

First a message from the author James R. Edwards who's E-mail address is jedwards@CSWNET.COM.

Mike,

You may post them to your sites - at any time you want. It might be fair, however, to add a few words stating that the "author" would appreciate any suggestions for improvements and any other Q&As that anyone would be willing to write.

You and Your Clock

ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS OWNERS ASK ABOUT THEIR CLOCKS

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1. What is my clock worth?

The only way to really describe the value of a clock to its owner is to say that it's worth what the owner is willing to take for it. Most of the clocks that my customers bring me to repair or maintain are treasured members of their families. An old clock can restore memories and good feelings of earlier times. They provide joy, comfort, stability, pride of ownership, and connections that reach from the past to the present, and into the future. Sometimes people buy clocks to enjoy a "treasure" from the last century; sometimes to have an heirloom to pass on. Reasons for owning a clock, especially an old one, usually involve emotions and are difficult to put into words.

Since a well-maintained clock can outlast many generations, its value is rightfully subjective. Let me share a couple of true stories about owners who grew up around grandparents or parents, remembering the soft tick-tock of an old clock, a sound that reminds them of the beat of a loved one's heart.

One client had bought an old cuckoo because her four year old daughter had requested one from "Santa" for Christmas. She paid \$25 for the clock. During the opening of presents, she video taped the child's delight when the clock's bird came out to sing the time. I rebuilt that clock five years later at a cost of \$125 and was privileged to watch the original video. Now whenever that clock responds with an announcement of the time, it reminds the parents of a happy Christmas and a delightful daughter! And later, what will the clock be worth to the daughter when her parents are gone? Can a value be put on heritage?

One day while I was working on a customer's chime clock, blowing the dust of years from inside the clock, a yellowed piece of paper fluttered out. On the paper was written, "When Mother dies I will receive this clock." The simple note was written and signed by the mother of my client, the

clock's present owner. She was thrilled to learn another bit of her clock's history and family heritage.

2. Is it "worth it" to fix my clock?

In light of the above, this is a question an owner has to answer for himself. To me, all pendulum clocks are worth the expense of repair. Just about all of the old American clock manufacturers are out of business so it only seems right to preserve as many of these clocks as is possible. Even clocks that are still being manufactured or which were recently manufactured (say, within the last twenty years), have the potential to become "valuable" to their owners.

My responsibility is to provide a way for you to have your clock repaired or maintained at a reasonable price. As one of a few remaining full-time professional clocksmiths, I have the skills, equipment, knowledge, dedication, and training needed to restore or repair your clocks. I'll ask plenty of questions to help me to get to know your needs so that I can advise you as to what you should do. The final decision, of course, is yours.

3. But I just bought it at an antique store and they said it "runs good."

Even though you may have just paid several hundred dollars for a clock which is "new" to you, it is still wise to have a competent horologist (a professional clocksmith) examine and service the clock as needed. I've never seen an antique store "guarantee" one of their clocks. This is because they're in the business of turning over their stock. If the clock was in good enough shape to carry a guarantee by the shop (or by the clock dealer who is consigning his clocks), it could easily cost at least a few hundred dollars more.

4. What will it cost to have it fixed, restored, or maintained?

When you bring your clock to me, I'll perform a quick inspection, listen to your comments, then furnish you a receipt with an estimate of what the repair charges will be. This will be a range, such as "\$125-150." I'll do everything in my power to stay within that range, but like any "estimate," the detailed cleaning, disassembly, and inspection may reveal that more extensive work is needed. If I have to exceed my estimate by 20% or more, I'll call for your approval. Should you decide to not have me continue with your clock, a small minimum charge will be necessary to cover time, cleaning chemicals, tooling, insurance, and other shop and business-related costs.

Charges for clock repair don't have anything to do with the clock's original cost or present value. Since some of the turn-of-the century clocks sold for around a dollar or two, repair costs can sometimes be one hundred or more times the original cost. But then, inflation has probably evened things out over the last one hundred years. People don't usually get their clocks repaired just to be able to tell time. If accurate time-keeping was all that mattered to us, then most local discount stores have good quartz clocks and watches that sell for less than \$25.

All of my charges are fair and are commensurate with the services I provide. I work on clocks because I love old clocks and am fascinated by the challenge of restoration. I do pledge fairness and good value in all of my dealings with you.

I try to only accept work when I'm allowed to "do it right," i.e., a complete overhaul. This enables me to stand behind my work and include a no-cost one-year warranty on all labor. I've found that when I agree to fix only that "little thing" that the owner thinks is wrong with the clock, I can easily set myself up so that the client "feels" that I am also responsible for other things that may go wrong with the clock. I do not warrant "minimum repairs" work, nor a clock's ability to keep time accurately.

5. My clock has been running good for years but now keeps stopping (or no longer keeps good time, or has other problems). What is wrong?

There are many things that can go wrong with a mechanical device as complicated as a common pendulum clock. It's really remarkable that clocks run as long as they do without demanding attention. Even so, any pendulum or mechanical-based clock needs regular maintenance every four or five years. The main thing that harms clocks is the dust which collects in the works, resulting in grit and wear that will damage the clock or cause it to stop. Of course, things can break (like springs), and oils can dry out. If it has been longer than four or five years since a professional has cleaned and oiled your clock, there is good reason to believe that the clock needs to be looked at.

Usually, if a clock begins to stop regularly, it's trying to tell you that it needs maintenance. When this happens, it's always best to leave it stopped until you can have it fixed. A clock may run for twenty years without maintenance, but it will usually do substantial damage to itself in the process. This can increase the repair charges above what it would have cost to have the clock periodically cleaned, inspected, and oiled by a professional clocksmith.

WD-40 is a great product, but under no circumstances

should it, or anything like it, be used on a clock. It might enable the clock to run for another year or two, but will cause more damage in the long run, and will result in greater repair costs. Only horological-grade oils made specifically for clocks should be used. I use the best imported synthetic oil money can buy. It costs me \$142 per ounce; that's more than four thousand dollars per quart!

6. I have to sell my clock. How much should I be able to get for it?

A clock, like anything for sale, has a "market value" which is defined as "the amount that a knowledgeable, willing and able buyer who wants the clock will pay to a seller who knows the value of the clock and who is under no hurry or duress to sell." Most clocks sell at a price less than this "top price." Only a professional fee-based appraiser can really furnish this information. Although I am no longer an appraiser, I'll be happy to point you in the right direction, or, to the limits of my ability, offer an "opinion."

If the clock is serviced by this shop, then you will be provided with as much historical information as I am capable of providing.

7. Do you make house calls?

Yes. For those who are unable to deliver their clocks to my shop, or who, for various other reasons, desire that I come to their homes, I'm happy to provide this service. There is a minimum charge for this, usually thirty-five dollars.

In the case of a Grandfather or other large floor or wall clocks, it is almost always necessary for me to come to your home to do the work or to remove the clock works for delivery to my shop so that I can properly service it. It is also better for me to return and set up these types of clocks in your home when repairs are complete.

If you have recently purchased a clock from a furniture store or similar store, I'll be glad to come to your home and properly set it up for you. I also pack or unpack and set up clocks when a household move is involved.

8. My clock runs too fast (or too slow). What should I do?

Providing that the clock is not in need of servicing (see Question Five, above), it may just need a little regulating of its speed. There are various reasons this may be necessary, e.g., moving the clock to another location, or a curious child (or a spouse!) may have changed something. Speed regulation is the responsibility of the owner and is really quite simple. Just remember that adjusting the pendulum bob, which is the

large disk shaped object at the lower end of the pendulum, will regulate the clock. Underneath the bob is a nut called the rating nut. It is the turning of this rating nut which moves the bob higher or lower. The lower the bob the slower the clock will run; the higher the bob the faster the clock will run. Here is an easier way to remember it: speed UP and slow DOWN. And another: LOWER is SLOWER. Some clocks, however, are regulated by inserting the small end of the winding key through a small hole in the face of the dial and turning the top of the key in the appropriate direction. The "usual" direction for this adjustment is clockwise for faster and counterclockwise for slower, but your clock may differ.

First, start by making a simple table to enable you to keep track of the facts and of the adjustments you make. Make columns to show the date, time, a + or - to indicate whether the clock is fast or slow, the number of minutes it is fast or slow, and the amount of adjustment you make, e.g., + 1/4 turn. Fully wind and correctly set the clock. Then wait about twenty-four hours to determine the loss or gain.

The headings on your table might look like this:

Date	Time	Fast (+) or Slow (-)	Minutes Off in last 24 hours	Amount of Adjustment + (faster) or - (slower)
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Don't expect complete accuracy from your old clock. Some fine old regulators will keep time to within a fraction of a minute a week. Others can be expected to be off by a minute or more a day. Many will be a little fast when first wound, and then run more slowly as they are about run down.

By keeping careful records on your table, and by making small adjustments over a long period of time (several weeks), you will arrive at the optimal adjustment for your clock. Usually adjustments of less than one eighth turn of the regulating nut or winding key are all that are needed.

If the clock is one that I have serviced for you in my shop, it will have been regulated to its optimum time-keeping ability. Furthermore, after I have completed any needed servicing and before I release it back to you, I will have observed its correct running for at least a week. This is to be sure that it will "be good" when it's back in your home. However, even though the clock has been running well in the shop, it most likely will need further adjusting in its home because of environmental factors beyond our control.

Finally, the above instructions may not apply to "special" clocks like the ATMOS, clocks with a balance wheel, an Anniversary (400-day) clock, or an electric clock. Please feel free to call me with any questions you may have about regulating these types of clocks.

9. I have a cuckoo clock. Do you work on them?

Absolutely! While the majority of clocksmiths refuse to work

on cuckoos, I really enjoy working on them and have become somewhat of a specialist with them. Cuckoos are usually quite a bit more complicated than a simple time and strike mantel clock. Because of the need for extra time to disassemble, clean, inspect, service, assemble, and adjust a cuckoo, the basic cost to correctly service it will usually be higher.

If your cuckoo has a modern mechanism (post World War II), I may be able to save you some of the cost of repair by replacing the entire mechanism with a new one. The reasoning here is that the same movement manufacturer is still economically producing similar movements. Because it may be cheaper, and should not affect the clock's authenticity, you may choose to have the entire movement replaced. Feel free to discuss this with me.

So, if you have a cuckoo clock that you like, by all means, invest in its care and maintenance. Its cheerful song will reward you for years to come.

10. How long will it take to get my clock fixed?

That depends on a number of things. To fix a clock correctly requires a lot of time. My usual backlog is six weeks to two months. Normally, I work on clocks in the order in which they've come into my shop, but on occasion I will arrange to complete a clock sooner if it's really necessary. Since I will not compromise on the quality of my work, a faster speed translates into higher costs, especially if I'm asked to work on evenings or weekends.

11. How will I know when my clock is ready for me to pick it up or for you to deliver it to my home?

As soon as I finish your clock and start to "run-test" it in my shop for its week-long minimum observation period, I will prepare and mail to you a detailed statement of my services and the cost. My warranty will also be included. Once the clock has run for a week with no problems, I'll call to make arrangements to get the clock back to you. Full payment is expected on delivery.

If the clock isn't picked up within a month, a one dollar per day storage fee will be added to the charges.

12. I wound my clock too tight and it quit. What should be done?

A clock in good condition will not usually stop just because it has been wound too tightly. Most likely it has stopped because it has reached the point where the force produced by the spring simply is not able to overcome the friction caused by dirt, dry oil, and wear. The cheapest maintenance a clock can receive is a good cleaning and oiling every three-to-five years, followed by a professional disassembly, cleaning, and overhaul about every ten years. Of course these recommendations will vary

depending on several conditions. It is actually better, however, to store a clock in a closet than to allow it to run beyond the time when it should be cleaned and oiled.

13. How long can I expect my clock to last?

With proper care your clock can last indefinitely 100, 200, or more years. I often work on clocks that are more than a hundred years old and still in good shape. Most of the time neglect or well-intentioned "tinkering" by an untrained person is what has damaged an old clock. Still, I haven't seen a clock that could not be restored to "top notch" condition at a reasonable cost if the owner so desired.

14. Do you warrant your work?

As explained in #4, above, a complete overhaul by me returns your clock to a "nearly new" condition and includes my one-year warrant of all labor and any new parts I've installed. The only exception has to do with a spring breaking and any damage it may do to the clock. Even new springs can sometimes unexpectedly break and are therefore not warranted. It is your responsibility to bring the clock to my shop for the warranty work. Service calls to your home will be at my normal rate. If you have a problem with your clock within the warranty period, please don't hesitate to call me. Maybe I'll be able to help you over the phone.

MAINSPRINGS: Unfortunately no warranty can ever be given against failure of a mainspring (even when new - although this is extremely rare and unlikely), and fracture can sometimes result in quite serious damage to the movement. Failure is often the result of poor lubrication over an extended period. Therefore, in order to reduce any such risk, it is advisable to have the springs carefully inspected and suitably lubricated every time the clock is overhauled (see "Maintenance" above).

Actually, I'd throw in something that my house calls are not warranted. The rest is cosmetic such as I give two and three year warranties but that's a personal shop decision.

On the same subject, what if you pickup a grandfather movement overhaul it and return it to the customer and something goes wrong. I believe the line "It is your responsibility to bring the clock into my shop" would then not apply.

Based on that I might state that if I pickup up and delivered the work then you can expect the same if there is a mechanical problem during the warranty period.

The above was prepared by Jim Edwards with contributions from the membership of the Clocksmiths E-mailing list.

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