



Brad Horrigan photos

To Kirtland Crump, left, and Mark Dudley of Crump Clocks in Madison, antique clocks are a link to a time and place nearly forgotten. Below, a collection of mantel clocks.

Mr. Crump's shop in Madison keeps a grand Yankee tradition ticking



# LAST OF THE CONNECTICUT CLOCKMAKERS

By Lisa Reisman

**T**HEY REQUIRE no computer chip or battery. There's no need to plug them in. They have ticked for more than 200 years and, with a little care and maintenance,

they'll tick for 200 more. And from the early 1800s to the mid-1950s, no state in America cranked out more of them than Connecticut.

Enter the renovated 1890 barn that





**Above, the seldom-scene workshop at Crump Clocks. When Crump works on a clock he says he is getting into the mind of the clockmaker.**

houses Kirtland H. Crump LLC on Boston Post Road in Madison and you'll be greeted by a forest of such old-timers. They chime and gong and cuckoo. They live in wood or in glass. Some run a tad too slow. Some turn a hair too fast.

That's where Kirtland Crump comes in. The alumnus of the British Horological Institute and co-author of "Timeless: Masterpiece American Brass Dial Clocks" is the person to call when a 19th-century mantel clock handed down through several generations has ceased operating or is suffering from some form of arrhythmia.

But why bother? Clocks — or, more precisely, the time they measure — can be found everywhere: on cellphones, computers, the dashboard of our cars, neon signs atop banks and chain-store pharmacies. They wake us up; they rush us out the door for work or school; and more often than not, they're the last thing we glance at as our heads hit the pillow at the end of a day.

Still, even in our laser-precise, digitally enhanced age, there are those who seek out the services of Crump and his longtime associate Mark Dudley because they see clocks as something more. To them, antique clocks are a link to a time and place nearly forgotten. Hearing the quarter-hour strike on a clock built in 1790



**These clocks may run a tad slow or a hair too fast. Here is the rear view of a carriage clock.**

gives a feeling of a slower-paced lifestyle, a continuity of lives.

"When you think about it, there is a lot going on with old clocks," said the amiable, gray-haired Crump in the gentle light of the showroom. "You have this beautiful piece of art that houses intricate machinery. So for some, it is the clock's beauty that attracts them. For others, it's the engineering."

Technically, Crump is an antiquarian horologist, a crafter of instruments for measuring time who specializes in antique pieces. In layman's terms, he's a clockmaker, a word that conjures up visions of an Old World artisan in a



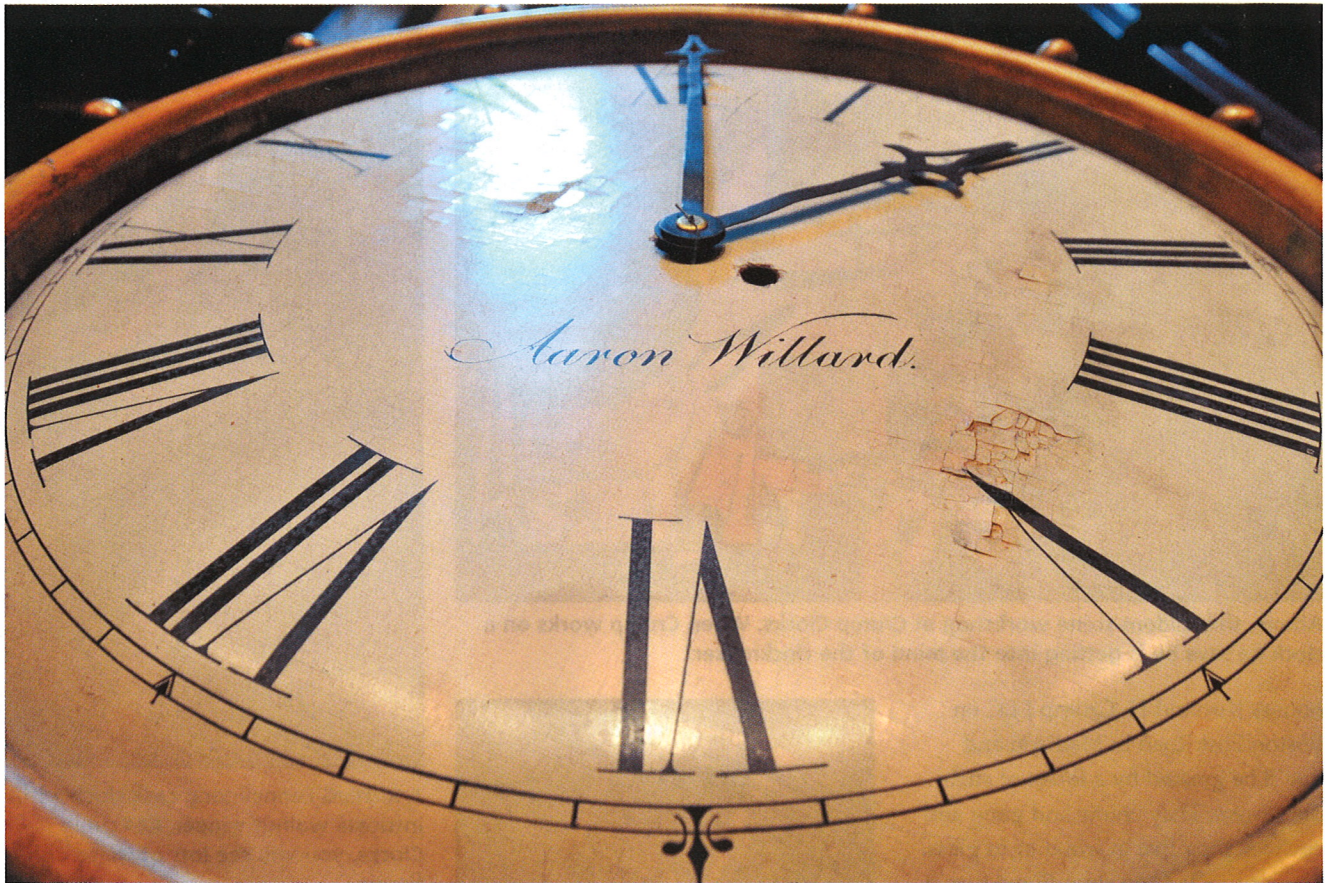
**A Richard Fennell long case clock with intricate walnut veneer. At Crump Clocks, you will see lots of these old-timers.**

Walmart culture.

Unlike most clockmakers, Crump and Dudley not only function as repairmen. They also fabricate missing parts. That makes them a valuable commodity. Indeed, when not engaged in restoring the Essex Town Clock and the one in Yale's Harkness Tower or making house calls around the state and country, they spend most days in the quiet confines of the wood-scented, second-level workshop, rebuilding pieces from the inside out, crafting new gears and hands out of brass and steel, repainting flaked or faded dials, and buffing cases to a high shine.

According to Crump, clockmaking is a trade that entails a lifetime of schooling, and even then, it's often a challenge. It demands such an aptitude for scientific skills and spatial mechanical abilities, such a wealth of historical knowledge, that no less than Albert Einstein admitted an obsession with the devices. Little wonder. "You have to understand principles of physics and chemistry," said Dudley. "You have to be an engineer and you have to be good with your hands."





A Willard gallery clock at Crump Clocks in Madison. Kirt Crump says each clock has a distinct personality and its quirks.

Not to mention that, much like people, no two clocks are identical. Each antique clock has a distinct personality and its distinct quirks. With each one, you have to figure out how to take it apart and put it back together. And that's precisely the fun of it, said Crump: "You're getting into the mind of whoever built the clock hundreds of years ago; thinking like him; seeing, as it were, what made him tick."

Listen to Crump talk about the fine craftsmanship and timekeeping accuracy of the clocks built by Daniel Burnap, and you'll sense his reverence for the early 19th-century Connecticut clockmaker. "Burnap was the ultimate perfectionist," said Crump, who's been diagnosing and treating the innards of antique clocks for more than three decades. "He knew what he was doing, and he did it very, very well."

Like earlier American clockmakers, Burnap was revolting against a strict British guilding code that dictated a clock be made a certain way, Crump said. "If it wasn't — if you did what



Hearing the quarter-hour strike on a clock built in 1790 gives a feeling of a slower-paced lifestyle.

Burnap did, which was to make dials differently — your shop could be shut down and your tools confiscated."

It was this same spirit of rebellion that engineered the efforts of Burnap's

apprentice, East Windsor's Eli Terry, toward transforming timekeeping from a craft into an industry. The way he did it, according to Dudley, was "brilliant, the model of Yankee inge-





The old red barn that houses Crump Clocks is a local landmark in Madison.

nuity." With a shortage of brass due to England's trade embargo after the American Revolution, Terry experimented with gears made of wood rather than the customary brass and standardized clock components so that they were interchangeable and could be mass-produced.

That breakthrough made clocks not just status symbols for the wealthy, but affordable to average people who, until then, had relied on bells, public sundials and town clocks to regulate their days. It also established Connecticut as the epicenter of clock-making in the world for more than a century, with peddlers venturing out to the frontier and putting woodcased clocks manufactured in the Naugatuck River Valley on the shelves of nearly every American home.

These days, Connecticut's clockmaking is all but extinct, having never recovered after retooling for World War II, said Crump. "And there's really nothing to point to it, except in museums and in the clocks people still have in their homes. And here in the shop, of course."

Not that those produced during Connecticut's heyday have stopped ticking. With that, Crump gestured to an Eli Terry clock produced in the 1820s. "That one is still functioning quite well almost 200 years later," he said. "And I don't see it stopping anytime soon."

Kirtland H. Crump Clockmakers can be found at 387 Boston Post Road, Madison. Call 203-245-7573.

*Lisa Reisman is a Shoreline freelance writer.*

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*born in Iowa, honeymooned in Cape Cod, now live in Connecticut*



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