

A Renaissance Man Comes to Philadelphia:

Jeffrey Lock, Restoration Specialist



Photograph courtesy of Jeffrey Lock

When Jeffrey Lock was a young student, he came across a copy of the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci and was enraptured with the mechanical designs so beautifully illustrated by Leonardo's hand. From that point on, he knew the direction that he wanted his studies to take.

His love of precision, detail, artistry, and utility eventually drew him to the restoration of historic scientific instruments. Upon Jeff's first visit to Philadelphia, he found a treasure trove of instruments in many museums' collections and was helped by curators who shared his passion. He discovered another master of mechanical innovation, the 18th century Philadelphian, David Rittenhouse, and has had the good fortune of working on and disassembling and restoring over a dozen instruments and tall case clocks by David Rittenhouse from museums and private collections.

The more he studied da Vinci and Rittenhouse, the more he realized they fine-tuned their research and talents specifically to the direction they chose to pursue. They were both motivated by the ultimate challenge of perfection, accepting no shortcuts.

In 2012, for the American Philosophical Society's David Rittenhouse Transit Telescope, Jeff constructed a tripod and cradle assembly like that used to hold the telescope built by Rittenhouse for use in the 1769 Transit of Venus. During work on that project, Jeff met Karie Diethorn, Chief Curator for Independence National Historical Park Division of Cultural Resources Management. The idea for Jeff to construct a similar cradle assembly for Independence Park's John Bird Transit and Equal Altitude Instrument using the tripod that he had built for the APS was born. Visitors can now see his fine work on the John Bird Transit in the Governors Council Chamber on the second floor of Independence Hall.

The combination of science and art and the utility of an object beautifully created are what inspire Jeff. He works to restore the artifact to a condition reflecting its use in its environment, not as a new, polished item on display. All of the parts Jeffrey makes are patinated to be consistent with the original instrument, and are signed and dated by him on the inside (or underside) so that a researcher knows what was original and what was replicated.

Jeff calls himself an altruistic perfectionist who loves working with his hands at each stage of the project. Aside from preserving a piece of beauty, this work preserves history and tells a story of how we got from then to now. Like Brunelleschi who designed the dome of the Duomo in Florence, Jeff believes in simple solutions, carefully and precisely executed.

But even an intense, inspired, generous perfectionist needs some time off. For Jeff, that's golf.