TREASURES & HEIRLOOMS

By Rob Reid

A warm fall to all.

This is a great little box that at first look one would think would be used for trinkets or jewellery. It has very fine inlay designs using several different woods to give sharp contrast and a very classical look. Often mahogany, boxwood and fruitwoods are used and in some cases the veneers are stained when the maker wants colours that are not naturally available. Colouring and staining are also less expensive than using some of the more exotic fruitwoods.

The surprise with this box is when you open it to discover that it is much more. Inside is a little painted bird that is silhouetted by painted flowers and leaves on the underside of the lid and a little trapdoor that has two Scottie dogs created with inlay – they are even wearing collars! These elements are all tied together by mechanical workings made of wood.

The only brass or metal used was for the hinges. Each time the box is closed the trapdoor opens and the bird lowers its head so when one opens the box again, the bird has a cigarette firmly clenched in its beak. Unusual and fun cigarette boxes have been popular for the last century and can be found in as many different shapes, sizes and materials as one can imagine.

This box is actually marked "Made in Occupied Japan". This means that it was made between 1945 and 1952. During this time after World War II, the Allied Forces assumed control of Japan and as part of the rebuilding of the Japanese economy businesses were allowed to export their products to other countries.

However one of the conditions was that 50 per cent of all exports must be marked either "Occupied Japan" or "Made in Occupied Japan". The rest of the exports were simply marked "Japan" or "Made in Japan". The type and range of items made was almost endless and can be found in almost every china cabinet or closet in the country.

As a collectible this category has been fairly popular. Many items such as small figurines, salt and pepper shakers and dishes can be found for less than $10. However because this piece has a mechanical movement, nice inlay, is marked Occupied Japan and is a smoking collectible, it has appeal to many different collectors and would sell easily for between $75 and $100.

I welcome inquiries about any objects and look forward to seeing and perhaps writing about them. Please forward a photo and a description to me through Stouffville Free Press, drop them off at Reid's Antiques, 6397 Main St. Stouffville during regular business hours or via my web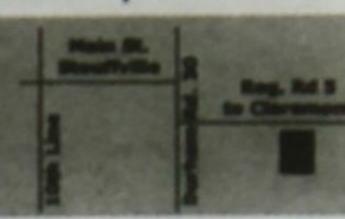site at www. reidsantiques.com.