

# The First One...

Where were you when you saw the clock or watch that became the first piece in your collection? Tell us what it was, send in a photo, and share some of the memories that go with it: NAWCC Publications Department, 514 Poplar St., Columbia, PA 17512, or e-mail to Editor Diana DeLucca at [ddelucca@nawcc.org](mailto:ddelucca@nawcc.org).

*Lee H. Davis (PA)*

August 1964...Boy Scout camp, where I have been a scoutcraft director, was over and it would be about three weeks before classes would resume at Illinois State University, where I was a senior majoring in biology.

My new bride and I decided to take a vacation and drive to Kentucky where many relatives on my mother's side lived and where I had many memories of boyhood vacations at a lake nearby.

We packed our 1951 Chevrolet with trail packs of dried food, a couple of sleeping bags and a tent, and other camping equipment and started off from central Illinois on a typical hot late summer day. After visiting several of my mom's cousins and camping out for many nights, we headed home. Driving along the Kentucky-Indiana border one morning, we spotted an old barn with large faded letters on the side which said "ANTIQUES."

We pulled in on the dirt road, parked the car, and went inside, where an astounding amount of furniture, glassware, and all sorts of antiques indeed were for sale. Much of it had obviously been there a long time, and dust, which had blown in through the old weathered barn boards, covered almost everything... actually making much of it more alluring.

Sometime during my exploration between large pieces of Victorian furniture placed haphazardly to create narrow aiseways that meandered throughout the main floor of the

barn, I spied a very attractive cuckoo clock hanging on a nail near the base of the old stairs that led to the loft.

My eyes locked on the well-carved bird surmounting the gable, inlaid wood surrounding the dial with applied Roman numerals, and the circular wooden pendulum. It was beautiful, and as a veteran who had been stationed in Germany and had seen quality woodcarvings, I had to ask the price.

Seeking out the elderly gentleman who stationed himself in the ancient rocking chair near the large barn door, I inquired about the price. Shifting his chaw from one cheek to the other, then aiming a well-placed stream of tobacco juice at a nearby milkweed stalk, he allowed that I could have it for \$35...but added he didn't think it would ever run again.

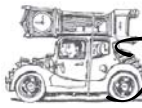
Well, the price seemed steep for a struggling college student who only paid \$65 a month rent in our small married student housing apartment...but I bit the bullet, did some rationalizing to my wife, and paid the man.

Upon returning home I looked closer at my purchase and thought I might not have done so badly because everything appeared to be there. I soon had the bellows out, the connecting wires unhooked, and the movement out. Then I was stuck. I knew nothing about what made a clock run, what problems it might have, or how to diagnose them.

After examining the various wheels, escapement, and how the weights provided the power, I thought I had a fairly good idea of the mechanics. Of course I knew nothing about bushings or the finer



points of what could impede a mechanical clock, but I did realize it was very dirty and needed to be cleaned. Not being a member of NAWCC yet, I knew nothing about clock cleaning solutions, ultrasonic treatments, or proper and accepted methods... but I did know that gasoline was a pretty good degreaser, so an old cake pan, an old toothbrush, and some scrubbing would probably solve the problem. And sitting on an old ce-



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ment block in front of our tiny and hot apartment working on my new-found project was a neat way to get better acquainted with my neighbors as they walked by and asked what I was doing.

After scrubbing the movement well with the old toothbrush (I didn't dare take it apart for fear of not getting it back together), I dried it off well in the sun and then with an old rag. Then I oiled it with some light machine oil. Looking at the residue in the pan, I was sure it was at least cleaner than before.

The bellows were in terrible shape. Time had taken its toll on the thin skins and they would not hold air, having holes in the fold creases. What to do? Since it would be another two years before I found out about the NAWCC and clock supply houses, I decided I might be able to carefully remove the old and very thin skins and perhaps make my own out of a chamois, like we used in those days to dry our car after washing it.

I located an auto supply house and purchased a new chamois...but alas, it was way too thick and heavy. But wait! In fifth grade we were shown a film about Eskimos and how the women would chew seal skins to make them soft and pliable for clothing. Why not give it a try?

In those days Coca-Cola was sold in thick glass bottles—a broken piece seemed just the thing to scrape the skin much thinner...and so I started gently scraping in long strokes to avoid tearing a hole in the skin.

Every day after classes when I returned to our little apartment, I cleaned off our kitchen table and proceeded to scrape, scrape, scrape. It was slow going. I didn't want to rush and put a hole in the skin and have all my efforts go for naught. I found the project very satisfying and could hardly wait to escape the drudgery of my studies to get back home and work on the clock again. It practically became an obsession.

Eventually, the scraping, chewing, and more scraping yielded an area large enough to cut two bellows skins from, so I carefully traced the flattened-out originals for the pattern and proceeded to make two new bellows. Then, with the best glue I could find, I cemented them to the wooden pieces as best as I could and waited.

Meantime, I reinstalled the movement, hung the weights, and Eureka! It ran! I could hardly wait to see the little bird pop out from behind the small door and announce the hour while dipping its body and lifting its wings.

I reinstalled the bellows, attached the whistles and the connecting wires, and made several adjustments. Finally, I got the right combination and it worked! It didn't work too well...the poor thing sounded like it had a bad case of asthma with its "breathy" cuckoo...but it made the basic sound, and I had achieved a great accomplishment.

Problem then was . . . I missed working on the clock, so I had to go out and find another! Many of us can identify with that situation!

I still have that clock and smile when I think of those more gentle days almost five decades ago.

*Don H. Middleton (NC)*

**M**y first clock was a Welch kitchen clock given to me by my father in 1956. It was traditional for him to give a clock to each of his children when they married, and I was the youngest of 11 children. My mother passed away, as a result of my birth, when I was six weeks of age. Thus, my father and I had a special kind of relationship. He was a tobacco farmer and repaired clocks for folks in the community as well as for his cousin, who owned an antique store.

His cousin attended auctions up and down the East Coast and often

purchased many clocks and furniture on any given trip. My father repaired those clocks in need of attention. His cousin was known to say that if his "magic skunk oil" did not get a clock going, he would contact my father. He gave to my father any clocks that were in poor condition. The Welch mantel clock shown here is an example. Please note that the decorative trimwork is not all original. The replaced panels were sawed out using a handheld coping saw, and the decorative design was carved with his pocket knife. Another very primitive tool he used was an old bulky soldering iron, the type iron that was heated in a hot bed of coals. I suspect his work was not very neat, but yet it did the job. And to think that today I sometimes have problems doing a neat job with an electric iron!

An interesting thing about the Welch clock is that it stopped running when my first wife and I separated. When I remarried a few years later, I remembered the old clock and decided I would dust it off and place it on the den mantel. Would you believe that clock began to tick and has continued to do so for many years now. Some skeptics may not agree, but to me this helps to prove what I have come suspect, that clocks are very near to being human. Well, kind of. As further evidence, after spending many long hours restoring and finally getting a clock back in order, there are times when I just know I have heard the clock say "thank you." Especially if it is late at night. Think about it. Some of you may know what I mean. I began tinkering with clocks in February of 2004. It all began when I purchased an old unloved clock at a thrift store in Melbourne, FL. I somehow managed to get it running. Sometime later my wife's teacher friend commented that her mantel clock had stopped. My wife commented that I might be able to repair it. And I'm thinking, what! On the day I went to pick



Today I have accumulated the basic tools and have a basic knowledge, but do not claim to be a specialist. I do major repairs on my clocks but usually not for others. I attempt to keep my interest in clocks as a hobby. Admittedly, there are times when repair requests are more than I care for. But it does a fellow's heart good to repair a clock that has much sentimental value to its owner.

One great reward when requested to repair an old clock is to discover that my father had once repaired the same clock many years ago, back when I was a lad. He had dated one of these December 24, 1945. Another, an iron case Ansonia, he had sold to a neighbor in 1947 for \$7.50, after the neighbor had a major fire at his residence. Very precious to me is that I have obtained 11 clocks once owned by my father. To disassemble a clock movement knowing that the last person who did so was my father, many years ago, certainly awards a feeling of nostalgia that perhaps only you readers and I can appreciate.

So what is going to happen to my clock collection when my time here is complete? No doubt many will be sold off at an auction. However, already each of my children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren has received a clock. My four (quadruplets) grandchildren have selected their tallcase clocks. Other collectible clock or clocks and watches of sentimental value that I wish not to be sold are all labeled as such.

Enough said about my first clock and the interest it stimulated. As to the story about my last clock, I suppose someone else may have to write that. I will look forward to reading it in the NAWCC *W&C Bulletin* from afar.

I would be remiss not to mention that my deceased brother had a master's degree in gemology and watch repair.

up her clock my wife and I stopped to visit a niece, who discovered that I was on the way to pick up a clock for repair. She excitedly said, "I did not know you repaired clocks!" I said, "No, I am not a repairman, but if by some small chance I can put a smile on the lady's face, then I will have done a good deed." Well, my niece gave me four clocks to repair that she had recently purchased at an estate auction. I came home with not just one clock but five.

Somehow I lucked out (I don't like the word luck but in this case I do not have a better explanation) and got each of them back into running order. It's kind of strange, but then maybe not, that after many years of not being interested in repairing clocks I was bitten by the bug that bit my father approximately 90 years

earlier. The experience of getting a few clocks back in running order inspired me to learn more. Thus, since then I have purchased many related repair manuals and CDs for both clocks and watches. Many long hours have been spent in my basement shop learning repairs, with every minute being enjoyable. I also joined the NAWCC, which has been very rewarding as a source of information and for enjoyable fellowship.

I now have over 500 clocks. Many are of little value but many are certainly collectibles. My watch collection numbers more than 200. Most of these are the old dollar watches whose restorations have served as good training aids. Obviously, I have been busy and still have no signs of a "burnout." I have been retired for 19 years.