

BY JEANNE SCHINTO

# Bids & pieces

*The auction house  
started by Robert Skinner  
more than two decades ago  
keeps pace with the  
giants in the field*

**A**ntiques are things in fixed supply. Why collectors so passionately seek and treasure them has much to do with their rarity. But the hunt also turns on less tangible qualities, like beauty (rare enough itself) or an antique's place in the history of a country, an individual, or an idea.

An auction is one way to buy or sell antiques, just as it is the way to market many pedestrian items — fish and heifers, for example — or any other things that won't be valuable forever. But an auction of rare, beautiful, or historically significant antiques is another matter. It is a chance for many suitors to come together and compete in public for the things they love.

Stephen Fletcher, one such suitor, started with coins. Fletcher's grandfather collected coins, and when he died the collection was passed down to Fletcher. He used to go to Emery Stratton's coin shop in Wellesley, where he grew up, and buy coins. Then one day Stratton sold him an 1830s wooden-works, tall-case clock (noncollectors would call it a grandfather clock) for \$12. It was 1960, and Fletcher was 12 years old. "He told me Mary Baker Eddy owned it or something," Fletcher recalls. "I didn't even know who she was. But I went home and found a picture of a clock that looked a lot like it in Brooks Palmer's book [*The Book of American Clocks*, a standard reference]. This was

*Continued on page 20*

JEANNE SCHINTO IS A FREE-LANCE WRITER WHO LIVES IN LAWRENCE. HER ARTICLE ABOUT CATHOLIC EDUCATION APPEARED IN THE FEBRUARY 2 *GLOBE* MAGAZINE.

## Bids and pieces

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

better than coins."

A self-described "fink" who "didn't fit in" as an adolescent, Fletcher was an antiques dealer by the time he was in high school, selling clocks with a friend in a booth at antiques shows. He also was buying at auctions. When he first met Robert Skinner, Fletcher recalls with a smile, Fletcher was looking for a tall clock.

It was the summer of 1963 when Bob Skinner, 30 years old, held his first auctions — at the Harvard Town Hall, one town away from Bolton, where Skinner lived with his wife, Nancy, and infant daughter. The summer before, Skinner had staged a few auctions with another antiques dealer, but now he was out on his own. It was still a sideline; the space at the town hall was rented just for the night.

Skinner was then employed full-time as a quality-control engineer in the microwave and power-tube division at Raytheon Company in Waltham. But he wasn't happy. Nancy Skinner remembers that she and Bob would "sit around racking our brains" to think of something he could do that he would really enjoy. Fletcher, the precocious collector, remembers that the personable, energetic Skinner was enjoying himself immensely as the new auctioneer on the block. Fletcher couldn't have known it at the time, but meeting Skinner at that auction was fortuitous. Not only would it be the beginning of a close personal friendship ("He's like a son," says Nancy), but Fletcher was also to become one of Skinner's most treasured employees in a business venture that would make its mark in the antiques world. And that summer Fletcher did buy from Skinner a tall clock — a Silas Hoadley, made in Connecticut in the early 1800s — for \$85.

**W**hen you talk about fine antiques and auctions, Sotheby Parke-Bernet and Christie's, the international art-auction firms with US headquarters in New York, are the big names that spring to mind. They also get the big prices: In January, a carved mahogany tea table, made in 18th-century Philadelphia, was bought for \$1,045,000 at a

Christie's sale. A month earlier, at Sotheby's, Rembrandt Peale's portrait of his brother, "Rubens Peale with a Geranium," brought \$4.07 million. Both set records, making international news headlines, the table as the costliest piece of American furniture ever sold at auction, the Peale taking over top place for an American painting. But while record figures always seem startling, it's never surprising to learn that one of the two posh firms, founded in England in the mid-1700s, has been behind them.

Yet the company now called Robert W. Skinner Inc., Auctioneers and Appraisers, of Bolton and Newbury Street in Boston, holds American auction price records of its own. Such records, of course, don't always last long, but as of the middle of last month, Skinner's held records for an American desk (\$176,000 on June 1, 1984), an American wood door (\$74,250 on November 15, 1985), a hooked rug (\$55,000 on October 28, 1983), a piece of Shaker furniture (\$41,800 on October 12, 1985), a bottle (\$35,200 on May 20, 1983), a quilt (\$30,800 on October 27, 1984), a camera (\$7,250 on March 13, 1979), a basket (\$3,520 on September 23, 1982), and a Christmas ornament (\$1,210 on December 12, 1985). In fact, Skinner's is one of only a handful of auction houses around the country that can compete at all with the New York colossuses for world-class consignments and, consequently, world-class prices. That's no small accomplishment for a company founded by a man who, like countless others, began as an itinerant, country-type auctioneer.

Such auctioneers seem to be everywhere. Wide-girthed and cigar-chomping, one sat on a bar stool in a smoky room above a restaurant on the North Shore not long ago, chanting, "Will you go ten will you go ten will you go ten? Watermelons and some other kind of fruit, it's a still life, who wants it?" Then, after a pause, "Awright, put it up," he yelled to his crew of helpers. "Ten bucks. Anybody want it?"

By all accounts, Skinner's was never quite like that. "Bob saw a need for a different kind of auction house here," says Robert E. Cleaves, an appraiser for Skinner's since its earliest days and now also one of its three vice presidents and five auctioneers. "He wanted it to be national in scope, a thing that would outlast him."

What Robert Skinner set in motion has certainly done that. In August 1984, at age 51, he died of a heart attack, and now Nancy Skinner, 54, who always worked alongside her husband and who did graduate work in business administration, now finds herself in the president's chair. She leads 43 employees, 15 departments, and a big business: Based on yearly gross sales revenues, which were \$8.6 million for 1984-85, Skinner's is the largest auction house in New England.

It was Nancy's family's antiques that sparked Bob Skinner's interest in the first place. The summer before his death Skinner told a reporter, "I had absolutely no interest in antiques until I was almost 30. Then after we were married, my wife and I went to auctions for entertainment. I bought a

few things for \$5 or \$10, then found that someone would buy them from me later and I would make a profit. Being a lazy person, I thought that this was a hell of a way to make a living: sit on my fanny and sell something to someone who will give you a profit for it." That, of course, was Skinner's assessment. Of his extraordinary success, Nancy Skinner says proudly, "He was very competitive — a gambler." The gamble seems to have paid off.

Stephen Fletcher, who is now a vice president and auctioneer at Skinner's as well as head of Americana, the house's most prestigious and lucrative department, went to work for Bob Skinner part-time in the summer of 1964, a year after they met at the auctions in Harvard. Those days, Fletcher recalls, he was "doing everything — washing glasses, loading the truck." He traveled with Skinner throughout New England and into upstate New York, returning with carloads of things, the roof rack piled high. "And he wasn't spending a lot of money," says Fletcher. "You didn't have to spend much in those days, and Skinner didn't

have much to spend."

In 1965 Skinner's two secretaries at Raytheon received lay-off notices. They were to be recession casualties, but Skinner offered to go instead, claiming, his wife says, that the secretaries did all the work anyway. So he left, and they stayed. At the time, he was 33 years old and had two daughters. Still, with a bank loan he erected a small, two-story, cedar-shingled shop on Burnham Road in Bolton, next to his home, and began to hold auctions in a field across the street. Says Fletcher, "They'd kicked him out of the Harvard Town Hall. He was attracting too many people."

The business grew and grew, "like Topsy," says Nancy Skinner, who remembers that in a few years "it became very clear we couldn't do both the shop *and* auctions." So Skinner started looking at land. "He wanted a permanent place. I was against it," she admits. "I thought if we had a building, that'd really be it." In 1970 Skinner bought a 16-acre plot of woodlands in Bolton, near a sheep farm and orchards, off Route 117. His first auction in the 500-seat gallery, with two

exhibition rooms and a revolving stage, was held in March 1971.

Antiques are like poetry: An acquired taste, they demand long and scrupulous attention, and their appreciation is not for everyone, prices aside. "Most pieces speak for themselves if you know the vocabulary," says Fletcher.

Louise Woodhead, the Oriental rugs and textiles specialist for Skinner's, explains the appeal of a mid-18th-century American needlework sampler sold by Skinner's for \$69,300 in October 1984. "It was in perfect condition. It had good provenance [that is, it was handed down through a prominent family, in this case, Samuel Gardner Derby's of Salem]. It was in its original black molded frame. It had the original glass. It had been in a show [at the Museum of Fine Arts]. It had everything. Plus two people wanted it very, very badly. But," she says, "the bottom line was that it was beautiful."

Linda Dyer, the Skinner's American Indian art expert, is somewhat elusive in describing the beauty of a mid-19th-century carved wooden mask that sold for \$45,100 on November

2, 1985. "It was strong," she says. "A masterpiece. They say, 'Until you've seen a real pearl. . .'" Dyer says "a little old lady" from Connecticut bought the mask at a yard sale for 25 cents when she was 7. She wore it on Halloween for 10 years. More recently, she had hung it on her wall at home, but when she saw a similar mask featured on a US postage stamp, she began to sense the mask was very valuable. She called Skinner's and brought it in. "She would have been happy with \$400," Dyer says, "but I knew when I saw it what she had." Dyer accepted the mask on consignment, and at a Skinner's auction in November of last year, a Chicago commodities broker bought it and another mask (for \$27,500), by telephone bids called in during the auction.

Potential consigners, as they're called, bring items to Skinner's every weekday, to the company's headquarters in Bolton or small office on Newbury Street. In Bolton and Boston, the Skinner's staff — including Woodhead, Dyer, and 17 other experts in Americana (fine 18th- and early-19th-century furniture and decorations);

Continental/Victoriana (19th- and 20th-century American and 18th-, 19th-, and 20th-century English, European, and Oriental furniture and decorations); bottles, historical flasks, and blown glass; jewelry; paintings; dolls and toys; arts and crafts; military items; and antique photographica (including old cameras, daguerreotypes, and books on the subject) — can be seen peering into shopping bags in the lobby or ushering someone into a tiny, windowless room for a more private appraisal.

The experts also make house calls. Karen Keane, the firm's third vice president and auctioneer who is the Boston representative, estimates she drives 25,000 miles a year to look at complete estates, a few items, or even one promising object. If the consignor decides to let Skinner's sell the item (or items), and if Skinner's decides to take it, the consignor agrees to pay Skinner's a commission, which is usually between 10 percent and 20 percent of the sale price. The buyer also pays a 10 percent premium to Skinner's. (The latter premium, incidentally, has been figured into all prices quoted in this article.)

*Continued on page 32*

## Bids and pieces

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 28

**O**n a recent morning Keane made two calls in Boston. First, after boarding an ancient, creaking elevator in a factory-like building on Harcourt Street, she visited Charles J. Connick Associates, designers and workers in stained glass since 1912, which is liquidating in August. Young apprentice Rebecca Breymann showed Keane an oak roll-top desk painted hospital green, a turn-of-the-century tall clock with three types of chimes and a moon-phase dial, sample stained-glass window panels from the Princeton University chapel, studies that were rejected for San Francisco's Grace Cathedral, books, and paintings. The place was cluttered. And dark. A fine black coating of dust had settled over everything, and Keane, who was wearing a business suit, white stockings, and heels, got dirty as she moved along making notes.

She took down dimensions, turned over a mission oak settle, or long wooden bench, look-

ing for the stamp of Gustav Stickley or the decal of "L. & J.G. Stickley," Gustav's less famous brothers in the arts and crafts movement. Severely plain, almost rugged, the Stickley style is currently in vogue among young collectors. It wasn't clear whether Breymann had planned to show Keane this piece as well as another mission settle, which was mahogany. Both were piled with papers, nearly hidden in the dark. But the staff of Skinner's is always on the lookout for buried treasure; it is not uncommon that a staff member goes to a place to appraise one thing and ends up noticing something of far greater value.

Keane spent two hours at Connick's. In the end, she suggested Breymann sell the desk and clock to individuals who had expressed interest. The prices offered (\$1,700 and \$7,000 to \$8,000, respectively) were much more than what Skinner's could hope to get at auction, where only the more unusual or better preserved pieces generate the kind of excitement and competition that brings high prices. Keane left with her notes and a ream of paper — Breymann's handwritten list of

the dusty books.

"Ecclesiastical themes — there's not really much of a demand for that kind of thing," Keane said on the way to her next appointment. "And stained glass in general may be a little too fanciful for today's market. It's softer on the market since 10 years ago." Nor would it sell itself very well. "We'd have to promote it," she said. "Connick is not a 'name,' like Tiffany. I'll need to do some research."

Earlier Keane had said, "When you go into a house, you have to be able to go around the room and point, saying, 'That'll bring 500, that'll bring 200.' When you get an important piece, you can afford to take your time." At 35, Keane has been a collector herself for almost 18 years. In childhood, she noted her mother's and grandfather's interest in collecting. Then, starting in 1968, when she came to Boston from Cranford, New Jersey, as a college student, she began to buy at antiques shops, the Salvation Army, and flea markets. Every Saturday morning with a friend she would "hit the yard sales" in the suburbs, starting out at 6 o'clock. She has also been an antiques dealer and a scholar.

She holds a master's degree in art history from Boston University. Her academic specialty is 18th-century American furniture, but on the job she must judge all kinds of objects.

In an office building lobby on Court Street a woman waited for Keane. In a dingy office a few floors above, piled with boxes, she showed Keane two pieces. The drop-leaf table was an English Pembroke from the Regency period, Keane told her. Keane took out the table's drawer and looked at the bottom, and then she turned the whole table upside down and ran her hands (and eyes) carefully over the wood. She told the woman it would bring an estimated \$400 to \$600 at auction.

The other piece was a butler's secretary, with glass-doored shelves above, a writing or serving surface that flipped down, and bureau-like drawers below. "Another English piece, Gothic Revival, from the same period," said Keane, who took out each of the drawers to inspect inside and out, and then got on her knees to look under the base. The woman said, grim-faced, that she thought the buyer, who wasn't there,

had probably overpaid for it. "Well, don't tell me," Keane suggested sportily. "An auction estimate would be a little less than half of retail on this. I'd say \$1,500 to \$1,700." The woman, impressed, said it had been bought for \$3,850. A few minutes later she decided to consign, and Keane decided to accept.

**B**ehind each Skinner's sale are months of preparation and planning. Backstage, so to speak, in Bolton, is a warehouselike area with 12-foot ceilings piled high with objects. Several weeks ago there were three orderly stacks, one each for upcoming auctions of Americana, Continental/Victoriana, and Estates, which is the Skinner's catchall "secondary level" category. The pieces resembled props stockpiled for an enormous theatrical show, and in one sense that's exactly what they were.

Each item up for sale at a Skinner's auction is described in a catalog, and most of the catalogs are illustrated with photographs of the choicest pieces (a format, not coincidentally, similar to that for Sotheby's catalogs). There is always a presale



time set for buyers to inspect items that will go on the block, and during these inspections the judgments of the Skinner's staff are subjected to the scrutiny of antiques dealers, collectors, and anyone else who wants to attend a Skinner's auction. Because all items are sold "as is," the catalog description is an aid, not a guarantee. And so in the exhibition areas, invitingly arranged like furnished rooms in a home (or a stage set), dealers and collectors don't hesitate to measure, finger, flip over, or crawl under the goods.

These shoppers are looking for signs of use as well as abuse. Evidence of use can add to the value of some items: On some of the most valuable chairs in America, turned top pieces and stretchers (or crosspieces) are worn thin. As Fletcher says, "A Queen Anne table that's had meat cut on it, lemons sliced, had cleaning solvents eat a pattern into its feet by a mop — all this leaves a glowing surface, like an oil painting you can touch. Or think of the place where a blanket chest has been opened again and again, and the oil of human hands has left a stain." Indications of this type of wear can heighten a buyer's sense of the past, spark the imagination. Serious damage, however — or even the most careful restoration — diminishes a piece's value.

At auction time, buyers and spectators sit as they would in a theater (although the lights in the gallery never dim), facing the stage, which is raised. Skinner's holds more than 50 auctions a year (last year there were 58), but each is specialized, and so, for the most part, are the types of customers each auction attracts. To the Americana sales, for example, come the so-called heavy-hitters — dealers and collectors who are able to drop small fortunes with a nod. Each of Skinner's last four major Americana auctions, which are held yearly in the fall, has seen record prices. "Twenty percent of our items should be considered 'important,' of museum quality," says Keane. And "museum quality" generally means big prices.

At other auctions in the same room, less glorious items are routinely sold, but the rate of sale at any Skinner's auction is steady no matter what the fare: approximately 80 lots (a "lot" being something that may comprise more than one item) per hour, nonstop, for approximately four hours.

Recently, Skinner's held an "Auction of Firearms, Swords, Military, Political, and Related Ephemera." It was an unusual sale for Skinner's — the items had been gathered over months from many sources — and it attracted an unusual crowd, mostly men, including a Massachusetts state trooper who wore high black boots, blue-striped jodhpurs, and a gun, and who bought 13 World War II posters for \$33. As William Schott, 27, the Skinner's auction coordinator and its newest auctioneer, started the bidding on another item — a letter written in 1892 by department store pioneer John Wanamaker — four or five bored-looking people competed with subdued raisings of a hand or the white plastic paddle they had been given, imprinted with their bidding number for the day. In a matter of seconds, during which the bidding proceeded with nods, a man in sunglasses looked over his shoulder to signal the end of his try. Another started drinking his soda to do the same — both subtle communications between bidder and auctioneer. The letter was sold for \$55.

On the days when the dearer items go, the procedure is the same, but the tension can be

palpably high. For the auction house's best sales, customers come from all over the country, sometimes from Europe (the twice-yearly antique Oriental rug sales, for example, attract customers from West Germany and England). Phone bidding is a regular feature of these auctions. And occasionally there is applause.

**A**n auctioneer's personality can be as crucial to an auction's success as an actor's is to a play's. Known for his easy, witty style, Fletcher started auctioneering for Skinner's when he was 23, and he remembers Bob Skinner telling him, " 'No matter how bad it's going, be cheerful, and don't knock the goods.' " Fletcher, however, acknowledges the effect of an off-beat comic style, "the insult taken just so far, like Joan Rivers'."

There is another element at an auction that contributes drama and color to the auction atmosphere — but it's also illegal. It's called "the pool," and everywhere auctions are held, the pool can be found. At Skinner's, it's visible as a cluster of about a dozen men who stand at the rear of the gallery, casually dressed and talking loudly. Jean Brooks, of the Skinner's jewelry department and director of the Boston office, where fine jewelry and small "collectibles" auctions are held, likens the pool to "the bad boys in the back of the class, trying to talk back to the teacher."

An antiques dealer for 18 years before coming to Skinner's in 1977, Robert Cleaves, the Skinner's vice president and auctioneer, admits he was once in the pool. A pool, he says, is "a group of dealers who attend a sale and agree not to bid against one another." Instead, one member or another is designated to make the purchase. Afterward, pool members "knock it down" — that is, hold an auction among themselves, at which the pieces go to the highest bidders and the profits are shared — but shared among the pool members, not with the auction house. It is illegal because pool members agree to refrain from bidding against other pool members.

Other pool actions, while not illegal, are annoying and sometimes intimidating. For example, pool members may try to disrupt the bidding process by asking the auctioneer — in the middle of a lot offering —



At a Skinner's storage room in Bolton, objects to be auctioned are piled high.

"Who's bidding? What lot number is this?" This is an attempt to disrupt the auctioneer's rhythm, which is all-important to a smooth-running sale. Pool members may also circulate around the audience and try to rattle independent bidders, asking, "Why are you bidding on that? Didn't you see the damage?" — even if there is no damage — again, in an attempt to keep prices low.

"To get rid of the pool would be like trying to start prohibition all over again," Cleaves says with a sigh, adding, "It's like pornography — you have the right to ignore it, and it's probably just as harmless." In Pennsylvania and Maine, nonetheless, officials have begun to investigate auction pooling in their states.

Dealers have always gone to auctions to get merchandise for resale. And because dealers must realize a profit on what they buy, there comes a point, just about at wholesale, when they will stop bidding on most goods. (There are exceptions, of course. But Fletcher notes that very competitive situations and, as a result, eye-popping prices "are seen only for the extraordinary items.") That's why bargains can be bought at auctions. At Skinner's, in fact, 60 percent of the lots in 1985 went for less than \$1,000 each. And Richard J. Freeman, the Skinner's accountant, estimates that of those, 40 percent regularly go for less than \$500.

Skinner's place in the auction world, then, like that of the other four or five auction houses of a similar size around the country, is paradoxical. While their record prices garner publicity, which in turn brings in more world-class consignments, the usual situation is something quite different.

Cleaves, for one, is frustrated that more retailers don't realize that great deals can often be had for just a bid or two above wholesale. He finds "gushing" about record prices "most peculiar" and asks, "In what other business

do you run around *bragging* about your high prices? What other business advertises how *much* things go for?"

Cleaves made his first purchase of an antique at age 8, 42 years ago, at a shop in Sandwich on a summer vacation. ("And," he says, "I still have it: a cut-glass Hawke's perfume bottle. I bought it for \$2.50, and it's got the wrong stopper, which the antiques dealer told me it had at the time.") His father took him to museums every weekend when he was growing up in Westborough. That, Cleaves says, was the beginning of the development of his aesthetic "eye." He calls his tastes "catholic in the extreme." (As well they might be, since in addition to his other duties he heads the Skinner's Continental/Victoriana department, whose auction offerings last month included objects as diverse as a 19th-century Chinese hand-painted wall-paper panel and a Louis XV carved walnut armchair.)

At one point, though, Cleaves thought of being more selective, even more scholarly about his personal collecting, and considered specializing in Japanese sword furniture — that is, "all the parts or appurtenances or furnishings" of a sword. "But," he says, "I suddenly became claustrophobic. I realized I would only be able to look at that kind of thing from now on, and that I'd have to learn Japanese. I decided I preferred the dangers of trying to know different fields."

"Buying something you've never seen before — it's a risk you take," says Keane, who also has not specialized while building her own collection. "But you can win big. We're pursuing the unusual here, after all. I buy what I like. It could be an art deco chrome-and-marble vanity, or it could be a pair of Egyptian Revival Victorian candlesticks."

Among auctioneers and collectors, however, there is unflinching agreement with the idea that there is a difference between a collec-

tion and a mere accumulation. "An accumulator has no aesthetic viewpoint, is a buyer without a goal," says Cleaves. "And you can't acquire an aesthetic sense. Like talent, it has to be born with you. It's an ability that you have that transcends knowledge. But again, like talent it can be improved." Says Keane, "Being a good antiques collector is like being a good museum curator. Polish your eye. Develop connoisseurship."

Upstairs at the Bolton gallery is a quiet place, above all the hurly-burly downstairs. It is the president's office — once Bob Skinner's, now Nancy Skinner's — filled with objects of note and value, including a sampling of the Skinner family's own collection of baskets and miniatures (including furniture, tools, even baskets). Here, too, are choice items waiting to be offered for sale, one of them another mid-19th-century American Indian mask, made of alder wood with locks of human hair hanging off it. It has a crack — 20 years ago a boy dropped it on his way to "show and tell," and the boy's teacher repaired it with glue, Dyer says. When Skinner's holds its next American Indian art sale, on April 12, Dyer estimates that this mask will sell for \$30,000 to \$40,000.

A rosewood and mahogany card table has a less certain future. Classical Revival, made in New York circa 1815, it has a pair of dour-looking griffins for legs, which in turn stand on a platform supported by four dolphin-head carved feet. The table failed to meet its reserve — that is, the lowest price for which both consignor and auction house had agreed to sell it. An undisclosed sum, the reserve at Skinner's is generally two-thirds of the catalog's low estimate. (In this case, the estimate was \$75,000 to \$125,000.) This, says the Skinner's staff, is the fate of 3 to 5 percent of the items offered at its sales, except rugs, which are "passed," or withdrawn by the auctioneer, at the rate of about 33 percent, because rug reserves tend to be much higher. The rosewood and mahogany table will be offered for resale at a lower reserve or returned to its owner — the estate of Elisabeth T. Babcock.

The sale of the contents of Hark Away, Betty Babcock's Woodbury, Long Island, home, on November 15 and 16 last year in Bolton, was one of only two Skinner's auctions in its history to bring more than \$1 million. (The other was a bottle auction in 1975.) It also was Skinner's sale number 1,100, counting back from those first evenings at the Harvard Town Hall.

Babcock, long a friend of the Skinners, had spent a lifetime pursuing antiques, though she never admitted to being a collector. "She disliked the word," says Fletcher, "but she did have a collection." Sixty years' worth, it included the 18th-century painted wood door — an object of folk art — that went for \$74,250. (The Skinner's estimate on that item had been only \$8,000 to \$12,000, so the final bids were an exhilaratingly pleasant surprise.) In all, 773 lots were offered, including a Federal inlaid mahogany tall clock, a Queen Anne maple highboy, a Chippendale cherry chest-on-chest, four splint baskets, and 24 sterling-silver-handled knives. "Betty Babcock had a collection *and* an accumulation," says Keane. "She must have had 300 hide-covered boxes."

"A collection is an expression of a personality," says Fletcher. "In fact, sales themselves take on a personality, because *we've* formed a collection on a limited basis. And by the end of it, it's totally dispersed, to start all over again, being collected in a new way." •