

Skinner, Inc., Marlborough, Massachusetts

Texans' Clock Collection Sells in Massachusetts

by Bob Frishman and Jeanne Schinto
Photos courtesy Skinner

A grouping of 58 stellar clocks was offered at Skinner's live auction of clocks, watches, and scientific instruments held in Marlborough, Massachusetts, on April 25. The Terry and Karen Brotherton collection comprised the first items of a relatively small sale of 274 lots and ten of the top 20 lots.

The live auction total just broke through the \$1 million mark, at \$1,008,231 (includ-

The Brothertons are well known in antique clock circles.

ing buyers' premiums), selling 244 of the 274 lots on offer. Of the associated online-only sale of 387 lots, 354 sold and added another \$216,695 to the coffers. Both sales had a high sell-through percentage, indicating Skinner's usual policy of reasonable or even conservative estimate ranges and reserves.

The Brothertons of Houston, Texas, are good friends and former customers of Skinner clock department director Robert C. Cheney, so it is no surprise that the collection ended up with him to disperse. 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 National Association of Watch & Clock Collectors (NAWCC). The Brothertons are well known in antique clock circles, and Terry has held important national and local positions with the NAWCC. Overall, according to Cheney, they were pleased by the results, although surprised that a few of their favorites, such as a circa 1810 Elnathan Taber "coffin clock," were passed and awaiting possible post-auction sales.

Their collection focused mainly upon New England and Pennsylvania timekeepers from the first half of the 19th century. Only one, attributed to John Albert of Adams County, Pennsylvania, was a floor-standing 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 New Hampshire and Vermont makers Joseph Dunning, Benjamin Morrill, and

John Winkley, whose Shaker cherry shelf clock was the sale's third-strongest seller at \$27,060. A Levi Pitkin wall regulator sold to the Shelburne Museum for \$22,140. Cheney was especially pleased that the Montpelier, Vermont, clock will now be back in its home state. He is convinced that Pitkin made this plain-cased timepiece for use in his own shop, not for a commercial setting, which would have required a fancier appearance.

The second-highest price at \$30,750 was for Joseph Nye Dunning's mahogany wall clock, circa 1820, from that maker's years of working in Burlington, Vermont. Like many clocks from this collection, it was displayed in 1999 at the NAWCC exhibit *Horological Rarities of Space City* and featured in the associated publication. The 45" tall eight-day weight-driven time-only banjo-style clock had a Peter Sawyer provenance. This well-known Exeter, New Hampshire, dealer was present at the auction and, as the high bidder, came to own the clock again.

Most American mechanical clocks originated in Connecticut, 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 & Company, Canajoharie, New York. 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 \$6150. The latter's globe had been badly damaged when a mounted deer head fell from the Brothertons' wall and scored a direct hit on the clock standing below.

Nearly 150 other clocks from different consignors were cataloged by Cheney's department. Ironically, the sale's top lot was the sole wristwatch on offer, a rare Tornek-Rayville TR-900 dive watch that sold for \$58,425 to a phone bidder. Usually these sales include more wrist and pocket timepieces, but the bulk of the watch consignments were relegated to the associated online-only auction.

There was one other watch in the live auction, a Japanese inro watch and case, circa 1845, that

made \$11,685. It was among a group of ten Japanese timekeepers that had our special attention. 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. For readers of Japanese, the school's website is (<http://tokei-co.org>).

The fourth-highest seller of the sale was a 19th-century Japanese combination lantern and pillar clock that sold to an Internet bidder for \$27,060. Prior to Japan's conversion to Western timekeeping in the 1870s, Japanese clocks displayed twelve hours—six day and six night. 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. Leading the pack was a circa 1835 Robert Houdin swinging glass dial mystery clock that sold to a phone bidder for \$15,990. 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 and Cupid, angels, eagles, a horse, a poodle, and a lamassu (Assyrian deity).

It never is 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 18th century until after World War II. At this sale four were sold, led by a Charles Frodsham two-day example that brought \$6150 and a much rarer eight-day Michael Rupp for \$4305.

The scientific instrument section included several terrestrial and celestial globes from the collection of famed astronomer Vera Rubin. Although most sold for under \$1000, her Henry Bryant Celestial Indica-

tor, made circa 1872 in Hartford, Connecticut, went for \$15,990, as did her W. Jones planetarium. Orreries, tellurians, sextants, sand glasses, and compasses from other consignors also did well. Two mercury barometers sold; the better one, by Batty Storr of York, England, brought \$4613 on a left bid from longtime English-furniture dealer Chris Jussel.

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 (est. \$70,000/90,000). Cheney suggested that the European dealers potentially interested in this clock were "saving ammo" for upcoming horology auctions in Europe.

Later in the day, high-end mechanical music automata also found no buyers. "Pierrot Serenading the Moon" (est. \$40,000/60,000) opened and died at \$20,000. A Gustave Vichy of a Paris fruit seller remained stuck at \$13,000 (est. \$25,000/45,000). A magician mechanical picture (est. \$10,000/15,000) could not advance from a \$5500 opener. The circa 1860 Nicole Freres "Six-tune Grand Format Over-

ture Cylinder Music Box" (est. \$40,000/60,000) climbed only to \$26,000. Of course, the market for these pricey rarities is very small and selective. Cheney commented that the estimates would have been right for 2005 but not for 2015.

However, clocks in the \$10,000 to \$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 antique horology auctions at Cottone, Fontaine's, R.O. Schmitt, and overseas. Cheney announced that his fall auction would also be larger. That sale will feature an important collection of pocket watches from the historic but now shuttered William Bond shop in Boston, as well as many Viennese wall and floor clocks with long-duration movements. Some of these Austrian weight-driven timekeepers require winding only once a year, just in time for Cheney's sale in fall 2016.

For more information, call (508) 970-3000 or visit the Skinner website (www.skinnerinc.com).



Peter Sawyer took home this Joseph Nye Dunning wall clock for the second time. It has an eight-day time-only weight-driven brass movement typical of banjo-style wall clocks, but the shaped mahogany case is distinctive and especially attractive. It made \$30,750. Two other rare Dunning clocks also brought strong prices.



One of only two watches in the live auction, this circa 1965 Tornek-Rayville TR-900 dive watch, stainless steel (not gold), was made for the U.S. 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.



When the hammer fell on this lot, we wondered if the \$400/600 estimate was a typo. This circa 1868 E.S. Ritchie ship's binnacle had provenance from the U.S.S. *Constellation*, the U.S. Navy Yard in California, the Valley Forge Historical Society, and the U.S. Naval Academy, where it had been on loan 1954-88. The standing gimbal compass opened at \$3000, and phone bidders pushed it up from there to sell for \$14,760.



Robert Houdin, the famed 19th-century French magician, also invented mystery clocks. This circa 1835 double-statue eight-day model swings its glass clock face and lower attached pendulum with no apparent mechanism. It sold for \$15,990.



John Delaney Jr. kneels to examine lot 77, an unusual Waltham regulator with a relief-carved bust of Benjamin Franklin at the top. It sold for \$3444 to the phone. The rococo nine-tube floor clock is at his right. Frishman photo.

A fancier tall clock would be hard to imagine. This circa 1880 rococo model, probably English, was 108" of ebonized, carved, turned, and shaped mahogany. The three-weight movement was equally complicated, chiming quarterly on nine tubular bells. The highly ornate dial included three smaller subsidiary dials in the arch top. We hoped that the Internet bidder who got it for \$13,530 has a large van.



Astronomer Vera Rubin's collection figured prominently in the non-clock portion of the sale. This circa 1872 celestial indicator by Henry Bryant of Hartford, Connecticut, showed both armillary and orrery models of the solar system and came with original testimonials and a pamphlet. It sold for \$15,990.



Perhaps to tempt on-site bidders, lots in the online-only auction were on display in the same room during the live auction. There were two more days to place computer bids. Robert Cheney is seated at the podium, assisting auctioneer LaGina Austin. Frishman photo.



Reserves were far too steep on the sale's high-end automata. This circa 1870 fruit seller by Gustave Vichy of Paris opened and stuck at \$13,000 (est. \$25,000/45,000). Rare, fragile, and complicated, these clockwork figures struck some previewers as spooky, perhaps recalling certain horror movies.



Like all Japanese timepieces made before Western time was mandated in the 1870s, this circa 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 shitan wood. It brought \$11,685.



Many people would not recognize this 19th-century Japanese lacquered *shaku dokei* as a clock. It has a gold floral motif and is on a decorated wood stand. Its short brass pendulum weight-driven movement would indicate the time on adjustable hour markers. It brought \$11,070.



Skinner consultant Paul Dumanoski demonstrated the features and operation of Japanese clocks during the gallery walk evening preview. Frishman photo.



Timepieces by London maker and seller Charles Frodsham always bring premium prices. This boxed marine chronometer was no exception; examples by other makers can be had for 75% less. This Frodsham lot had some bonus features: a retailer's label from Cardiff, an ivory boss from Boston ship chandler Charles Hutchinson, and a 1925 rate certificate. It made \$6150.



One look at this "acorn" shelf clock revealed why these fragile and ornate cases are so rare. The bent, turned, and laminated wooden components would challenge any woodworker today. The painted glasses are easily damaged, and detached fuses were a costly add-on to the eight-day striking movement. This one, made by the "Forestville Manfg. Co., Bristol, Ct." around 1850, showed the Hartford State House on its glass panel. It sold for \$18,450.



Basic wooden works pillar-and-scroll mahogany shelf clocks have plummeted in value recently, but some in this style still stand out. This circa 1830 shelf clock was from Pennsylvania and was in tiger maple, which increased its price tenfold over its common cousins to reach \$11,685.



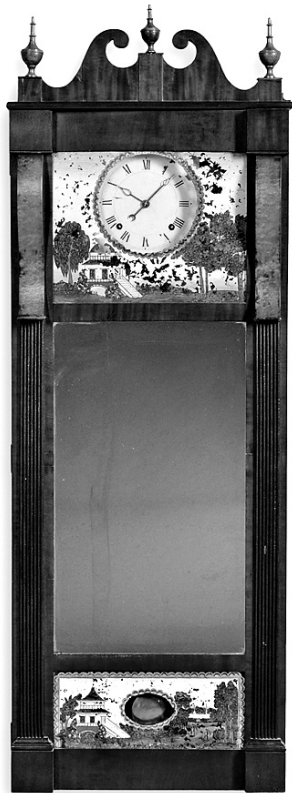
Lyre clocks are part of the banjo clock family, and this circa 1830 fine mahogany example by Abiel Chandler of Concord, New Hampshire, more than tripled its \$4500 high estimate to bring \$14,760. The movement's alarm function added to its rarity and appeal.



Many more clocks followed the 58 consigned by the Brothertons, and this Aaron Willard inlaid mahogany tall clock, Boston, circa 1790, was in lovely condition. While many of us remember when these Roxbury cases brought much higher prices, this one hit the middle of its \$12,000/18,000 estimate to sell for \$14,760. It had the correct ogee feet, eight-day brass works, a signed, painted dial, and tin-cased weights.



More than doubling its \$6000 high estimate to sell for \$13,530, this clock from "The Globe Clock Co., Milldale, Connecticut" showed an 1883 patent date. Its L. Hubbell lever-escapement movement rotated the globe's 12 color lithograph gores. It is rarer and brought a higher price than the two Juvet globe clocks in the sale. It once belonged to Chris Bailey, retired longtime curator of the American Clock & Watch Museum in Bristol, Connecticut.



The Brothertons sent four Joseph Ives clocks to Skinner. This circa 1820 "looking glass" model was discussed in *The Contributions of Joseph Ives to Connecticut Clock Technology, 1810-1862* (1970) by Kenneth Roberts. Its two-weight eight-day brass movement features iron plates, roller pinions, and rack striking. Robert Cheney owned this one in the past. It sold for \$6150.



American ogee-style antique clocks are extremely common and usually of little value, but this circa 1850 example more than doubled its strong \$600 high estimate for good reasons. The painted metal dial shows the important name "J.C. Brown, Bristol, Ct." The lower reverse-painted glass shows a portrait of Brown. The case is highly decorated with stencils and mother-of-pearl. The striking movement is eight day and stamped "Brewster & Ingrahams, Bristol, CT." The manufacturer's printed paper label is intact on the backboard, and former owner Amos Avery, an NAWCC president, also stuck his label inside. It sold for \$1353.



Both John Delaneys, father and son, of Delaney Antique Clocks, West Townsend, Massachusetts, attended the auction and bid actively. They bought this Aaron Willard circa 1810 Boston mahogany shelf clock for \$11,685. Its lower reverse-painted glass tablet depicts Poseidon and Father Time, and behind its painted iron dish dial was an eight-day time-only weight-driven brass movement.



Silas B. Terry of Terryville, Connecticut, may have been as inventive as his famous father, Eli, although not as good a businessman. One of S.B. Terry's most interesting and coveted clocks is this circa 1845 oversize steeple clock with a brass balance-wheel movement visible through the dial openings. It is illustrated in several classic clock reference books and was previously owned by Anthony J. Sposato, another well-known expert and collector. The same clock, confirmed by distinctive stains on its inside paper label, was displayed in May 1959 at the 15th annual convention of the NAWCC in Swampscott, Massachusetts, and its case and movement were pictured on page 23 of the accompanying booklet. It brought \$10,455.

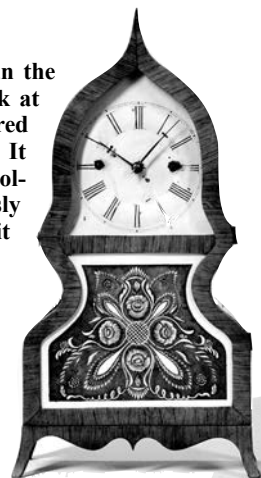


Jacob D. Custer of Norristown, Pennsylvania, made this circa 1830 mahogany variant of the classic pillar-and-scroll weight-driven shelf clock. Unlike the common Connecticut style with daily wind wooden works and reverse-painted glass tablets, his had eight-day brass works and a matched-grain wood front panel. Two Pennsylvania clock experts, Edward LaFond and J. Carter Harris, included this clock in their 2008 book *Pennsylvania Shelf and Bracket Clocks: 1750-1850*. It sold for \$14,760.

Few Shaker clocks were made, and fewer survive. This appealing cherry example, just 26½" tall, was attributed to John Winkley of Canterbury, New Hampshire, from around 1790-95. The eight-day time-only weight-driven brass movement has typical cutout plates from those frugal makers. The provenance lists Peter Sawyer; this time he let it go to a phone bidder for \$27,060.



Less fancy but even rarer than the other Forestville "acorn" clock at the sale, this rosewood veneered shelf clock also is circa 1850. It was from the Herbert Nilson collection and was sold previously by Skinner in 2008. This time it made \$20,910.



The high price of \$24,600 for this Samuel Grosch shelf clock also demonstrated the value of rare pillar-and-scroll variations made in Pennsylvania. This one, from Marietta, circa 1820, must have been top of the line in its day, too, with an eight-day brass movement, calendar, center seconds, rack-and-snail strike with pull repeat, and a colorfully painted dial and glass. Also featured in the LaFond and Harris book, it came from another important clock collection, Herbert Nilson's, and sold at Skinner in 2009.



So-called "Salem Bridge" Connecticut clocks always have special appeal. Heman Clark of Plymouth made this mahogany four-column eight-day weight-driven clock around 1820. Doug Cowan, a former president of the NAWCC, owned it previously. It sold for \$9225.

