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Attic Treasures... by Rob Reid

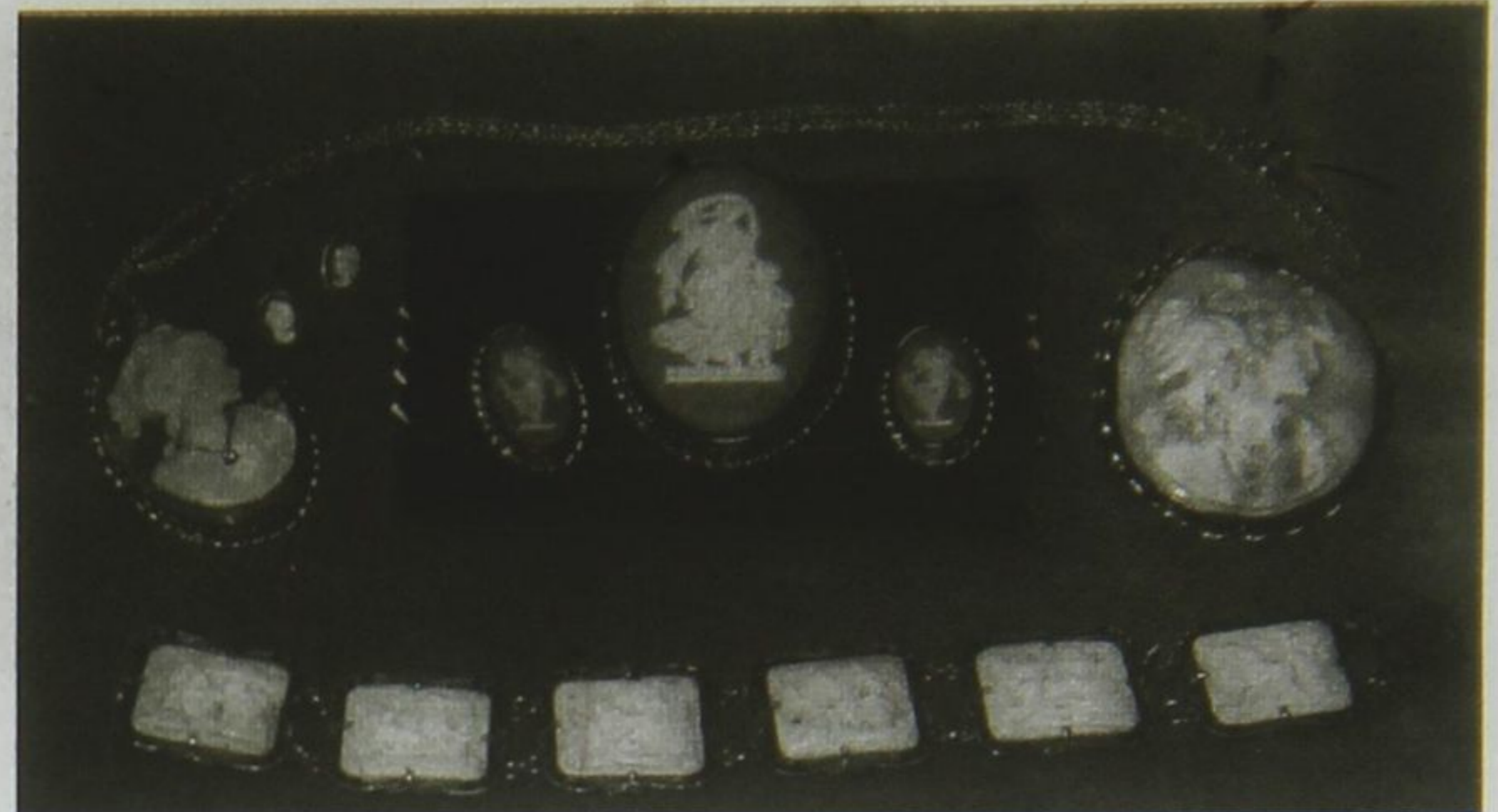
Making a cameo appearance

Here we have a lovely grouping of figural Cameo jewellery, where on each a portrait or scene is carved in relief on a contrasting colour background. Cameos made with shell were first carved in Italy starting around 1805. Other materials such as gemstones, stone, lava, coral and manmade materials such as ceramics, glass and plastics have also been used to create cameos.

During the Victorian Era (1837-1901) cameos became very popular and as shell was inexpensive, abundant and easily carved it was the material most often used. Motifs were greatly influenced by classical and mythological figures and stories. The most popular motif was and remains the portrait of a woman. Carvers could fashion the "ideal women" easily and quickly, and these examples sold well as tourist pieces.

In the accompanying photo the cameo with chain is made in a typical Victorian style with a gold and diamond necklace adorning the figure's throat; however this piece is only about 15 years old. The set in the centre is made by Wedgewood in Jasperware (ceramic) and mounted in sterling silver. The large cameo depicts a woman and her child, while the earrings show a single female figure. All are dressed in Roman style clothing. This set dates from about 1960.

The large cameo on the right is carved from a rather irregular piece of shell. This has allowed the artisan a great depth of field for his carving. Typically the women are young and beautiful while the woman depicted here is of a mature



age which could indicate that it was a commissioned piece, rather than a generic tourist example. The long Roman nose and laurels and roses adorning her, as well as the hair style, also suggest that it could date from the mid-Victorian period, and while well carved the simple silver setting indicates this was not a piece of high style jewellery, but more suited to a woman of the new middle class.

The bracelet across the bottom has six panels. Each panel is set in silver with marquisite with varying scenes of Roman women charioteers, several illustrating mythical beasts pulling the chariots. The shell used for the carving is of a single colour and therefore does not give the strong contrast evident in the other more typical cameos. The bracelet is marked 800 silver which means that this was made on the European continent around the turn of the century. Dating cameos with accuracy is a skill that can take years to perfect.

The more cameos one examines the better one can become in determining whether it is machine-made, made in one piece or assembled from different materials and glued together. The frame cannot be reliably used to date a piece, as these are frequently changed or modified to update the jewellery.

These pieces range in value from \$50 to about \$500. But no matter what they are worth, cameos are an art form that many people have appreciated and collected for years.

Rob Reid is the owner of Reid's Antiques and Consignment on Stouffville's Main Street. He welcomes inquiries about any objects that you may have and looks forward to seeing and perhaps writing about them. Please forward a photo and a description through *Whitchurch-Stouffville this Month*, or drop them off at Reid's Antiques, 6397 Main St. Stouffville, during regular business hours or via email at robert.reid5@sympatico.ca.



FRAMED— Pam Wright (left) recently moved Stouffville Picture Framing to 6146 Main Street. For her grand re-opening, she held a draw for this famous Norman Rockwell print, "Girl in a Mirror". Local teacher Nancy Clark was the lucky winner!

Bring your old coins for unique Parkview fundraiser

Eric Lismanis, one of Ontario's top coin experts, will be available to appraise old coins at Parkview Village (12184 Ninth Line South) in Stouffville on Saturday Nov. 20 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Mr. Lismanis has a passion for numismatics and enjoys the excitement of looking for treasure among old coins. He has volunteered to share his expertise as a fundraising activity for the Parkview Home Building Fund.

People will be asked to contribute \$5 for an appraisal of up to 10 coins; \$10 for larger amounts. An additional option will be to donate coins to be sold for the Building Fund. Charitable receipts can be issued to the donor for the sale price.