

## *Three Generations of Clock Makers in New Jersey*

Three generations of clock makers in New Jersey were headed by two families—the Miller family and the Brokaw Family.

Aaron Miller, the head of the family, was a clockmaker of some note in Elizabeth Town, New Jersey, from at least 1747. Miller had lived in New York before setting up his business in Elizabeth Town. The New York Gazetteer (November 23, 1747) described Miller as “a clockmaker in Elizabeth (who)...makes and sells all sorts of clocks after the Dutch manner-...he likewise makes compasses and chains for surveyors.”

Isaac Brokaw was born in Hillsborough Twp., Somerset Co., NJ in 1746. He apprenticed around 1760 with clockmaker Aaron Miller of Elizabethtown. Brokaw married Miller's daughter Elizabeth in 1766. In 1770, Brokaw was living in Bridgewater when a local judge ordered that his property be sold off to pay off his outstanding debts. However, he was allowed to keep 30 pounds of lead to continue his trade. Shortly thereafter, he would again leave for Elizabeth, where he would produce some of his first significant works. He probably worked in partnership with Miller's son, Cornelius, for a time. His father-in-law, Aaron Miller, died in 1778 and left part of his clockmaking tools to him, as his father-in-law's will states that he left his clockmaking tools to his son, Cornelius, and his son-in-law, Isaac Brokaw. Cornelius died in 1779, and Isaac inherited the rest of the clockmaking tools.

After Aaron and Cornelius Miller died, Isaac Brokaw returned to Elizabeth Town to work in the same shop where he had learned his trade. He was active there until 1778-1779, when he moved to Bridge Town (now part of Rahway), leaving his eldest son, John, in charge of his former shop. Isaac Brokaw worked in Rahway until 1816, when he transferred the business to his son, Aaron, after his son, John Isaac, had died in 1812. The style practiced by Miller and Brokaw is of a decidedly Dutch tradition, as Central Jersey, particularly the area around Somerset County, was known as an early Dutch settlement.

Isaac Brokaw and his wife, Elizabeth Miller, had three sons, John Isaac, Aaron, and Cornelius. John, the eldest of them, and Aaron took up the trade of clockmaking, having been taught by their father. Son John Isaac died in 1812. Their father, Isaac Brokaw, died in Rahway in 1826, and Isaac's son Aaron died on December 18, 1853.

John Isaac Brokaw, grandson of Aaron Miller, was born in 1765 in Hillsborough, New Jersey, the oldest son of Isaac Brokaw and Elizabeth Miller, daughter of clockmaker Aaron Miller. John Brokaw was taught the trade by his father, Isaac Brokaw, who was well known for his clocks of fine quality. When John's grandfather, Aaron Miller, died in 1778, he willed his tools to his son-in-law, Isaac, the father of John. Isaac, and Isaac's sons, John and Aaron, continued the clock-making business in both Elizabeth Town and Bridge Town (Rahway). Our clock has “John Brokaw Bridge Town” on the face. Our clock, we estimate, was made before 1812, as John Isaac Brokaw died December 26, 1812, in Rahway, New Jersey. His brother Aaron continued the clockmaking business afterward and continued to make clocks after their father, Isaac, died in 1826.

Clocks made by these three generations of clockmakers are elegant, stylish, and of the finest quality. Isaac and Aaron Brokaw used the best cabinet makers in New Jersey to produce exquisite cases for their clocks, sometimes in New England walnut or imported Caribbean mahogany, and occasionally with decorative marquetry inlays. These were very much influenced by designs and fashions that were popular in England, though, generally, styles seemed to linger longer in America, possibly as there was a delay in the latest designs reaching the former colonies. The Brokaws are thought to have used Matthew Egerton, a renowned cabinet maker from New Brunswick, New Jersey, for some of the cases, as well as Rousett and Mulford of Elizabeth Town. Aaron may also have worked in association with John Scudder, a cabinet maker based in Westfield and Rahway, who sometimes retailed his own clocks, having made the cases and bought the movements for them. The cases were mostly made around the dimensions of the clock, so each clock case is unique to the clock installed in the case.

The John Brokaw Clock is on display at the Van Veghten House, headquarters of the Somerset County Historical Society, 9 Van Veghten Drive, Bridgewater, New Jersey

Source: <https://discoveringclocks.wordpress.com/2014/08/13/remembering-three-generations-of-american-clockmakers-a-longcase-clock-by-aaron-brokaw-of-new-jersey/>