

Auction Action In Marlborough, Mass.

The David Newsom Fine Horology Collection At Skinner

MARLBOROUGH, MASS. — David Newsom would not have wanted this article written. A private person with no interest in public recognition, he nonetheless was a hugely generous donor and a serious collector of important watches and clocks. Tragically he died on February 29, 2020, probably one of the first Massachusetts Covid victims.

At a live auction on October 22, Skinner offered 107 lots from his estate in a dedicated sale, and many more lots, not attributed to him, in an online sale that concluded two days previously. The Newsom collection garnered just over \$1 million. Those horological treasures are a clear window into his collecting passion, and they represent the parts of his collection that he had not yet donated, as he probably would have done if his lifespan had not been cut short.

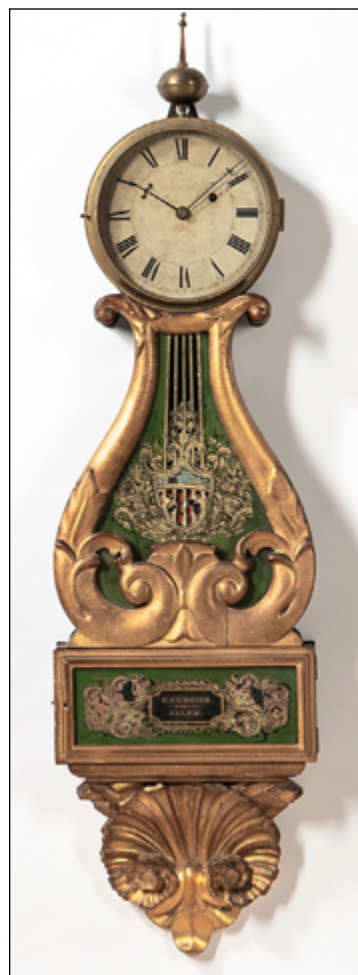
David donated or provided acquisition funds for more than 50 important horological objects at the International Museum of Horology in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland, after befriending its then-director, Ludwig Oechslin. Among those donations was a complete set of the five sizes of E. Howard & Company banjo clocks, which now line a wall of that world-class museum. He also gave three watches by Luther Goddard (1762-1842), the first American watch manufacturer, and a 1970 ultra-high precision pendulum clock by Fedchenko.

As an active board member of the Willard House and Clock Museum in Grafton, Mass., he donated an extremely rare astronomical regulator by Simon Willard Jr, along with an Aaron Willard Jr shelf clock. His generosity was spontaneous and unselfish as he often responded without hesitation when his assistance was requested. As Robert Cheney, director of the Willard House recalls, David's typical reply to a funding suggestion was "anything you need," not "send me a detailed proposal or contract to consider." To both the IMH and Willard House, he also regularly provided substantial financial assistance when urgent projects needed funding.

David reportedly was one of the country's first dot-com millionaires, having sold his data-management company in the early 1980s and then continuing for many years to con-

sult with the corporate buyer. He was married to Carol Lee Natelson Newsom (1946-2003) who as a professional photo-journalist covered international tennis and was active in promoting women's tennis during the early days of the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) and the Virginia Slims Tennis Circuit. She was the first woman photographer granted credentials on Centre Court at Wimbledon. She died of cancer in 2003.

It is unclear when and how his deep interest in horology was sparked, but 20-plus years ago he attended several two-week watchmaking class-



Two days before the Newsom sale, a Skinner online auction of clocks and watches wrapped up. Many lesser Newsom items, not so identified, were offered in that format and also sold well. However, a star of that auction did not have Newsom provenance but was an outstanding lyre-style gilt-front weight-driven wall-hanging timepiece, circa 1825, by Edmund Currier (1793-1853) of Salem, Mass. With its original reverse-painted glass tablets, it reached a good-old-days price of \$106,250.

David Newsom collected not only antique and vintage time-keepers but also finely crafted new and modern models. We see him here with Michael Parmigiani (b 1950), an award-winning Swiss watchmaker who produces unique precision and complex watches. The photo, in its appropriate frame, was taken at a Boston restaurant when the owner received a gold open-face Parmigiani pocket watch as a 50th birthday present. The watch, made in 1999, was offered in this sale but did not meet its reserve.



Waltham's skilled watchmakers also played with nonmetallic movement plates, although not as production models. This watch, No. 17 and circa 1885, has transparent crystal movement plates which make it rare and highly desirable and which allow users to view the wheels normally hidden between brass plates. A small number of such fragile "crystal plate" Walthams are known. The watch took \$40,625.



A \$300/500 estimate range seemed far too low for an unusually small one-day fusee detent-escapement marine chronometer by London's Charles Frodsham, and it rightly sold for \$1,800. This high-precision timepiece possibly was converted during the First World War from a pocket chronometer to one fit into a gimbaled wood box for marine service.



The sale's highest lot, at \$175,000, was a Breguet astronomical quarter-repeating watch, No. 2835, in an 18K gold case. The company confirmed on a framed certificate that the watch was sold in 1825 to Lord Henry William Paget. The watch was illustrated and described in George Daniels' authoritative book *The Art of Breguet*.



Review by Bob Frishman
Catalog Photos Courtesy Skinner Inc



Animal bone is not the best material from which to construct a watch, but this was accomplished circa 1865 by Mikhail Semyonovitch Bronnikov and it brought \$10,000 at the sale as a rare and interesting novelty. Only the springs and pivots were not possible to craft in bone and these are instead made from traditional metals. This probably should be kept away from pet dogs.



With faces and subsidiary dials on both sides, this complicated Swiss 18-K gold astronomical watch was produced circa 1872 by Louis Audemars. Phases of the moon are revealed, and the perpetual calendar even keeps track of the leap years. It also tells the time, and sold for \$12,500.



Skeletonized watch movements, visible through a clear dial center, beautifully display the wheels and springs and jewels not usually visible. This Breguet No. 785 in an 18K gold case, was accompanied by a Breguet-signed box and brought an even \$10,000.



Patek Philippe watches are at the pinnacle of desire for many collectors. Skinner department head Jonathan Dowling helped his phone bidder capture this 18K gold split-seconds chronograph No. 97440, dated 1900 on its cuvette, for \$18,750.



There were choices of “jump hour” calendar pocket watches but this one, retailed by Van Cleef & Arpels in a thin platinum case, brought the most at \$15,000, nearly quadruple its \$4,000 high estimate. It had an engraved warm inscription “To My Friend...” dated 1924 and its movement, possibly by Patek Philippe, had the small but important Geneva seal stamped on both plates as proof of its high quality.



Among the best-sellers, also from the Sandberg Collection, was this Ibery of London watch made for the Chinese market. The colorful enamel scene of a couple enjoying an Alpine setting is attributed to the workshop of Jean-Louis Richter, circa 1810. The watch’s beauty, its fine fusee movement featuring a detent escapement, and its Antiquorum certificate all contributed to its \$40,625 selling price, more than triple the \$12,000 high estimate.



Most lots in this very successful sale exceeded their high estimates, but this watch hit square in the middle, selling for \$17,500 against a \$15/20,000 suggestion. Usher & Cole of London made this 22K gold multi-dial minute-repeating perpetual-calendar model, circa 1890, for John Wallace M.P. Sandberg and Antiquorum provenance confirmed its high value.



Circa 1775 and thus one of the oldest watches in the sale, this gold and enamel watch, probably German and attributed to Jean André, had an unusual and highly decorative movement protected by a painted image of the Virgin Mary on the case exterior. From the Sandberg Collection and accompanied by Antiquorum’s certificate of authenticity, it cost the fortunate new owner \$7,500.



Not all the fine watches in the sale were European. A top-of-the-line Waltham also made the grade; this one a Premier Maximus in an 18K gold open-face case. The 23-jewel movement featured an “up-down” indicator below the dial’s 12, alerting users when the mainspring needed winding. It sold for \$6,875.



Self-winding (or “automatic”) watches are nothing new. This one is circa 1810 and is signed “Breguet a Paris,” but the company recently stated that the watch is rare and interesting but “not a timepiece manufactured by the Breguet workshops.” Assuming that the watch is moved regularly, its pedometer-style weight will keep the movement wound and ticking for the new owner who paid \$11,250.



Telling the time on this Gubelin Swiss astronomical watch may not be easy, but its astronomical features are its appeal, especially if the buyer lives at the latitude of Hamburg, Germany, for which the dial was adjusted. Made by Richard Daners/International Watch Co. with a caliber 970 movement, it sold for \$11,250 with provenance from a 2007 Dr Crott auction in Germany.



On auction day, it appeared as if this watch sold for \$190,000, but later it was posted as unsold. It was an extremely rare Abraham-Louis Breguet one-minute tourbillon watch sold in 1817 to Le Baron de Pomaniczky. Just ten such tourbillon watches were made between 1810 and 1817. A complete example is in the Frick Collection but this one has a replacement 18K gold engine-turned case completed for the late-consigner by Breguet in 2019 after he purchased just the movement at auction some years previously.



President Grover Cleveland (1837-1908) no doubt enjoyed owning this complicated keywind pocket watch that made music, sounded the quarter hours on demand, and featured two automaton musician figures on its dial. Unsigned but Swiss-made in an 18-K gold open-face case, it descended through the president’s son and sold for \$5,625.



Perhaps the sleeper bargain of the sale was the physician’s watch made by Jean-Baptiste Sosime Schwilgue (1776-1856) of Strasbourg in the early Nineteenth Century. The timing watch sold for \$2,000, far above its low estimate of \$400/500. This French maker achieved international acclaim for constructing an entirely new monumental clock for the Strasbourg Cathedral, completing it in 1842 to replace the previous one from the 1570s.

Skinner



This smaller-than-lifesize Ben Franklin automaton, a 20-inch-tall modern recreation by the same-name firm that fabricated such machines in the Eighteenth Century, sold for \$53,125. Jaquet-Droz was the Swiss maker, and Newsom paid \$205,250 for it new at Royal Jewelers of Andover, Mass., in July, 2009. It has more than a thousand clock-work parts and required the skilled labor of 11 different craftsmen. Oddly, the machine writes “We The People,” the first words of the preamble to the US Constitution that was not composed by Franklin but by Gouveneur Morris.



Famous French watchmaker Abraham-Louis Breguet (1747-1823) sought in 1797 to produce and market more affordable watches by subscription with a down payment of one quarter of the total price. About 700 of these simplified one-hand “Souscription” models were sold. However, according to current Breguet records, this watch is not one of them because the serial number does not match company records. With the exception of a steel, rather than ruby, cylinder escapement, it has all the right attributes and sold for \$4,062, still substantially below an example that the firm could verify.



Antique decorative pocket watch keys are a collecting niche, and this one would be a highlight of any collection. When the key is fit onto a watch's square winding arbor, the arrow pointer on the calendar-dial advances by one day. Circa 1785 and signed “Changeont Minon,” it came through the Sandberg collection auctioned in Geneva in 2001 and sold this time for \$3,000.



An outstanding example of David Newsom's frequent generosity was his donation of a Simon Willard Jr (1795-1874) astronomical regulator to the Willard House & Clock Museum in Grafton, Mass. This extremely rare high-precision timepiece descended directly in the maker's family, and we see it here with a rightfully smiling Newsom. Photo courtesy of Robert C. Cheney.

es at the school in Columbia, Penn., of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors (NAWCC).

Jim Michaels, the school's instructor at the time, remembers that David was the first to call when the initial classes were announced, that he was in the very first class, and that he was the most enthusiastic of all his students, interested in everything but especially high-grade watches and those by the famous French watchmaker Breguet. David's generosity extended to the NAWCC as well, offering frequent contributions and underwriting the school's first promotional VCR video, which drew many more new students to the educational programs. Jim and David's friendship continued into later years as they would attend horological auctions together after Jim founded his House of Time watch and clock repair business near Gettysburg, Penn.

David was also good friends with lifelong clockmaker John Losch who still lives less than a mile from David's former home in Holliston, Mass. John was a clock-repair instructor at the NAWCC at that same time, but their friendship blossomed later when they discovered that they were nearly neighbors. John also recalls David's selfless generosity, which included paying all travel expenses for international trips taken together, as David also did for Robert Cheney. Not interested in becoming a professional daily horologist, David instead wanted to know all that he could about the craft in order to best appreciate the wonderful objects that he was collecting and, at times, having them built or restored.

It is sad to think how much David would have loved being at his own auction. The Breguet watches would have fueled his passion for that esteemed maker, as would all the other high-end, rare and elegant watches that now belong to others. His special clocks would have drawn him in, too. Examples included antique long-duration, grand-sonnerie and astronomical wall clocks, a circa 1877 tower clock movement from London, and two modern high-precision floor-standing regulators. One of these, AutoRegulator S/N 1, was built to David's order by Robert Shannon of Leominster, Mass. It features 13 dials and near-perfect accuracy based on a cesium atomic clock and GPS.

Two lots had provenance from Seth Atwood's Time Museum in Rockford, Ill. That museum closed more than two decades ago and its collections were dispersed during several epic Sotheby's sales where David attended and actively bid. A Waltham crystal-plate watch was one; another was a unique low mahogany and glass display table with an Elgin Model 600 marine chronometer mounted on top and with compartments below that displayed the chronometer's individual parts. The loaded table's new owner paid just \$850 for it.

Only a handful of people actually attended the live auction, Robert Cheney among them along with a watch dealer in the room snagging many of the mid-range lots. However, as usual, most bids came from the phones, internet platforms and absentees who placed hopeful bids in advance.

In-person previewing was

possible, although only by advance reservation and for just one-hour time slots when available during the few pre-sale days. Again as usual, not many bidders came to preview, perhaps in this case feeling reassured that if these items belonged to David Newsom, they must be okay. The online catalog offered multiple high-resolution photographs, particularly necessary for complicated watches, and condition reports. Unusual was a complete printed 32-page catalog, mailed in advance and free at the preview, that for this sale was an upgrade from recent printed brochures that simply are teasers for the complete catalog offered online.

Whether bidders had the printed or online versions of the catalog, they certainly bid with gusto. A majority of the lots sold at multiples of the high estimates, and most oth-

ers were within or above the estimate ranges. Only a few sold under estimate or were passed. Skinner's normally pessimistic estimates proved remarkably low even for their standards that may be designed to encourage entry-level bidding rather than reflect true market value. Most bidders, for example, would have been thrilled to buy an unmarked silver tourbillon watch for the \$400 high estimate, but not for the \$10,625 eventual price.

But we also could dare to think, based on this and other recent auctions, that prices for antique timekeepers are not only off the barrel's bottom but actually climbing back towards their past days of glory.

All reported prices include the buyer's premium. For more information, www.skinnerinc.com or 508-970-3131.



One elegant lot had book collector appeal as well. Several previous watch lots had Sandberg-collection provenance, and a small number of deluxe leather-bound gilt-tooled full-color printed and boxed catalogs from that momentous 2001 Geneva sale were produced. This example was signed to Carol and David Newsom and sold for \$1,375.



David Newsom did not only collect fine watches. Also on offer was his Breguet month-going mahogany standing regulator sold in 1937 to a Monsieur Pusy as confirmed on a framed certificate from the firm. The clock again sold in 1991 at an auction in Geneva, and this third time it brought \$32,500.