893, Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr. was given a richly engraved minute repeater with split-seconds chronograph as a twenty-first birthday present from his father, the famously foul-mouthed “Commodore.”

The taste for Patek was shared by many men, few more different from each other than Henry Graves Jr., a blue-blooded New York financier, and James Ward Packard, an inventor and auto baron, whose watch collection was of such importance that parts of it went

Founder Antoine Norbert de Patek was convinced that the company’s future belonged to America



American Register.		
Name.	Where from.	Visit.
Rev. Mr. A. B. C.	New York	Hotel B...
Mr. R. S. D.	"	"
Mr. E. F. G.	Brooklyn N.Y.	"
Mr. H. I. J.	Brooklyn N.Y.	"
Mr. K. L. M.	New York	"
Mr. N. O. P.	"	"
Mr. Q. R. S.	Chicago U.S.A.	"

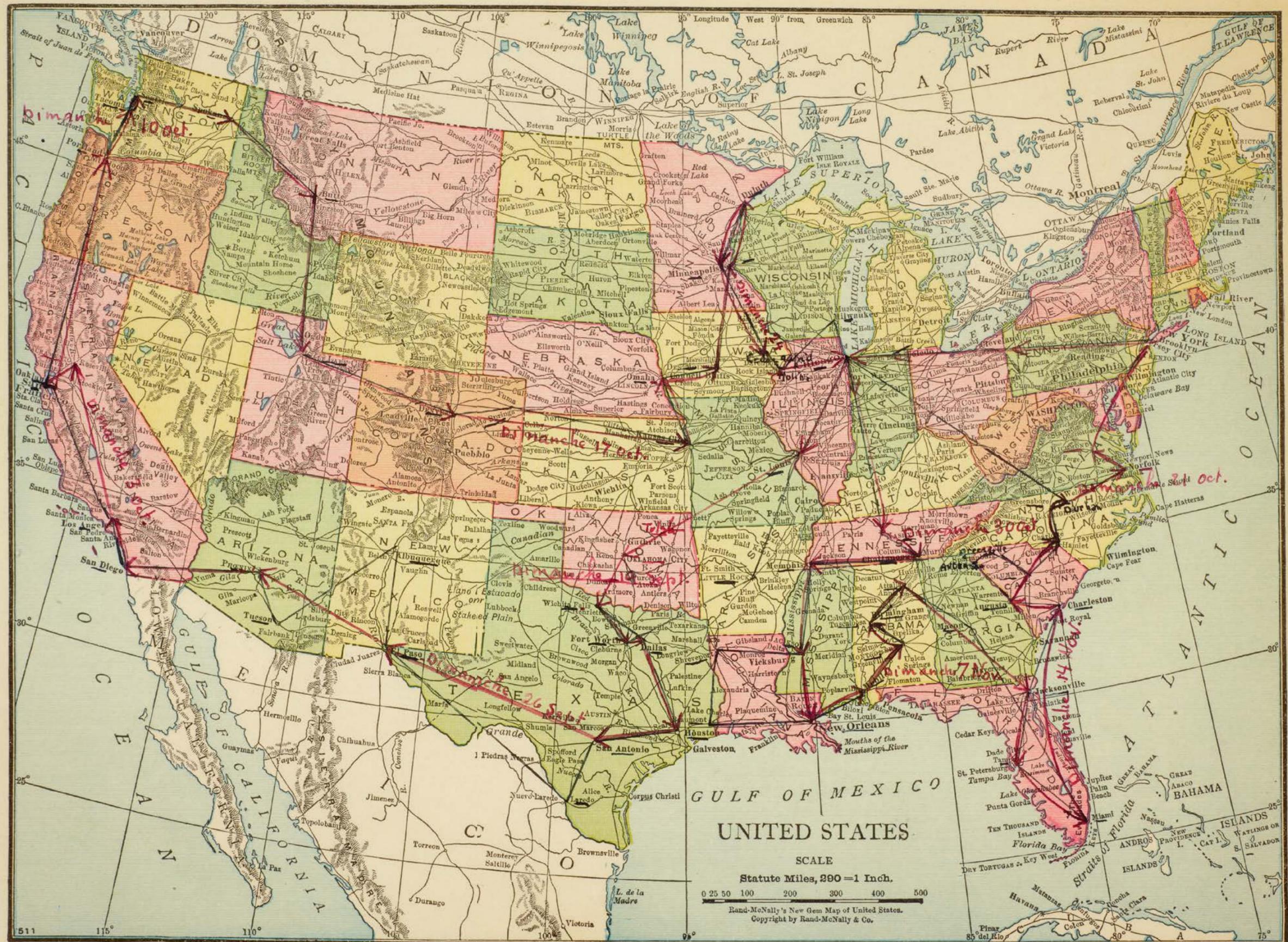
Previous spread: Henri Stern with colleagues, at Rockefeller Center, where Patek Philippe had offices, c. 1945. This page, clockwise from top left: from 1876 the Patek Philippe building in Geneva declared the company’s relationship with Tiffany & Co. in New York; the company’s first foray into the U.S. market dates from 1851, with pocket watch No. 4035, decorated with

George Washington’s portrait; among the timepieces created for Tiffany is this rare 1902 five-minute repeating split-seconds chronograph; and the 1852 hunter-cased ladies’ pocket watch, No. 4740; the “American Register” recorded visits and orders from U.S. patrons; an 1860 portrait of Antoine Norbert de Patek, who visited the U.S. in 1854 to establish trade links

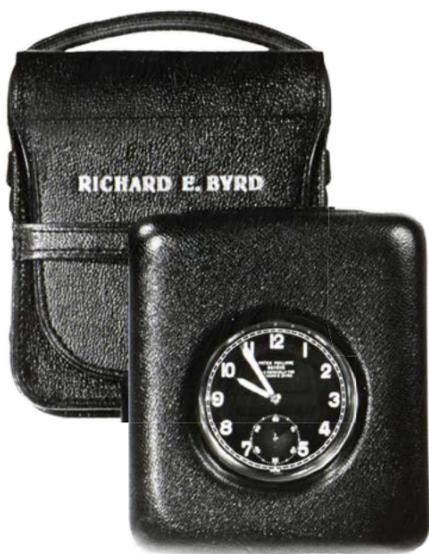


Henri Stern, who joined Patek Philippe in 1935 at the age of 24, was tasked with reviving the company's U.S. business during the aftermath of the Great Depression. Henri used this map of America, right, to study the path taken by his predecessors and to plan his own route, which he hoped would be more successful. Above, from top: the Ref. 2597 was launched in 1957. Known as the "Cross Country," its two-time-zone mechanism allowed the wearer to

hour hand at the press of two buttons – useful when traveling between the different time zones; in 1954 the Ref. 2523 was the first World Time watch with two crowns, enabling the wearer to adjust it to local time via a rotating disk showing a choice of 41 locations. This particular yellow gold example features a colorful map of North America in cloisonné enamel and has a 24-hour AM/PM revolving disk; Patek Philippe's first retrograde date perpetual calendar, the 1937 Ref. 96



— Minéraire Muller
 — Rectifié



Above: Henri Stern, right, at the company's New York offices in the 1950s. Above right, from top: the unique 1930 REF. 541 with perpetual calendar and minute repeater on two gongs was recased in platinum in 1939; as Henri Stern's dynamism shaped the American market, back in Geneva the atmosphere was that of fierce innovation. Pieces such as the legendary 1947-48 REF. 1518 perpetual calendar in yellow gold

began to appear; American ads included this 1940s example; the company's relationship with the U.S. is celebrated in this 1976 advert; a 1968 design by adman Seth Tobias encompasses the themes of inheritance and longevity, now synonymous with Patek Philippe's advertising. Left: designed to be operated with gloved hands, this anti-magnetic pocket watch was made for the polar explorer Admiral Byrd in 1955

on display at the Smithsonian. Whether or not the two men were involved in a competition to commission the most complicated Patek Philippe can be debated, but what is indisputable is that Henry Graves Jr. owned the most complicated watch designed before the age of computer-aided design. He received his famous supercomplication in January 1933, by which time the Gilded Age was long past and America had entered the Great Depression.

Although it began in New York with the stock market crash of 1929, the Great Depression was felt in every part of the civilized world. In Geneva, Patek Philippe teetered on the brink of collapse but was rescued by one of its suppliers, a family-owned dial-making company, Stern Frères. In 1937 Henri Stern, a young man in his twenties, was sent to America. He remained there for 20 years, witnessing, firsthand, the dawn of the Golden Age of Capitalism and the emergence of post-war America as a global superpower.

"In the 1940s and until the 1950s or early 1960s, somewhere around half of the watches that were produced were sold to Americans," says Hank Edelman, whose father worked as a watchmaker for Patek Philippe in New York from the 1940s and who himself would rise to be president of the U.S. branch of the company. Americans were now shaping the future, and Patek Philippe was determined to help them.

In 1955, Admiral Richard Evelyn Byrd of the United States Navy was appointed Commander of the U.S. mission Operation Deep Freeze, set up to establish a research station in the Antarctic. Byrd was a veteran of polar exploration and had taken a Patek Philippe (Serial No. 201 484) with him on an earlier expedition. When the firm learned that he was returning to the icy wastes of Antarctica, it quickly offered to equip him with "a high precision Patek Philippe watch as a token of gratitude and friendship from us." Byrd replied with alacrity, accepting the gift "with warm thanks" and adding that his new watch would "be a valued possession and will certainly accompany me wherever I go." But he was also quick to reassure Patek Philippe that his earlier watch was still "functioning perfectly after these many years."

Long-distance travel would not remain the preserve of the adventurer, and as the needs of the New World developed, it is possible to see the wider influence of America on Patek Philippe's output. Synchronizing almost perfectly with the launch of the first jet flights linking America to Europe came the REF. 2597, also known as the "Cross Country" or the "Two Time Zones." Its appeal was best summed up by the slogan "Push Button Time." Two small pushpieces could be pressed to advance or set back the hour hand.

"This [function] is intended for the man who frequently travels from one time zone to another," the company's literature explained.

Moreover, it is part of company folklore that an aerial view of an American highway junction inspired the shape of the famous Golden Ellipse, icon watch of the late 1960s. At the time of its release, the Golden Ellipse was one of the most avant-garde designs in the Patek Philippe portfolio, yet it was during this same decade that the company began to talk about its extraordinary history. America turned an eager ear to the narrative. An article in the *Dallas Times Herald* of October 15, 1969, invited its readers to marvel at the craftsmanship and history of the Old World.

"A priceless and select exhibit of antique timepieces from the Patek Philippe Museum in Geneva will be shown for the first time in this country next week at Linz Brothers Jewelers, downtown store, 1608 Main...On display Tuesday and Wednesday will be a heart-shaped watch made in 1856 for Marie-Christine, Queen of Spain...Also included will be...a minute repeater pocket watch made in 1928 for Pope

Pius XI, enameled with the Papal coat of arms...While the cloisonné and enameling on these historic timepieces is generally regarded as a lost art of the Old World, viewers will be privileged to see a group of contemporary men's pocket watches with magnificently hand-enameled cases depicting marine, equestrian, and hunting scenes...Among the notable Patek Philippe timepieces from the 1970 collection to be displayed will be ladies' watches with dials of eighteen-karat blue gold; bracelets set with diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and emeralds; strap and bracelet models for men; automatics with

sweep-seconds hand; and several unique pieces such as a perpetual calendar watch, which also shows the moon phase of the day's date."

Almost 50 years since the citizens of Dallas inspected the treasures of Patek Philippe, this summer America will again be able to admire the marque's remarkable watches, including pieces from the world-renowned Patek Philippe Museum, as *The Art of Watches Grand Exhibition* opens to the public in New York.

Nothing this ambitious has yet been attempted by Patek Philippe in the United States, and not just New Yorkers but visitors from beyond Manhattan and beyond the borders of America are expected to attend. They will be able to immerse themselves in the culture and the crafts that have drawn Americans to Patek Philippe for more than a century and a half. It is to be hoped that these visitors from out of town form a better impression of New York than Antoine Norbert de Patek did, a little more than 160 years ago. ♦ For more on this subject, see the exclusive video content on *Patek Philippe Magazine Extra* at patek.com/owners

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