

Antique collector specializes in the unusual

Story: CORINNE ARATT
Photos: DICK KELLEY

The first place Stuart Sterling of Bloomfield Hills went when he received his driver's license was to an antique show. That was eight years ago. Now, at 24, he's still chasing after antiques at every opportunity.

He's passed through furniture and furniture refinishing to smaller collectibles. The furniture had to go when the family home became so crowded there was no room for the residents.

That overcrowding was the impetus

for the present collections. These include tobacco oriented items such as snuff boxes and match safes which are not only pocket size, but frequently budget wallet size. In the larger size category, Sterling collects Springfield rifles, mine's lanterns, plus a vast assortment of the daily life items of past eras.

Gradually this young electronics executive is turning his apartment in the family home into a personal museum complete with display cases.

With his pet parrot, Kelo, perched

contentedly on his shoulder, he said quietly, "These simple things are beginning to be worth something."

Sterling says he has looked for collectibles in about 40 states and every country of Europe. "People are used to

seeing me at every show," he said. "At the Ann Arbor shows I'm there by 6 a.m."

He likes to talk with the dealers, watch the action, and in the process add to his own collections.

"COLLECTING IS LIKE PERPETUAL MOTION — once you start, you can't stop. If you look for a month and find one good thing, it's worth the month," he said.

All of this hunting has resulted in a variety that ranges from a rather ingenious, screened fly trap which lures flies with bait to watches, tiny metal purses, a cure-all machine and a carnival coin separator.

When asked how much a person would need to start collecting early American trivia, Sterling said, "Five, 10, maybe 20 bucks." He paused searching for an example, "You can spend \$5 and get a neat bottle, stopper and everything."

He picked up a small, glass jelly mold with a metal lid. "Look at this, isn't it pretty? Two dollars. This can for dancer's was \$5."

He opened a U.S. government issue snuff box from 1860 and said simply, "Three dollars."

From a corner of the room he produced a long metal rod, crooked at the end with a long wooden handle.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked. Getting no answer he said with a grin, "A chicken catcher."

In seconds Sterling was back with another long pole with moveable pinches on the end. These were used by store clerks who wanted to pull out a particular perfume bottle from a full case. He also has poles of various lengths with moveable pinches used in grocery stores to retrieve boxes and cans from high shelves.

Boxes of all kinds intrigue this collector. He has everything from elaborate wood inlay boxes used to hold

valuables to the small ones for snuff and matches. The metal ones are generally decorated, the tortoise shell ones frequently trimmed with silver. Some have inlaid mother of pearl. Many of the snuff boxes are paper mache which looks and feels like painted wood.

MSNUFF BOXES carried by coal miners had to be made from non-ferrous metals so there was no chance of a spark to set off a mine explosion. One 18th century match safe is a carefully worked chestnut.

The earliest coal mine inspector's lantern burned whale oil. The presence of gas in the mine could be detected by a change in the color of the flame.

Sterling has many of the items pictured in his collection of books on antiques. He is presently working on a small collectibles book of his own with a collaborator.

When he had antique furniture, Sterling estimates it would have taken several trucks to move the collection.

"Now," he said, "I could pack all of this stuff in a couple of big boxes."

A firm believer that collections should be displayed to provide enjoyment and stimulate the imagination, Sterling is planning to line the walls of his apartment with display cases.

Because of their easy mobility, in many instances, modest cost, and insight to history, Sterling believes small collectibles are the wave of the future.

Even before graduating from Seaholm High School, Sterling was working in his father's electronics firm. Now he is a manager and one of his duties is to train workers. He is particularly enthusiastic about training and employing the handicapped.



George Shirley, tenor, born and raised in Detroit, will return home for a Laudenslager concert on Sunday, Jan. 14.

Laudenslager Series hosts George Shirley

Tenor George Shirley will return to his hometown to perform in an evening of vocal and chamber music by Schubert, Loeffler, Vaughan Williams, Hindemith, and Michigan composer Leslie Bassett Sunday at 8 p.m., Jan. 14 in Orchestra Hall.

Joining him in the concert, the second in this season's Laudenslager Music Series, will be pianist Lawrence LaGore and three Detroit Symphony Orchestra instrumentalists, Donald Baker, oboe; David Ireland, viola and Mario DiFiore, cello.

Shirley will begin the concert with Schubert's song "Auf dem Strom," accompanied by LaGore and DiFiore, who will then perform Bassett's "Music for Violoncello and Piano."

The first half of the concert will finish with Ralph Vaughan Williams' "Four Hymns," sung by Shirley with LaGore and Ireland.

After the intermission Baker will collaborate with Ireland and LaGore in Charles Loeffler's "Two Rhapsodies." The concert will conclude with a performance of Paul Hindemith's "The

Serenade" (opus 35), a little cantata on Romantic texts in which Shirley will be joined by Baker, Ireland and DiFiore.

As always after Laudenslager concerts, the audience is invited to meet informally with the artists over refreshments in the Orchestra Hall lobby.

Since his debut at the Metropolitan Opera in 1961, Shirley has performed with opera companies around the world. Raised in Detroit, where he graduated from Cass Tech and Wayne State University, he has appeared with virtually every major orchestra under distinguished conductors in this country and abroad. He is widely recorded, and as a recitalist his repertory encompasses both the European classics and the music of his own American heritage.

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