

The Self Winding Clock Company

Frequently Asked Questions:

How much is it worth?
How much will it cost to restore it?
How old is it?

Often customers approach us, having just purchased a Self Winding Clock either on Ebay, at an antique shop, or perhaps elsewhere. The first question on their minds is, "Did I pay too much?"

The next thing that happens is they notice that the clock has been "converted to D cells." We are not comforted by this knowledge. Often the way this has been done is highly suspect and perhaps even hazardous to the condition of the clock. Wires are wrapped and taped. This is not reliable. The wires oxidize quickly and before long the connection no longer conducts current. Wires are often left uninsulated. This is an invitation to a short circuit and a leaking battery which can badly damage or corrode the clock.

Having a D cell battery pack exposed to the interior of a metal clock could, if not done properly, result in a short circuit especially with metal cased clocks or battery shelves. A shorted battery will always leak. We'd prefer to have a first line of defense against D cell leakage. Our 1900 No. 6 family were designed to mitigate all of these problems, are very economical for what they provide in terms of longevity to the clock, and are designed to last a lifetime (of course the internal alkaline cells must be changed and are readily available).

How much is it worth? Without seeing it, that's impossible to judge. Some of the earlier long cased wood clocks, well ornamented and built with fine woods, beveled glass, with Style A movements and in mint condition, can net \$5000 or more to a passionate buyer. The metal case clocks seem to be the most common. We have seen this style clock being sold "reconditioned" (be careful when you see this terminology) for upwards of \$600. But as always when we are dealing with clocks in the low mid range in value (under \$10,000) it is difficult to appraise them even with the clock in hand. It is most dependent on finding an interested customer willing to pay what the owner would consider a fair price. One thing is for sure: you know how much it is "worth" in the condition it is in now if you just purchased it. If restored like new, it would be worth more, but then you probably wouldn't want to sell it since the charm of these clocks is addictive.

How much will it cost to restore? It is difficult to estimate what it will be to restore a self winding clock movement sight unseen. For that reason, we offer free estimates. Most full movement restorations range from \$350 to \$500, sometimes more, depending on condition. As rare as it is, periodically we see these clocks which will run with a few adjustments and oiling, again this is unusual. Wires and contacts are often corroded, oxidized, or just plain dirty. After well over a half century of running and/or sitting in damp basements or attics, the mechanical movements are often so sludged up and worn out that they won't do anything when power is applied. Even if they do, it is usually short lived.

If however by some miracle the clock movement only required oiling and adjusting it would be much less, probably in the \$150 range. But this is very unusual unless the clock was very well

cared for over its life. And like it or not this is also very unusual due to the unique nature of these clocks. They are foreign and intimidating to many clock repair folks because of the electrical content. Those that brave them often do so without the knowledge, parts, or tools that are commonplace to the world of mechanical-only clocks, but not-so-available for early battery powered electrics and self winders.

How old is it? The earliest Self Winding Clock Co. units date back to around 1890. The earliest of these if in original condition, are identified by their internal wood skeleton to retain the dial. Often in the earliest models the wires to the batteries route to the top of the clock since they were powered by Leclanche cells. These liquid chemical jar-style batteries (born around 1850) were much wider than the No. 6 and were available long before the No. 6 battery was in production (late 1890s). The Leclanche batteries often made a chemical mess so stains on top of the clock (inside the cornice trim molding) can often be observed.

Later, probably in the early 1900s, production clocks were changed so that dials were secured by 4-40 nickel plated steel screws that fastened through the dial into brass pillars extending from the front clock plate. Presumably the manufacturer realized that to service the movement the dial would have to be removed. Eventually some models required removal of the dial to change the batteries. It didn't take long before a dial screw fastened into a wood frame would strip out, causing the service personnel difficulty. This resulted in the change over to a machine screw fastened into the brass pillar as described earlier.

Once the No. 6 battery proved itself, the clocks were equipped with small battery shelves inside the case, probably since this was a more convenient place for the service personnel to access. Again, our guess is this would have been predominant some time after 1905.

The square metal case self winders were built between the 1930s and the early 1950s. The round sweep second hand metal cased units were meant as Radio Broadcast studio clocks, so we'd guess they would have been available between the early to mid 1930's thru the early 1960s. The exact date that the clocks became obsolete is unknown.