

Auction News

A recent survey of NAWCC members revealed that the majority of respondents identified themselves as timepiece collectors. Auction News acknowledges their interest in knowing the value of their collections and individual items with its focus on top auctions and their results. However, this feature is also sure to appeal to anyone curious about the auction prices of certain watches and clocks today. FNAWCC member Bob Frishman's article is followed by photos and brief descriptions of items and their auction prices from various auction houses. Anyone who is interested in writing about an auction they attended may contact Editor Therese Umerlik at tumerlik@nawcc.org or the Publications Department, 514 Poplar St., Columbia, PA 17512-2130.

Texans' Clock Collection Sells in Massachusetts

by Bob Frishman, FNAWCC (MA)

Terry and Karen Brotherton of Houston, TX, captured several top lots in Skinner's live auction in Marlborough, MA.

The Brothertons of Houston, TX, are good friends and former customers of Skinner Clock Department Director Robert C. Cheney, so it is no surprise he dispersed the collection at the auction this past April. Their collection comprised the first items of a relatively small sale of 274 lots and ten of the top 20 lots.

The couple spent decades assembling an impressive number of rare and important American clocks, mostly in original condition, purchased from respected experts and dealers. Many were illustrated in familiar clock reference books and exhibited at events sponsored by the NAWCC.

The Brothertons are well known in antique clock circles, and Terry has held important national and local positions with the NAWCC. He also received the NAWCC's Silver Star Fellow and Fellow awards.

Their collection focused mainly on New England and Pennsylvania timekeepers from the first half of the nineteenth century. Only one, attributed to John Albert of Adams County, PA, was a floorstanding clock. The rest were classics of shelf and wall styles, some with wooden works, some with fusees, and some with wagon springs powering their brass movements.

Pennsylvania makers also included Jacob Custer and Samuel Grosch. Massachusetts names, such as Aaron Willard, Horace Tiff, Elnathan Taber, and Edmund Currier, were familiar to bidders, as were other New England makers Joseph Dunning, Benjamin Morrill, and John Winkley, whose Shaker cherry shelf clock was the sale's third-strongest seller at \$27,060 (Figure 1).

A Levi Pitkin wall regulator sold to the Shelburne Museum for \$22,140. Cheney was especially pleased that the Montpelier, VT, clock will now be back in its home state. He believes Pitkin made this plain timepiece for use in his own shop, not for a commercial setting, which would have required a fancier case.



Figure 1. Few Shaker clocks were made and fewer have survived. This appealing cherry example, just 26½" tall, was attributed to John Winkley of Canterbury, NH, ca. 1790-1795. It has an 8-day time-only weight-driven brass movement. The provenance lists Peter Sawyer; it sold for \$27,060. COURTESY OF SKINNER.



The second-highest price at \$30,750 was for Dunning's mahogany wall clock, circa 1820, from his years of working in Burlington, VT (Figure 2). Like many clocks from this collection, it was displayed in 1999 at the NAWCC exhibit *Horological Rarities of Space City* and featured in the exhibit catalog. The 45" tall 8-day weight-driven time-only banjo-style clock had a Peter Sawyer provenance. This well-known Exeter, NH, dealer was present at the auction and, as the high bidder, came to redeem the clock.

Most American mechanical clocks originated in Con-

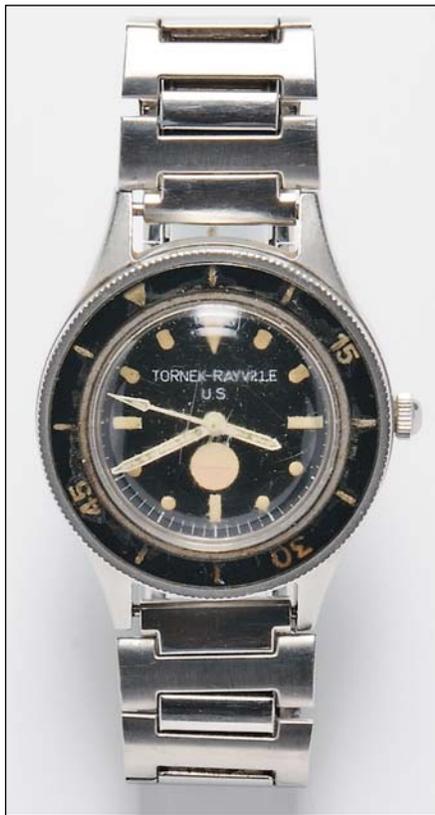


Figure 2, far left. This Joseph Nye Dunning wall clock has an 8-day time-only weight-driven brass movement typical of banjo-style wall clocks, but its shaped mahogany case makes it distinctive. It made \$30,750. COURTESY OF SKINNER (2).

Figure 3. This ca. 1965 Tornek-Rayville TR-900 diver's stainless steel watch was made for the US Navy. It was the sale's top-selling lot at \$58,425 and was not even pictured in the print catalog, which demonstrates the strength of today's vintage wristwatch market.

necticut, where mass production factory methods were pioneered at the beginning of the 1800s. The Brothertons had early examples by Silas B. Terry, who produced unusual and innovative clocks in relatively small numbers, and pristine models by other desirable clockmakers, including Miles Morse, Heman Clark, J. C. Brown, Seth Thomas, Chauncey Jerome, Smith & Goodrich, Birge & Fuller, and Joseph Ives.

The Brothertons also had two examples of revolving globe clocks manufactured in the 1880s by Juvet & Co., Canajoharie, NY. The auction catalog cited an 1880 endorsement by *Scientific American* lauding the clock as "a fit ornament for any library, a valuable adjunct in every business office, and a necessity in every institution of learning." A pristine table model sold above estimate for \$11,685; a floor model, normally worth more than the table model, brought only \$6,150. The latter's globe had been badly damaged when a mounted deer head fell off the Brothertons' wall and scored a direct hit on the clock standing below.

Ironically, the sale's top lot was the sole wristwatch, a rare Tornek-Rayville TR-900 diver's watch that sold for \$58,425 to a phone bidder (Figure 3). Usually, these sales include more wrist and pocket timepieces, but the bulk of the watch consignments was relegated to the associated online-only auction.

There was one other watch in the live auction, a Japanese intro watch and case, circa 1845, that sold for \$11,685 (Figure 4). It was among a group of ten Japanese timekeepers that had our special attention.



Figure 4. Like all Japanese timepieces made before Western time was mandated in the 1870s, this ca. 1845 inro watch had movable indicators to adjust for seasonal variations in hour lengths. The movement had a cylinder escapement, and the case was made of shittah wood. It brought \$11,685. COURTESY OF SKINNER (2).

At the conclusion of a recent hiking tour of Japan, we visited the clock museum at the Emperor Tenji shrine just outside of Kyoto where we saw many similar rare examples. The 38th emperor of Japan, Tenji (626-672), is the Japanese deity of clocks because of his importation of the first clock, a water clock, from China. Every June at his massive shrine is a ceremony celebrating him and clocks. Japan's only clock repair school is on the shrine's grounds, with 30 students enrolled in a three-year full-time program. We received a special tour of the museum and school from instructor Mitsutoshi Ito. My article on this visit begins on page 12 in this issue of the *Watch & Clock Bulletin*.

The fourth-highest seller of the sale was a nineteenth-century Japanese combination lantern and pillar clock that sold to an Internet bidder for \$27,060. Before Japan's conversion to Western timekeeping in the 1870s, Japanese clocks displayed 12 hours—6-day and 6-night hours. These hours varied in length, depending on the season, and hour indicators were movable to accommodate the shorter daytime hours of winter and longer hours in summer. Pre-1870 Japanese pillar clocks and bracket clocks are sought after and were also on offer, but a clock that combines both styles is highly unusual.

For bidders who preferred polished marble and bright metal castings, many French clocks were available. Lead-



Figure 5. Robert Houdin, the famed nineteenth-century French magician, also invented mystery clocks. This ca. 1835 double-statue 8-day model swings its glass dial and lower attached pendulum with no apparent mechanism. It sold for \$15,990.

ing the pack was a circa 1835 Robert Houdin swinging glass dial mystery clock that sold to a phone bidder for \$15,990 (Figure 5). The Houdin pendulum swings and the hands advance with no obvious connection to the movement. Several non-mysterious statue clocks featured figures, such as Napoleon, Belisarius, Diana, Cupid, angels, eagles, a horse, a poodle, and a lamassu (Assyrian deity).

It is never clear whether marine chronometers, highly accurate boxed timepieces used in navigation, should be listed with clocks or scientific instruments. Keeping time within a few seconds a month, chronometers helped determine longitude at sea from the late eighteenth century until after World War II. At this sale four were sold, led by a Charles Frodsham 2-day example that brought \$6,150 and a much rarer 8-day Michael Rupp for \$4,305.

The scientific instrument section included several ter-

restrial and celestial globes from the collection of famed astronomer Vera Rubin. Although most sold for under \$1,000, her Henry Bryant celestial indicator, made circa 1872 in Hartford, CT, went for \$15,990, as did her W. Jones planetarium.

Although the sale had an impressively low number of buy-ins, a few lots with the highest estimates failed to sell. A William Hardy observatory regulator clock made in London circa 1825 stalled at \$55,000 (value estimated between \$70,000 and \$90,000). Skinner Director Robert Cheney suggested that the European dealers potentially interested in this clock were “saving ammo” for upcoming horology auctions in Europe.

However, clocks in the \$10,000-\$30,000 range sold well, perhaps indicating that demand is strong and strengthening for clocks at these and lower prices. The Brotherton collection did offer some exceptional pieces,

so broader market trends should be clearer after larger upcoming antique horology auctions.

About the Author

Bob Frishman has repaired, restored, collected, sold, and researched antique timekeepers since 1980. His business, Bell-Time Clocks, is based in Andover, MA. He lectures regularly about the history, science, and culture of mechanical timekeeping and has authored many articles for the *Watch & Clock Bulletin*. He can be reached via www.bell-time.com. He recently received an NAWCC Fellow Award and is chair of the Ward Francillon Time Symposium Committee.

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More Auction House Results

This rare miniature dickory dickory dock clock sold for \$1,775 at a September 2015 auction held by Horton's Antique Clocks.

This miniature was the first version of this popular novelty clock, designed by Elmer Dungan. It is only 15.5" tall and was never marketed; only a small number were made. Its history is described in Charles Terwilliger's "Elmer Ellsworth Dungan and the Dickory Dickory Dock Clock," *NAWCC Bulletin* Supplement No. 4 (Summer 1966).





This Silas B. Terry round front clock sold for \$1,050 at a September 2015 auction held by Horton's Antique Clocks. The clock was found in a local auction in eastern Kentucky and based on the service tags it appears to have had a long history in Kentucky. While there is no label, the dial board is a typical Terry paper-over-wood slat and is signed "Terry's Ville Conn". The weights appear to be designed to fit in this thin case.

This is the movement in the Silas B. Terry round front clock above. It contains an unusual but unsigned brass plate, weight-driven movement with a large escape wheel, typical of Silas B. Terry movements.





This New Hampshire stenciled mirror clock sold for \$2,650 at a September 2015 auction held by Horton's Antique Clocks. The maker of this clock is unknown, but several possibilities include Simon Willard & Son, John Sawin, John Stowell, and Eliphalet Horne. The stenciling on the columns is quite uncommon, as is the presence of an alarm. This clock was owned by Alfred C. Scott, president of the NAWCC from 1959 to 1961.



This is the movement in the New Hampshire stenciled mirror clock above. Snowden Taylor wrote about this clock's unusual time, strike, and alarm movement in the October 2011 issue of the *Watch & Clock Bulletin*. The alarm has not been seen before and is wound by pulling up the weight by hand in the right channel. The strike chain is also unusual in that it has two flies.