

2pm

FIRST SUNDAY ESTATE WALK
HILL-STEAD MUSEUM
35 MOUNTAIN ROAD, FARMINGTON

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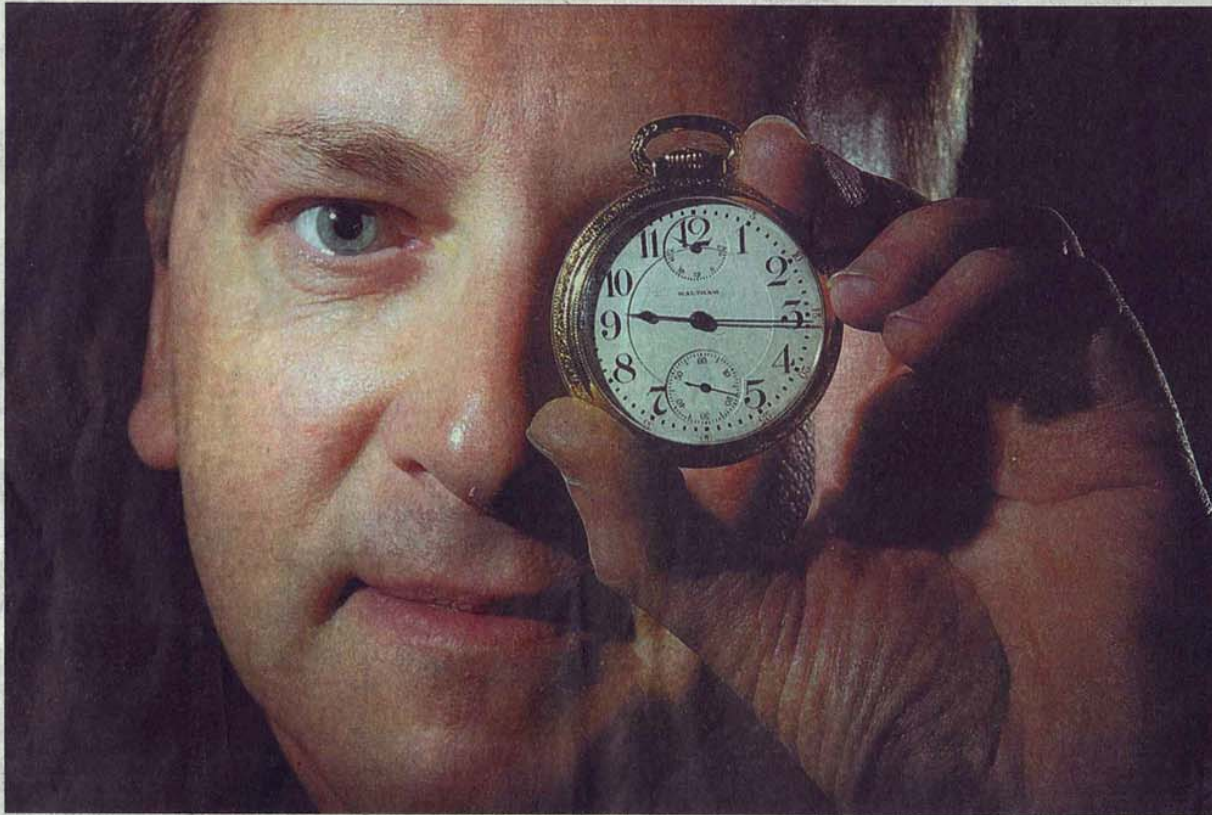
JUSTON MCKINNEY
FUNNY BONE COMEDY CLUB & RESTAURANT
MANCHESTER

IT HAPPENED TO JUNE

THE HARTFORD COURANT 3/4* SUNDAY, JULY 1, 2007 SECTION H

"What could be neater than having a watch that's 50 or 100 years old and still working on your wrist?"

RICK LITTLEFIELD, NEWINGTON WATCH STORE OWNER



PIECES OF TIME owner Rick Littlefield, who repairs and restores vintage timepieces, holds a Waltham pocket watch, manufactured in Waltham, Mass., around 1920. Below is a display of pocket watches at his Newington shop.

TIME DOES TELL

COLLECTORS OF ANTIQUE TIMEPIECES KNOW THERE'S MORE TO THE STORY THAN ACCURACY

STORY BY ADRIAN BRUNE | SPECIAL TO THE COURANT

PHOTOS BY RICHARD MESSINA | THE HARTFORD COURANT

We spend millions a year on timepieces — wristwatches, pocket watches, clocks, chronometers and more.

And then there are those who spend more than a million dollars on just one timepiece.

At the annual "Important Collectors' Wristwatches, Pocket Watches & Clocks" auction last month at the New York Timezone, a 2003 Patek Philippe Ref. 5002 went for more than \$1.2 million — a record for a wristwatch in the United States. That sale follows similarly spectacular prices earned by a 1939 Patek Philippe World Time Ref. 1415 and a Vacheron Constantin King Fouad 1, as a timepiece collection becomes a more frequent addition to antique collectors' lists.

"Collecting is a difficult thing to explain. You get the corporate exec to the guy in the Honda — all walks of life — coming to my store for anything from a 1950s Bulova Tank running about \$350 to a 1968 Rolex GMT Stainless Steel, which will set a person back about \$3,400," says Rick Littlefield, owner of Pieces of Time, a vintage watch store in Newington.

"I have one theory, though. Since most of my customers are men, and men hardly wear more than a wedding band and a watch, they want a number of different watches to rotate on a regular basis.



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Collectors Know Watches Tell More Than Time

FROM PAGE H1

"And what could be neater than having a watch that's 50 or 100 years old and still working on your wrist?"

And wouldn't it be even better if that watch came with a pedigree, a good tale to tell?

Here's a story that begins with the perils of polo in India in the 1930s. Vacationer Cesar de Trey was dismayed by the damage that the sport caused to so many exquisite Patek Philippe and Cartier Tanks wristwatches worn by the polo players. When he returned home to Switzerland, he created a solution—a watch with a reversible face. The Jaeger-LeCoultre "Reverso" was the first wristwatch whose crystal face slid out and swiveled from front to back.

These days, an original Reverso will fetch about \$4,000. Two of the 500 replicas Jaeger-LeCoultre made in 1995—with even more bells and whistles—sold at the auction last month in New York for \$28,320 and \$20,060, respectively.

"It's such an ingenious design—the idea of having a watch that could flip over," says Julian Schaerer, the watch director of Antiquorum USA, a premier auctioneer of vintage timepieces and the company that held last month's auction. "Combined with the classic elegant rectangular watch of the '30s, the ones worn by aristocrats and the avant-garde, it was a great concept."

Spectacular prices and rare wristwatches grab the headlines, but selling watches is a daily business.

Bob Iagrossi is a Hartford-area accountant who got hooked on watches in the first grade after he received a Zorro watch from his parents, and he picked up collecting when he started a career and a family. Known as a flipper—a collector who will buy a watch and then sell it or trade it for something different a week later—Iagrossi owns about 15 different wristwatches at any given time. He says he has eclectic taste and offers as proof his Jaeger-LeCoultre Mark 11, a military watch made for the Royal Air Force during World War II, and his 1964 Omega.

"Some people want the military watches; some like certain dials or movements," says



RICHARD MESSINA / THE HARTFORD COURANT
A VACHERON CONSANTIN GENEVE at Rick Littlefield's Pieces of Time watch store in Newington.

Iagrossi, who visits Littlefield's shop about once a week and usually buys a watch as frequently. "Me. I've had whatever variation of whatever there is."

Still, Iagrossi says, he will never part with his Mark 11. "Even if someone offered me \$10,000 for it, I wouldn't flip it."

That sentiment is well understood by members of the Connecticut chapter of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors. The group, which meets every other month in Edmond Town Hall in Newtown, usually draws about 60 men and women serious about their collecting.

Ask any aficionado and one of the first things he or she will tell you is never buy anything quartz. Sure it has flawless timekeeping, but that's an overrated quality for collectors who treasure the mechanical intricacies and

craftsmanship of a Rolex or Patek.

As with most collectors, each person has their preferences.

Danbury collector Jennifer Gallo favors Panerai watches, which came to prominence in the 1930s from a commission from the Royal Italian Navy, which needed a watch able to withstand the rigors of submarine life.

"The Panerai has elegant, simple design. Durability, size and uniqueness are also a big attraction," Gallo says. "Rolex makes almost a million watches per year. Panerai produces around 40,000. This makes Panerai much more special to me."

Littlefield, who started his business in 1992 after years of retail marketing, stocks a lot of Rolex and Omegas, but really loves the Pate Philippe watches. He particularly covets the Geneva-based watchmaker's "Pink Gold 2557" and the "Geneve," both of which were on the block in New York last week.

Iagrossi doesn't currently have one, but he is clearly a Rolex man.

"I've had about 30 or 40 since I started doing this," he says, including a Submariner from his birth year, 1960.

And each collector has his or her Holy Grail—a watch for which they will search.

Schaerer, the Antiquorum watch director, insists the "Paul Newman" Rolex Cosmograph is the watch to own, while Iagrossi argues that a '50s-era Pate Philippe Quantum Perpetua would be hard to top.

Gallo's top watch: a 1960 Panerai Luminor limited edition.

"It's referred to as a 'Fiddy' by the Paneristi," she says. As long as it's not a Seiko, however, anything goes.

"People come up to me and say, 'That's a beautiful watch,' and when I tell them it's from 1960, they ask if it runs," Iagrossi says. "I say, 'Yeah, it runs. Usually it's off about 10 second a day.'"

"They usually have a quartz watch that keeps perfect time and then ask, why would I want my watch when theirs keeps perfect time. And I tell them, 'You're not into watches; you're into timekeeping.'"