

## Clock Collection Sold in Cambridge

by Jeanne Schinto

A Beatles song from *The White Album*, "Revolution 9," came to mind during the clock section of the sale at CRN Auctions in Cambridge, Massachusetts, on August 28. "Number nine, number nine...." Nine was John Delaney's bidder number. Delaney, owner of Delaney Antique Clocks in West Townsend, Massachusetts, bought 54 of the 80 timepieces that auction coordinator Karin J. Phillips called.

The CRN staff had arranged folding chairs at the back of the Cambridge armory. While the preview of general merchandise continued, two dozen anticipatory bidders took their seats. But as Delaney began to win lot after lot, the defeated ones got to looking deflated. Carl Nordblom had a bidder on his cell phone for a while, but he too eventually got discouraged.

The clock guys who previewed the rows of 19th-century shelf clocks, virtually all "brown wood" Connecticut-made examples with engraved makers' labels inside, thought they recognized in them the collecting eye of a fellow member of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors. They were right. The North Shore Boston resident, who asked that his name not be printed in *M.A.D.*, said he had deaccessioned them for one reason: space. "And I still have too much stuff," he told us by phone after the sale.

Eight years ago, he moved to a rental with the intention of buying a house. His collection—clocks, scientific instruments, and American furniture—went into storage. Meanwhile, he built a second collection. When he finally bought his house and brought the two collections together, he saw what he had done. "It was like the scene in *Citizen Kane*, where they're walking through Xanadu, and there are just boxes and boxes and boxes. So I got in touch with Carl."

Nordblom was the first auctioneer he contacted because Nordblom has a reputation for "buying stuff outright," said the collector. "I had it all laid out and organized. He walked through. I told him what I wanted. He said, 'If you add this, this, and this, we have a deal.'" The collector didn't feel the need to call anybody else. "It was a very mature, clean, fast liquidation."

Some market observers dislike the dynamic when items are owned by the auctioneer rather than a consignor. To their way of thinking, auctioneers who own the lots feel more pressure to sell high, because they have made a bigger investment. Following that logic, these observers say owner-auctioneers may more easily be tempted to achieve their goals illegally. It can easily be argued, however, that non-owner auctioneers feel equal pressures and temptations to engage in shenanigans when they make their profits solely from commissions—with no chance of winning big upon occasion.

Nordblom, for his part, said, "I'm a gambler. That's always been my makeup. I used to bet on the games, at the racetrack." And when he does poorly on items he has bought? What then? "I'm like the supermarket. That's my loss leader."

The North Shore collector, who did not attend the sale, asked us to read him the prices realized. Some were "crazy," we agreed; others were surprisingly soft. There was not a lot of logic to it. Of his own decision to sell rather than consign, the collector said, "I'm glad I did. I'm very pleased. No regrets. If I had consigned them, I'd be in trouble." By his calculations, Nordblom had done OK too. "I gave him a very nice price on everything," he said.

The "everything" included several of the better non-clock pieces in the sale: a continuous-arm Windsor chair, a stenciled mammy's bench, and two signed stick barometers. The fates of these items varied. Neither part of the sale was a knockout, nor was it intended to be. Its advertised purpose was, like the collector's, to create some space in cramped quarters. "This is our annual eclectic clear-out-the-warehouse auction," stated CRN's ads. Indeed, in Nordblom's packed depot across the street from the armory, rooms were filled with choicer items saved for the November sale.

The usual suspects gathered for this one—dealers and ardent collectors. One of the latter was the congenial 86-year-old Fred Innis of Cambridge. Innis, a Charles Darwin look-alike, with white beard, expressive eyebrows, and lanky frame, paid a reasonable \$575 (with buyer's premium) for a ten-item lot of Arts and Crafts pottery that included a Grueby matte green cylinder vase, a Fulper vase, a Chelsea tile hot pad, and seven orange-glazed cups and saucers. A dealer in the bleachers took another Arts and Crafts item, a 3 1/2 inches tall hammered-copper covered jar with an enameled top decorated with red flowers on a green field and a salmon enamel interior, for \$172.50, a bargain.

That dealer bought multiple lots of decorative items—a Victorian window shade, a floral hooked rug, an Empire mahogany mirror. If the price was right, his bidding was casual to say the least. "I didn't even look to see if it was antique," Nordblom said after knocking down to him a Georgian-style mahogany upholstered side chair for \$149.50. "Did you?" He hadn't.

A dealer sitting up front bought heavily in all pre-20th-century furniture styles and categories. His purchases included a pair of New England country grain-painted side chairs with original rush seats (\$460), a painted leather China trade trunk (same price), and a pair of 19th-century Venetian-style painted side chairs (same price again).

Four hundred dollars on the hammer seemed a price point for the dealer in the bleachers too. That was his final bid for a pair of octagonal painted pedestals, a Heywood-Wakefield wicker floor lamp, and a Victorian brass lamp table.

Absentees took a few of the better items; so did some retail people in the room. A handsome Mission oak piece went to a young woman who arrived by motorcycle with her boyfriend. It was a 42 inches wide bookcase with a geometric Frank Lloyd Wright-like pattern of green leaded glass in the upper part of its double doors. She paid \$1150 for her impulse purchase; her boyfriend went home to get the car.

Nordblom, along with Phillips (who is now Nordblom's equal business partner and co-owner of the company), runs a very friendly auction. At moments on this summer Saturday the sale resembled nothing so much as a Norman Rockwell painting. A postman wandered in, looking to deliver the armory manager's mail. Buddy, CRN's "auction dog," roamed; so did another canine mascot on a very long tether. A third pup rested in a bidder's arms.

Phillips did not beg for bids during the clock part of the sale. The Delaney factor was so intimidating it was probably wise that she didn't. But Nordblom, who conducted the non-clock part, occasionally chided his audience. "Don't tell me if you saw that on a table at Brimfield you wouldn't think it was a bargain for a hundred," he said of a 5 1/2 inches tall Native American woven basket with a geometric design. A room bidder added it to his bill for \$115.

For more information, contact CRN Auctions at (617) 661-9582 or visit the Web site ([www.crnauctions.com](http://www.crnauctions.com)).