

Bulova Celebrates America's 250th Anniversary

By Carl E. Rosen (NY)

In celebration of the 250th anniversary of American independence, we're pleased to present this new series throughout 2026. Each article—published in the order received—provides a very brief overview of a key American clockmaker, watchmaker, or manufacturer who played a critical role in horology. These snapshots remind us of the incredible craftsmanship and entrepreneurship fostered by a spirit of independence.

Bulova is as much an American story as the United States is a Bulova story. Beginning with the company's founding in 1875 by Czech immigrant Joseph Bulova in New York City, the firm has impacted how people tell time for over 150 years. Bulova's technical and marketing innovations helped the US be a leader on the world stage, and even beyond this planet with advances in space exploration.

Joseph Bulova (Figure 1) has been called the "Henry Ford of watchmaking" with his focus on standardization of parts, not only for efficient manufacturing, but also for reducing the number of components needed to repair a watch. With almost 400 patents, his impact has been far-reaching. For instance, the 1927 patent for the movement dust cover represented a major improvement in watch reliability (Figure 2).

In 1927, Bulova began producing Miss America watches for presentation to the winner, as well as offering it to the American public (Figure 3). The inaugural Miss America watch became the best-selling ladies' sports watch in 1927.

When I give tours of one of Bulova's museums, I often tell visitors that one can view the history of the United States through the lens of Bulova. While it was and remains on the forefront of horological technology, the designs, marketing, and even packaging represent a journey over

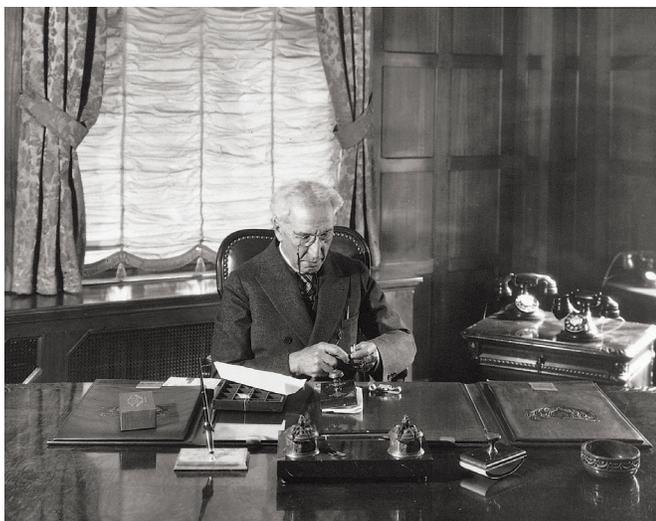


Figure 1. Joseph Bulova. COURTESY OF BULOVA.

Jan. 11, 1927.

1,614,276

J. BULOVA

WATCH

Filed Sept. 8 1925

Fig. 1.

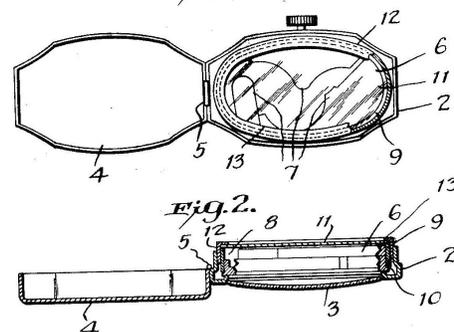


Figure 2. Joseph Bulova's 1927 patent for a movement dust cover.

Figure 3.
The 1930
Saturday
Evening
Post ad for
the Miss
America
model.
COURTESY
OF BULOVA.

PRESENTING
MISS AMERICA
BY
BULOVA

MISS AMERICA
\$3750

MISS AMERICA: 15 jewel movement; artistically engraved; 4 simulated sapphires or emeralds; flexible bracelet set with matching gems; in presentation box.

Cased and Timed at the Bulova Observatory
Fifth Avenue, New York

TODAY—the Bulova Miss America makes its debut. Today—leading jewelers from coast to coast present this beautiful timepiece. The handsomely engraved case, set with simulated sapphires or emeralds . . . the beautiful, flexible bracelet . . . will quickly appeal to those who appreciate beauty, accuracy and true value in a timepiece.

But Miss America is only one of the many new Bulova models for men and women. Priced from \$25 to \$2500, each is a dependable timepiece. Be sure to see them—and above all, the Miss America!

BULOVA WATCH COMPANY, Fifth Avenue, New York . . . In Canada: Sterling Tower, Toronto

“LISTEN IN” NIGHTLY FOR BULOVA RADIO TIME ANNOUNCEMENTS

AMBASSADOR: 15 jewel movement; radium dial; engraved; flexible band to match . . . **\$3750**

LONE EAGLE: 15 jewel movement; radium dial; engraved; flexible band to match . . . **\$3750**

AT THE BETTER JEWELERS . . . EVERYWHERE

BULOVA OBSERVATORY

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the last 150 years. During and after World War II, Bulova was as much of a precision instrument company as it was a watch and clock manufacturer (Figure 4). The company manufactured aviation and navigation instruments, telescopes for tanks, fuzes, ordnance devices, jewel bearings, and even missile guidance systems.

Bulova was chosen to be one of the few watch manufacturers to produce a watch with the US A-11 specifications with a hack mechanism that is referred to as "the watch that won the war," because it enabled the synchronization of military operations (Figure 5). With five-star General Omar Bradley as its chairman from 1958–74, the company was also a key timekeeper supplier to 46 NASA missions (Figure 6).

Bulova also supported those who served during the war by opening the Joseph Bulova School of Watchmaking in 1945 (Figure 7). Over the years, technical training was provided to over 2,000 disabled veterans; it gave them a profession, dignity, and a way to care for their families. Today, Bulova supports the Veterans Watchmakers Initiative, founded by a graduate of the Bulova School and dedicated to the same principles.

Besides making the timepieces themselves, Bulova provided a mechanism for Americans to set their watches to the correct time. In 1926, it became the first company to advertise nationally on radio. The famous "time checks"—"It's 8 p.m. B-U-L-O-V-A, Bulova Watch Time"—aired on radio stations across America every hour. (By the



Figure 4. Pages from the 1944 Bulova Annual Report describing its war effort. COURTESY OF BULOVA.



Figure 5. The 1944 A-11 Hack Watch. COURTESY OF BULOVA.

mid-1950s, these time checks had aired 5 billion times!) Radio was an essential medium for entertainment, and families huddled around their set to listen to radio shows.

In 1928, Bulova created the first clock radio, which combined two technologies into a piece of furniture that resembled a grandfather clock (Figure 8). In the 1950s, Bulova's Electronic Division produced bedside and kitchen clock radios, transistors, phonographs, and even ladies' electric razors.

In 1941, Bulova became the first company to advertise on television. The ad ran before a Brooklyn Dodgers and Philadelphia Phillies game. Bulova was ubiquitous on television (Figure 9), sponsoring shows such as the *Frank Sinatra Show*, also known as the *Bulova Hour*, and the *Jackie Gleason Show*.

Launched in 1960, the Accutron was the first revolution in timekeeping in over 300 years. Powered by a battery, a tuning fork vibrated at 360 times per second and provided the beating heart of a timepiece with just 12 moving parts and accurate to within 1–2 seconds per day. The Accutron became the official Presidential Gift of State as a showcase of American technology and design, was the clock on Air Force One (Figure 10), and was the official issued watch to all X-15 pilots.



Gemini VI spacecraft instrument panel, photographed after splashdown. White case, lower left, houses 24-hour-dial Bulova Accutron GMT clock. US Navy photo.

Figure 6. The 24-hour Bulova Accutron GMT clock used in the Gemini VI spacecraft, 1965. COURTESY OF BULOVA.



Figure 7. The Joseph Bulova School of Watchmaking in Woodside, NY, opened in 1945 and closed in 1993. COURTESY OF BULOVA.

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Figure 8. Photo taken in 1964 of Bulova president Harry B. Henshel (left) and Bulova chairman General Omar Bradley (right) with a 1929 Bulova clock radio. COURTESY OF BULOVA.

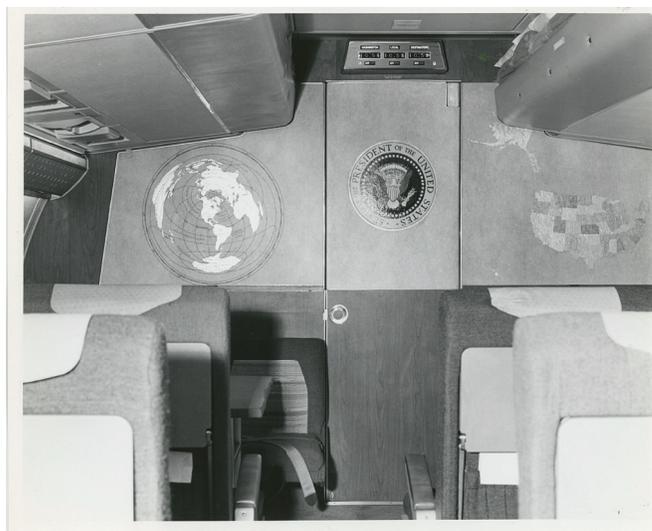
In the 1970s, during the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) debate, Bulova advertised its new Accutron ladies watch with an advertising campaign in support of the ERA: “Equal Pay. Equal Time” (Figure 11). In the 1980s, Bulova was an American Olympic sponsor and ran the “One Great Face Deserves Another” campaign that featured many celebrities, including Muhammad Ali (Figure 12).

Bulova’s consumers were very attached to the brand, even to the point of naming favorite models. In 1970 Bulova introduced the generically named “Chronograph C”—because it was the third in a sequence—but the public instead referred to the watch as “Stars and Stripes” due to its bold, patriotic design in red, white, and blue (Figure 13). When Bulova launched the Archive Series in 2016 to reintroduce its most historically significant timepieces to 21st-century consumers, Chrono C was the first to be released, based on a survey of Bulova collectors’ preferences. The Lunar Pilot, Super Seville, Miss America, American Girl, Jet Star, Parking Meter, Computron, Surfboard, and Oceanographer are no



Figure 9. Iconic image from a 1940s Bulova television ad. COURTESY OF BULOVA.

▼ **Figure 10.** An Accutron clock on Air Force One, 1969. COURTESY OF BULOVA.



longer just names from the past; they are reincarnations with the latest technologies to enhance functionality. These watches inspired by the past have earned Bulova a reputation as a collectible brand. The company has reinvigorated existing watch aficionados and motivated others to become collectors.

In 2025, the Accutron tuning fork movement made its return with the launch of the Spaceview 314 collection (Figure 14), an evolved and reimagined successor to the original 214 caliber.

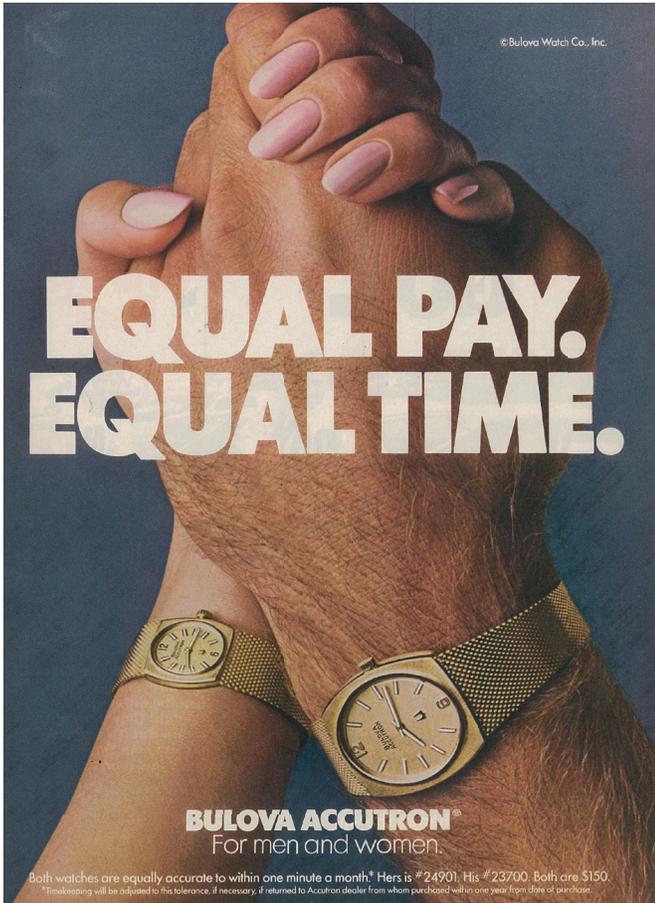


Figure 11. 1974 Bulova Accutron ad. COURTESY OF BULOVA.

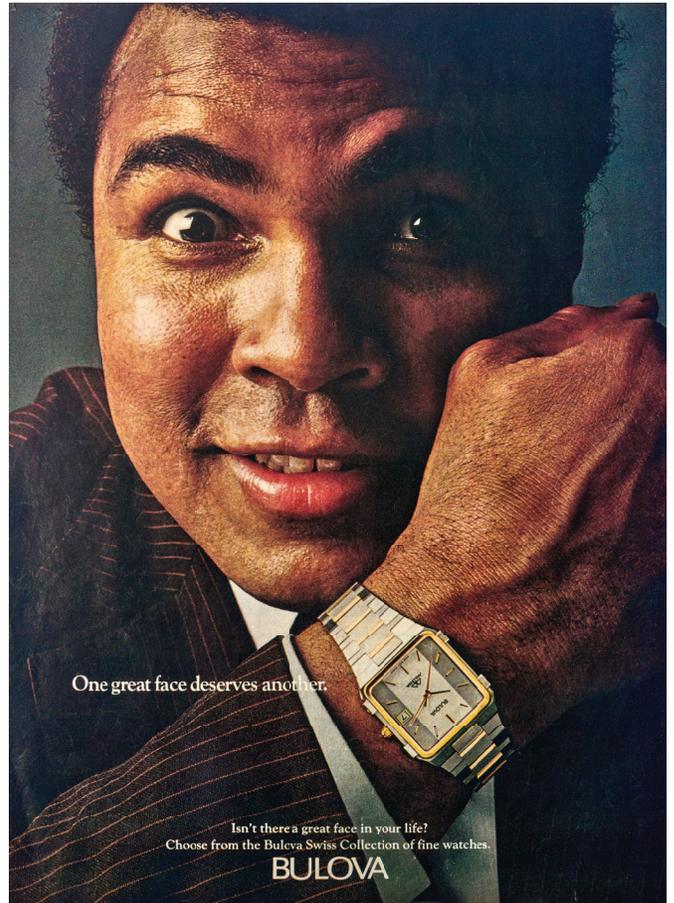


Figure 12. The 1982 "Great Faces" ad featuring Muhammad Ali. COURTESY OF BULOVA.

Bulova is a sponsor of Sail4th 250, a celebration of America's 250th birthday in 2026, with the largest-ever flotilla of tall ships from around the world gathered in the harbor of the Port of New York and New Jersey. The event will create a majestic nautical spectacle and an unforgettable once-in-a-generation event on land, sea, and air. This partnership brings the brand full circle, as one of Bulova's early jewelry stores was on Maiden Lane near the seaport. Bulova, as a proud American brand, will introduce a limited-edition red, white, and blue Snorkel model created especially for the event.

Bulova has been operating in New York City since 1875. Its current headquarters is fittingly located in the Empire State Building, a fellow American icon.



Figure 13. The 1970 Chrono "C" known as the Stars & Stripes. COURTESY OF BULOVA.

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14A



In 2025, Bulova dedicated an exhibit at the National Watch & Clock Museum in Columbia, PA (Figure 15). It is not only a display of horological innovations, but also a walk down America's memory lane. Happy 250th!

About the Author

Carl E. Rosen has been the Bulova historian since 2016. He served as chief operating officer and president of Bulova Swiss, S.A., during his Bulova career, which spanned 30 years. He was also the chief information officer of Loews Corporation, Bulova's former parent company. He has a BS in civil engineering from Tufts University and an MBA from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania. He has appeared in many watch-related videos, podcasts, and television programs, including the History Channel's *Modern Marvels*.

Figure 14A. The 1960s Accutron Spaceview caliber 214. **B.** The 2025 Accutron 314. COURTESY OF BULOVA.

14B





Figure 15. The Bulova gallery at the National Watch & Clock Museum. COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL WATCH & CLOCK MUSEUM.



National Association of
WATCH & CLOCK
Collectors, Inc.

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