The sale's top lot,

a circa 1858 E.

Howard 90-day

escapement, sold

for \$124,425 (est.

\$80,000/120,000)

walnut case is 56"

four glass vials of

wall regulator

with a Fay's

to Charles

tall. The

Grichar. The

pendulum has

Clock Rarities and Holtzapffel Lathe Lead \$1.2 Million Sale

October 12th, 2011

by Jeanne Schinto

Massachusetts by Jeanne Schinto Photos courtesy Skinner

Skinner Inc., Marlborough,

American horological rarities

and a London-made ornamental-turning lathe highlighted Skinner's science, technology, and clocks sale on July 16 at the auction house's headquarters in Marlborough, Massachusetts. As usual, besides mercury for temperature its serious and star lots, the sale compensation. The silvered brass also offered a number of dial is signed "E. Howard & Co., amusing oddities. Boston" and "Patented May 11, Juxtapositions make them all the more fun. For example, there was a circa 1980 cruise missile launch control seat and

then, right after it, a circa 1880 medical examination chair used by two generations of Hatfield, Massachusetts, physicians. One seat for patients of Drs. Charles and Robert Byrne; the other for associates of Dr. Strangelove, you might say. The lathe, a circa 1827 Holtzapffel & Deyerlein,

designed to be used for turning exotic woods such as teak and ebony as well as ivory, was featured on the catalog's cover. Mounted on a mahogany bench

with a foot treadle and

"shepherd's crook" overhead

cabinet with glass doors in the top section. Inside the cabinet were brass chucks, mandrels, faceplates, indexing cross slides, cutting tools, and turning tools. Thirty-six of the turning tools, some with rosewood handles, were marked Holtzapffel. The setup made a delightful tableau at the preview, creating the illusion that its operator had just stepped away for his tea. Looking beautiful as well as daunting, it is "an extremely complicated piece of equipment," said department head Robert Cheney. "If you bought one of these, you were setting yourself up for a lifetime of education in how to do some very complicated procedures." Collector David Newsom of Massachusetts had his eye on it. Asked where a private buyer, if successful, would put it, he said

unhesitatingly, "In the living

room." As it happened, Cheney

said, the ensemble came out of

an estate in Maine, where its

owner had displayed it in the

bay window of his living room

for the last 40 or 50 years. But

the lathe won't be in anybody's

living room next. Estimated at

Newsom as its underbidder, the

\$15,000/25,000 and with

lathe sold on the phone for \$65,175 (including buyer's premium) to a person Cheney described as "a very talented and knowledgeable New England craftsman who fully understands and appreciates it. And it's wonderful when a craftsman can acquire a piece of equipment like that and actually put it back to use." A circa 1858 Boston-made E. Howard 90-day wall regulator with a Fay's escapement sparked a battle between collectors Charles Grichar of Houston, Texas, and Jim Cipra of Long Beach, California. Grichar, who collects Americana of all kinds and who has often walked away with the top lot at these sales, was the victor, paying \$124,425 (est. \$80,000/ 120,000). The

clock is a rarity for a couple of

90-day regulators by Howard,

reasons. There are other known

but the others are floor-standing

models. To Cheney's knowledge

this is the only known Howard wall clock that runs for that duration on one winding. "I am told that there's another one around, but I have not seen it," he said. Grichar's purchase is also the only extant wall clock (as opposed to a floor-standing clock) by any maker with a Fay's escapement—alternatively known as a "walking pawl" or "silent" escapement. Patented by Henry C. Fay of Troy, New York, the mechanism does appear to be "walking," Cheney said. Watching it work is "a bit like looking at a praying mantis. It's just so delicate." And true to its other nickname, it runs absolutely silently. "I have no idea why it was made to run silently, but I don't think the silence part of it was the real technical aspect that was to be desired. All of this stuff boils down to providing less friction.

The least amount of friction

possible, particularly in the area

in which it is most sensitive, the

better timekeeper a clock will

Cipra was the underbidder on

Attributed to Charles Fasoldt

as a designer of pocket watches

be."

for the carriage trade, the circa 1870 clock is another true rarity, one of only two known. The other was offered at Part IV of Sotheby's Masterpieces from the Time Museum sale on October 14 and 15, 2004. According to my catalog notes, it was estimated (ridiculously) at \$10,000/15,000 and then withdrawn, because of a missing pendulum, among other issues. (It is believed to have been sold later for \$65,000.) The one in this Skinner sale had its original pendulum, hands, weight, and pulleys, and, according to the Skinner catalog, no significant repairs, replacements, or restoration. It sold on the phone for \$100,725 (est. \$80,000/100,000). Bob Frascatore of Upton, Massachusetts, bought an Ithaca Regulator No. 1 made by

the Ithaca Calendar Clock

Company of Ithaca, New York,

in 1883. "Come to Poppa!" an

elated Frascatore said when his

\$15,000/25,000). The collector/

dealer was also successful on the

Crane's patent eight-day three-

winning bid was hammered

down at \$24,885 (est.

ball torsion-pendulum clock, paying \$4148 (est. \$2000/4000). Made in 1846-48 by J.R. Mills & Company of New York, the timekeeper is an example of the innovative work of Aaron Dodd Crane. An absentee paid \$21,330 (est. \$15,000/25,000) for a Curtis & Clark early spring-powered shelf brass carriage clock, signed clock. Made circa 1825 in Plymouth, Connecticut, it is known as a Salem Bridge clock. There were five other Salem Bridge clocks in the sale, but Although not all Salem Bridge clocks were produced in Salem Bridge, now Naugatuck, Connecticut, the name is used

particular kind.)

clocks."

in 1862.

feet, and its moon dial had been repainted. Even a Simon Willard tall clock, in virtually original condition, with just its central finial missing, went reasonably to another phone bidder at assembly room. too aggressively at \$5000/7000, was bought in.

otherwise impressive sell-through rate that still came in at 89.2%. "That's a classic example of what happens when collectors have overly optimistic watch buy-ins. "Entirely predictable. A specialist like me goes into we do not succeed. With more reasonable estimates and reserves, the pieces in that collection would have found new homes."

Speaking of aggressive estimates, a collection of pocket watches was

uniformly saddled with them. One was a Patek Philippe chronograph in

an 18k rose-gold hunting case. Featured on the catalog's back cover, it

presentation to M. Scooler of New Orleans by "Friends" on December

25, 1895. But when there were no phone-bid takers at the ready, it was

pretty clear what would happen. Estimated at \$40,000/60,000, it was

\$30,000/50,000) for a presentation American Watch Company pocket

watch inscribed by Abraham Lincoln to his advisor David Dudley Field

Twenty other lots from the same collection failed, marring the auction's

was made to order by the Geneva company and inscribed with a

bought in. Nor was there a buyer willing to go the distance (est.

The second-biggest chunk of the sale, after the clocks, was taken up by 150 lots of antique microscopes. They belonged to Serafino "Sal" Avella, proprietor of Apple Valley Minerals in Smithfield, Rhode Island. Typical examples sold for approximately \$1000 to \$3000 to active phone and Internet bidders. A dealer in the front row took a dozen other lots, mostly in the \$200 to \$300 range. Bidding in the room, Andrzej Herczynski, who teaches in the department of physics at Boston College and has an enviable collection of books, clocks, and scientific instruments, bought two. One of his was made circa 1880 by R. & J. Beck of London; Herczynski paid \$504 for it (est. \$250/450). For the other, he spent \$356 (est. \$200/400), but said it's the more interesting example. Made in Paris

Poland," Herczynski, a native of Poland, wrote. "He is well known for his studies of the solar corona—he showed it was due to the sun, not the moon, and discovered that its light is polarized." A day or so later, after the professor had done more digging, he wrote again: "The family Prazmowski was a noble clan going back to the fifteenth century. It included prelates, canons, and bishops. Among scientists, there was another Adam Prazmowski (1853-1920), a leading microbiologist of his generation. There was also Wladyslaw Belina-Prazmowski, a heroic colonel of the Polish cavalry. The family name itself derives from a village, Prazmów, where the earliest ancestors had their

For more information, contact Skinner at (508) 970-3000 in Marlborough, (617) 350-5400 in Boston, or via its Web site (www.skinnerinc.com). A 1982 cruise missile launch control seat from Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona, went to an absentee for \$830 (est. \$400/600). It

had been purchased in 1990 by its

manufacturer, Fairchild Aircraft

information. Fairchild replied that it

was one of only 24 examples made

for use in a heavily armored mobile

consignor, who wrote to its

Service, asking for more

In 1987, when the U.S. and Russia entered into the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the vehicles and their components were deactivated, deconstructed, and destroyed or sold.



1858." The date is a reference to its Fay's escapement. An extremely rare Charles Fasoldtattributed table regulator in a 23" tall brass and beveled glass case with interior mirror sold to a

brass and champlevé crystal regulator, made circa 1890 in France, sold for \$14,700 (est. \$3500/4500). Its eight-day time-

and-strike (both hour and half-

hour) movement was stamped by

A 20½" tall

its retailer, Tiffany & Company. This 281/2" tall mahogany wall acorn clock by J. C. Brown sold to a room bidder for \$17,775 (est.

\$5000/8000). Made circa 1845 by

Manufacturing Company of

Bristol, Connecticut, it has an

eight-day spring-powered time-

only movement. There are many

acorn clock is "a rare beast," said

shelf acorn clocks, but a wall

Cheney, "and this one was in

really nice condition."

Brown's Forestville

A rare alarm shelf clock, made circa 1825 by Eli Terry & Sons of

Plymouth, Connecticut, sold to

mahogany case is 22½" tall. The

mounted on the bottom board.

The name derives from the fact

that its spring goes around a

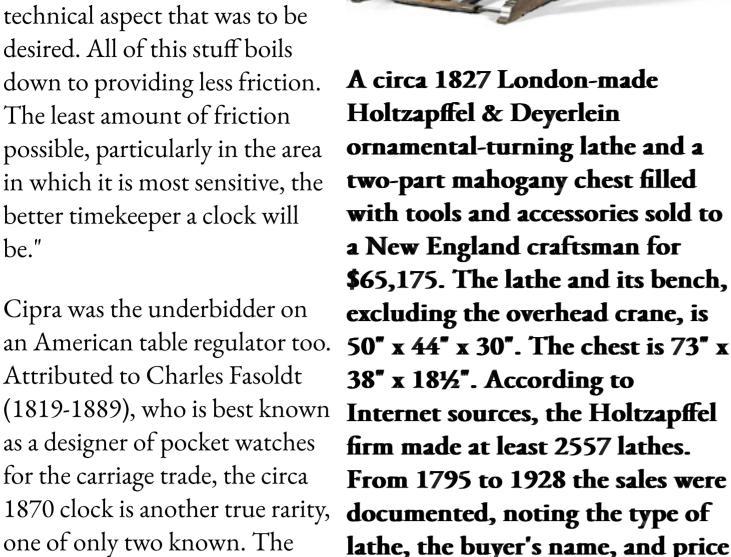
cylinder.

with "window-shade" alarm

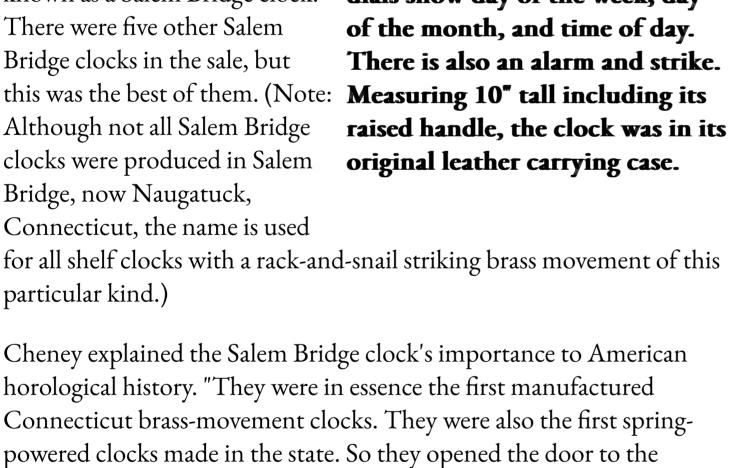
movement is a 30-hour time-only

an Internet buyer for \$10,413

(est. \$5000/8000). The



This circa 1740 ivory-handled English microscope sold to an absentee bidder for \$6518 (est. \$1000/1500). It was the one from Sal Avella's collection that had the best result. The shagreencovered wooden case is 54" wide x 3½" deep. The lot included a compass microscope that fits the same handle, six slides, and accessories.



tsunami of other clocks that Connecticut was famous for by the mid-

nineteenth century. These clocks were beautifully made, almost in the

handcrafted tradition. They were not the cheap ogee clocks that had

brass movements. They began that age of brass clockmaking in

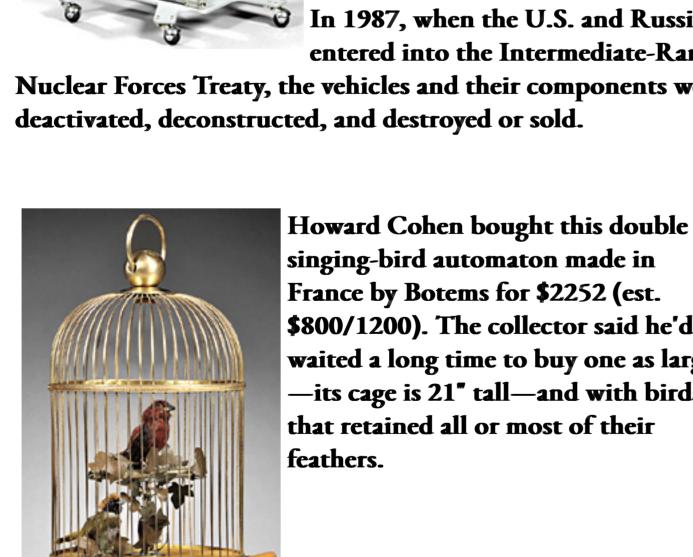
\$38,513 (est. \$30,000/50,000). A rare one, too, for the large size of its painted iron dial (16"), it was possibly intended for use in a public I wondered if collectors would go for two non-clock Willard items—i.e., paper ephemera. One, a circa 1785 Aaron Willard watch paper, estimated On the other hand, a letter written by Benjamin Franklin Willard (1803-1847), invitingly estimated at \$300/500, sold for \$1185 to Larry

opinions of what their collections are worth," Cheney said of the pocket someone's home and tries to bring them down to earth, and sometimes This sale grossed \$1,277,847 and attracted a steady number of Internet bidders throughout the day. They slowed the auction's pace somewhat (and missed the free lunch), but so did the cautious nature of bidding in general. Bidders on laptops, on phones, and in the room seemed to pause

1865-70, it is signed "E. Hartnack & A. Prazmowski" and housed in a beautiful mahogany box with a functioning lock and key. Hartnack was a major inventor of optical instruments, Herczynski told

manor house. Today its population is 403." He signed off, "OK, I promise to spare you any more on this. But that's what I love about old instruments: they frequently have interesting stories to tell and often provide a unique view of some, more or less, obscure aspect of history."

trailer designed to launch tactical nuclear cruise-missiles in the 1980's.



The Trey Ly Clock Sty 6]

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waited a long time to buy one as large -its cage is 21" tall—and with birds that retained all or most of their feathers. The circa 1970 Teeny Tiny

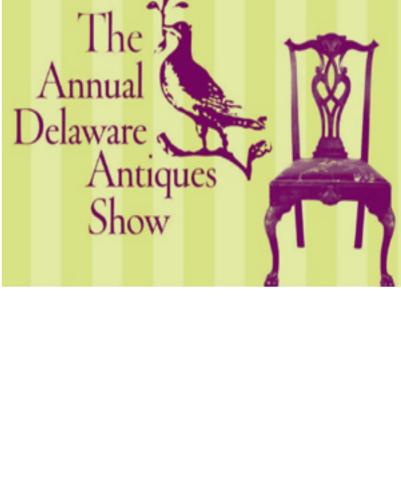
Clock Shop went to David Newsom for \$652 (est. \$150/250). This dollhousescale clock shop features 15 clocks of various kinds, including girandole, acorn, lyre, pillar-and-scroll,

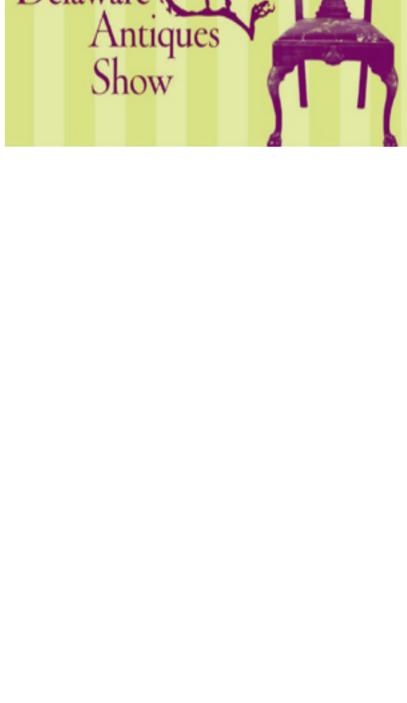
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patented timepiece (a.k.a. banjo), among others, none over 5" tall, and each with a working watch movement inside. According to the catalog, it was all handmade by Jacques and Mary Deveaux of New York.

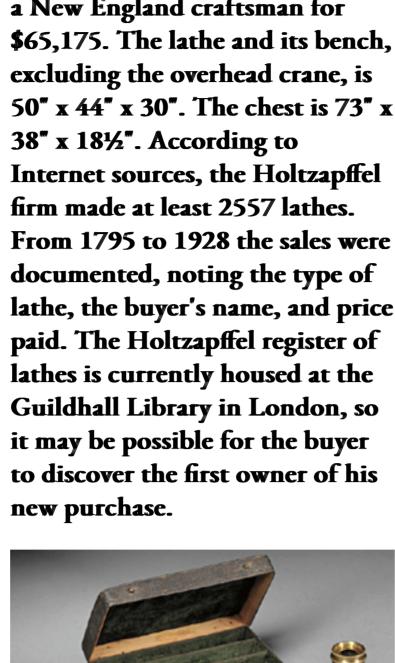


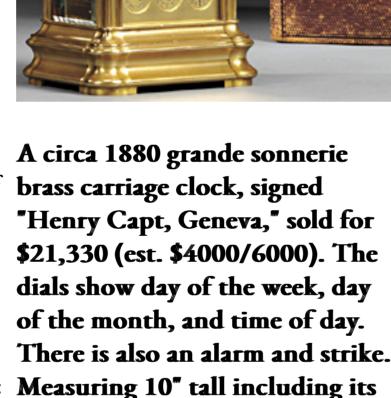


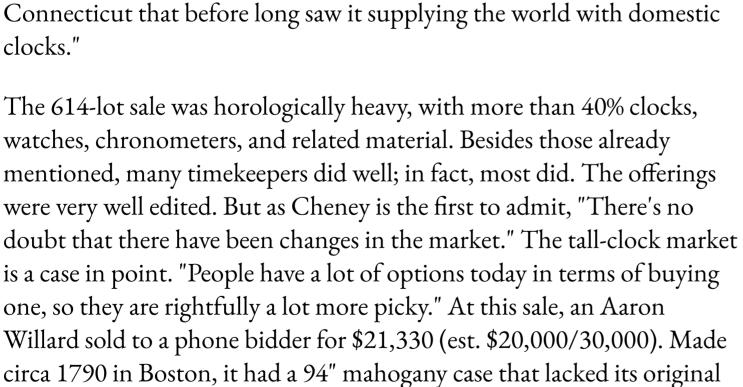












Chelmow of Canton, Massachusetts, who was bidding for the Willard House and Clock Museum in North Grafton, Massachusetts. "If you will be so kind, as to lend me your widest chisell and give me a small piece of sand paper," Simon Willard's fifth son, a mechanic, clockmaker, inventor, and artist, wrote to one Mr. Humphries on February 10, 1820.

and consider before raising each increment. A Regina 27" disc-changer coin-operated musical box, for example, had three phone bidders on it, but went only to \$10,073 (est. \$10,000/15,000). That's the way we live today. Of course, that's also a reflection of the current musical box market—solid a decade ago, now soft, if not downright gooshy. Multiple phone bidders got more palpably excited over a 21/4" x 43/4" gilt-

brass singing-bird box whose lever-activated avis emerges from the box's

top lid, rotates, flaps its wings, and moves its beak, all the while singing

\$500/700). The estimate was a tease, it's true, but helpful to remember is

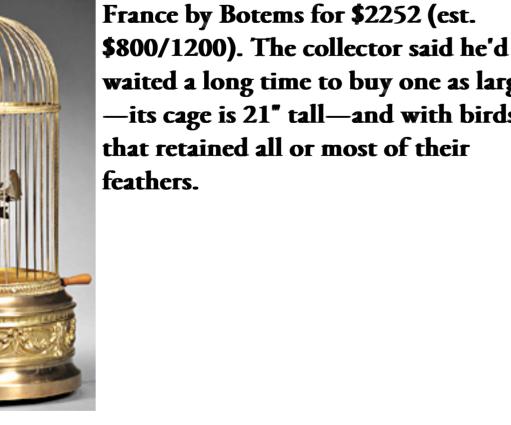
that at Skinner presale numbers that seem like typos don't mean you're

apt to get it for that price. Rather, they're a sign that a consignor—often

an estate—has allowed an item to go essentially unreserved.

sweetly. A 20th-century West German example, it sold for \$4148 (est.

me in an email. Prazmowski—Adam Prazmowski—was a professor of mathematics and astronomy in Warsaw. "It turns out that Prazmowski was the first and most famous nineteenth-century astrophysicist in



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