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Country Career Woman

(By Doris Fitzgerald in the Family Herald and Star)

Mrs. T. A. Paterson of Agincourt was not thinking about the future when she bought the old glass cake stand, and the lilacs. Nevertheless those spur-of-the-moment purchases were the unwitting means of starting her upon two highly successful ventures. Today Mrs. Paterson is renowned for both early Canadian furniture, and magnificent lilacs. Though she has never advertised, nor put a sign upon her house, thousands of Canadian and American collectors visit her each year, and, before gas rationing, more than 50 flower lovers came in one day to see the lilacs in bloom. Fortunately, this slight, keen-minded, ex-farm woman likes people, and savours the many interesting contacts and friendships made in this way. Fortunately too, she has the full co-operation of her husband. Mr. Paterson used to tease his wife about her "junk." Now he willingly helps her to hunt antiques, though his pet concern is still the garden.

This story really begins in 1916 when it became evident to the Patersons that their young son was going to make radio, rather than the land, his life work. They decided to sell their farm and move to the nearby village of Agincourt, Ontario. Retirement was not, (and still is not) a word that either pleased, or suited this active middle aged pair, so there is no knowing to what use they would have put their new found leisure, if it had not been for the cake stand and the lilacs.

The T.A.'s (as they are known to a host of neighbors and friends) were enthusiastic gardeners. A 15 mile drive to the city did not deter them from being frequent exhibitors (and medal winners) at Toronto flower shows. At one of these meetings, two fellow members of the Toronto Horticultural Society mentioned that they were planning to import some lilac bushes from France, and asked Mrs. Paterson if she would like to include an order. She promptly put her name down for 18, thinking how nice they would be for the new garden.

Shortly afterwards she attended an outdoor country auction—one of those sales held during slack seasons, where farmers and villagers from miles around, gather to combine business, and the pleasure of chatting with old acquaintances. When Mrs. T. A. arrived, the auctioneer was disposing of a table full of glass and china. His assistant held up a pressed glass cake-stand of rather quaint design. Someone made a tentative bid of five cents, Mrs. Paterson quickly uped it to 10, and almost before she had recovered her breath, the cake stand was being passed to her over the heads of the crowd. She still remembers the excitement of that moment, and her pride in that first purchase.

The lilac bushes were delivered and planted, but it was to be three years before their first blooming, and in the meantime Mrs. T. A. was becoming an auction addict. Here and there, for modest sums, she was picking up a fall-leaf table, a Boston rocker, an old print, or perhaps a bit of china, a hand-hooked rug, or an old chest that had taken her fancy. She had grown up among such things and they were at home among her own furnishings and heirlooms in the comfortable new house.

However, her little buying sprees happened to coincide with the revival of interest in Canadian crafts. In Ontario, at least these had become practically extinct due to the overwhelming competition of inexpensive factory-made goods. Machine-made furniture was standardized, and passing through a particularly ugly phase. Discerning buyers with slim purses but a keen appreciation of the handmade and individual, began to look eagerly for the simple, well-proportioned pine and maple pieces which were a commonplace in the homes of the pioneers. In southern Ontario many such beds, tables, chest of drawers, chairs and corner cupboards, made more than a century ago by amateur craftsmen, and village cabinet makers, have come to light at country auctions. Although they have served generations of owners they are still sturdy and desirable to lovers of the old-fashioned.

One or two city people happened to hear about Mrs. Paterson's hobby, and came to see her acquired and inherited antiques. Soon they were followed by their friends, and their friends' friends, all begging her to sell this or that, or to be on the lookout for their special needs. It seemed that willfully, she was to become a business woman, and she accepted the challenge.

In order to meet the demands of a steadily increasing number of collectors, Mrs. T. A. and her husband have attended hundreds of country sales. Sometimes they have been rewarded by real finds, sometimes by disappointment, and nearly always they have had to do a lot of tedious standing about until the auctioneer reached the particular lot in which Mrs. Paterson was interested. They seldom go home empty handed, and quiet, humorous Mr. T. A. has become adept at packing an amazing assortment into their still trusty 1923 Reo touring car.

Long experience has taught Mrs. Paterson to put comfort before fashion. On cold days her brown is her turn to smile a little later, when they have retired shivering, and left her in command of the field. She neither asks, nor expects favors, and auctioneers always welcome her presence at a sale. Bidding becomes brisker because competitors feel that when Mrs. T. A. wants something, it must be worth having.
In 1934 Mrs. Paterson heard of a

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LOCUST HILL	3.51 P.M.	7.51 P.M.
Arr. TORONTO	5.05 P.M.	9.05 P.M.
		8.00 P.M.
		8.10 P.M.
		8.18 P.M.
		8.21 P.M.
		9.35 P.M.

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century old log house, some three miles away, which was going to be torn down and sawn up for lumber. She promptly bought it, and had it re-erected on the verge of their two acre bush, which fronts on an old Indian trail. In this authentic setting she is able to display her choicest bits of Canadiana. (A number of these have also appeared in parka, shawl muffler, and black felt boots cause open amusement among other women present, but it exhibits which she was invited to arrange at the Canadian National Exhibition). The five roomed log house now completely furnished, presents a colorful record of the pioneer way of life. Being justly proud of this achievement, Mrs. T. A. was amused to overhear one visitor say to another "now if some people had that, they could make a nice place of it."

The rest of her collection, which is constantly being augmented and depleted by buying and selling, crowds the neat green barn and has overflowed into the house. A few things are not for sale. She would not part, for instance, with the handsome, curly maple corner cupboard in the front room. It was made from local wood, and belonged

to her grandfather "Sawmill Willie," son of David Thomson, the first settler in the district. There are, however, quaint pine cupboards, stripped of paint and varnish in the currently approved manner, spindle and poster beds, arrow back chairs, drop leaf tables, Boston rockers, chest of drawers, Seth Thomas clocks, carriage lights, oil lamps, and a conglomeration of pictures and bric-a-brac which will stir nostalgic memories in the not-so-young.

The porcelain statue with the gilt-lettered "Shakespeare" on the base has no sale value, but is worth its weight in laughter. At some time or other, the bard lost hand and head. Rummaging in a box of odds and ends Mrs. T. A. found a slightly oversize hand and cemented it in place. The best she could do for a head was that of a rather undersized black baby doll. Being a very fun-loving woman, she likes to watch the faces of her visitors when they come upon this "grotesque."

Also rather startling to the uninitiated who are browsing about is the insistent feminine voice calling "goodbye, goodbye." This will be Polly, the 42 year old green Mexi-

can parrot, who has been a petted member of the household for the past 12 years, and is given to speaking her mind.

Mrs. T. A.'s mail may keep the post office guessing sometimes, but she has safely received letters addressed, variously, to 'Mrs. Paterson, the Lady Antique Dealer, Agincourt, the Lady Antique Dealer, Agincourt, and Mrs. Paterson, the lilac Queen.' Which brings us back to the lilacs.

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