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## How man seeks intrigue in clocks

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Cromwell era so well.

He has four of them. Two circa 1880, are lantern or Cromwellian clocks. Handmade in Bristol, England, they have a square base with a dome top.

One has original side panels, those for the other are lost. He notes that while the works are simple, the workmanship is exacting and beautiful.

Ashdown is one of two remaining charter members of the Michigan area National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors. His son, Neil, 13, is also a member.

As an assayer and refiner, Ashdown buys gold, silver and platinum pieces. If they are not salable he melts them into pure blocks or sheets to sell.

"I'm crazy about gold," he says. "I've been buying it since 1951. I'm one of the few old-fashioned smelters in the area with my own furnace and my own rolling mill."

The scrap gold he buys is from 12 carats (which is half gold, half other metal) to 24 carats, which is pure gold. The pure is marked 999 fine plus. He melts the scrap gold and silver. When it is pure, he rolls it into sheets and sells it to jewelers.

"I'm a gold bug, myself. I figure the two most precious things in the world are gold and love."

Gold pocket watches, of course, aren't melted down. Many of his are English. One with a screw back is a Deuber-Hampton made in Ohio, another is an early New York Standard.

And his wild horses are another story. These are dreams, the chases after treasure, the million-in-one chance to strike it rich.

He sells metal detectors—machines which beep when held close to the ground if there is metal under them.

He once found an 1854 Canadian half penny next to his house with a detector. He also has found bullets in the Masonic Temple Yard. There have been other finds, he says, close to home.

True to the treasure hunter's unwritten code, Ashdown won't give exact locations.

Fortunately, he says, his wife, Joyce, likes chasing wild horses too. She's willing to take off in the car or across the fields when a mutual spirit moves them.

"People in this area don't dream and so they don't buy the detectors much. You've got to be a dreamer to expect to find something when you go out. It's kind of like being an alcoholic—once you start chasing wild horses, you never get over it."



Pocket watches have always been popular and Ashdown has managed to collect hundreds of different models dating back several decades. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)