July 29th, 2010

Skinner Sells Unprecedented Horological Tool Collection by Jeanne Schinto

After the tools and books, a

section of clocks from various

consignors went up, including

some from the Crom estate.

1815 nine-month duration

regulator by Jean Joseph

an unidentified buyer for

\$106,650 (est. \$30,000/

length glazed door. The clock keeps track of

passing hours, minutes, seconds, and days of

the month. It also has an equation-of-time

laudatory article about this very clock in the

indicator. Peter Recourt, who wrote a

National Association of Watch & Clock

discovered that it actually runs for only

winding is necessary. He suggested that, for

easy remembering, one could wind it on the

Fourth of July and Christmas, but given its

country of origin, Bastille Day might be a

better choice for the summer windup. He

A phone bidder paid

\$10,000/ 15,000) for

this 1825-30 Joseph

"Brooklyn" model—

mahogany case with

The printed maker's

label inside states in

part: "Manufactured

An Eli Terry

pillar-and-scroll

escapement (note

the wheel above

the hands) sold

to a phone

bidder for a

phenomenal

\$50,363 (est.

\$8000/12,000).

The circa 1818

clock, made in

Plymouth,

clock with an

outside

a 10½" iron dial.

by Joseph Ives,

Ives lever-spring

shelf clock—the

in a 29''' tall

\$24,885 (est.

also discovered that its accuracy is

Brooklyn, Long Island, New York,

midwestern collection.

Warranted if Well Used." It came from a

Connecticut, stands 28" tall without its

private collector in Connecticut. The price

may well be a record, said Robert Cheney.

outside escapement carried the price part of

the way. In addition, the clock was made

during an early period in Terry's career.

Finally, it was in near-pristine condition,

with old surface, original glass, untouched

dial, movement with no major problems,

pediment all "right." In 35 years of looking,

and feet, scrollwork, and swan's neck

he has seen only one other comparable.

(missing) finials. The consignor was a

"If not, it's a very close second." The

seconds a year.

astonishing—off by fewer than seven

about eight months, not nine, before

Collectors Bulletin, February 1995,

Lepaute (1768-1846),

The top lot of the day, a circa

clockmaker to Napoleon I, was

Crom's. It sold on the phone to

40,000). The 85¾" tall case is

figured mahogany with a full-

by Jeanne Schinto

Skinner, Inc., Marlborough, Massachusetts

Photos courtesy Skinner

"You don't see a collection like that, well, basically, ever. That was the finest set of tools, in one place, that I've ever seen." With those words, collector David Newsom of Massachusetts spoke for many who attended the sale of the horological tool collection of Dr. Theodore R. "Ted" Crom at Skinner's headquarters in Marlborough, Massachusetts, on May 1.

profession, Crom (1920-2008) spent 60 years on his hobby of collecting, studying, and writing books about the tools used for making and repairing early clocks and watches. His private museum in Hawthorne, Florida, enjoyed an international reputation, and the sale drew bidders from many parts of

A civil engineer by

the United States and Canada as well as England, Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Initially, science, technology, and clocks department director Robert C.

sell the collection in two or three installments —"because it's such an enormous amount of material of a very specific nature to put on the market at one time." When his first wave of advertising hit Europe, however,

he was inundated

with phone calls

and

Cheney said he

thought he would

e-mails. It made him realize that overseas buyers would not want to make two or three different trips across the Atlantic. "So I decided to do it as one sale, and oh, am I glad I did." The sale as a whole fetched \$1,116,039

761 offered, more than half were Crom items—tools, books, and some clocks. But it was his tools that presented the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Among the most coveted were two rose engines—i.e., specialized lathes used to make elaborate decorative engine turnings on watch and clock parts and on cases. "I don't remember ever seeing two of them at the same

(including buyers'

premiums) on sales

of 711 lots. Of the

at the sale. "Any rose engine is considered an important tool," said Cheney. "But one like this is dream material in the collector department." That's because it was from the workshop of Frenchman Abraham-Louis Breguet (1747-1823).

auction before," said Newsom, who bought one and underbid the other.

The one that Newsom didn't get was perhaps the most talked about item

Cheney said,

his lifetime, sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars. On May 11, 2009, at a Christie's sale in Geneva, a Breguet "humpback" travel clock once owned by Caroline Bonaparte, Queen of Naples, sold to the Breguet Museum in Paris for \$654,061, and not the least of its features was an intricate engine-turned dial. Crom's early 19th-century Breguet rose engine, estimated at \$8000/10,000, opened at \$8500 with an absentee bid from the desk.

Room bidders were in contention as well as phones for a while, but after

phone bidder 957, who eventually took it for \$44,438. Cheney described

this bidder, who took several other notable lots, as "a major collector of

\$20,000 or so, it was just Newsom in the back of the room and lone

Breguet is considered by many to have been the greatest horologist of all

time. Timepieces by Breguet, especially those made by the shop during

international importance." The next lot up after the Breguet was the other rose engine, from an unidentified shop. Cataloged as probably Swiss, circa 1875, it went to Newsom at \$15,405 (est. \$5000/7000). Newsom, however, doesn't consider it a consolation prize. "I've always wanted to have a rose engine —to use, not just to collect and display," he said. "So the second one was perfectly fine. There is a certain amount of mystique associated with the name Breguet, but technically the second one was in better shape in terms of function. So I thought I did very well in terms of the price on

the second one. I was really happy."

Divisit" for \$9480.

and 1870.

of them were dated earlier than the rose engines and destined, like Newsom's purchase, to be used, since their buyers were "working craftsmen," said Cheney. "And it's pretty amazing to think that a twohundred-year-old tool that technologically is obsolete is still an important fixture in a clock—or watchmaker's shop today." Signed tools saw the heaviest competition, among them examples by Englishman John Wyke (1720-1787), who in the 1740's or 1750's founded a horological tool business in Prescot, Lancashire, which he later moved to Liverpool. Phone bidder 957 paid \$1541 for a mainspring

winder made by Wyke in the period 1759-87. The same person paid

Crom's approximately 2000 other tools were divided into 350 lots. Many

with Wyke circa 1771 and continued after Wyke's death until circa 1811, when Green's wife, Elizabeth, continued the business for a few more years. Incidentally, Wyke should be of interest to the wider world of antiques collectors—in fact, to scholars of industry in general-since he was perhaps the first person to publish a trade catalog for any trade when, in 1758, he came out with A Catalogue of Tools for Watch and Clock Makers.

Exactly whom did Wyke expect to buy his tools? On the night before the

Crom sale, Cheney answered that question in a slide lecture that told the

story of the more than 20,000 clock—and watchmakers who worked in

Prescot and environs within a 20-mile radius of Liverpool between 1700

It's important to stress that each of these men (and some women) made

only part of a timepiece, not an entire clock or watch from scratch. Some

20 specialists were involved in making a watch in those days, Cheney said. Similarly, "there really weren't clockmakers. There were clockcomponent makers. Seventeen different artisans were involved in making an eight-day [tall-case] clock." These artisans worked at home in workshops attached to the north-

the Prescot model was adopted by the Willard family in early 19thcentury Roxbury, Massachusetts, "with variations," making that locale the American center of the same type of specialization. (For more information, see Cheney's "Roxbury Eight-Day Movements and the English Connection 1785-1825," The Magazine Antiques, April 2000, pp. 606-616.) Attendees at the slide lecture included collectors Tom McIntyre of

They weren't factory workers per se, but their network can rightly be

described as "a very early factory system," in Cheney's opinion. In fact,

Antiquarian Society; Cynthia Dias-Reid, director, Willard House & Clock Museum, Grafton, Massachusetts; and David Gow, conservator, Willard House & Clock Museum. "It's good for those of us who love horology to see this [institutional] kind of interest expressed," said Cheney. "The actual buying at the sale is how we all stay in business, but that academics continue to be interested in this material is also very good for the field." Many of the sale's participants knew Crom personally. Cheney himself was a good friend and occasionally, back when Cheney was a collector/dealer, accompanied Crom on tool hunts. "I've been with Ted

could acquire the entire story too. But he also did buy entire collections." In 1970 Crom published his first book, Horological Wheel Cutting Engines 1700 to 1900, a comprehensive study of the tool that is used to cut teeth around the outside circumference of clock and watch wheels. Not surprisingly, the sale featured dozens of these engines, and one was featured on the catalog cover. A late 18th-century example, signed by another horological toolmaker of Prescot, Daniel Sephton, it sold on the phone for \$8888 (est. \$1500/2500). Cheney said the buyer was "a private individual."

sight of so many tools—and so many of the same tools—was overwhelming. "It may seem to the untrained eye like there's fusee engine after fusee engine," said Newsom, who also bought a few items for the Musée International d'Horlogerie in La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland. "But in fact they're different, which is why he had them. He was collecting different styles from different countries and time periods, to see the various tools people had invented or developed to solve a particular technical problem."

Like comparative literature, Crom's pastime might be considered comparative technology, and his collection a kind of Kew Gardens of horological tools. In fact, Crom did hope the collection would find its way into an institution, but, according to those who knew about attempts to place it, a satisfactory arrangement was never found.

November 20. By then, other mysteries may be cleared up. For example, it's not known

at this point who else has owned either of the rose engines. "Unfortunately, Ted got sick unexpectedly," said Cheney. "Ted kept very careful records. It amounts to quite an extensive archive, but it needs to be sorted out. There will be no question about those details [of provenance] in the future, because the family's made some good progress in finding the necessary papers, but it will take some more time."

One other facet of horology was represented at this sale by a group of several dozen early 19th-century Liverpool-made pocket watches from the collection of David Evans. They fit in nicely with the Crom consignment, being products of that early factory system described by Cheney's slide lecture. One of the more complicated examples, with

alarm, in an 18k gold case, sold in the room for \$2489 (est. \$2000/3000). It was made by Robert Roskell and hallmarked 1813. A silver pocket chronometer by Litherland, Whiteside & Company, hallmarked 1807,

(www.skinnerinc.com). Originally published in the August 2010 issue of *Maine Antique Digest*. (c) 2010 Maine Antique Digest

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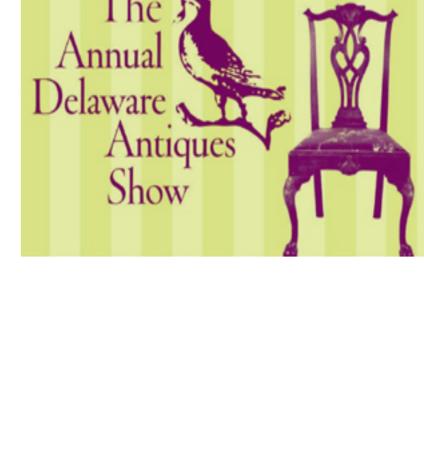
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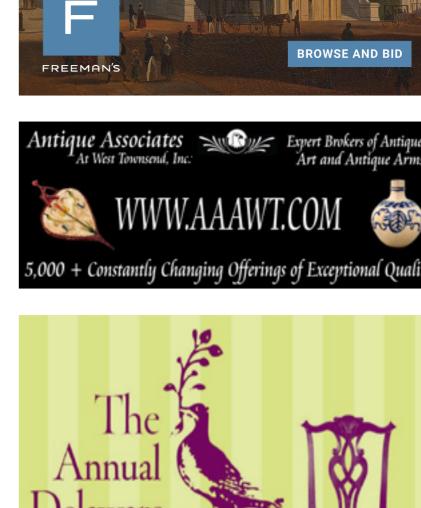
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\$3081 for a late 18th-century fusee engine "possibly" by Wyke. Bidder 957 also bought a circa 1790 wheel-cutting engine marked "T. Green According to Crom's research, Thomas Green entered into a partnership

facing side of the house. The slides showed some of these structures that can still be seen today. In Prescot, half of all households were involved in the trade at one time, said Cheney.

Harvard, Massachusetts, Bill Carson of Groton, Massachusetts, and David H. Grace of Madison, Wisconsin; watchmaker and restorer Moritz Elsaesser of Wellesley, Massachusetts; scientific instruments collector/dealer George Collord of Portland, Maine; and clock dealer Gary Sullivan of Sharon, Massachusetts. The talk also attracted a number of institutional representatives: David F. Wood, curator, Concord Museum, Concord, Massachusetts; J. Edward Hood, vice president for museum programming, Old Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge, Massachusetts; Marcus McCorison, president emeritus, American

in the shops of some of the top tool dealers throughout England," he said. Of his collecting methods in general, he added, "He would acquire these things in all manner of different ways, but perhaps his favorite way was acquiring them from the family of the original owner. That way he

Even to those with more than a passing acquaintance with horology, the

He also accumulated a vast library—some 1000 titles—which, unlike the tools, will be sold in installments. A few dozen were sold at this sale. Many of the rest will be sold at this department's next sale, scheduled for

sold to another room bidder for \$3318 (est. \$2500/3500). More ordinary ones sold for as little as \$100 on the hammer. For more information, phone Skinner at (508) 970-3000 or visit

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