

# Clock of the Month

## Seth Thomas Regulator Number 2

*December, 2007*

### ***The Hunt***

One day I heard that an estate sale of heavy machinery, tools, and personal belonging coming up, and that there were watchmakers equipment also. I arrived early and was instructed by the sellers that if anyone is interested in the watchmakers tools, to please indicate so when entering the large building as they were being held in a special room, keeping the general public from scattering the items. Being number six into the sale, I told them my interest and was quickly taken to a room containing the watchmakers tools. After about 20 minutes, I left a written bid for the jewelers' lathes only and decided to take a look at the remainder of the estate items in the adjoining shop area.

I headed to the back of the room and quickly saw a kitchen clock, which was constructed from particleboard by its now deceased owner, how funny. And just beyond this was another clock lying flat on the table. From knowledge gained at our Pacific Northwest Regional just a few months earlier, I recognized the clock as a Seth Thomas No. 2 regulator. This one with its broken cord had lost its weight, pulley, and the seconds' hand was also missing, marked price \$200.



I snatched the clock from the table and headed to the cashier to store and mark the clock as "sold." I then asked her if she may have seen a brass weight and her answer was "yes, but I don't know where." She took a short time to

locate the weight but came back with nothing. I then launched into a search and rescue mission and spotted the weight in the middle of a huge table built on sawhorses and a sheet of plywood. Reaching through the crowd of interested buyers, I again snatched the item from the table: the pulley was never found.

With my treasures in hand, the cashier said that "this is a Seth Thomas clock and worth the asking price of \$200, but seeing that the dial has some missing paint and the seconds hand is missing, how about \$180?" I quickly paid my bill and scurried out to the car to store my treasure and head to work. Oh, I didn't mention that this sale was on a "work day" and I was a little late in arriving at my office that day.

### ***The Restoration***



The original owner of my new treasure had poorly re-shellacked over the oak case and its original finish, this had to come off so the complete case was stripped to bare wood. This took a great deal of time but was worth the effort. The stripped case was allowed to dry for many days before applying the new finish. Using an airbrush, taking the time to sand between every two or three coats of orange shellac, I applied multiple coats. After

about ten to twelve coats, I decided the finish looked rich enough and let it again dry for several days. The final touch was to rub the shiny shellac with mineral oil and rotten stone to remove the high gloss, giving it a rich satin finish.

Over the years of use, the original lacquered pendulum bob and weight had worn through leaving a dark oxidized patch on the brass. The original owner solved this problem by applying gold paint to each. Once the paint was removed, both polished to their original beauty. After the movement was disassembled, cleaned and oiled, it was put into service once again. From studying the characteristics of my clock, I determined that it was manufactured between the years of 1913-1921.

Oh yes, I had been chastised for removing the National Rifle Association (NRA) sticker from the tablet during this restoration, but that simply had to go. I ordered a new seconds hand and a friend gave me the correct pulley for this clock.

## History

The Seth Thomas number 2 regulator was introduced in the early to mid 1860s and produced until 1950, likely the only clock with such a length of production. Originally selling price is unknown, but by 1873, the price was \$16 and when production ended and priced at \$110. The timepiece with its 12" dial and long wooden case is handsome on any wall. The number 2 was again reissued in 1976 with only four thousand being manufactured. At this time, Seth Thomas was a division of General Time, a Talley industries company.

When introduced, the case was a walnut veneer. Around 1890, cherry, oak, and old oak cases were introduced; with the final wood case available in mahogany and oak around 1913. The overall case length varied between 34 to 36 1/2 inches depending on the period in which it was manufactured.

Dating the manufacturing period can be difficult as there are many characteristics that need to be studied. As mentioned, the available woods changed, as did the construction and style of the base, the tablet, case length, dial and the numeral style, seconds bit, and the hands. Another feature in dating the number 2 is the area directly below the dial and above the lower door and tablet called the "bow tie." The bow tie can be made up from one to three pieces of

wood depending on its age. Some of the later cases have a series of numbers stamped or stenciled on the back of the case and by decoding the numbers, the month and year of manufacture can be determined.

Over the life of the regulator, four different Seth Thomas movements were used in the timepiece, the number 61, 77, 77A, and the 77B. Each of the movements had a Graham deadbeat escapement, maintaining power, weight driven, and designed to operate with a 2-pound pendulum on a wooden rod.

The Seth number 2 is an accurate timekeeper and the railroad used them in their system showing the correct time to the many travelers passing through the train stations. Many were fitted with a Montgomery dial, which today is coveted by collectors.

Now to quote Paul Harvey, "now for the rest of the story." A company named Bradley Woodworks in Ontario, Canada is offering a Seth number 2 in kit form. Their German weight driven movement is a product of Hermle, and for less than \$800, you can have a new Seth No. 2. So the famous regulator that Seth Thomas started manufacturing in the 1860s lives on.

## Parting Comments

About two weeks after the sale, I noticed a sign "final sale, all items must go." I returned just before the doors locked, made them an offer on all of the watchmakers' tools, they accepted and took them home.

While at the estate sale, I discovered a family member that told me she remembered the Seth regulator number 2 ticking away in her grandfather's home. I assured her that it was going to a loving and caring home where it will again tick the time away.

*Submitted by Terry White*