



Bertoia Auctions to sell magnificent Aaron and Abby Schroeder antique bank and toy collection: Part I of live gallery series slated for March 5-6

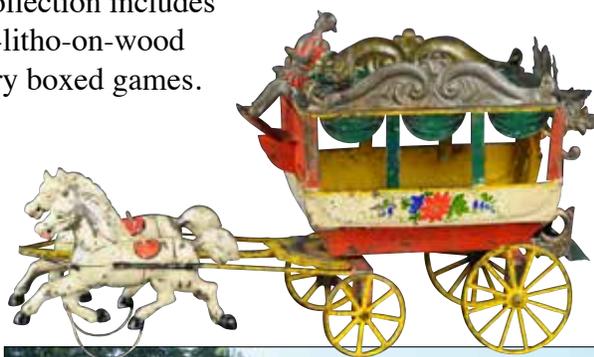
Partners in an international network of music publishing, record production and artist management, the Schroeders started collecting mechanical banks in 1963



VINELAND, N.J. – Another illustrious entry will soon join the list of legendary collections that have passed through the portals of Bertioia Auctions’ New Jersey gallery. As confirmed by company president Michael Bertioia, the Aaron and Abby Schroeder mechanical bank and antique toy collection – considered by most to be in a league of its own – will be auctioned by Bertioia’s on March 5-6, with Part II scheduled for fall of 2021.

The Schroeders’ vast private collection encompasses the finest of late-19th and early 20th-century American cast iron, including incomparable mechanical and still banks, ultra-desirable horse-drawn and bell toys, and rare cap guns and cap bombs. An extraordinary selection of early American tin and clockwork toys, including museum-worthy classics made by Ives, is beautifully complemented by an array of European tin that includes many boxed Lehmann and Martin character windups, tin autos, aeronautical toys, and penny toys.

The Schroeders’ impressive grouping of Schoenhut toys is led by a prized 44-inch horse-drawn Humpy Dumpty Circus Bandwagon with driver and six musician figures. Additionally, the collection includes several delightful skittles sets, paper-litho-on-wood boats, and coveted turn-of-the-century boxed games.





“In terms of quality, rarity and importance, the Schroeder collection is on par with those of Donald Kaufman, Max Berry, Dick Claus and the Perelman Museum,” Michael observed. “The core of the collection was amassed four to five decades ago, when it was still possible to find rare banks and toys in shops and at antique shows and flea markets. In fact, Aaron and Abby made their first purchase – a Stevens ‘Magic Bank’ – for a mere \$40 back in 1963.”

Music Business Innovators Become Bank Collectors

The late Aaron Schroeder (1926-2009) and his wife and business partner of 49 years, Abby Steinberg Schroeder, wielded influence and garnered worldwide respect both in business and philanthropy, just as they did in the playful world of antique toys, for which they had a great passion.



Aaron's multifaceted career in the music industry was one that grew from his prodigious talent as a songwriter. Many prominent vocalists recorded his songs, including Frank Sinatra, Nat "King" Cole, Tony Bennett, Chaka Khan, Carl Perkins and the Beatles. Elvis Presley recorded 17 of Aaron's songs, five that became No. 1 hits. In 1960, Aaron launched music-publishing and record-production companies and, together with Abby, developed, guided, produced and/or managed the careers of numerous top-tier artists, including Gene Pitney, Barry White, Randy Newman, Al Kooper and Jimi Hendrix. In her pivotal role as vice president of the Schroeder businesses, Abby established 12 overseas corporations from the ground floor up, participated in the recording process of their artists and became a master at artist representation, copyright law, contract negotiation, and crusading for songwriters' rights.



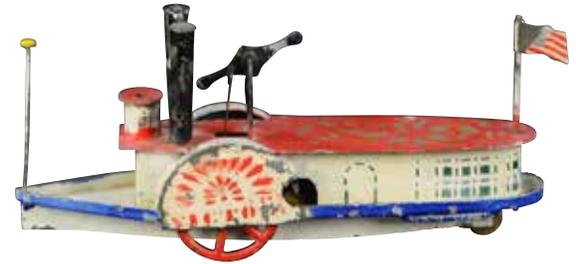
Along with their incredible success came the unwelcome burden of stress. Abby recalled: “Aaron lived music, 24/7. One day in 1963 his doctor called me after his checkup and told me, ‘He’s not in good shape. You need to find something to slow him down and take his mind off work, even if it’s just one day of the weekend.’ So I suggested to Aaron, ‘Let’s see what might pique your interest and take your mind away from business.’” Quite unexpectedly, that “something” turned out to be mechanical banks.

Abby’s mother had worked for an antiques dealer and on weekends would take her toddler daughter antiques. The experiences were ingrained in Abby’s memory. After the ominous warning from Aaron’s doctor, Abby suggested to workaholic Aaron that they wander around New York City exploring the various possibilities of collecting. That expanded into drives farther afield into the New Jersey countryside. On one such occasion, noticing a sign on a barn that read “Antiques,” they stopped and rang the bell to summon the owner. Inside, on a high shelf, Aaron spotted a colorful little cast-iron building, which Abby was able to identify as a mechanical novelty known as The Magic Bank. Aaron was smitten with the unique little toy, and after a bit of bargaining, they walked away with what would be the first of hundreds of mechanical banks in their collection, many of them extremely rare and in pristine condition. That first one, which is symbolic of how the couple’s collecting odyssey began, will remain in the collection forever.



The Schroeders became immersed in collecting, solely for the joy and appreciation of each object they acquired. "We didn't feel we had to have every single bank we came across." After his initial \$40 purchase, Aaron set his sights on locating more mechanical banks. He and Abby found these discoveries extremely inventive, historically representative of the period in which they were made, and beautifully constructed. The couple treated the collection and the way in which it was displayed as art rather than an investment. They would buy banks at shows, from dealers and other collectors, and even at the fabled Manhattan toy store FAO Schwarz, which sold them retail on the third floor.

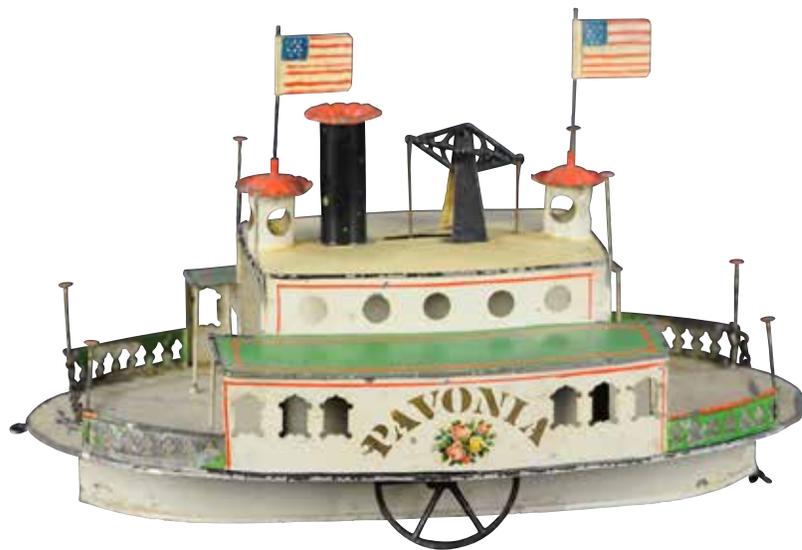




“For a few years, Aaron concentrated on mechanical banks, even though we were quite aware of the wider world of antique toys. We had been to collectors’ homes and seen the toys, which were gorgeous,” Abby said. One day she suggested to Aaron – who was very choosy about the banks he acquired – that if he couldn’t find a bank he liked, perhaps they could buy a toy. That led to the Schroeders’ first toy “deal,” a trade with the venerable antique Folk Art & American toy collector Bernard M. “Barney” Barenholtz (1914-1989), who became a lifelong friend. Although Aaron and Abby could not have predicted it, that one transaction would open a whole new collecting avenue for them to explore.

“Aaron had a pristine duplicate Panorama bank that Barney wanted, so Barney said, ‘Come over. I don’t have banks to trade with you, but I do have toys. There will come a time when you won’t be able to find the next bank so easily.’ We found that to be 100 percent true. We visited Barney and realized that the expansion into other categories of toys actually added to the pleasure of our discovery. As the collection continued to grow, so did our expectations for quality and condition. With the bar set very high, it became impossible to find certain banks that met our standards, but we were patient and would not settle for second-best. For example, it wasn’t until 2015 that I had an opportunity to purchase a Punch and Judy ‘Large Letters’ bank that suited the level of our collection.”





Having discovered antique toys, Aaron and Abby started networking and became friends with many of the pioneers and grandees of the hobby. They were able to buy toys that already had long and enviable provenance from having been in the collections of legends – trailblazers like Edwin Mosler, John Meyer, Covert Hegarty, and memorable dealers like the lovable “horse trader” Frank Whitson.

During their business-related world travels, they began to uncover abundant buying opportunities. Aaron’s workaholic tendencies were tempered, in particular, by their trips to Europe. There he and Abby would attend business meetings by day and enjoy dinners in the evenings with music industry friends and fellow toy collectors. But weekends were strictly reserved for toy-hunting expeditions to antique shops and their favorite markets.

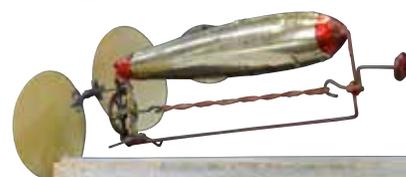


Abby credits Barney Barenholtz with inspiring her and Aaron to collect toys and “aim high.” As they had always done when buying banks, the Schroeders wisely set their focus on acquiring only exceptional toys that they considered artistically pleasing and historically educational. It was never about quantity, Abby said, although in the end, their spectacular collection probably numbered in the thousands while also garnering every possible superlative from fellow toy aficionados.



Abby recalled: “We would go to London’s Bermondsey Market on Thursday, Elephant and Castle on Friday, Portobello Road on Saturday, and periodically head off to Paris to shop at the city’s big flea market (Marche aux Puces de Saint-Ouen). Our overseas travels exponentially broadened the range of our collecting interests. I remember that in Paris Aaron found the most exquisite magic lantern in the shape of a mandarin, in absolutely pristine condition. We also found a large French biscuit tin in the shape of a trolley, which we loved. Years later, back at the Paris market, we added the colorful sign that advertises that very tin.”

The auction of the Aaron and Abby Schroeder Antique Toy & Bank Collection, Part I will take place on March 5-6, 2021 at Bertoia Auctions’ gallery, 2141 DeMarco Dr., Vineland, NJ 08360. Visit Bertoia’s website for updates and additional information. A full preview will appear in the next issue of Antique Toy World. Online: www.bertoiaauctions.com.

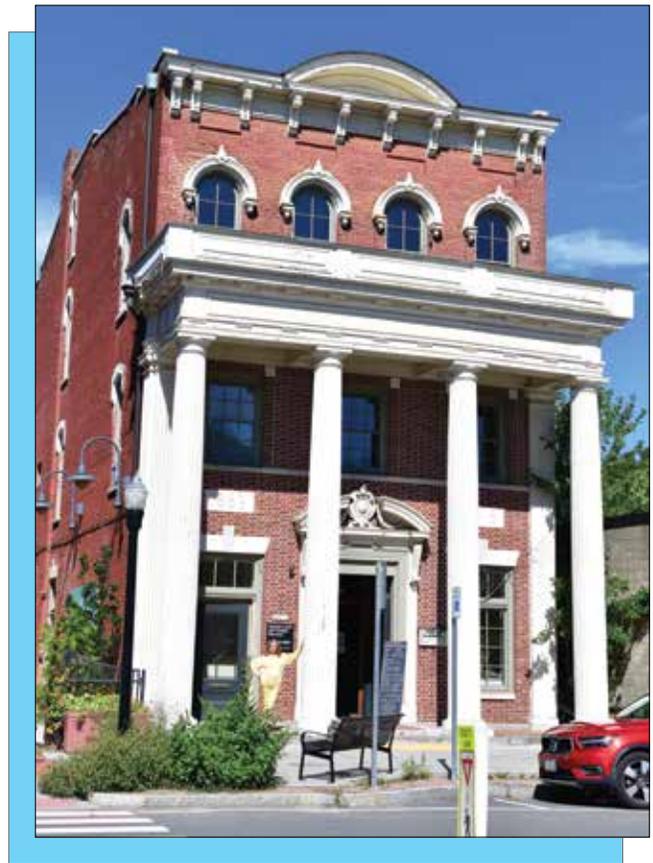


A Toy Museum Dream and Philanthropy

In 1978, while enjoying a storybook life and career together, Aaron and Abby Schroeder sold their successful music-business holdings, although Abby retained and continued to operate A. Schroeder International, representing Aaron's formidable song catalog together with Barry White's catalog of hits and a couple of wonderful musical theater writers. With their five-year-old daughter Rachel, they moved to the scenic Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts. They wanted to live a more relaxed life and give their child a chance to develop in an atmosphere of a warm, arts-minded community where she could gain a broad understanding of the world away from a city structure.

There, Aaron and Abby set about achieving a shared dream of opening a first-class museum – named The American Museum of Antique Toys (AMAT) – in which to display a toy collection they developed specifically to be shown to the public, with the addition of loaned pieces from their own beloved collection of banks and toys...and so the hunt began to find a proper home for the museum.

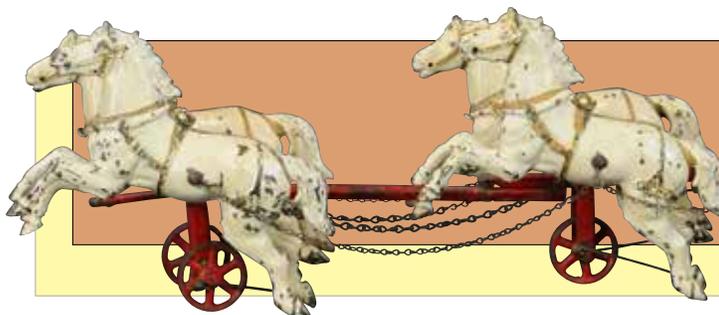
Abby's eye was immediately drawn to a stately bank building located at the center of the historic and arts-centric resort town of Great Barrington. Aaron concurred that it was an excellent choice, but as far as they knew, it was not for sale. That didn't stop them from walking into the bank and asking to see the manager. Noting that the building had no drive-up window, Abby asked the manager, "Would you have any interest in selling the building to us?" He looked at the Schroeders with a shocked expression and replied, "How very strange – yes, we're actually going to sell this building because we need to add a drive-up window and don't have the room for one here."





After purchasing the building, Abby and Aaron hired an architect to design the museum's interior, and Abby, as contractor, called in local experts and got down to the business of restoring the 1860 building and retrofitting it for climate control and security. In the meantime, Aaron returned to his first love, songwriting. They built a studio/guesthouse on their property so Aaron could invite other writers to share their wonderfully peaceful rural setting in which to create new material. At the same time, while renovating their 18th-century Great Barrington home, Abby commuted to New York to continue her work as a music publisher and crusader for songwriters' rights.

As plans for the museum began to solidify, Aaron and Abby started laying out their collection so it could be cataloged. That's when the unimaginable happened. Little by little, Aaron began to show signs of forgetfulness and was having difficulty writing, thinking and talking. Consulting with top medical experts, the Schroeders realized he would not be able to participate in life's normal activities, a cruel irony for someone as artistic and immensely gifted as Aaron.



For a few years, the couple contacted a number of small museums throughout the country and loaned out portions of the AMAT collection. Abby's time was now focused entirely on Aaron's welfare and the up-bringing of their daughter Rachel. However, her mind was spinning a new plan for AMAT. She developed the idea of building a barn on their own acreage that would look like a normal barn from the outside but the interior of which would showcase the AMAT toys and their own extensive collection. The joint display would be made available to groups who shared their interests. In the mid 1990s, their dream was realized, and Abby, with help from her employees, created the museum setting that she and Aaron had long planned.



In 2004, it became apparent that Aaron was in need of 24/7 care, which had become daunting at home. A close friend and theatrical luminary, Harvey Sabinson, advised Abby to explore The Actors Fund Home, an assisted-living and nursing home facility in Englewood, New Jersey. Sabinson explained that the home's name was deceiving, in that it was actually available to all professional members of the entire entertainment community. Located in a very residential country-like setting on six acres, the home offers all of the comforts and medical needs that Aaron required. Abby moved into the apartment they owned in nearby Ft. Lee so she could visit Aaron regularly. She also immediately hired three independent caregivers, each staying in his room, working 8-hour shifts, to ensure that Aaron received continuous care and attention. Aaron remained at The Actors Fund facility, comfortably and contentedly in the company of other industry folks, until his passing at age 83, on December 2, 2009.



The devastating loss of her husband did not end Abby's connection to The Actors Fund. Not by any means. During her visits to the Englewood home while Aaron resided there, Abby had witnessed unfailing compassion and kindness to all residents, whether they were able to contribute financially toward their own care or not. She made up her mind that, for the rest of her life, she would use her business skills and connections to benefit The Actors Fund. She became a trustee and serves as a vice chairman of the board and on several of the organization's committees, including executive, finance and development. She has produced Actors Fund galas honoring business titans and major stars, like Annette Benning, Al Pacino and Harry Belafonte. Donning a hard hat, Abby immersed herself in the most recent renovation of the home, overseeing construction and offering practical and useful suggestions that generally enhanced the project.



In yet another act of gratitude, Abby generously gifted The Actors Fund with some of the toys that had been displayed at the Schroeders' American Museum of Antique Toys. That collection will be auctioned by Bertoia's in fall 2021 to benefit The Actors Fund, during the same week that Part II of the Schroeders' private collection is auctioned.

