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November 1st, 2014 A Giant Clock and a Giant Clamshell

by Jeanne Schinto

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Skinner, Inc., Marlborough, Massachusetts

Photos courtesy Skinner

An exceptionally ornate mahogany floor clock, a giant at 119" tall, sold to an anonymous collector bidding on the Internet for \$98,400 (including buyer's premium) at a clocks, watches, scientific instruments, historic arms, and militaria sale on November 1, 2014, at Skinner in Marlborough, Massachusetts. Originally made for a New Orleans mansion built in 1901-04 and still standing at 4717 Charles Avenue, the clock was retailed by Tiffany & Company. The case, carved with griffins, mermaid caryatids, winged putti, and other over-the-top rococo details, was attributed to R.J. Horner & Company of New York. The eight-day threetrain movement, which strikes the hours and quarter-hours and plays musical chimes, was attributed to J.J. Elliott of London. The nine tubes responsible for those chimes were marked by Walter Durfee of Providence, Rhode Island. All in all, the mammoth timekeeper was a group effort by the best and brightest in the floor-clock business at the turn of the 20th century.

Skinner department head Robert C. Cheney said the clock once had stood at the bottom of the mansion's grand staircase. "And so, as it chimed either of its two different tunes [Westminster or Whittington] the sound would drift upstairs and everybody could hear it. I've read that the house has thirtytwo rooms and an underground garage. The present owner has his Ferrari collection down there."



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This Tiffany & Company mahogany floor clock sold for \$98,400 (est. \$90,000/ 120,000). It is in a 119" tall case, attributed to RJ. Horner & Company, with a three-train eightday movement, attributed to J.J. Elliott of London, and nine tube chimes marked "Walter H. Durfee" of Providence, Rhode Island. The chimes can play either of two tunes, Westminster or Whittington.



The giant clock was made for this Richardsonian Romanesque Revival mansion. It was built in 1901-04 for W.P. Brown as a wedding gift to his wife. The four-story structure was designed by Favrot & Livaudais, who also designed several other New Orleans buildings in the same style including some on Tulane University's campus. Schinto photo.

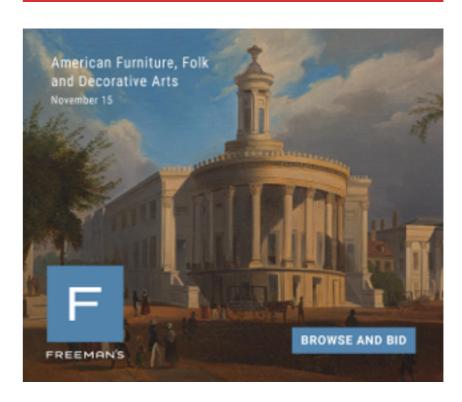


This circa 1920 E. Howard & Co. No. 29 gilded mahogany gallery clock went to an Internet bidder for \$8610 (est. \$2000/4000). It is 38" x 70" with a 30" dial. The Boston-made timepiece has an eight-day time-only movement. It was once the property of the Eutaw Savings Bank of Baltimore, and a framed picture of the bank interior accompanied the lot. Schinto photo.

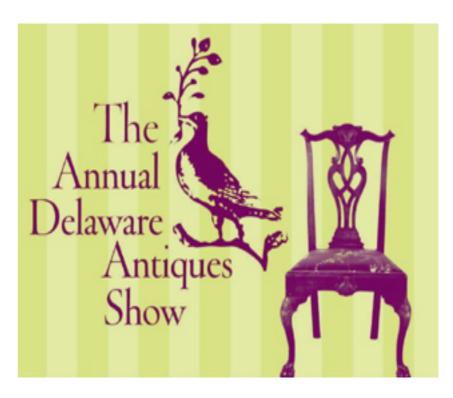


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The mansion, designed in the Richardsonian Romanesque Revival style by the Louisiana architectural firm Favrot & Livaudais, was built for W.P. Brown, the New Orleans "cotton king." The second owners took possession of the house and the clock in 1930. They were William Joseph Gibbens Jr. and his wife, Florieda, who attained some fame as a participant in the socalled Women's Olympics of 1922 in Paris. [In a 1920s listing of her competitive career, her name is spelled "Floreida Burton Batson."] In 1979, Florieda gave the clock to her granddaughter, who consigned it to the sale. As for the mansion, it is now owned by John W. Houghtaling II, a New Orleans attorney. Cheney said he contacted him to say that the clock was for sale, and so did I. Neither of us received any word that he would be a bidder. The underbidder in the room was collector Charles Grichar of Houston, Texas.

Readers may recall that two similarly gigantic tubular-chime floor clocks, also retailed by Tiffany, were sold at Skinner almost exactly one year earlier, on November 2, 2013, for \$84,000 and \$72,000. Those were in quartersawn oak cases; this example's mahogany case was a major reason why this year's clock went higher, Cheney said. It also had "that great provenance," he noted. Asked if the mahogany one had come to Skinner because of the successful sale of the other two, he replied, "No, and I knew about this one long before we got the others."

Another giant object, from a completely different field of interest, caught the eye of previewers and generated an appropriately large level of interest at the sale. The object in question was the clamshell of a *Tridacna gigas*, a so-called giant clam that had been collected from one of the Indo-Pacific Oceans at an unspecified date. Fitted with metal rods to hold its halves open, the clamshell is 38" long and 22" wide. "That's a living example of what might come in the door unexpectedly at Skinner," said Cheney. Displayed with a good-size pumpkin inside it, since the previews took place during Halloween time, the clamshell was estimated at \$900/1200, opened at \$1600, and sold to a phone bidder for \$2337. Within days, it was in the window and on the Facebook site of Andrew Spindler Antiques, Essex, Massachusetts.

The sale was otherwise notable for the unpredictability of its results. Two tall clocks by Simon Willard, for example, went well beyond expectations despite condition problems, while an excellent circa 1780 example by Samuel Mulliken went at a bargain price, estimated at \$10,000/15,000 and selling to an Internet bidder for \$5535.



This giant clamshell sold on the phone for \$2337. It is 38" x 22". Schinto photo.



This 18th-century Japanese doublefolio **dai dokei** clock, 45" tall, sold to an Internet bidder for \$25,830 (est. \$10,000/15,000). It has a weightpowered time, strike, and alarm movement. The stand with hood is paintdecorated wood. The clock case has an etched brass surface.



The brass dial of this circa 1890 E. Howard & Co. No. 77 floor clock needed a bit of flattening. That accounted for its \$8000/12,000 estimate, but the dents didn't deter bidders, who pushed the Bostonmade timekeeper to \$30,750 (est. \$8000/12,000) "Get out the ballpeen hammer. It should be put in the hands of a qualified clockmaker, of course," said Robert Cheney. The clock is 8'10" tall and has an eightday time-and-strike movement.



"The Samuel Mulliken [price] was a real disappointment to me," said Cheney. "It was a very clean clock, a no-apologies kind of a thing." Nonetheless, it had a brass dial. Unlike clocks with painted dials, they are, in his words, "traditionally difficult to find homes for." That's because they "require an educated buyer," he explained. "They're not always the clocks you can find in a reference book. They

This Simon Willard tall clock went to an Internet bidder for \$18,450 (est. \$5000/8000). The mahogany case, attributed to Abiel White, who was a Stephen Badlam apprentice, is marked by the initials "A W" with a distinctive point between the two letters. The clock stands 89" tall including its finial. It was once taller, but the bottom has been trimmed, no doubt to accommodate a low ceiling. The eight-day time-and-strike movement was marked by an English maker ("Wilson"). Willard imported movements and other clock parts from England as a matter of course. It was, said Robert Cheney, "a slick business model."

may have lost their silvering, so they don't always look like they should. You don't have to worry about original signatures with them if you understand engraving. They're wonderful things, but it takes a little bit of study."

The clocks by Simon Willard, meanwhile, estimated at \$3000/5000 and \$5000/8000, went for \$17,220 and \$18,450, respectively. "In one instance, the base was cut down, and in some people's minds that's a pretty significant problem," said Cheney. "But if you have a low ceiling and you want a Willard—as Albert Sack used to say, it's 'apartment size.'" Other than the condition problems, he added in retrospect, "they were pretty darn nice ones, and they both had good strong dials that were original."

Another disappointment was the buy-in of a Federal painted shelf clock by Aaron Willard. Known as a bride's clock, presumably because of its white paint, it was sold after the sale for its low estimate, \$30,000. Mystified, Cheney harked back to the days when such a clock would have brought double the price and had "half a dozen people chasing it." Times and tastes change, however.

More in keeping with the interiors shown in shelter magazines these days was an 18th-century Japanese double-folio dai dokei clock with slender features. At 45" tall, including its painted wood decorated stand, it is technically a floor clock but at the extreme end of the style spectrum from the ginormous Tiffany. "It was very sculptural and would go well in a 20th-century interior," Cheney observed. Estimated at \$10,000/15,000, the clock sold to an Internet bidder for \$25,830.

Four other smaller Japanese clocks in the sale did well, each selling within estimates. Cheney said he had not handled many others. "Maybe I will in the future."

While unsuccessful on the Tiffany, Charles Grichar did not go home to Houston empty handed. He was the buyer of a circa 1890 E. Howard & Co. No. 77 floor clock, paying \$30,750 (est. \$8000/12,000) for the presentation timekeeper. The inscription on a silvered plate on the clock reads: "J.N. Faithorn/ from/ Western Freight Association Friends/ Chicago/ Oct. 12, 1890." The clock with an eight-day time-and-strike movement came to the sale by descent from the original owner to the consignor. Grichar also bought another presentation clock by E. Howard & Co., a circa 1875 No. 17 white-marble wall clock, for \$2952 (est. \$2000/4000). That presentation reads: "Presented to/ John J. Madden/ By His Friends/ Nov. 21, 1900."

The cover lot of the sale—another of Grichar's purchases—was not a clock per se, although a timekeeping element is part of its design. It was a Time Globe made circa 1880 by Juvet & Company, Canajoharie, New York. This lot sparked a bidding war with one other competitor in the room besides Grichar and two on phones. In the end, it was Grichar's for \$19,680 (est. \$4000/6000). "I think it's clear why that did well," said Cheney. "Condition, condition, condition. And some people like that size [31" tall] even better than the floor-standing ones, because they take up less space and display nicely on a table."

The sale opened with two vintage cars, a 1980 Ferrari 308GTSI and a 1957 Ford Thunderbird convertible/hardtop. They sold for \$38,130 (est. \$28,000/32,000) and \$34,440 (est. \$30,000/35,000) respectively. A lot of 19 Packard motorcar hubcaps from the 1930s was the last lot, offered on line only, along with some 363 other, lower-end lots. The hubcaps sold

for \$308 (est. \$400/600).

All told, the live auction fetched \$1,211,360, and the on-line auction, which ended three days after the live one, added \$234,702 more, for a total of \$1,446,062. The sell-through rate was 90%.

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Skinner's next sale of clocks etc. is scheduled for the last weekend in April. One of the highlights will be "some good automata," said Cheney. "We haven't had them in a while. We've had them, but not on the level of these,

which are documented and in original condition."

For more information, phone Skinner at (508) 970-3100 or see the Web site (www.skinnerinc.com).



The catalog cover lot, a circa 1880 Time Globe by Juvet & Company, Canajoharie, New York, sold for \$19,680 (est. \$4000/6000). The tabletop piece stands 31" tall including its lacquered-brass tripod stand with three stylized dolphin feet. The globe itself is 12" not including its brass equatorial ring. The clock has a 30-hour movement. It is wound by the feather end of the arrow and rotates the globe 15 degrees each hour. It's quite a piece and in excellent condition.



Like the Joseph Ives clock, this circa 1825 Curtis & Clark miniature (23" tall) Salem Bridge shelf clock is a rarity. According to Robert Cheney, only about 500 of them were made by the Plymouth, Connecticut, company. With an eight-day time-and-strike movement whose main spring was imported from Geneva, this example sold to an Internet bidder for \$12,300 (est. \$4000/6000). The carved-column case is mahogany and has its printed maker label inside.



The price of this circa 1835 French gilt Reims Cathedralform shelf clock was a surprise. Estimated at \$2000/4000, it opened at \$8500 and sold to an Internet bidder for \$12,300. "We're always conservatives in the area of estimating, as you know," said Cheney. "But some people find it troublesome when a clock like this doesn't have its original glass dome. I guess we were harder on it than we should have been." The clock, with an eight-day time-and-

strike movement, is 24" tall.

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