

Skinner, Inc., Marlborough, Massachusetts

Clocks and Cannon Balls

by Jeanne Schinto

Photos courtesy Skinner

A well-edited, well-orchestrated sale of clocks, watches, scientific instruments, historical arms, and militaria took place at Skinner's suburban Boston headquarters in Marlborough, Massachusetts, on May 3. A plain success, the 574-lot two-catalog auction was 95% sold and totaled more than \$1.7 million (including buyers' premiums).

"Probably a decade ago, in different financial times, it would have been a monumental sale."

The star horological lots included about three dozen excellent, fresh-to-market timekeepers in great condition. "Many of these clocks have not seen the light of day in over forty years," said Skinner's clock and science department head Robert C. Cheney at a preview on the night before the auction. "Probably a decade ago, in different financial times, it would have been a monumental sale. Now that prices have adjusted, shall we say, they still should do well, and I'm hoping very much that this sort of thing will enliven the market a little bit."

It's a given that people tend to hold back good material in a poor economy unless compelled by circumstance—usually one of the three Ds (debt, divorce, or death)—to sell. Now that the economy has improved a bit and a significant number of stellar consignments were on the table, the big question was: Would bidders respond? The answer is that they did.

Several of the topnotch clocks among the approximately 150 offered went to dealer Peter Sawyer of Exeter, New Hampshire. One was a Nathaniel Mulliken tall clock made circa 1765 in

Lexington, Massachusetts. Housed in a cherry case and with the clockmaker's name engraved in a silvered boss above the dial, the eight-day time-and-strike Mulliken, estimated at \$10,000/15,000, went to Sawyer for \$52,275 (including the buyer's premium).

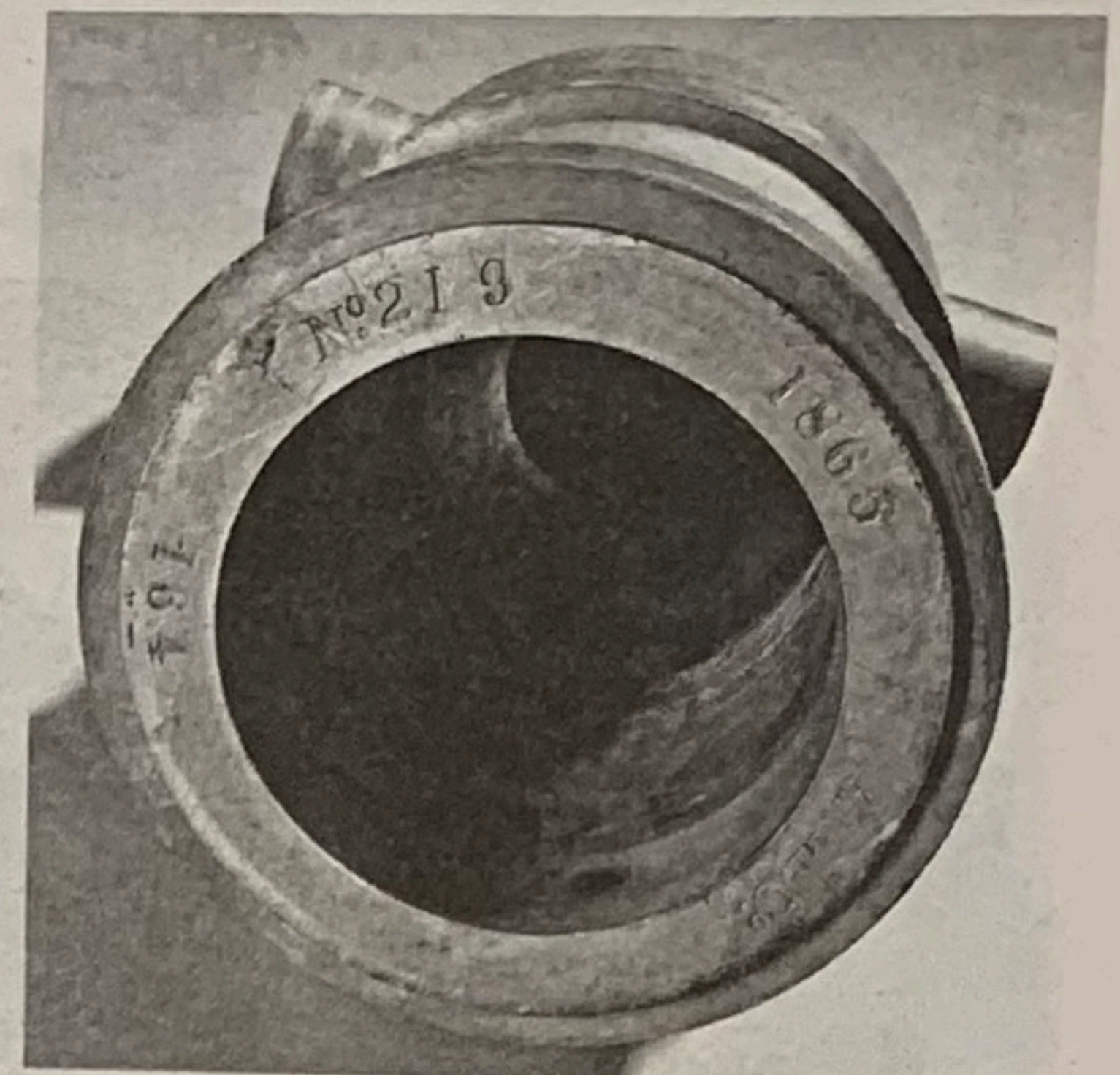
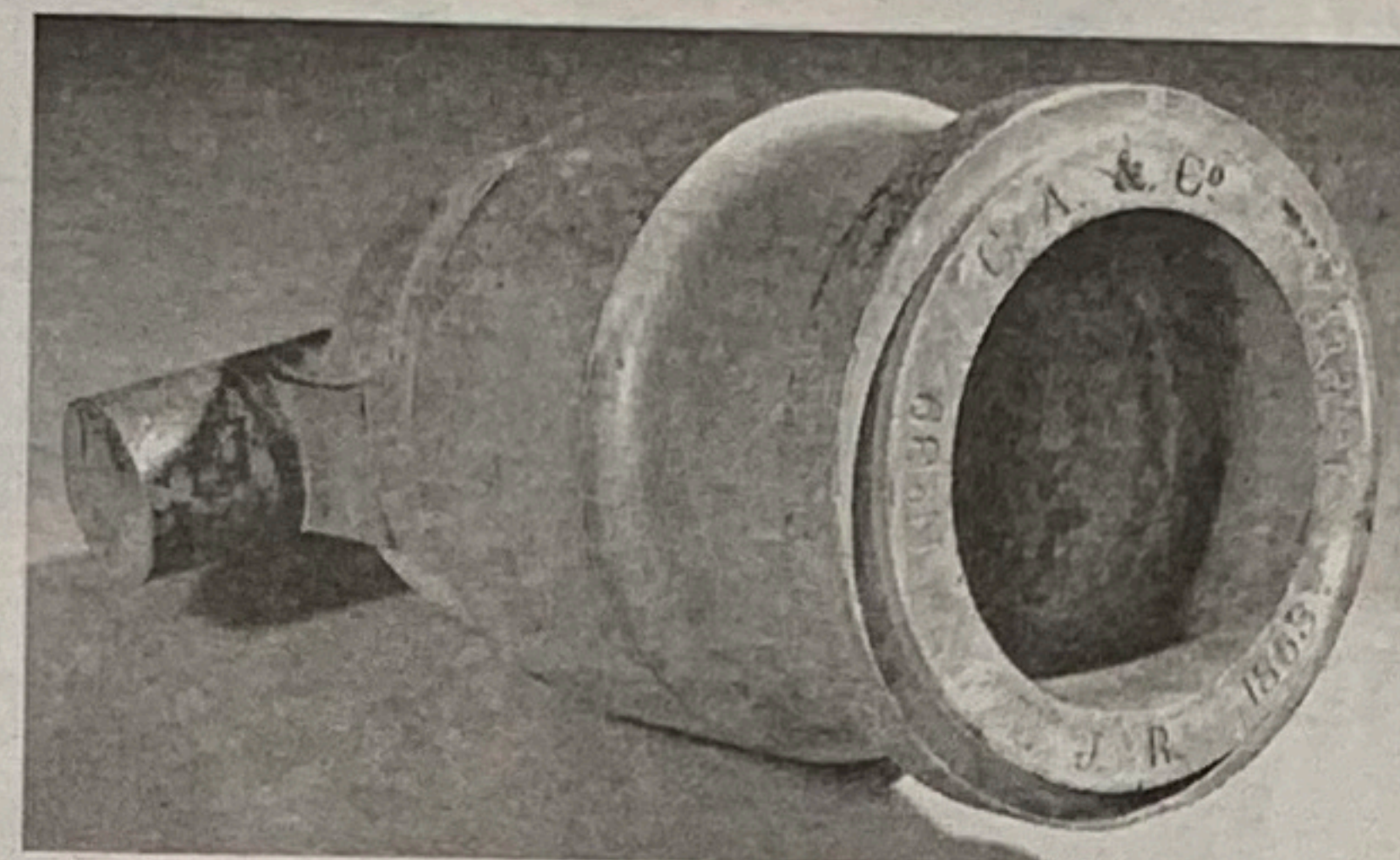
Considering the strong price, one might surmise that he bought it for a client. He did not. "I bought the Mulliken for stock because I happened to love it," Sawyer said. "You can go years and years and years and never see something like that. That was a rare opportunity."

Cheney, for his part, called the clock "a virtual time capsule. It was in untouched condition. You can learn a lot by studying a clock like that."

Sawyer said that among his other purchases was one for a client. The 40" tall shelf clock with a so-called kidney-shaped dial was made circa 1800 by John Munroe of Barnstable, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod. Signed in a cartouche below its dial, the clock was housed in a case with a scalloped apron and high French feet attributed to Munroe's brother William of Concord, Massachusetts. The price, including a bench-made inlaid shelf, was \$30,750 (est. \$10,000/15,000).

A similar shelf clock by Joseph Loring of Sterling, Massachusetts, went for \$17,220 (est. \$8000/12,000) to another big buyer of the day, John Delaney Sr. of Delaney Antique Clocks, West Townsend, Massachusetts. Loring had been a journeyman under the famed Willard clockmaking family and others, and one of his account books is in the collection of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts.

The Delaney firm used two bidding cards. The other was in the hand of John Delaney Jr. That number bought



Each of these is a U.S. Model 1838 Coehorn mortar, 16½" long, bronze, with a marked muzzle. The one made circa 1863 by Cyrus Alger & Company (left) brought \$28,290. The other, circa 1865 by Ames, sold for \$19,680.



The 30-star 10' x 18' flag from the Peter F. Frazier and M. Prudence Frazier Fleck collection sold for \$984 (est. \$1000/1200). It dates from 1848-51. Behind the ropes and stanchions is the tree section from Little Round Top. On right, two Coehorn mortars. Schinto photo.



Detail of the tree section from Little Round Top. The relic fetched \$23,370 (est. \$1000/1500). Schinto photo.

the highest-priced item. Going at \$168,000, it was an E. Howard & Company No. 80 Renaissance Revival tall clock in a fully carved mahogany case. Made circa 1890 by the Boston firm, the clock has a three-train

movement, meaning it tells time, strikes the hour, and plays Westminster chimes on each quarter-hour. Consigned by a nursing home run by nuns in New Hampshire, it has survived in superb condition.



Robert Cheney gave a preview night slide lecture, "The Pitfalls of Collecting Simon Willard's Patent Timepiece or 'Banjo' Clock." One could surmise he knows the subject. As the 62-year-old said, he cleaned his first patent timepiece for an unnamed major American institution when he was seven ("and I can prove it"). So it was sobering to hear him say next that the Simon Willard patent timepiece is in his judgment "the most difficult American clock to acquire in original condition today."

Simon Willard invented the patent timepiece in 1802. (Decades later, it was nicknamed the "banjo clock" because of its shape, but don't use that phrase in front of Cheney. He hates it.) The form was produced thereafter by Willard family members and their apprentices, as well as by large manufacturers, reproduction makers, and fakers.

Cheney's message was a simple one: "When examining a patent timepiece, assume the worst, and you will be correct better than nine out of ten times. In other

words, you have a ninety percent chance of buying a timepiece with a problem or problems." This form and its variants are, in his words, "a minefield of difficulties" for beginners and connoisseurs alike.

In 1994, when Cheney was a private dealer, he examined 41 of the patent timepieces for sale that year and found 34 had "significant problems," e.g., replaced reverse-paintings on glass, new gilding, repainted dials, phony signatures, new cases, replacement movements, new hardware, and so on. The lecture was devoted to a discussion of how to identify these defects. As Cheney stressed, the skills have "nothing to do with deadbeat escapements or anything like that. You don't have to be a mechanical engineer, but you do have to know decorative arts." That is, you have to know how to look at wood, nails, glass, painting, metal, iron, and the many other components of antiques of all kinds.

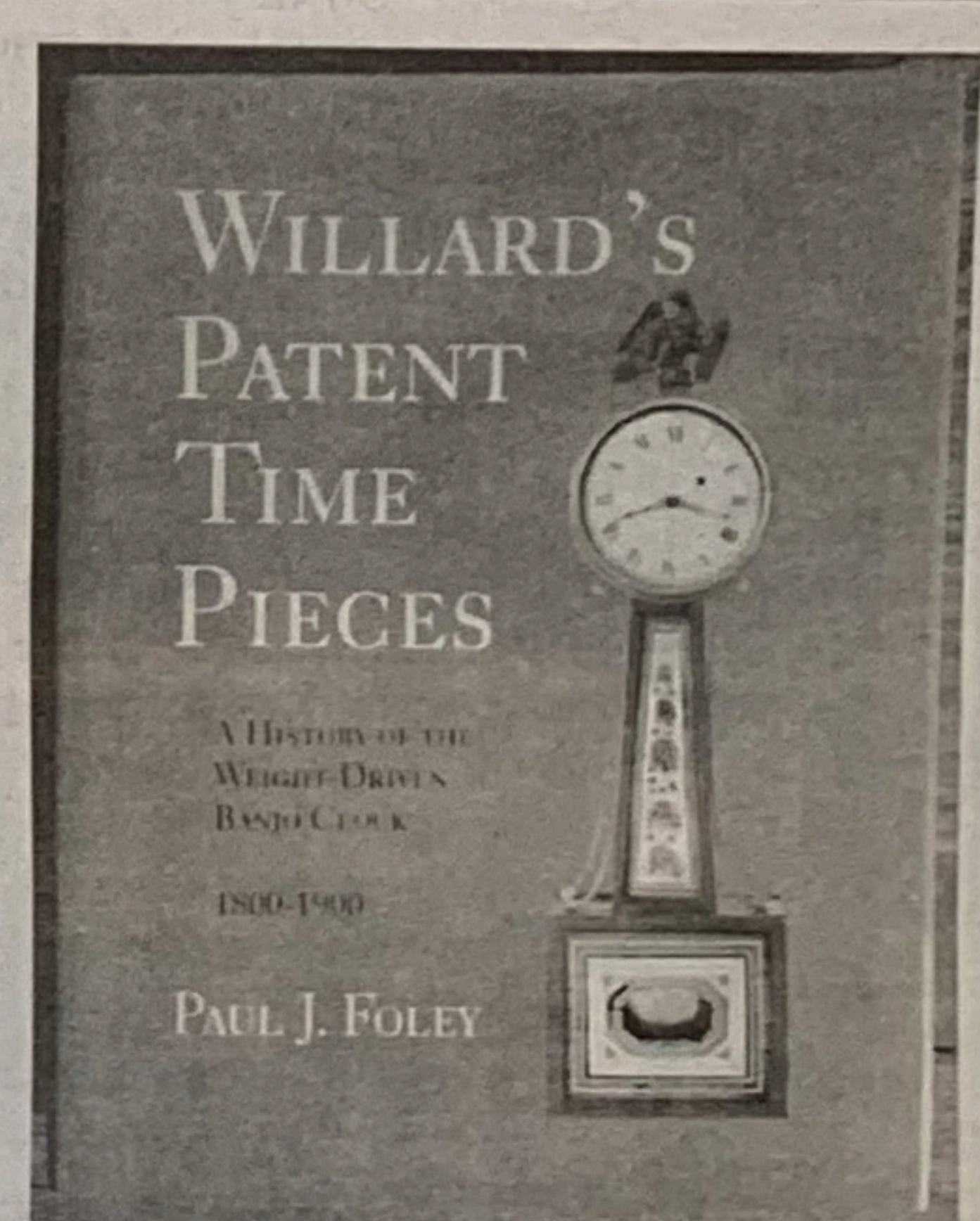
Photographs of two genuine fakers, to coin an oxymoronic phrase, were included in the slides. Cheney referred to them as "Mr. X" and "Mr. Y." He met them at their shops as a boy with his clockmaker father, Bradford W. Cheney, in the 1950s. "Mr. X" was a classically trained artist who converted common timepiece cases to "Willards" by changing the glasses, adding gilding, and so forth. "Mr. Y" converted the movements. "This is what you're up against," said Cheney. "These guys are your worst nightmare." He cited Harold L. Peterson's *How Do You Know It's Old?* (1975). Quoting Peterson, Cheney said, "The purchase price of the fake is the collector's tuition to study the subject."

More seriously, he repeatedly

recommended Paul J. Foley's definitive *Willard's Patent Timepieces: A History of the Weight-Driven Banjo Clock, 1800-1900* (2002). "Read this book! Read this book!" he practically shouted. He also directed the audience's attention to the chapter called "Spurious Timepieces" in his own 1992 book, *Clock Making in New England, 1725-1825*, which he wrote with Philip Zea.

What to do besides reading and worrying? "Find a good example and look at it," he advised. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, he said, there are "a dozen" that are not worth looking at. At the Willard House and Clock Museum in Grafton, Massachusetts, there are "a high percentage of good ones." At the Concord Museum in Concord, Massachusetts, where there will be three to five on display at any given time, "every single one is worth studying," he said.

In closing, Cheney quoted from an 1822 newspaper advertisement, placed by Simon Willard himself, which addressed the subject of fake patent timepieces. "He wrote, 'I believe the public are not generally aware that my former patent right expired six years ago, which induces me to caution them against the frequent impositions practiced in vending spurious timepieces. It is true, they have 'patent' printed on them, and some with my name, and their outward appearance resembles those formerly made by me: Thus they are palmed upon the public.' He goes on to say that 'Several of them have been brought to me for repairs, that would certainly put the greatest bungler to the blush....I therefore disclaim being



Paul J. Foley's *Willard's Patent Timepieces: A History of the Weight-Driven Banjo Clock, 1800-1900*. Foley, a former FBI agent, has been studying the form since 1972. To order the book, see (www.roxburyvillagepublishing.com).

the manufacturer of such vile performances."

Cheney intoned, "If Simon Willard was concerned about forgeries in 1822, God help us to understand the patent timepiece today! Always assume the worst, learn to judge components, and hopefully that will keep your tuition bill down."

Note: When I found myself sitting at the lecture next to collector Matt Atanian, who is a professional photographer, I handed my camera to him.



The top lot of the sale, a circa 1890 E. Howard & Company No. 80 Renaissance Revival tall clock, sold to John Delaney Jr. for \$168,000 (est. \$7000/9000). The Boston clock's under-bidder was on the phone.



At the preview, Nancy Monti, who described herself as "a collector's wife," admired what was destined to become the sale's top lot. The clock's height is 106". Schinto photo.

1815 David Wood shelf clock (\$23,370), and a circa 1818 dwarf clock by Reuben Tower (\$33,210). They paid over estimate, sometimes well over, for each of them.

Another lot that went to the senior Delaney's number was an 1817-18 Eli Terry pillar and scroll clock. Its outside escapement was one feature that made it special and justified its within-estimate price of \$17,220. (One without that feature sold for \$3998.) Readers who aren't conversant in clocks needn't be frightened by what may be an unfamiliar phrase. All it means is that the clock parts that swing the pendulum and make the tick-tock sound are visible just below the "12" on the dial.

Rick Merritt of Reading, Pennsylvania, was a very active buyer at prices lower than those paid by Sawyer and the Delaneys. Formerly of Merritt's Antiques, the venerable firm founded by his grandparents in 1938, Merritt has been buying and selling clocks as R. Merritt, Inc., and working as a consultant for several auction houses since 2006. The winner of 19 clocks at Skinner, including a Seth Thomas Regulator No. 1 "keyhole" wall clock (\$3690), he



Detail of the carving on the E. Howard No. 80. Schinto photo.



Two gentlemen from Houston, Texas, stood with the E. Howard: on left, dealer Ralph Pokluda of Chappell Jordan Clock Galleries, and on right, collector George Goolsby. Although Goolsby has bought from Skinner for years, this was his first time at a sale in person. Schinto photo.

needed to rent a Penske truck to take home those and approximately 80 other lots he bought at the horology auction of R.O. Schmitt Fine Arts held in Manchester, New Hampshire, on the previous weekend.

The idea that one dealer felt confident enough about the market economy to absorb that much horological material in an eight-day period is encouraging for everyone. Still, there are places where weaknesses remain. "Clocks with defects or in need of restoration remain soft," said Merritt.

When I spoke with Cheney after the sale, he was shortly leaving for "an educational adventure" in Switzerland. The third-generation clockmaker was going to learn more about high-end watches. At this sale,

there were a few, including a circa 1968 LeCoultre Polaris stainless steel diver's wristwatch with alarm (\$14,760) and a late 19th- or early 20th-century Hamilton & Company 18k triple-complicated minute-repeating pocket watch (\$24,600).

Among the historical arms and militaria lots, a 55" tall section of an oak tree from Little Round Top that was embedded with late 19th-century artillery projectiles fascinated everyone, including the clock and watch folks. It sold for \$23,370 (est. \$1000/1500) to a bidder who wants to remain anonymous, said Joel Bohy, who heads Skinner's historic arms and militaria department. Brought back from Gettysburg to G.A.R. Post 89 in Beverly, Massachusetts, the tree had been since 1974 in the collection of Peter F. Frazier (1922-1982) and his wife, M. Prudence Frazier Fleck, of Wenham, Massachusetts. A typed note that came with it said in part: "On one side can be seen a 5" Union cannonball and on the other side, pieces of Confederate shrapnel. The 20th Maine, under Col. Joshua Chamberlain, held 'Little Round Top'—It was a Union Victory!"

"There are still a lot of great things that are coming out, right here in New England," said Bohy.

Other highlights of this section of the sale were consigned by the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. They were being sold to benefit the museum's acquisition fund. Don Troiani, a collector, historian, and artist known for the accuracy of the clothing in his paintings, paid \$14,760 (est. \$2000/3000) for a Model 1858 commercial hospital steward's blue broadcloth frock coat. A sewn-in name tag on one sleeve was marked "C.P. Morse." Charles P. Morse of Lynnfield, Massachusetts, wore



These are both circa 1800 Massachusetts shelf clocks, each 40" tall, with so-called kidney-shaped dials. I have asked experts why these dials are called "kidney-shaped," when kidneys are bean-shaped. No one seems able to answer me convincingly. At any rate, the one on left, made by John Munroe of Barnstable and in a case attributed to William Munroe of Concord, sold to Peter Sawyer for \$30,750 (est. \$10,000/15,000). The other, by Joseph Loring of Sterling, Massachusetts, sold to John Delaney Sr. for \$17,220 (est. \$8000/12,000). Schinto photo.

this uniform as a hospital steward in the 17th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment in 1861-62.

Deaccessioned from an unidentified private museum were two 16½" long bronze Coehorn (portable) mortars from the Civil War. They fetched \$28,290 and \$19,680, respectively, each with a \$10,000/15,000 estimate. What made the price difference? Their relative ages, said Bohy. The more expensive one, marked "C.A. & Co." by maker Cyrus Alger & Co., was dated 1863; the less expensive one, marked "A.M. Co." by maker Ames, was dated 1865.

By unfortunate coincidence, the 37th annual Ohio Civil War Show and the 22nd annual Artillery Show were taking place in Mansfield, Ohio, on the same weekend as this sale, drawing many would-be live bidders away. But many had come to preview, then left bids or phoned them in on auction day. "It wasn't just a good sale, it was a great sale," Bohy said afterward.

Besides, the room was plenty full with bidders interested in the other specialties. They were very attentive. I haven't seen such attention paid to bidding in a while. Perhaps such close attention was paid because from lot to lot no one knew quite what to expect. It was an auction that was truly suspenseful. By the end, people were smiling. Either they had bought well, or their consigned items had sold well, or both. All around, it was a happy day.

In closing, it's important to mention the sale's on-line component, which ended a few days later. It featured lesser lots that formerly would have been in the live auction. That's one reason why it could be so well edited. Now a regular part of major Skinner sales, the on-line section is the perfect place for beginner collectors to find items estimated in the three-digit range. More happiness.

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



Seen at lower right and in the detail is the sale's top clothing lot, a Model 1858 commercial hospital steward's blue broadcloth frock coat, buttons intact, with sash and belt. Sold by the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College to benefit its acquisition fund, it fetched \$14,760 (est. \$2000/3000). Other items of clothing in the sale included a McDowell-style Federal forage cap from the Frazier-Fleck collection that sold for \$3198 (est. \$700/900); a Model 1858 musician's dress coat from the Hood Museum, \$1722 (est. \$600/800); also from the Hood Museum, the mid- to late 19th-century dress epaulettes of General Benjamin F. Butler, \$2706 (est. \$600/800); and a Civil War-era company-grade infantry officer's frock coat from an unidentified source, \$2583 (est. \$800/1000). Schinto photo.



Charles P. Morse of Lynnfield, Massachusetts, wore this uniform as a hospital steward in the 17th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment. He enlisted on July 22, 1861, and was discharged on August 7, 1862. The uniform now belongs to Don Troiani.

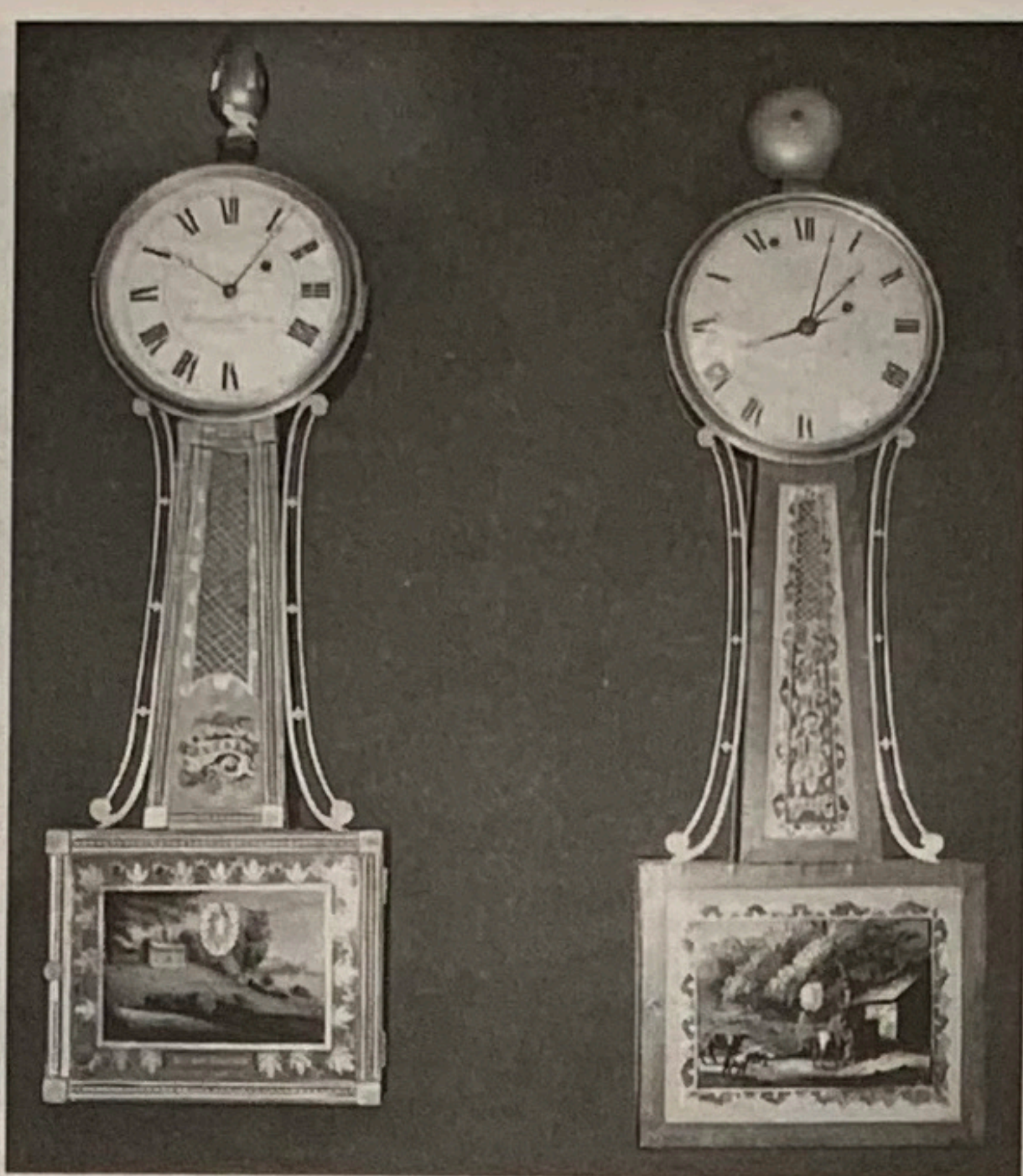


A circa 1765 tall clock made by Nathaniel Mulliken of Lexington, Massachusetts, sold to Peter Sawyer for \$52,275 (est. \$10,000/15,000). Its cherry case is 90" tall.

A circa 1790 clock by Levi and Abel Hutchins of Concord, Massachusetts, with eight-day time and hour strike movement went to an Internet buyer for \$15,990 (est. \$6000/8000). Its height is 86½".



A tall clock made by Aaron Willard of Boston sold for \$22,140 (est. \$8000/12,000). Its mahogany case is 95". Its movement is an eight-day time and hour strike. It can be dated precisely because the original bill is still attached to its backboard. It states: "Jan. 11, 1806/ Benjamin Billings [?] Bot of Aaron Willard/ one eight-day clock at \$64/ Received payment in full/ Aaron Willard." Some condition problems kept it from going higher.



Two circa 1815 patent timepieces. On left, an example by Lemuel Curtis of Concord, Massachusetts, with a scene of Mount Vernon in the lower glass, sold to a phone bidder for \$12,300 (est. \$7000/9000). On right is one by Aaron Willard Jr. of Boston whose lower glass has a country scene and whose movement has an alarm feature. The Willard sold to a different phone bidder for \$11,685 (est. \$7000/9000). Schinto photo.



An 1875 Louis Bernhard 30-day wall regulator sold to John Delaney Jr. for \$36,900 (est. \$30,000/50,000). The 95" tall walnut and burl walnut-veneered case has a carved crest depicting "Columbia." The clock's temperature-compensating pendulum was signed, just like the movement, "Louis Bernhard, Bloomsburg, Pa." That movement was skeletonized, which means that most of the movement plates had been cut away, converting solid brass sheets into lacy patterns of just enough brass to support the wheels. The clock's glass dial allows one a great view of it.



A closeup of "Columbia" and the clock's face. Schinto photo.



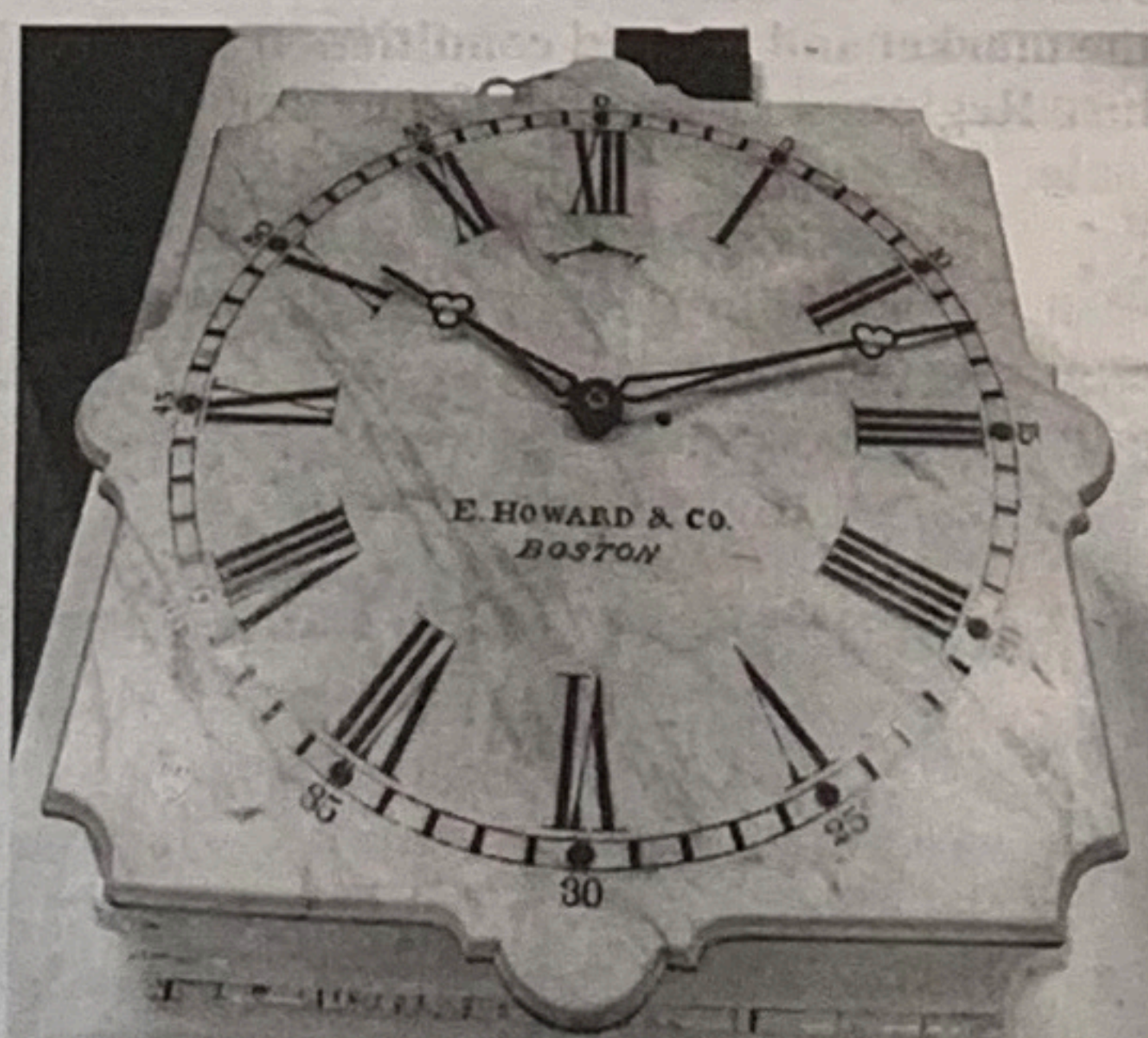
Peter Sawyer paid \$6150 (est. \$3000/5000) for this 27" tall Timby's solar timepiece No. 36. The eight-day clock was made by L.E. Whiting, Saratoga Springs, New York, circa 1863, with a globe manufactured by Gilman Joslin, Boston, circa 1860. The original paper label inside confidently declared that this new style of dial would mark the end of conventional ones: "Illustrating the Diurnal Revolution of the Earth, and serving as a GEOGRAPHICAL EDUCATOR for the SCHOOL ROOM and the FAMILY, Ornamental in the Parlor, and useful everywhere. The old and unmeaning clock-face may now be banished from use, as no longer desirable." Schinto photo.



A circa 1825 mahogany lyre clock attributed to John Sawin of Boston sold to an absentee for \$13,530 (est. \$2000/4000). The 41" tall timepiece has an eight-day movement and its original, fractured reverse-painted glasses.



A circa 1818 dwarf clock by Reuben Tower of Hingham, Massachusetts, sold to John Delaney Sr. for \$33,210 (est. \$10,000/15,000). The 47½" case is pine with "mahoganized" surface.



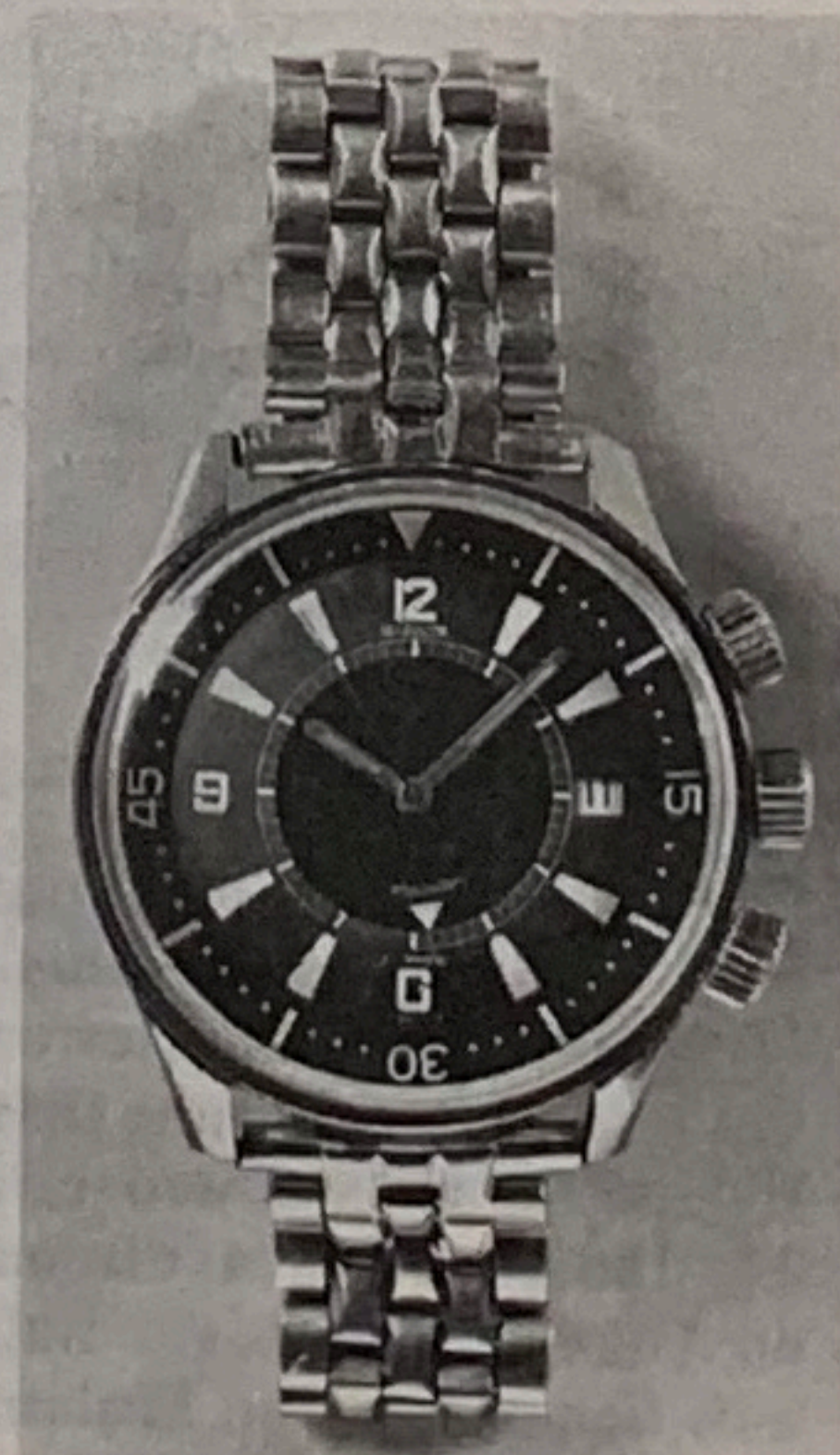
This circa 1920 E. Howard No. 20 with its distinctive white marble dial sold to John Delaney Sr. for \$2091 (est. \$2000/3000). The Boston-made timepiece is 28" tall. Schinto photo.



Made circa 1815 by Dubuc in Paris, this 16" tall figural shelf clock depicting George Washington is highly desirable, especially with pedestal and glass dome. This one had condition problems, however, including a shattered porcelain dial. For that reason, it was reasonably estimated at \$5000/7000. Nonetheless, a phone bidder paid \$29,520. That buyer must have or be a good restorer.



A late 19th- or early 20th-century Hamilton & Company 18k triple-complicated minute-repeating pocket watch went to a left bid for \$24,600 (est. \$20,000/40,000).

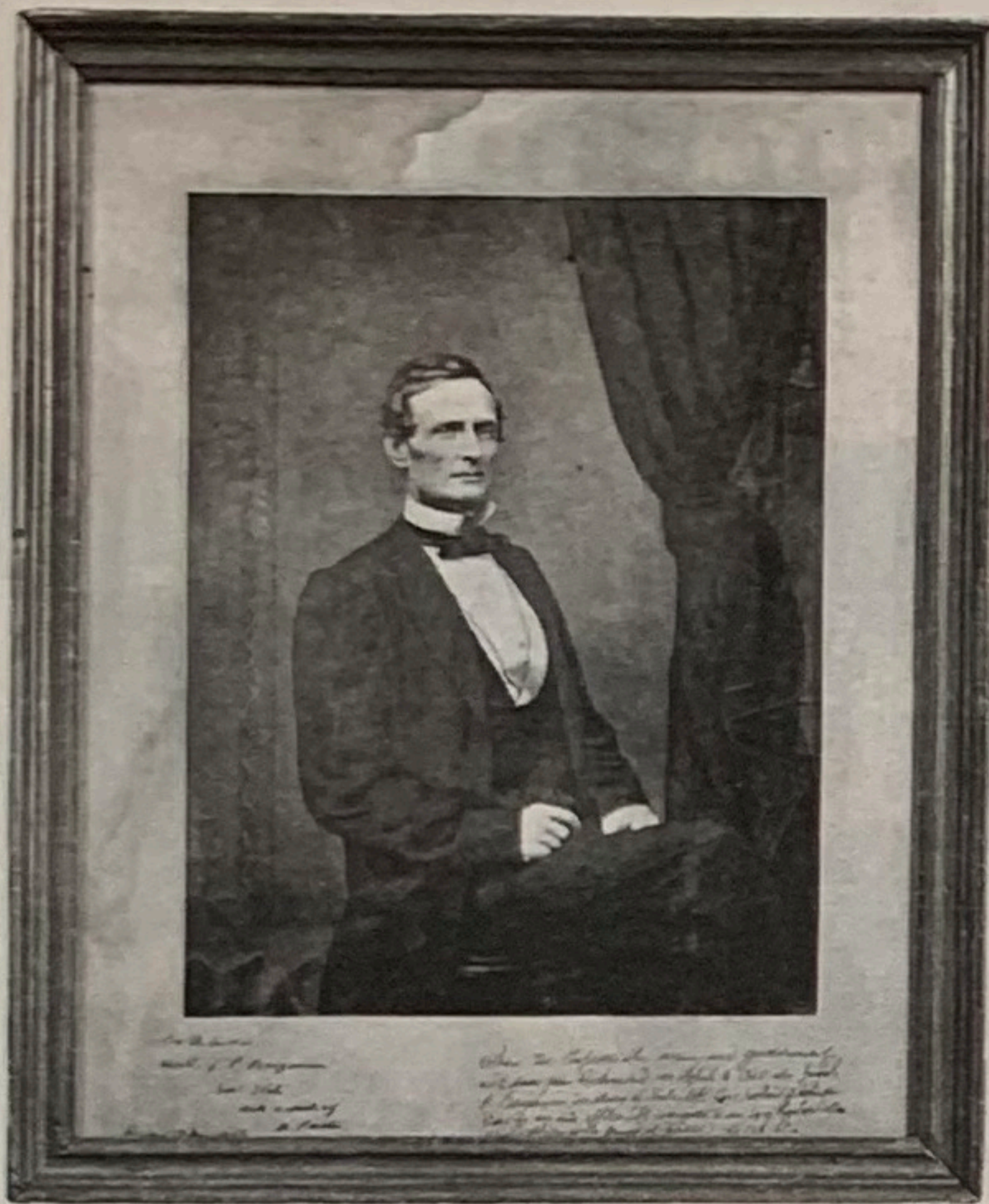


A phone bidder took this circa 1968 LeCoultre Polaris stainless steel diver's wristwatch with alarm for \$14,760 (est. \$4000/6000). At that price, one hopes the buyer will keep it dry.

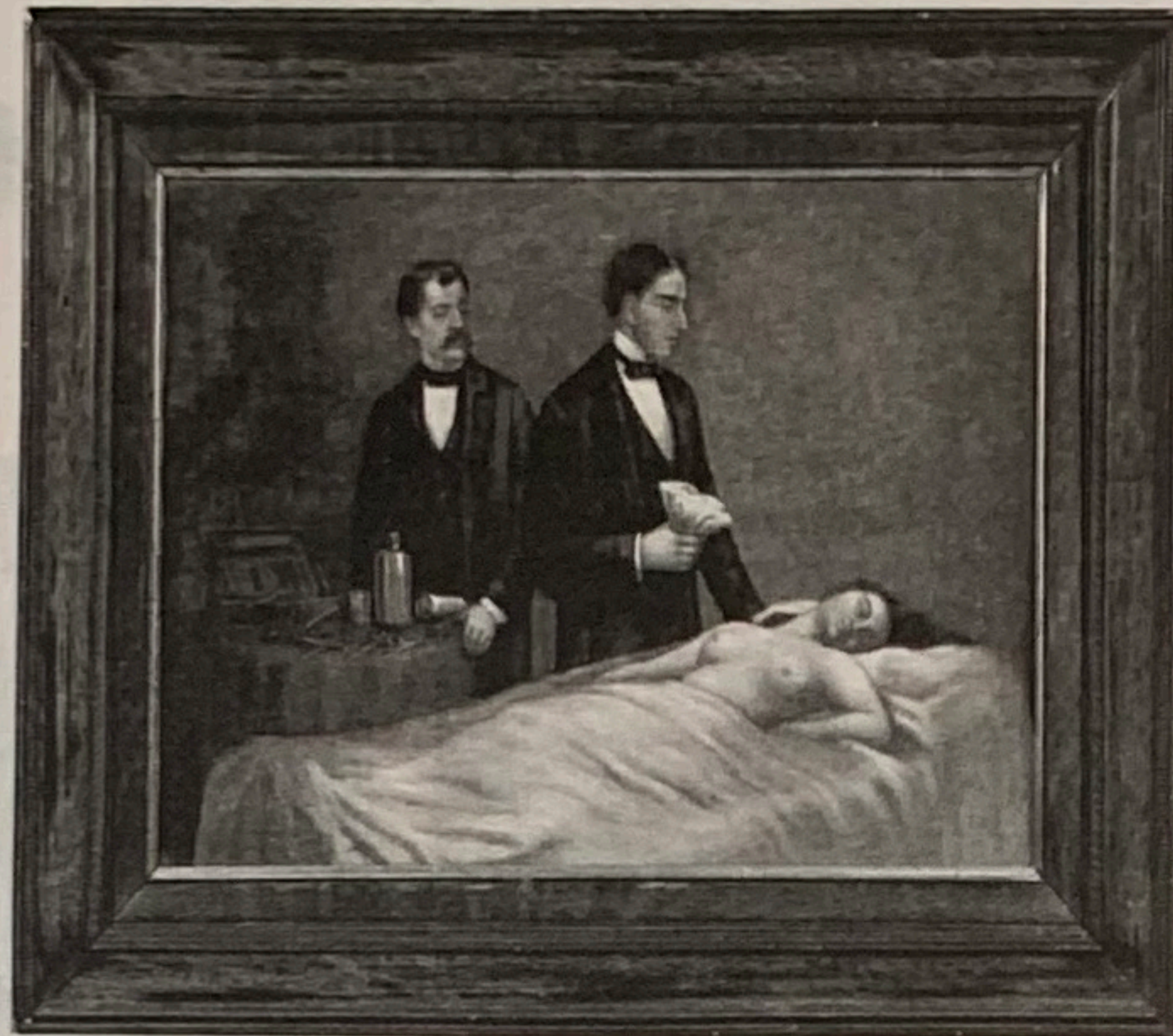


A Paillard & Company interchangeable orchestral cylinder musical box on a matching two-drawer table sold for \$13,530 (est. \$6000/8000). The price included six eight-air cylinders. The couple is looking at an oil on canvas painting of a mastectomy surgery. Schinto photo.

- AUCTION -



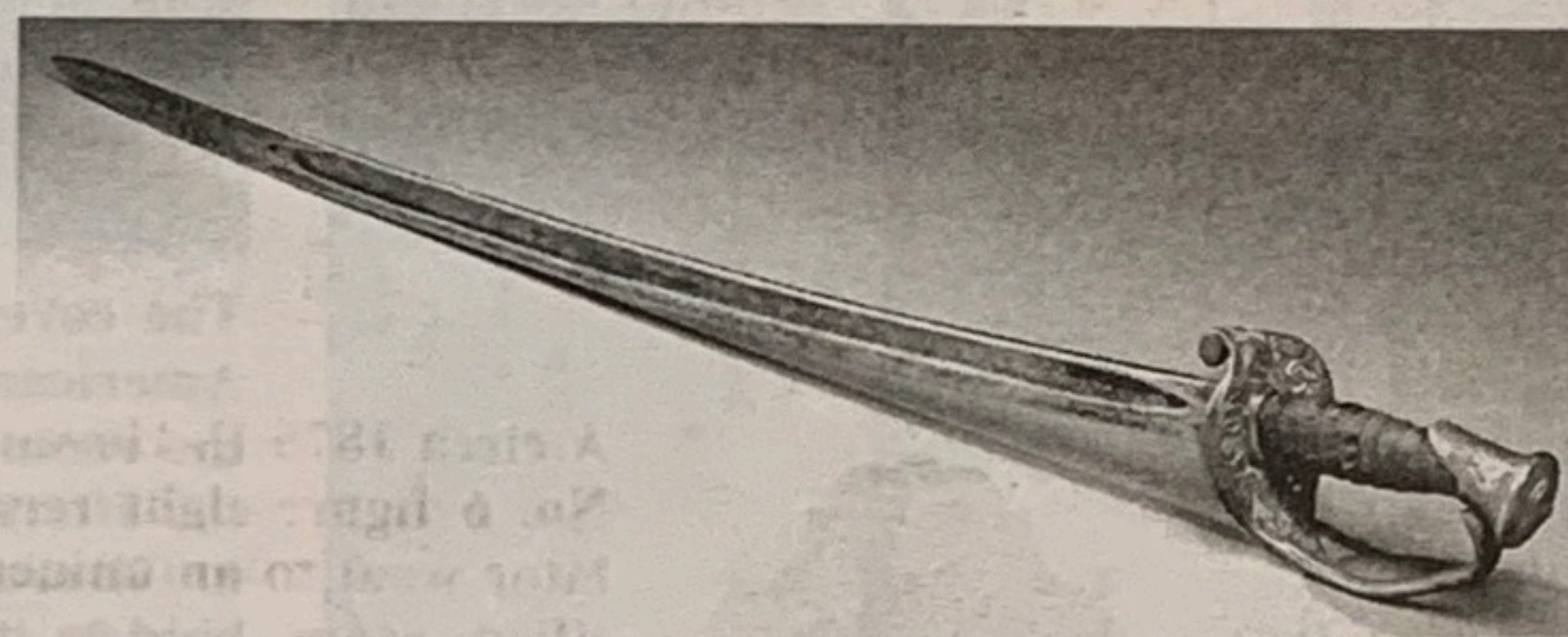
A 17½" x 14¼" circa 1864 photographic portrait of Jefferson Davis made \$7380 (est. \$400/600). It is inscribed at lower right: "When the Confederate army and government withdrew from Richmond, on April 2, 1865, Mr. Judah P. Benjamin, Secretary of State, left this portrait of Jefferson Davis in his office." On the back it says: "Honbl. J.P. Benjamin/ Secy State/ With respects of/ W. Preston/ Havana, 7 May 1864," possibly a reference to William Preston, Confederate minister to Emperor Maximilian of Mexico. Frazier-Fleck collection.



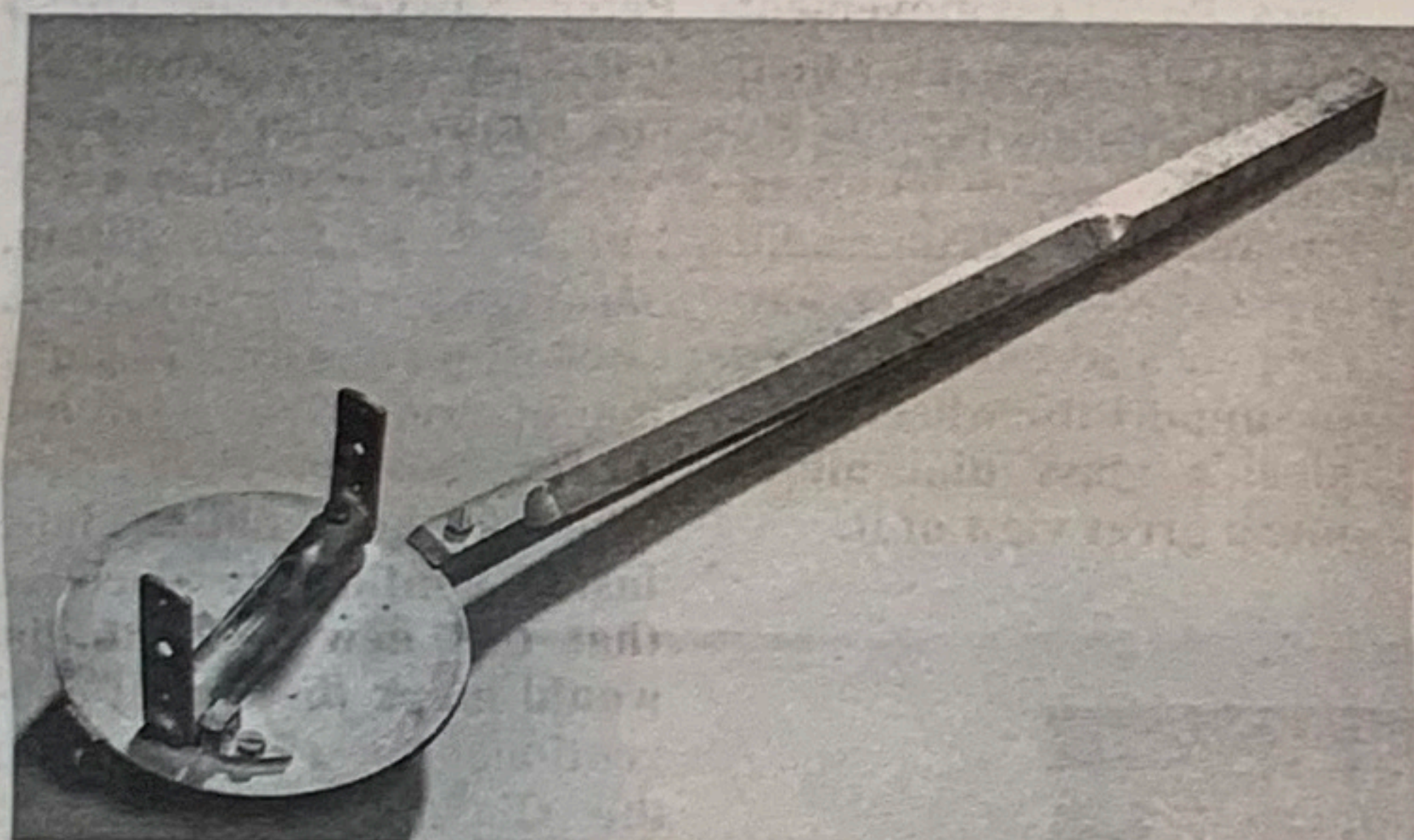
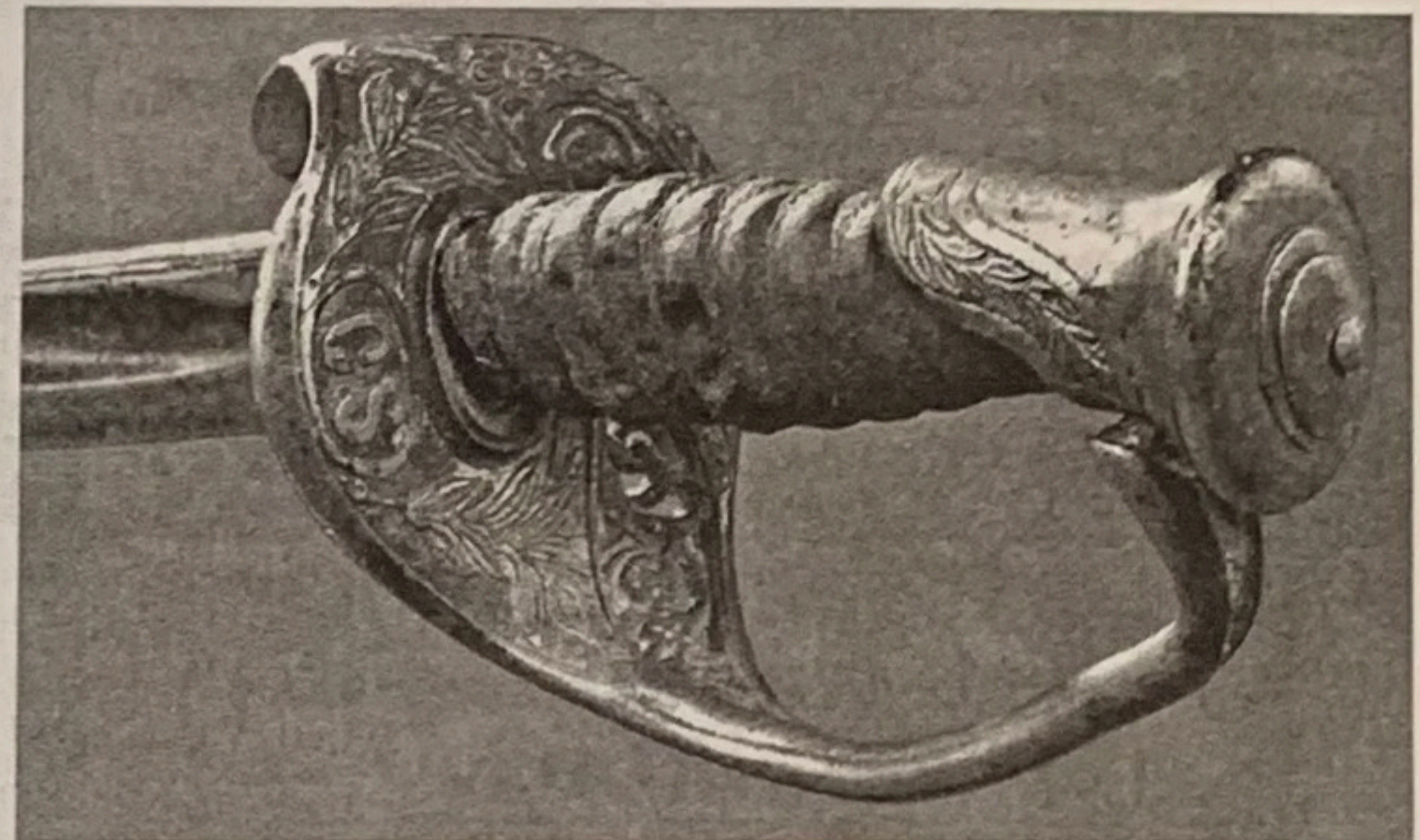
Not a subject for everyone, this unsigned 19th-century 29" x 38¾" oil on canvas shows a breast cancer patient with two surgeons, one with a chloroform cloth in his hand, the other with an instrument tray. The painting sold for \$1230 (est. \$800/1200).



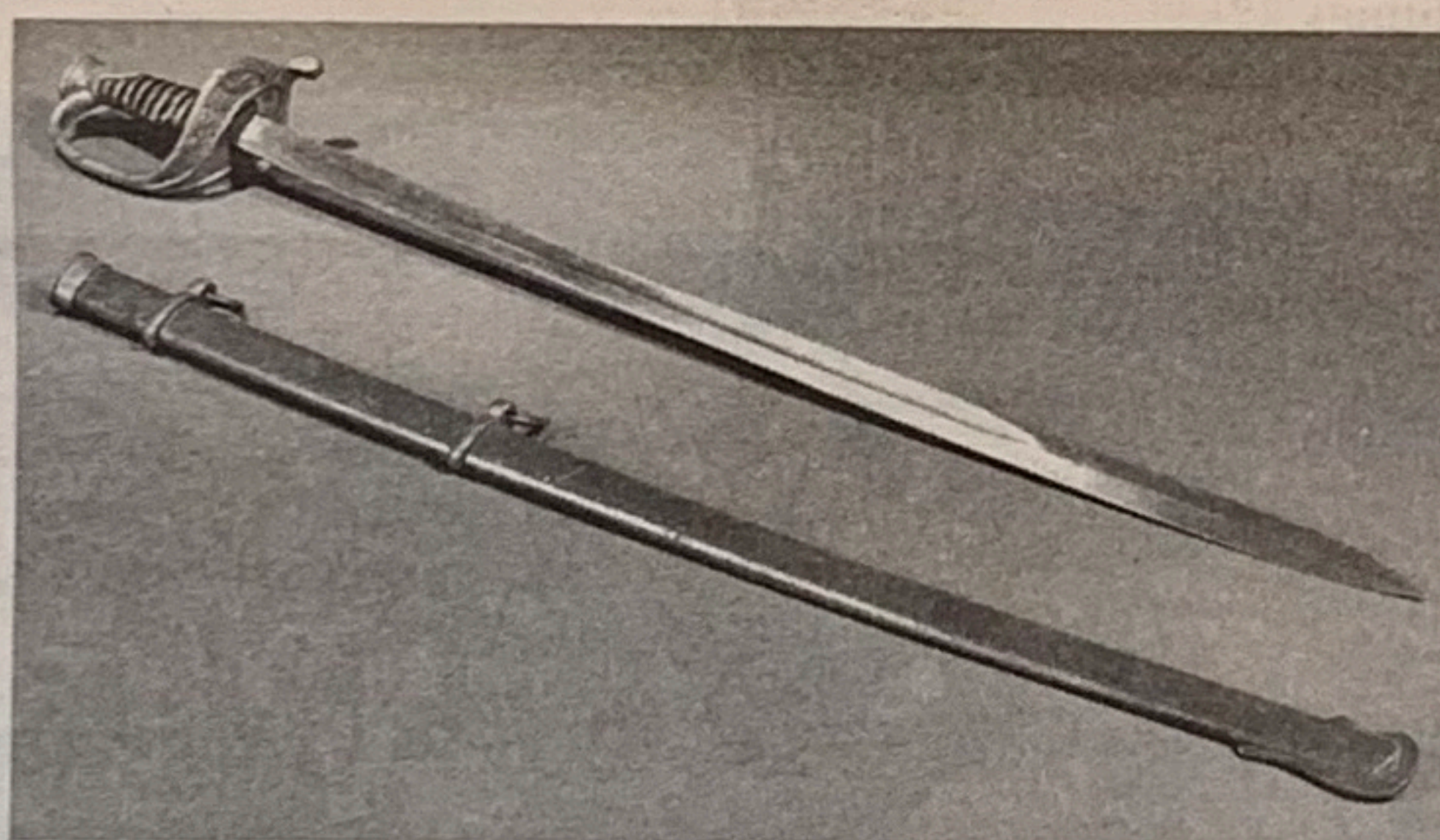
Previewing the rifles. Schinto photo.



A Confederate foot officer's sword, marked "CS" in an oval and with a leather-covered wood grip, sold for \$6765 (est. \$1000/1200). From the Frazier-Fleck collection, it measures 35" overall.



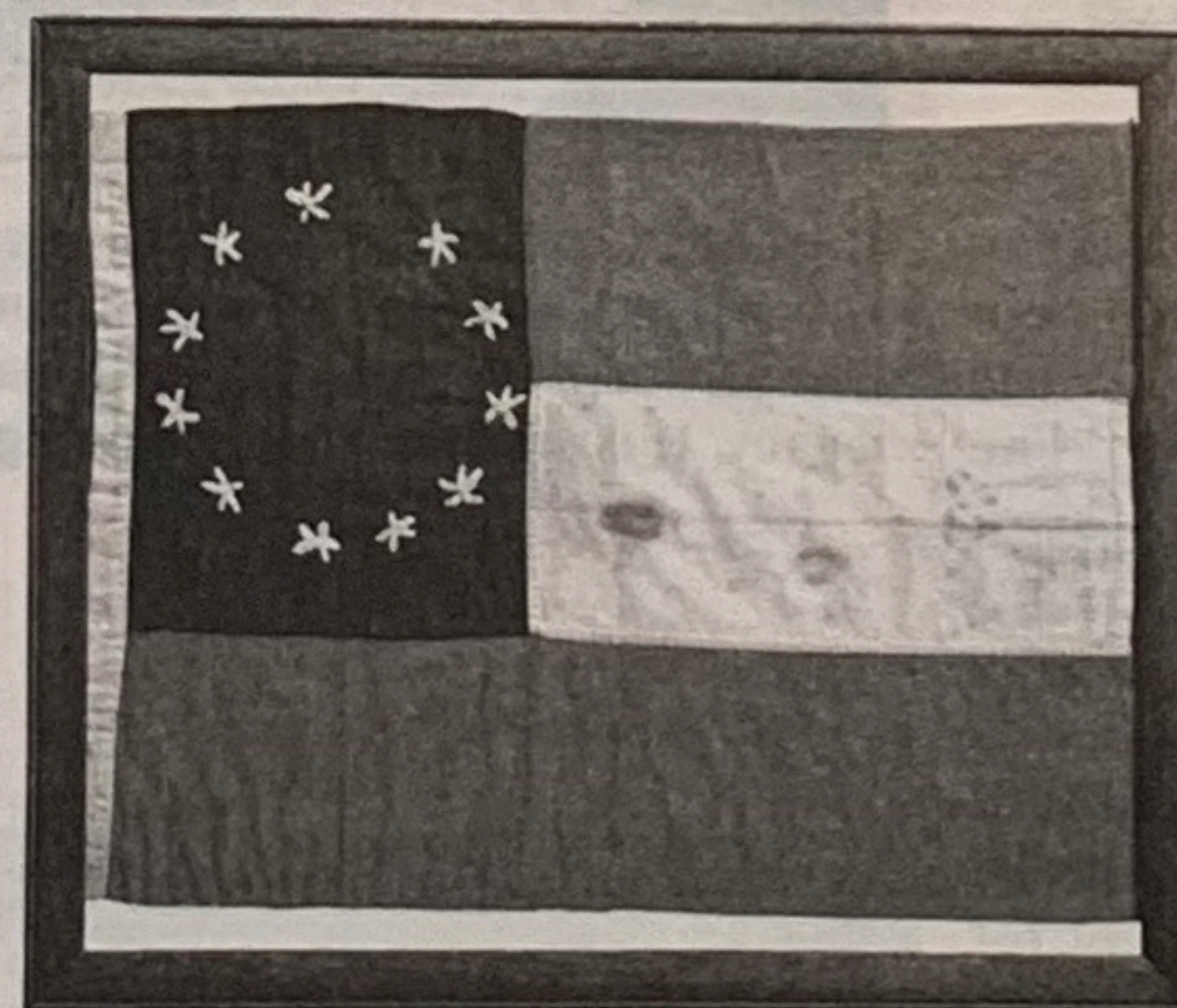
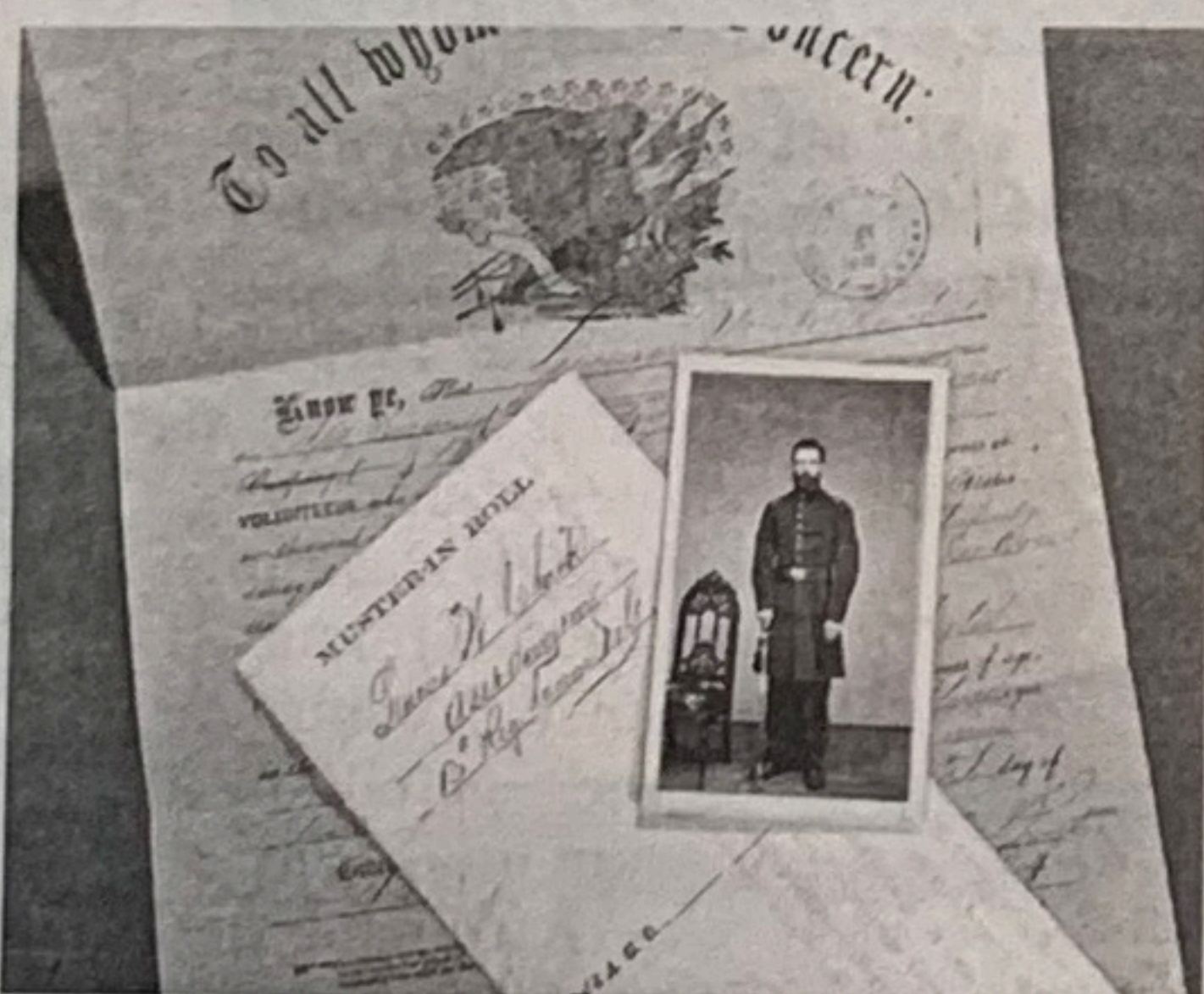
The militaria section featured an unusual scientific instrument, this 17 1/8" long, early 19th-century American tool that was used for artillery sighting. Marked by its maker, William Davenport (1778-1829) of Philadelphia, it sold for \$9225 (est. \$1000/1500).



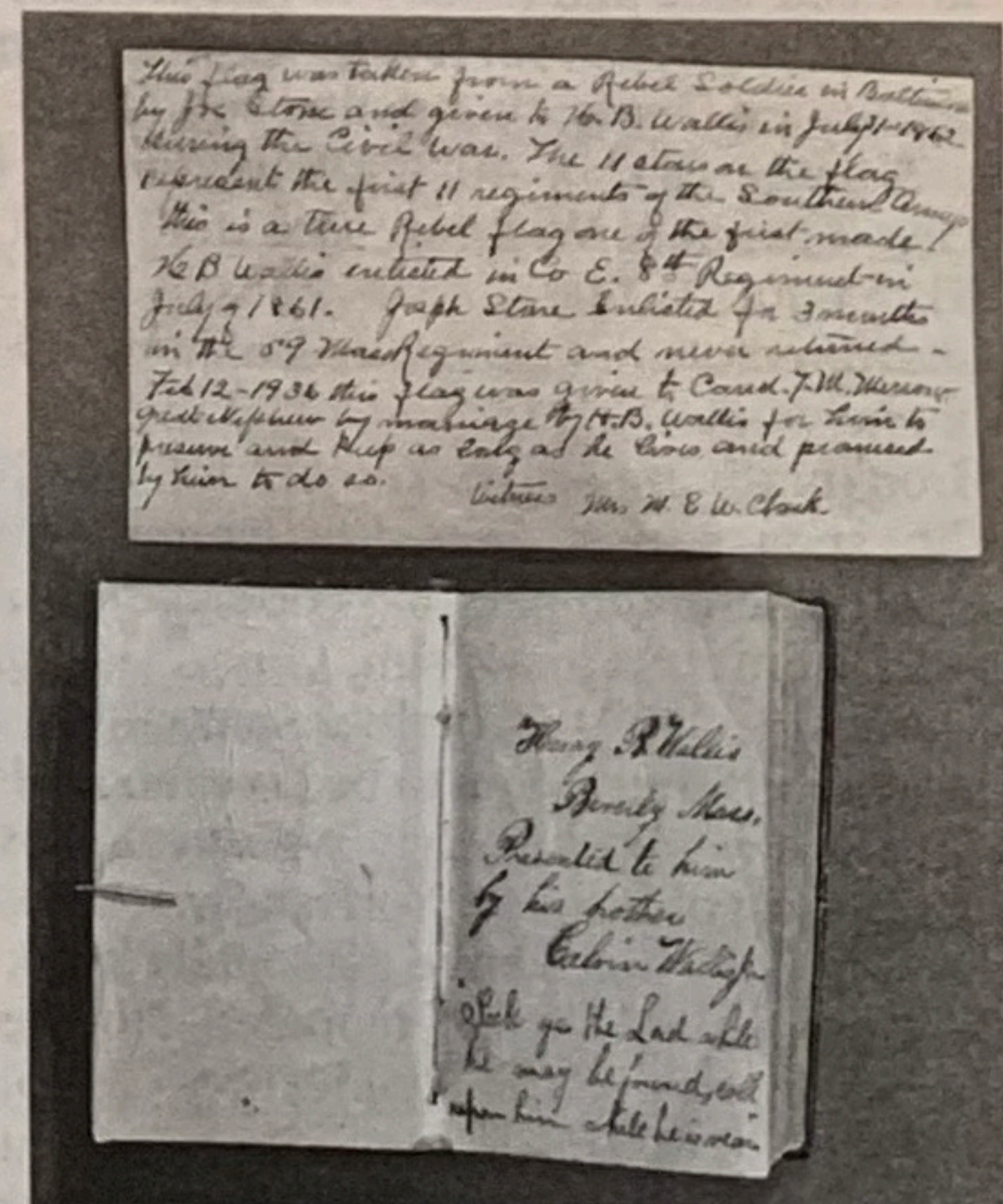
A 35" long Froelich Confederate officer's sword with brass hilt initialed "C.S.A." in a banner brought \$22,140 (est. \$8000/10,000). Fresh to the market and in good condition, it was said by the family to have been brought home by a veteran of the 13th New Hampshire Regiment at the end of the Civil War.



A 16 1/8" x 6 3/8" x 3 3/8" surgeon's medical kit and documents related to Lucius Clarke of the 13th Connecticut Volunteers brought \$17,220 (est. \$5000/7000). Included in the lot was a carte de visite of the doctor in uniform.



A small (12½" x 16½") 11-star first national Confederate flag, circa 1861, sold for \$7380 (est. \$700/900). The lot came with a note: "This flag was taken from a Rebel Soldier in Baltimore by Joe Stone and given to H.B. Wallis in July 31-1862.... Joseph Stone enlisted for three months in the 59 Mass Regiment and never returned." Frazier-Fleck collection.



This may look to some people like a piece of art, but it's actually four Civil War inert artillery projectiles. The group sold in one lot for \$738 (est. \$400/600). Schinto photo.



A Model 1855 percussion rifle fetched \$8610 (est. \$1500/2000). Dating from 1859, it measures 49½" long. Frazier-Fleck collection.