

Down on the Farm

By Doug Shilson

It was one of those warm summer days. The landscape was dotted with farmhouses. Maude Carlson was 82 years old and living on a pension of \$500 a month. Her neighbor Beulah fared better; she was only 79 and received \$575 each month. These two old ladies spent many pleasant afternoons rocking back and forth on the porch talking about the days of long ago. Both were living on the small acreage where they had lived for over 70 years somewhere next to a dusty, dirty road in the Midwest.

A middle-aged Fuller brush salesman was driving by and decided to stop and see what kind of sales he could make. He noticed that this particular farmhouse was a wee bit worn down. He started to look around and noticed all the old furniture and the super old fans that were still running after all these years (no air conditioning). After trying to sell Maude and Beulah something they didn't need or want, the talk turned to antiques. To Maude and Beulah antiques were just old worn-out, dusty things they had always known, but that usually found their way to the public landfill. It amazed them both that the current demand for antiques had raised prices to many times their original cost.

The sly Fuller brush salesman finally got around to asking the old ladies about their old bottles and fruit jars. Maude, thinking about that new dress she saw in town a couple of weeks ago, was first to speak. "I just might have some old things around, but you'll have to give me a week or so to look 'em up." She remembered

that several years ago there was old "junk" in her backyard tornado shelter.

The last big tornado that hit the area was back in 1938 or '39. The shelter was filled up with all the glass and junk just in case they needed to preserve more food. Beulah mentioned to the "salesman" that maybe she would look, too.

The man departed and said he

She had to be careful as the old steps didn't look that good, but seemed still strong after all these years (her late husband, Stan was a master at everything and made things to last). She swept all the cobwebs and spiders away. Several mice had made the area their home and now an intruder had come to upset their living conditions. They scattered to get out of the way to avoid getting stepped on. Maude just looked at them and smiled. Many years ago she remembered that she would have been running and screaming at seeing them, but Stan would save the day. She used the broom as a staff and descended into the cool darkness of the "cave."

She looked at the first row of bowed shelves. Maude realized the bowing in the middle of the shelving was caused by the weight of the glass jars. Remembering what the salesman had told her she carefully looked over the jars looking for lettering or what he called "embossing." "Letters that stand out from the glass" she told herself. At

first she thought they all looked alike. They all had some sort of "writing" on them. "Let's see, he said I should look for the colored ones, like browns and blues, but it's so dark they all look brown. There they are, those 'brown jars' that the man mentioned." In the corner there were some of the jars her mother had given her as a child and later when she first started housekeeping she remembered that using the old red wax was so messy. There were some of the old stoneware jars that she remembered her mother storing cooked meat in. The jars were "terrible at displaying at the County fair. The food just didn't look right in them. They never did win any ribbons!" As she looked over the other "bowed" wooden shelves, she discovered more clear jars. Those



Down on the Farm
Picture supplied by Dar Furda

would return in a week or so. After discussing the day's events, both decided to call it a day and would look at what they could find. Beulah said good-bye and went back over a well-worn path over several acres to her farmhouse. As she was walking, she too dreamed of the nice new "ice box" she saw at the new department store in town.

Maude went through the much-mended screen door and put on some old clothes. She put on her old dilapidated straw hat and tied it down over her long, flowing silver hair. Then she tucked her hair neatly under her hat and seized a broom and headed for the "cave" as she called it. As she pried open the creaking doors, she could smell the cold damp earth and the aroma of old junk and wood!

jars were the ones her mama won her prize money with. The judges could see the quality pickles, peaches and rhubarb inside. Delicious pies were made from the peaches and rhubarb from those jars. Maude thought, "Let's see, I bet she won over 50 ribbons during those early years. She was a very good cook."

Maude selected some of the browns and a couple of the blues. She brought them up the short climb out of the "cave." After she placed them on the old wooden kitchen table she went out to her rocker on the porch and sat down to think and rest her old bones. She thought of that new dress she saw and maybe one of those new type fans. Maybe they could be bought with the money she might get from that gentleman.

Meanwhile Beulah was busy in her attic as she didn't have a "root cellar" or "cave" like Maude, as it had caved in long ago. Her house was a large old three-story farmhouse. All the rooms were small with a narrow stairway leading up to the second floor. There was an even narrower staircase up to the attic. It was very hot and very stuffy as no one had been up there in many a year, except those bats!

Somewhere there was a small hole where they came in. Once in, they made their home. All they needed was the owner of the house to come up there and disturb their "hanging" around. Beulah was a tough old bird, though. Nothing was going to stop her in her quest for her riches as she kept thinking of that nice new icebox she wanted. One swat and all of the bats decided this was one person not to deal with, and out they went. The attic was filled with all the old stuff that one would see in an old farmhouse, but something was missing. It was too neat looking. Now she remembered! She told her husband Wesley to get rid of those ugly old jars and haul them out and fill that hole in the ground where that old outhouse once stood. She knew that now there was a huge oak tree

next to that area. "Wes" must have done a good job here in this attic, as the boxes were neatly stacked.

"But wait a minute, there was a small room off to the side of the attic where Maude and I played house as children," she remembered. She had to remove several wicker doll buggies and an old funnel-looking phonograph with hundreds of Edison rolls. But being on a mission, and wanting that icebox, she kept plowing through things. Beulah had to bend over as she entered the small room as it was in a corner. "Funny, it was so big, back then, now it is so small," she realized. There were several rounded-top trunks in this small room. She could hear funny little sounds coming from one of them. As she opened the trunk lid, wow, to her surprise there was a family of three baby raccoons inside. They had eaten a hole in one of the corners and had made a home. Well, she decided to put them in a box and set them aside, knowing that their mother would be back. She didn't want to tangle with a mother raccoon with her babies. "Besides, they will be gone in a few months anyway," she reasoned.

Next to the nest were two wooden boxes with colored jars and some filled with something red. The note on the side of each read, "Dirt from 5-2-1861, site of the battle of Manassas Junction." She thought, "What do I need with two jars filled with dirt from some other state? Oh well, I better keep everything as is for the gentleman so he can do whatever he pleases with it." As she started to close the cover, she noticed several "square-shaped" bottles in this rather large wooden box. She picked up some of the still-full bottles and looked at the intact labels that read "St. Drakes Plantation Bitters." Well, they certainly looked interesting but she didn't think much about the bottles and put them aside. After all it sounded like he wanted only fruit jars anyway. With her meager pension she could use the money, so she brought the jars downstairs.

The next day Beulah took her two jars filled with dirt and walked down the well-worn walkway to Maude's house. Beulah and Maude sipped their morning coffee wondering if their "finds" were actually worth anything. They figured that the six jars sitting on the old kitchen table must be worth something. Hopefully, the two of them could end up buying something at the new department store in town.

"Do you really think they are worth anything," Beulah asked. Maude looking like she knew a little, says, "Well, they might be worth a couple of bucks."

"A couple of dollars, I hope I get enough to buy at least a new straw hat!" Beulah grunted. She found herself thinking that the nice new icebox was now down the drain.

A few weeks later, as they were sitting nursing their morning coffee at Maude's house, the traveling salesman came up to the screen porch door. He looked in and asked, "Have you had time to look for the jars, ladies?" Just as he said that he noticed the jars sitting on the table. He opened the screen door and walked in. Maude was a stickler for manners, and walking into one's home uninvited was too much.

"You weren't invited to enter, sir, but you're invited to leave," she quickly said. Maude was not very big, but her voice carried enough weight to tell this uninvited guest to watch out for this lady, she means business. The man tried to excuse himself, but Maude followed his retreating steps and abruptly shut the door.

Beulah was sick, because she had great need for the few bucks that she would have received for the dirt-filled jars. As far as she knew the jars were what he wanted. Beulah kept grumbling about her loss, but Maude assured her that anybody that comes into her home uninvited was not a nice person. Maude figured further that maybe, just maybe, this city slicker had no good intentions anyway. After a few minutes, the man

was back at the door, but this time he knocked and apologized to the ladies. Well, Maude, being a good person, relented and let the man back in. He walked over to the table and picked up each jar and examined them. He sat each jar down with disgust.

After several minutes of looking he said, "Is this all you found?" Maude looking a little irritated shot back, "Are they any good?" He replied, "They ain't much, but I will give you two dollars each." Beulah piped up and asked, "How about the dirt inside my jars?"

"Nah, as soon as I get them home I'll dump the dirt and clean off the labels. He reached for his billfold and put the twelve dollars on the table. Maude didn't live 82 years for nothing and didn't feel quite right about this deal. She knew something about the human race. She thought, "Eight dollars for me and four dollars for my friend Beulah?" Something in his manner bothered her. The salesman had already irritated her so she said, "Beulah, you can do as you please, but I think I'll sit on my decision for awhile." Then she added "Sir, if you come back in a couple of weeks or so, I'll let you know my decision then." As the money was still on the table, the man grabbed the eight dollars and left four for Beulah. He was starting to pick up the jars filled with dirt when Beulah called out, "Hold on there, mister, I think I will tell you in a couple of weeks, too." The man left in a huff and looked like a rejected salesman defeated by two old ladies.

The ladies went outside and sat in their rocking chairs, as the "rejected" salesman drove off in his dusty car. Beulah finally spoke out and said, "Now you've done it."

"You could have sold your two jars, but there was something about this man that didn't look right," Maude replied. Both were very quiet for some time, contemplating on what they could have had.

Just then, several beautiful bright red Cardinals landed on one of the many bird feeders next to the porch.

"Cardinal," blurted Maude, "Cardinal Antiques. The last time I was in town there was this new kind of antique store that opened up next to the bank." Both Maud and Beulah started to rock a little faster and Maude got an idea. She remembered a sign in front of that antique store that said they buy and sell antiques. Maude said, "Umm, I wonder if they buy old jars?" After several hours of thinking and rocking, Maude got up out of her rocker and found the well-used one-eighth inch thick telephone directory and made a call to that store. Maude was talking and Beulah stopped rocking while she stretched her neck trying to hear the conversation. Maude explained to the person on the other end that there had been a "slick feller" here twice, trying to buy the jars that she and her friend had. She asked the person at the store if the store might be interested in some old jars. Beulah heard Maude warn the person on the line "not to fool around with us older folks, as we know something about antiques." Just then she turned to Beulah and winked as she had no clue as to just what was an antique. Maude hung up and went back to rocking. Beulah started to ask many questions, but all Maude would say is "Just you wait and see."

Several days went by and a new car drove up and out came a well-dressed lady who looked to be around fifty or so. She walked up to the porch where Maude and Beulah were sitting in their rocking chairs and introduced herself. "Hi, my name is Winnie. I was contacted by the lady that owns the Cardinal Antiques store, to come out this way to look at your jars, and give you an appraisal." Maude gave a quick look to Beulah and looked back at the lady. With Maude's old gut-feel of trusting, she decided she could immediately trust her. Maude, Beulah and Winnie walked through the old repaired screen door and over to the table where the six jars were.

"Well," ventures Maude, "Are they worth anything?" Winnie looked speechless! As she examined the jars, she kept shaking her head. She took

out some paper and started to write down the prices. "Well, this jar is worth \$150 and if you had the glass lid for it then it would be worth another \$100." Maude walked over to her old porcelain kitchen sink and reached into the black iron kettle filled with soapy water that was holding the rest of the "glass tops" and the funny looking gizmos that hold the glass tops down. She brought one that fit on top of one of the jars. "There," said Maude, "The others are being washed -- you'll have to get them yourself."

Winnie could not believe her eyes. The next jar had a face on the side that said "LAFAYETTE." It was worth at least \$400, and the two aquas (with the same face, but pint size) were worth at least \$650 each. The two with the dirt inside turned out to be Civil War jars embossed A. STONE & CO. PHILDA with huge iron pontils on the bottom and complete with wax-filled seals. They were quoted as being worth \$500 each! Maude could not believe what she was hearing and Beulah just stood there, reached for her hand fan and then started to fan her face very fast. Both of the old ladies started to cry with disbelief. Winnie thought that she had caused them to cry, but could not understand the immediate cause. She thought that maybe her prices were too low. However, Winnie felt that her prices were fair and accurate. Winnie even felt that if the two ladies wanted her to call in another appraiser to verify her prices she would be willing to do it.

After calming down, the three of them sat down and over several cups of coffee and pieces of freshly baked apple pie, a warm friendship developed. Winnie asked if there were any more jars around. "Well," says Maude, "If you don't mind a little mice and a lot of dust, then come with me." As Maude, Winnie and Beulah made their way to the old root cellar, both of the old ladies were grinning from ear to ear. They now realized that their dreams could come true. Maude warned Winnie to be

careful because the steps were very old and some were rotted out. Maude opened her cellar wooden doors and gave Winnie a flashlight. As Winnie slowly stepped down one step at a time, she shined the light on the first row of jars and bottles. She could not believe what she was seeing. Her glasses were fogging up due to the dampness of the "cave" but gave up wiping them. They ended up down on her nose. Her heart was pumping fast. After taking a deep breath she settled down and still smelling the decayed wood, walked out into the daylight shaking her head. "Ladies, you have a gold mine right here a few feet from your back door. How would you like to have a sale of your jars and bottles? I will get my partner out here to get the sale set up and all you have to do is sit on your porch and hold onto the money that will be coming to your door!"

Maude went back to make some cold lemonade as Beulah and Winnie went over to Beulah's house. Winding their way over the well-worn path, Winnie noticed several deep depressions in the yard. She asked Beulah, "Is this where the old outhouse stood?" Actually Beulah mentioned that the outhouse had several locations, and when they got "filled up," they just dug another deep hole and moved the outhouse over to the new location. "But not to worry," Beulah reassured her, "Wes filled the holes up with the junk he found around the house. So you won't get hurt!" Winnie mentioned she knew several bottle diggers that would love to "do their thing" and make your area safer to walk around on. Beulah told her that it would be no problem. Beulah figured that all the junk in the holes was probably broken anyway. Besides, she wanted to show Winnie "her stuff" so that maybe she could sell some of her things along with Maude.

They walked into the kitchen and up to the second floor past several small rooms that had neatly stacked wooden and cardboard boxes filled

with her treasures. They hadn't gotten to the attic yet. Winnie had to stop and look. Long forgotten boxes with the last date written across them, some of the dates were 1890, 1900, 1920 and on. Winnie started to examine some of them and noticed more bottles and some jars that Wes forgot to throw away. As they made their way up the narrow steps into the attic, a bat flew close to Winnie's head. Beulah called out, "Don't worry, they're just trying to get out of your way." Again Winnie just stood there looking and shaking her head. In the corner there were several wooden cases that were stamped in black, ST. DRAKES X PLANTATION BITTERS. Winnie noticed the picture of the bottle was on the cases, as well. As Winnie opened one of the boxes that were still full of straw, she noticed a strong odor of wine. She took one of the bottles out and looked at the dusty label and then looked at the color of the glass. It was "yellow green," she thought. In all, there were six of these cases that held 12 bottles each. In the rounded-top trunk there were several more empty ones and some with partial contents. Beulah said, "I suspect Wes had a little sip in his day. He was such a hard worker, but he was happy. God rest his soul." Winnie kept looking and found more wooden boxes that held deep-color blue jars, with names embossed on them, that she had heard of before.

"I think I can make your day," Winnie said, "With your friend Maude and all this up here, I think we can have one heck of a yard sale. This sale would be one of which no one has seen in these parts for a long time."

Sitting down on Maude's porch sipping a cold glass of lemonade, Winnie made plans with the two ladies and told them that she would get back to them in a couple of weeks. She finished with "Would that be all right with the two of you?" Maude piped up with "After 82 years, I think that we can wait a few more weeks, right Beulah?" Maude sent a wink in

Beulah's direction.

A plan was set. This was going to be a sale of sales, and this was how it was going to work. A call to the president of the area's largest bottle club was made. Many calls to other members were in motion. The word spread fast of this super find of old bottles and jars. Next thought was where and when? The president was also the editor and passed the word by the club's monthly newsletter. The secret was known only to Winnie. She would get back to the club's editor so he could let everyone know the details. The word spread like wild fire.

The editor was being called many times day and night. Calls were coming in from all points of the U.S. Only the town's name and a predetermined time were left out. They were all to meet on an early Saturday morning. By the time the editor got to the area, there were hundreds of cars and twice as many collectors. It was said that the "slick" salesman was in the crowd somewhere. Winnie and the editor had cards made up with each collector's name on them; then they were dropped into a clear, plastic container.

The first name drawn was a lady from Mound, Minnesota. Next was a person from South Dakota. Ron, who lived on a farm, collected bottles for many years. His neighbor Kim was also the lucky person to be selected. Next was a collector from Minnesota named Steve. He just so happened to know Ron (they were partners in digging early outhouses). Rounding out the top 10 was a collector from Iowa. Mike seemed to know a lot about bottles and jars. The drawing went on for over an hour until a little over 200 were handed out. The lucky one at the end was from a small town in Nebraska. The first 15 representing six states were loaded into a large van. Anticipation was the talk of just who were these ol' ladies and how come no one had heard of them before?

Winnie was conducting the sales

at the end of the long driveway, surrounded by giant oaks. She anticipated the amount of collectors and since she was married to the local sheriff, asked for help. He made sure everyone was well behaved. The first van pulled up and the numbers that were handed out were the first in line. The lady from Mound, Minnesota, was just overwhelmed. So many jars, so many bottles. Where do I start?

It was a beautiful sunny morning, with the fresh smell of the country side. The sun was shining through all those beautiful colored jars. All those tall, amber bottles with the "ladies leg" necks were also stunning to see. The Mound lady and South Dakota Ron were trying to figure out where to go first. The rest of the people were talking and planning their strategy. Each one had an idea where they would go first. It was like being little kids in a candy store. So close, but so far.

A decision had to be made the day before by Winnie and her partner, anticipating the huge crowd, many of whom were coming from far away, that **ONLY 10 ITEMS PER PERSON** would be allowed (a box full counted as one item). At the next day sale, folks could pick as many as they wanted. This would be fair to all. Each person had 15 minutes to make a selection. These were the ground rules with no exceptions!

Approximately 500 jars and over 300 bottles were displayed on tables and on blankets on the ground. There were several hundred stoneware jugs and crocks plus numerous antiques of all kinds. It seems Maude and Beulah had forgotten all the "junk" in the cold dark basements when Winnie went to find more items for sale. More jars and plenty of stoneware from a long forgotten local clay works! Many were marked on the bottom and the sides in cobalt coloring. It was time for the first one in line to get her time to pick. The lady from Mound, Minnesota, picked up several cobalt fruit jars, two ambers, and a very large gallon size aqua jar with an

"iron" pontil. To round out her items was a case of St. Drakes Plantation Bitters. Ron from South Dakota first picked the only known fruit jar from the Dakota Territory in an unusual "olive green" color. It was from a small glass works close to where Ron lived. He also picked two cobalt jars, an olive green, cone-shaped Bryant's Bitters, a case of St. Drakes Plantation Bitters and a rare Dakota Territory Jug in both a small and large size. Next in were Kim and Steve. Both went for their specialty. Kim grabbed the required amount of Dakota stoneware and two beautiful yellow jars. One of those jars had "the" dirt inside. Steve went for color. He picked cobalt, olive green, deep aqua fruit jars and a rare Red Wing Minnesota stoneware with a fancy design of a bird and the whiskey place of business. The lettering was done in cobalt color. He also rounded out his selection with a case of St. Drakes Plantation Bitters.

On and on it went, van after van, they came. All Maude and Beulah did was smile and rock in their chairs wondering if all of this was going to end. They had several large punch bowls full of their special lemonade for all the collectors to drink. One of the collectors had mentioned to the editor that maybe, just maybe, the ol' ladies flavored the punch with something a little stronger than water and sugar! Toward the end of the two days of the biggest sale ever to hit this small town, Winnie and the ladies sat down and discussed the adventure of what just took place.

Oh! By the way,

the last person in line on the second day was the "slick" salesman. It seems he purchased the only remaining item. It was an old stand-up radio, and as he carried the radio past the ladies sitting on the porch, three very small baby raccoons fell out. The mother raccoon was in close pursuit. Maude, Beulah and Winnie were laughing as the "slick" salesman dropped the radio and got into his car and was never seen again! In the area where the outhouse stood on Beulah's land, three men were digging up hundreds of jars and bottles. Ron, Steve and Kim were all smiles.....Remember, it could be true!!!

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