

THE HUNT FOR THE YALE WONDER CLOCK

by Johnny Duckworth

Jack, I see in the last issue of C.O.C.A. you are looking for some good “tales of the hunt” stories. Well this is a machine I picked up this summer and I am glad to say I can share this story with everyone. It could have easily turned out to be something very embarrassing that I wouldn’t want to share with anyone.

I received a phone call one Thursday from a friend who knows I chase the old floor machines with a passion and he asked if I would be interested in something called a Yale Wonder Clock. The machine is similar to the early floor machine with a large wooden cabinet but that is about all they have in common. I could remember seeing one pictured in Bueschel’s trade stimulator book and that was all I had to go off of. I told him I was really interested and would like to see if I could add it to my collection so he passed along the information. I called the guy who was selling the machine that night and talked to him for a long time. The machine was buried in his garage and he hadn’t even come up with a price let alone taken any pictures. I explained I was very interested in the machine and would like to get a good photo of it. He said he would dig it out and take a few photos on the weekend.

In the middle of chasing this big lead we had promised to attend an annual float trip that weekend which my brother hosts for all his friends. The next morning we headed out for Missouri to float down the Niangua, as promised. We floated all day Saturday in the sun with the Yale Wonder Clock on my mind. When we returned back to the cabin that night I knew I was in the wrong direction of this machine so as you can imag-



ine we headed for home Saturday night. I made connections with the seller on the drive home to nudge him along. My wife and I made it home Sunday at 12:30 in the morning and at 1:00 in the morning I had cemented the deal on the phone as I agreed to his price but still hadn’t seen what I was buying.

He called me at 6:30 in the morning to see if I had received the email with all the pictures. I checked the computer and sure enough it was an original Yale Wonder Clock. We were out the door by 7:30am and on the road to Colorado to reel in this big machine. I had only seen one model of this machine in a book as I have mentioned, so I knew very little about it. The pictures he sent showed the music portion in the lower part of the cabinet covered with a round wooden board. You can only imagine that the music was discarded long ago and covered up with this to hide any trace that it ever existed. The early floor machines are notorious for this and when

the music became out of whack the operator would pull them out of the machine. The window in the center of the machine was empty with some sort of metal cage inside. I thought maybe this was where a clock movement went as the name is Yale Wonder Clock. It all happened so fast that there just wasn’t a lot of time for research and it was just a gut feeling I had to go on.

This could have been the embarrassing part or the end of the story if I wouldn’t have reeled this fish into the boat. I was in such a hurry and on a mission to get this machine I had managed to only get a cell number, first name, and a town in which the machine was located. Not bad if it is a few towns over but this was over 700 miles away. I drove across Kansas with a sinking feeling that I was making a huge mistake by rushing out

the door and not getting more information. This was only followed by repeated phone calls made all the way across Kansas with no answer. I have to say my passion jumped about 10 steps ahead of my brain. Well my fears were calmed when we made it into Colorado, he called me and what a relief. He had stayed up late to get the pictures out for me and had been sleeping all day.

Keep in mind when you are on a long drive all you can think about is what will this look like in person, what is it missing, and can I find some old parts to fix it? You think of this over and over in your head and with different scenarios. My only two fears with the machine were what is behind the wood board and what went in the empty window. While driving and talking to him on the phone I asked him about the empty window in the top glass where maybe a clock or something had gone. Good thing I was sitting down as he told me the window was for advertising cards which slide back and forth as there is a full box of them in the bottom of the machine. I couldn't wait to see what I was hearing so I gripped the wheel a little tighter and put the pedal thru the floor. The only other problem to recon with now, was the music and if it was there or not. He had found 4 musical discs with the machine so I couldn't figure out why there would still be discs if the music player was long gone.

We had decided it would be much easier to meet him in town and then follow him home with all the road construction going on. We met up with him and followed him out to see our prized machine which he had already moved outside for us to load. I just about jumped thru the car window as we drove up to the machine and I could see the wood which was covering the music area was not mounted directly to the machine. Come to find out there are 4 original nickel studs which stand off the machine to hold the glass covering the music and this wood was put in place of the glass. I am sure at some time in its life the glass was broken and they decided it was much easier and cheaper to replace it with a piece of wood. I have to say it is not normal for all my problems to be solved so fast but this was looking like it

was too good to be true. I got out of the car and the first thing I had to do was to look behind the wood and see what was hiding back there. I looked behind the round piece of wood and the musical disc player with twelve bells was staring me right in the face. You know that feeling you don't get to feel very often but when you do it's a rush of excitement, I felt it! We loaded this big machine up which stands just over 7 feet tall and headed for home. I was so excited we ended up driving it straight thru and made it back home by 2:00 am Monday morning.

These are amazing machines for when you put your nickel in and pull the handle you will get a token back in trade, the advertising cards slide across in the window, the music with twelve bells plays music, one of the four lights will light up to indicate the payoff, and it even has three reels with numbers under the glass which spin in order to bet on. It is interesting how this huge machine gets its name the Yale Wonder Clock from a little 3" clock on the front of the machine. I am currently researching and working on an article on the Yale Wonder Clock for a future article in the C.O.C.A. TIMES so if you have any information on this machine you would like to share, let me know at jtduck@msn.com or 816-835-3316.

HAPPY HUNTING!

Now we want to hear your tale. Send it to Jack Freund, PO Box 4, Springfield WI 53176 or e-mail it to jbgum@msn.com

*Meanwhile,
Pray for more STUFF!*

