

World Maker Faire, Queens, New York

# The Kids Are All Here

by Jeanne Schinto

I went to what I thought would be the antithesis of an antiques show this past fall. The event, on the weekend of September 23 and 24, 2017, in Queens, New York, was the eighth annual World Maker Faire ([www.makerfaire.com](http://www.makerfaire.com)). For those who have not heard of it, there is a so-called maker movement. It was spawned by *Make:* magazine, founded in 2005. To put it simply, makers build, design, craft, create—they make new things. The magazine, the movement, and the regional Maker Faires that take place around the country and the world all year long embody and embrace the future.

Yet to my surprise and delight, I found evidence on the grounds of the New York Hall of Science, former home of the 1964 World's Fair, where the World Maker Faire took place, that many makers are keenly aware of the past. They understand the debt they owe to older technologies and traditions. Fascinated by vintage artifacts, they enjoy sharing that fascination with others.



I noticed Owen and his Lincoln T-shirt when I visited the booth occupied by the Princeton International School of Mathematics and Science.

**“If I can inspire them to go back into their schools and communities and make things, I think the world will be a better place.”**

Granted, even though the obsolete spelling of “faire” harks back to an earlier time, I had to look hard to find these past-conscious makers, but they were definitely there. While robots wheeled back and forth along the World Maker Faire’s pathways, drones dipped and hovered in the skies, video screens flashed, a giant dragon made of metal breathed real fire, and 3D printers pumped out all kinds of items, I visited a booth that had early typewriters on display and another with early phones. I saw a guy working on an old sewing machine, since many makers sew their own clothes.

Everyone was taking photos, digitally of course, but I saw one attendee taking movies with a camera that turned out to be a 1959-60 16 mm Bolex H16 model that he bought on eBay. Named Clyde Shaffer, he was born in 1991. I asked Shaffer how he figured out how the camera worked. “Trial and error,” he said with a smile, adding that he had an even older model at home, a Kodak Cine Model B, introduced circa 1925.

I also saw old clocks. They were in the booth of my forward-thinking, horologist husband, Bob Frishman, who set up at the event to do what he calls his missionary work, in this case for antique clock repair. Since the maker movement is also about recycling and using alternative energy sources, repairing a broken timekeeper and running it with human energy fits the bill. I think I can say without bias that the booth was a big hit. By late Saturday afternoon Bob had talked himself hoarse, and there was Sunday still to go. This had never happened at any antiques show he had ever done. Here’s why. The official attendance number given by the organizers after the faire was 90,000! Ninety thousand, and Bob swears he spoke to at least 45,000 of them.

Besides Bob’s booth, called Gear Time, perhaps the most fully antiques-conscious booth I encountered was the peripatetic Museum of Interesting Things. Its presenter, Denny Daniel, takes his mobile museum to schools, hospitals, parties, and virtually anywhere else he’s asked to bring it. (As his brochure says, “... just give us a room full of people, and we’ll fill it with our interesting things!”) He was dressed in an old-time black coat and bowler. Reminiscent of Harpo Marx, he honked an antique car horn to entertain the crowds waiting in line for the gates to open each morning. When I visited his booth, I saw on display an example of the 19th-century optical toy known as Le Praxinoscope. I saw a stereo viewer and cards. I saw a Q.R.S. Playasax, cousin to the player piano, capable of playing music via a punched paper roll. Daniel also had on hand an early 20th-century Edison Amberola, capable of playing musical recordings etched into wax cylinders. He put a cylinder on for me. Out came the voice of Ada Jones singing “By the Light of the Silvery Moon.”



Here, a father and son have a look at Bob Frishman’s circa 1910 Ingraham mantel clock movement. Frishman, who was showing at the World Maker Faire as Gear Time rather than Bell-Time, which is his business name, also brought a working oversize escapement model, an actual clock running with its movement exposed, and tools of the clock repair trade.



Denny Daniel’s circa 1960 solar space phone (Sun-Fone), “a wireless telephone powered by the sun’s rays.”



San Francisco’s Electronic Frontier Alliance’s logo references the famous “We Can Do It!” poster of the World War II era. The website ([www.eff.org](http://www.eff.org)) says it is “the leading nonprofit organization defending civil liberties in the digital world.” Founded in 1990, EFF works “to ensure that rights and freedoms are enhanced and protected as our use of technology grows.”



Event-goers were encouraged to peck at old typewriters outside the Staten Island MakerSpace’s STEAM wagon. Signage told youngsters that they needed to use the return carriage to get back to the start of the next line. Quite literally, they otherwise had no clue.



I was attracted to this large mechanical ant because of its industrial-antique look, but Philip, who works for its creator, Les Machines de L'île, Nantes, France, said it was only "antiqued." Les Machines de L'île is located on former shipyards along the Loire River, across from the Musée Jules Verne. Philip said that its cofounders, François Delaroziere and Pierre Orefice, are "interested in refurbishing old industrial spaces."



Some New York City students were visiting the fair as a group.



Denny Daniel with his circa 1930 Q.R.S. Playasax. A product of the Q.R.S. DeVry Corporation of Chicago, it makes music, similar to a player piano, by means of a perforated paper roll. You turn the crank and blow into the mouthpiece.



Denny Daniel with his Le Praxinoscope, an optical toy invented by Frenchman Charles-Émile Reynaud in 1876. Daniel's Museum of Interesting Things is "a traveling, interactive, demonstration and exhibition of antiques and inventions." His promotional brochure says, "Enjoy actual antiques you can handle and see demonstrated!" and "Maybe we can think of ways to use yesterday's technology to power the future." To reach him, see his website ([www.museumofinterestingthings.org](http://www.museumofinterestingthings.org)).



In some instances, being a maker simply means making your own meals. Ethan Frisch, founder and owner of Burlap & Barrel ([www.burlapandbarrel.com](http://www.burlapandbarrel.com)), was selling spices. Pictured are whole nutmegs that retain their seed covering, called arils. From the aril of the nutmeg comes another spice, mace. Although I'm a foodie, I had never before seen a nutmeg with its aril intact. I was impressed. The company is not a traditional retailer. As the website says, it is "rethinking international spice supply chains to make them direct, transparent and traceable.... We work to end inequality and exploitation in food systems that disenfranchise skilled, serious artisans along the entire chain."



"I'm her biggest fan," Daniel said of Jones (1873-1922), whom he called "the Lady Gaga of her day." Noting the Amberola's effect on children who were passing by his booth, he declared, "It's a pied piper." Plenty of adults were being drawn in too. "I show people things from the past that they think are new," Daniel declared. "I call it 'Back to the Futurist.' The energy in these items lasts, even though some of them are over a century old. It's still magical. We're living off the 'steam' of the industrial revolution."

Speaking of steam, the maker movement would seem a natural partner for another phenomenon, steampunk. A World Maker Faire veteran told me that in past years, he would see many attendees in steampunk costumes. This time, I saw a few. Perhaps the diminished number is a sign that the steampunk movement is waning or morphing.

What I didn't see at the World Maker Faire was a single cranky child or bored teenager, not even close—and I spent time consciously looking for them. I didn't even see one at the end of the second day, when temperatures reached 90°F.

There are lessons to be learned from the organizers of this authentic, kid-friendly family outing. Just one example: I saw makers demonstrating woodworking techniques, and it started me wondering how kids can be expected to appreciate wood furniture, antique or otherwise, if they don't know how it's made. Shop classes are a thing of the past. Knowing how to put together an Ikea item is not an acceptable alternative. The Antiques Dealers' Association of America might just try setting up at a Maker Faire. The

American Watchmakers-Clockmakers Institute has gotten the message. It was set up next to Gear Time. Both booth spaces were rent-free, as they were to anyone who wasn't selling something.

It was not free to attend, however, except for children two and under. Far from it. Admission at the door for an adult (18 years and older) was \$45 or \$80 if you bought a weekend ticket; it was \$30 for youths and students to age 17 or \$50 for the weekend. Discounts were available for advance purchase. As we know, some antiques show promoters are experimenting with lower admission prices or no admission price at all for certain demographic categories. But what 90,000 people were willing to pay to attend World Maker Faire seems to indicate that price is not what's keeping them away from antiques shows.

*Make*: magazine's website ([www.makezine.com](http://www.makezine.com)) lays out the maker movement philosophy: "[It] embraces innovation, creativity, and learning to improve our communities and create a better future. Tinkerers, educators, parents, and professionals are included, because we are all Makers. That includes you. What will you make?" it asks, and the question is not rhetorical.

Those who attended the World Maker Faire could hear Dale Dougherty, the founder of *Make*: magazine and therefore of the whole movement, speak informally

on Sunday afternoon. I wandered over to the designated location waiting for him to appear. I had read that in 1993 he had launched the Global Network Navigator, the first web portal and the first site on the Internet to be supported by advertising. I was expecting him to be someone similar to the flamboyant Steve Ballmer, the former CEO of Microsoft. Silly me. The soft-spoken, cherubic-faced man, who is, same as Ballmer, in his early 60s, reminded me of a high school teacher, one who would be a good candidate for everybody's favorite.

Dougherty didn't speak long. He simply told his audience how much the maker movement has grown. Every year more than 225 regional Maker Faires take place in 48 countries, he said. (Shortly after my World Maker Faire weekend was over, I went to Germany and noted that there are seven Maker Faires in that country alone.) He then quickly laid out the maker movement's two related goals. "One is creating an economy that more of us can participate in meaningfully and have more control over. The second one is having education opportunities that are more meaningful and purposeful and reflect the kind of future that we're going to live in."

He went on to encourage people to network after the weekend was over. "One of the reasons for creating Maker Faire was to flush projects into a public place," he said, "so that people can learn and talk about them. We don't know how much making goes on around the country and the world, because people are often private about it."

Then he said this: "One thing about Maker Faire that you can't miss is all the



Antiquated skills such as making soap, mud-dyeing clothes, and starting a fire without a match, as seen here, are encouraged by the maker movement. "If you were in the wilderness, Andrew, you'd die," this boy was told by his adult companion while visiting the booth of Earth Living Skills ([www.earthlivingskills.com](http://www.earthlivingskills.com)).

kids running around. And if I can inspire them to go back into their schools and communities and make things, I think the world will be a better place. That's the fundamental premise behind what we're doing."

You can decide how relevant those sentiments are to the antiques trade, collecting, curating, and whatever else you are trying to do with your life. For more information, start with *Make*: magazine in print or online ([www.makezine.com](http://www.makezine.com)). ☞



The 2600 guys drive a refurbished Bell Telephone Company field technician's van.

Rob Vincent, whose website ([www.robvincent.net](http://www.robvincent.net)) posts that he is an “artist, hacker, writer, performer, journalist, cleric, rogue, tinkerer, puppeteer, autodidact, media producer, community organizer, loud voice, and nerd-of-all-trades,” was helping out in the booth of 2600, publishers of *The Hacker Quarterly*. He is pictured with an old dial-less phone, one that required a human operator, similar to Lily Tomlin’s “Ernestine” character. As he reminded me, the earliest hackers were phone freaks who hacked phones, not computers.



An early to mid-20th-century rotary dial phone was on display at the 2600 booth. For the significance of the number 2600, do an Internet search for “2600 hertz.”



Note the old phone booth in the 2600 booth.



Rob Vincent’s business card features vintage photos of his great-grandparents.



A boy named Jack, when asked how old the STEAM wagon was, put its age at circa 1950. Actually, said one of the adults, it was circa 1990.



Possibility Studios of Kingston, New York, an 1800-square-foot maker space, brought an old-time face board. The oval face was on a hinge that flipped back for photo ops. Available to members of Possibility Studios are such things as a table saw, band saws, jigsaw, drill presses, sanders, routers, a painter sprayer, a sandblaster, heavy industrial and traditional sewing machines, and so on.



Old-fashioned go-kart races were a crowd pleaser and big draw at this event. The contestant driving in front rode a go-kart in the style of a vintage Volkswagen van.



Make magazine founder Dale Dougherty.



“Join the Industrial Re-Revolution” is the slogan of Dustin Roderigues’s Tachyon Electrics. He is pictured with his electrified motorcycle.



Melanie Clark, assistant to Topaz M. Terry, proprietor of Bicycle Trash ([www.bicycletrash.com](http://www.bicycletrash.com)), was selling jewelry made of old bicycle parts. A pendant is pictured in the detail. “Functional art for bicycle enthusiasts,” says Bicycle Trash’s business card. Makers want to find ways to repurpose, recycle, and reuse materials. They even want to figure out how to use debris from disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes, instead of just putting it all into a landfill.



The Funkrust Brass Band, based in Brooklyn, performed on Sunday.



The Heavy Meta [*sic*] Dragon, a fire-breathing artwork that doubles as a mobile sound stage, was designed and built in Toronto. It is 30' long and 19' tall, and has interactive fire, sound, kinetic, and light components. Built atop a GM mini bus, it is capable of being driven on the highway.



The American Watchmakers-Clockmakers Institute’s booth.



The Staten Island MakerSpace’s STEAM Wagon’s license plate.



Most of the event was outdoors. This was the scene in the covered pavilion.

