



Advancing age and the threat of West Nile virus curtailed our digging this past summer. Auctions (even on-site farm sales where pleasant surprises might be found) seemed to be plagued by amateurs who overbid on anything that struck their fancies.

Amazingly, yard sales provided more quality at reasonable prices than we could believe. Street sales with block after block of plastic junk attracted crowds of people who made sellers happy. Many antiques seemed to go unnoticed.

Among our finds were several books: Dr. Kellogg's Colon Hygiene and a 1908 copy of Viavi Hygiene. The Viavi system bears further research. I have never seen any of their products or bottles, but they had many offices throughout the world including a dozen in Canada.

Quality bottles were in short supply. Their dearth was more than balanced by stoneware that seemed to appear with regularity. Our list of finds includes:

A Gurd's stone ginger beer. A Tennant stone beer bottle (Scottish). Three probable pieces of McCoy Sanitary Stoneware and two other pieces, which this story is really about.

The Long

The first day of summer was a beautiful Saturday. Both buyers and sellers would have to agree that it was a day made for yard sales. After cruising eastward and breaking for lunch, we headed west from our house. At about one P.M. we found a huge street sale. We parked at the first available spot and proceeded to walk along, scanning the sales as we went. Most didn't require a second look.

After about three long blocks Marie nudged me, pointed and ran across the street. When I caught up to her, she was standing over a five gallon jug that had been painted red from top to bottom. Under the peeling paint, just below the neck we could make out two letters: zi. I managed to say, "It's a Lazier" before she told me to be quiet.

When the woman in charge came out of her house we inquired about the price. Twenty dollars was the firm demand. We pointed out the lip chip and the fact that it was painted a hideous shade

of red. She then hauled out a common three-gallon jug from under a table. If we bought both of them the price was \$15. The handle had obviously been glued back on, but it was not worth the price of a proper repair.

After a little haggling we handed over \$15 and took both. Maybe we could recoup a few bucks if we put it in our yard sale. The woman placed them on the sidewalk and I went to get the car.

It was a long walk and a long drive back trying to get around numerous cars slowing down to get a look at the different sales. When I drove up, Marie had been standing guard for about twenty minutes. I gingerly placed the big red one in the car and wedged it in so that it couldn't move. Then I picked up the other one just as the woman had - by the handle. Well, it had been sitting in the shade until she placed it on the sidewalk. I'm guessing that the handle was fixed with hot glue and by the time I got back it had been sitting in the sun too long. I was left holding the handle about two feet in the air looking down at a pile of shards. The mortified woman rushed over and insisted that we take a \$5 rebate.

We snaked our way home stopping at more sales along the way. The next day I brushed on paint stripper for about three hours and discovered that we had a Hart Bros. & Lazier/Bay of Quinte Works 5 gallon jug. There wasn't a painted design, but what do you want for ten bucks? It cost \$25 to repair the lip chip. I guess that I may have used five dollars worth of paint stripper. So for \$40 we have a nice addition to our collection. A great story comes with it.

The Short

With our giant red jug tucked safely in the car, we were happily pondering what might lie hidden under the ugly paint. Many sales had closed because of the hour. We were just cruising without even bothering to get out of the car at most places.

One sale deserved inspection. We pulled over and proceeded to look at many wares protected by display cases. Among various dolls, jewelry and pieces of china we spotted a miniature jug with a brown top and the following lettering: "MEDICINE HAT POTTERY CO./FT. BATHURST ST., TORONTO/ADEL. 2959" The price was quite reasonable. It joined big red in the car.

It was a very nice piece. It puzzled us though. Medicine Hat is in Alberta. Why the Toronto address? How old was it? Was that a six-digit phone number with the EL being just a reminder that it stood for Adelaide? As soon as I could, I hit the books

Medicine Hat had been gifted with natural resources. It became a settlement when the Canadian Pacific Railroad arrived there in 1883. By the first decade of the twentieth century the city was incorporated (1906) and itching to expand. A plentiful supply of natural gas led to the boast that it was perhaps the only city in the world where the street lights were left burning night and day 365 days a year. It was cheaper than hiring staff to turn them off. Entrepreneurs were lured by the offers of cheap natural gas, land and deferred taxes in exchange for business development and job creation.

The real attraction for commerce, however, was the massive amount of exceptional clay under large portions of the region. The expanding frontier needed brick, tile and sewer pipe as well as a cheaper supply of pottery. The rail link, clay and natural gas attracted investors from both Canada

and the United States. The economic and social history of Medicine Hat in the first half of the twentieth century revolved around pottery.

Firms were bought and sold, destroyed by fires, bankrupted, hurt by depression and aided by the increased demand to provide tableware for the armed forces in the war years. Companies that operated in Medicine Hat, among others include:

The Medicine Hat Pottery Company (1912-1914)
Medalta Stoneware Ltd. (1915 - 1924)
Medalta Potteries Ltd. (1924 - 1954)
Medicine Hat Potteries (1937 - 1955)

My research yielded a probable answer to the history of the miniature. In 1915 Charles Pratt, W. A. Creer and Ulysses Sherman Grant gained control of Medalta Stoneware of Medicine Hat. By 1924 they manufactured nearly 75% of all the stoneware used in Canada and restructured as Medalta Potteries Ltd. Agents wholesaled and retailed their products in different Canadian cities.

A retail outlet was located in Belleville, Ontario (The Belleville Pottery Co.). Charles had a brother, Albert Pratt, who managed The Medicine Hat Pottery Company of Toronto, a wholesale outlet. The mini jug was obviously a promotional item for Medalta to support their eastern wholesale operation.

An inquiry to the Friends of Medalta Society (www.medalta.org) shed further light on the jug. Ronald Getty, the author of the Medalta Review Newsletter, was kind enough to provide the following information about miniature Medalta jugs. Medalta produced miniature jugs for the Medicine Hat Pottery Company located at the foot of Bathurst Street from roughly 1926 to at least the mid 1930's. Dated invoices indicate a shipment to the address on the 11th of March 1926. Three variants are known - one with ADEL. 2959, one with ADELAIDE 2959 as telephone numbers under the Bathurst Street address and one with no address - just the ADEL phone number. At least 600 mini jugs were produced in the ADEL 2959 style. One hundred of those were made with a hole in the bottom for use as truck hood ornaments.

A search of the Might Directories for the City of Toronto indicates that Albert W. Pratt of the Medicine Hat Pottery Company began residing at 133 Glenrose Avenue in 1927. He is not listed in the directory for 1926.

The company also existed at a different location in 1925. The address SPADINA AVE. BRIDGE/MAIN 1847 is known in two variants. Spadina Avenue Bridge/MAIN 1847 transfer was also used on a miniature churn. The company was not listed in either 1924 or 1926. A glance at a Toronto map shows that the Bathurst and Spadina addresses are so close that they may have used the same railroad siding and merely moved the office into a different building.

On March 15, 1929, despite great success, Medalta changed hands. The company was bought by Reginald Carlisle and O. C. Arnott (a pair of Calgary investors) for \$250,000. Several reasons may have prompted Charles Pratt to sell. Glass containers were being produced much more cheaply than stoneware and had already decimated many potteries in Great Britain. Perhaps Pratt anticipated the impending "glass disaster" and sold out. Maybe his business acumen allowed him to foresee the coming crash in October of that year.

He may have had health problems. In 1928 he went to the Mayo Clinic with concerns for which "They were unable to do anything."* It was also hinted that he suffered from personal problems. After selling the business, Charles Pratt left for Florida, leaving his family behind. His brother Albert still remained in business at the Toronto location.

It is quite possible that Albert Pratt started distributing stoneware for the rival Medicine Hat Potteries after Harry Yuill founded that company in 1937.

* Pottery in Alberta The Long Tradition, Marylu Antonelli and Jack Forbes, The University of Alberta Press, 1978 p. 69

REFERENCES:

Friends of Medalta Society www.medalta.org

Ronald Getty - personal correspondence

Pottery in Alberta The Long Tradition, Antonelli and Forbes, The University of Alberta Press, 1978

Might Directories for the City of Toronto