

**COLLECTING CANADIAN HAND PAINTED PORCELAIN FROM  
THE 1880'S ONWARDS<sup>1</sup>****O COLECȚIE DE PORȚELAN PICTAT DE MÂNĂ ÎN CANADA DE  
LA 1880 PÂNĂ ÎN PREZENT**

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**Abstract**

After being practiced in the large factories of Europe, the art of decorating porcelain became an amateur domestic industry especially for women. In Canada, it mostly remained a feminine specialty that was linked to the Arts and Crafts Movement introduced into the country in the last quarter of the 19th century. Because the movement was North American in scope, it is important to compare developments in Canada with those in the United States. On the Canadian scene, the brothers John and James Griffiths were largely responsible for spreading of this "professional" hobby. The Cabot Commemorative State Dinner Service presented in 1898 to Lady Aberdeen, the Governor General's wife, exemplifies the degree of skill attained by Canadian women artists of the time. The article highlights the achievements of several artists in the field from its beginnings in Canada.

**Key words:** china painting, Canadian hand painted china, collectibles hand painted china porcelain, Canadian Historical Dinner Service, Alice Mary Hagen

After being practiced in large factories in Europe, the art of decorating porcelain became an amateur domestic industry for many women. In Canada, this art, in which women were the most active, was linked to the Art and Crafts Movement introduced into the country in the last quarter of the 19th century. The movement was North American in scope, which inevitably leads us to compare the Canadian scene with developments across the border in the United States.

Fundamentally, a piece of china can be decorated in three ways: by surface modifications, by painting, or by transfer printing. Surface modifications, under glaze decoration, and transfer printing are, generally speaking, not within the scope

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the author's collection of hand painted China.

of this type of collectible. The only type of decoration consistently used by artists and amateurs alike in a studio setting was painting on the glaze with enamels. Enamel colours require at least a second firing to make them permanent on porcelain.

In the United States, an important pioneer of hand painted porcelain was Edward Lycett, a prominent instructor of that art in St. Louis and Cincinnati from 1877 onwards. The Lycett students were so numerous as to constitute a majority among amateur American china painters. Moreover, they were mostly women who were allowed creative occupations or who embraced the art as a hobby. Needless to say that women played a major role in the birth and spread of the American china painting movement.

There is one noticeable difference in china painting between the United States and Canada. By the turn of the 20th century, painting on porcelain in the States had become a cottage industry for more than 25,000 talented artists. Most of these were women who did not have the opportunity to achieve professional status otherwise. In Canada, the talent base was smaller and the art was limited mostly to private studios and cultural associations. China painting never integrated into a huge industrial concern such as the American Pickard firm. On the Canadian scene, the brothers John and James Griffiths were largely responsible for spreading this “professional” hobby.

The creation of the Cabot Commemorative State Dinner Service at the end of the 19th century was a pinnacle in the art of china painting by Canadian women artists. Mary Ella Dignam, founding President of the Women's Art Association of Canada, was the originator of the 1896 proposal to create a commemorative dinner service to be presented in 1898 as a farewell gift to Lady Aberdeen, wife of the Governor General of Canada. Sixteen artists were selected from across Canada by competition to paint the Cabot Service, an eight course service with 24 place settings, decorated with historic landscapes, flora and fauna of Canada. The service was taken from Canada and placed in Lord Aberdeen's residence at Haddo House in Scotland, where it still survives complete.

Among the artists who participated in the creation of the historical service was Alice Mary Hagen of Halifax, Nova Scotia, one of the best known Canadian china painters and potters. The activity of some commercial artists and amateurs alike are presented by the author, together with an attempt at classifying this type of collectible by functionality. The developments in china painting, both internationally and in Canada conclude the exposé.

Stylistically speaking, there is an evolution of taste and motifs in china decoration over the decades, and it sometimes helps with dating unmarked pieces. Also the maker's mark can give an indication of the period when a piece was created. But all too often, the lack of background makes impossible any accurate speculation as to the artist, place or time of creation. These pieces are inscribed with the name and the year of creation in the best of cases, but when a piece has

none of this information, there is not much left to work with. In most of cases, the place of acquisition is the only clue as to geographical background and, as a result, the only type of classification that can be used is functionality. The intrinsic beauty of the piece is often the only motive of acquisition for the hardened collector.

How does the collector recognize hand painted china? The most important clue is the inscription appearing underneath, usually the name of the artist or initial, the date, and sometimes the place of execution. The body is almost always hard-paste porcelain, and therefore translucent. Manufacturers are frequently famous names such as Limoges. Printed outlines within which to apply the paint are rarely seen. Often pieces can be recognized at a distance by the gilding, which in the majority of cases is not burnished, and has a characteristic dull appearance.

The art of decorating earthenware goes back to remote antiquity. A finer type of earthenware, called porcelain, was produced in China in the 10th century. Around 1710, the secret was discovered in Germany, from which it spread to other European countries. This medium became a favourite for artistic expression. In Europe, after being practiced in large factories, the art became an amateur domestic industry for many women. In Canada, this art, in which women were the most active, was linked to the Art and Crafts Movement introduced into the country in the last quarter of the 19th century. The movement was North American in scope, which inevitably leads us to compare the Canadian scene with developments across the border in the United States.

Fundamentally, a piece of china can be decorated in three ways: by surface modifications, by painting, or by transfer printing. Surface modifications, under glaze decoration and transfer printing are generally speaking not within the scope of this type of collectible. The only type of decoration consistently used by artists and amateurs alike in a studio setting was painting with enamels on the outlined design made with a china-pencil on the glazed surface of a blank. A large variety of enamel colours were perfected at an early period, and most of them were made from metallic oxides, such as iron, copper, and manganese. Enamel colours require several firings to make them permanent on porcelain<sup>2</sup>.

The blanks, or undecorated body, on which the paint is applied come in all forms and sizes: tiles and plaques, chargers, dinnerware, chocolate and coffee pots, teapots, jardinières and planters, lamps, punch bowls, cider pitchers, goblets, mugs, and all variety of vases. The paste and the glaze of the blanks are designed to take multiple firings. In the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, these blanks came mainly from France, Germany and England, but later were imported from Japan, and also from China in the last half of the 20th century. Once in North America,

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<sup>2</sup> Debby DuBay, "Hand Painted Porcelain: Women Played a Major Role" in *The Journal of Antiques and Collectibles*, Sturbridge Massachusetts, February 2003. General information on this topic is found on the internet site [http://artistictile.net/pages/Info/Info\\_Porcelain.html](http://artistictile.net/pages/Info/Info_Porcelain.html) and in "A history of porcelain" by William C. Gates, Jr., M.A., Curator and Historian, Ohio Historical Society.

the blanks were sold to professional decorating factories in the United States, to china painting schools, or to department stores in the States and Canada, where the many amateur artists of the era could purchase them for hand painting.

The art of hand painting was perfected in the early years of the great porcelain factories of Europe that employed numerous artists, mostly specializing in a particular genre: flowers, garlands, animals, landscapes and figures. It wasn't rare for good artists to sign or initial their work. Gilding was applied separately by other workers<sup>3</sup>. The women working for the china factories of Europe became skilled "Paintresses"<sup>4</sup>. Woman artists were also favoured by the establishment of a first French Female School of Design in Paris in 1815<sup>5</sup>, followed by a London school in 1842<sup>6</sup>.

The English Minton porcelain manufacturers were in a sense visionaries and precursors of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Minton's Art Pottery Studio was established in 1871 at Kensington Gore, London, and had a reputation from the start of hiring the best professional sculptors for the forms and the most talented painters for the decoration. The Studio was put under the direction of W.S. Coleman, an English designer, illustrator and water colourist, who worked with both professional and amateur decorators. In the 1860s, Coleman had conducted experiments in pottery decoration for the W. T. Copeland pottery. From 1869, he worked as a freelance decorator at Minton, painting bowls, plaques and slabs for fireplaces, and from 1871 to 1873, he directed the Kensington studio. Although the Studio was very popular and influential, it wasn't rebuilt after it was damaged by fire in 1875<sup>7</sup>.

The Arts and Crafts Movement, born in late 19th century England, was inspired by William Morris who promoted a return to pre-industrialized standards of craft and design. In the field of ceramics, the movement expressed itself mostly in the works of artist potters in studio conditions, but its emphasis on handicraft also provided the inspiration for the amateur hand painted china movement which spread in North America<sup>8</sup>.

In the United States, an important pioneer of hand painted porcelain was Edward Lycett, a prominent instructor of that art in St. Louis and Cincinnati from

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<sup>3</sup> See Stanley W. Fisher's comments on continental and English porcelain in *Fine Porcelain and Pottery*, London: Octopus Books Ltd., 1974, p. 24-90; also Mary Frank Gaston, *The Collector's Encyclopaedia of Limoges Porcelain*, Collector Books, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> r. Ilya Sandra Perlingieri, "Paintresses: Victorian Women China Painters and Potters" in *New England Antiques Journal*, March 2007, and the site [http://www.antiquesjournal.com/Pages04/Monthly\\_pages/march07/paintresses.html](http://www.antiquesjournal.com/Pages04/Monthly_pages/march07/paintresses.html).

<sup>5</sup> For the French development of this phenomenon see also: [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manufacture\\_nationale\\_de\\_S%C3%A8vres#Les\\_femmes\\_.C3.A0\\_la\\_Manufacture\\_royale\\_de\\_porcelaine](http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manufacture_nationale_de_S%C3%A8vres#Les_femmes_.C3.A0_la_Manufacture_royale_de_porcelaine).

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Ilya Sandra Perlingieri, "Paintresses: Victorian Women", *loc.cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Louise Ade Boger, *The Dictionary of World Pottery and Porcelain*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971, p. 228.

<sup>8</sup> Harold Osborne, (ed.), *An Illustrated Companion to the Decorative Arts*, Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1989, p.49-50.

1877 onwards. The Lycett students were so numerous as to constitute a majority among amateur American china painters. Moreover, they were mostly women who were allowed creative occupations, or who embraced the art as a hobby. Needless to say that women played a major role in the birth and spread of the American china painting movement<sup>9</sup>. (Fig. 1)

By 1877, there had been several books published in Europe as guides to painting on china for amateurs, but it was a Cincinnati student of Karl Lagenbeck called Mary Louise McLaughlin who published the first book in America - *China Painting - A Practical Manual for the Use of Amateurs in the Decoration of Hard Porcelain*. Mrs. McLaughlin's enthusiasm for this art form spread throughout the United States. She is credited with educating the general public who could not attend classes on the art of china painting. Her book included information for tracing on china, china painting techniques and directions for gilding, firing, etc. In 1879, McLaughlin formed the Woman's Pottery Club, and by 1881, there were major china painting studios in Boston, Cincinnati, Philadelphia New York and Chicago<sup>10</sup>. (Fig. 2)

There is one noticeable difference in china painting between the United States and Canada. By the turn of the 20th century, painting on porcelain in the States had become a cottage industry for more than 25,000 talented artists. Most of these were women who did not have the opportunity to achieve professional status otherwise. In Canada, the talent base was smaller, and the art was limited mostly to private studios and cultural associations. China painting never integrated into a huge industrial concern such as the American Pickard firm.

On the Canadian scene, the brothers John and James Griffiths were largely responsible for spreading this "professional" hobby as detailed in Mrs. Elizabeth Collard work: *Nineteenth-Century Pottery and Porcelain in Canada*<sup>11</sup>. The brothers worked mostly in London, Ontario, and their activity is well documented. Many of their hand painted objects are now in the collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, Quebec. Elizabeth Collard, an authority in the field, commented that:

By the end of the century in Canada, every properly educated young lady knew how to paint on china. She had studied at an art school or with a private instructor, or had at least learned the rudiments in a young ladies' seminary. Some amateurs became very good, their work as good as that of professional china decorators<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Debby DuBay, "Hand Painted Porcelain ...", *loc.cit.* See also Mary Frank Gaston, *The Collector's Encyclopaedia of Limoges Porcelain*, Collector Books, 2000 and Debby DuBay, *Collecting Hand Painted Limoges Porcelain: Boxes to Vases*, Atglen PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 2004, p. 15-33.

<sup>10</sup> Debby DuBay, "Hand Painted Porcelain ...", *loc.cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Collard, *Nineteenth Century Pottery and Porcelain in Canada*, 2nd ed., Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1984, p. 315-319. Also Colin S. MacDonald, *A Dictionary of Canadian Artists*, vol. 2, Ottawa: Canadian Paperbacks, 1968, p. 325-325.

<sup>12</sup> Elizabeth Collard, *op.cit.*, p. 320.

As they gained in number and importance, the women artists took the first step towards establishing the Women's Art Association in 1886, and the Women's Art Association of Canada in 1892, which created a number of branches in many parts of Canada<sup>13</sup>.

The quality of amateur china painting in Canada is well illustrated by the dinner service, called the Cabot Commemorative State Service<sup>14</sup>. In 1896, Mary Ella Dignam, founding President of the Women's Art Association of Canada, initiated the proposal to create a commemorative dinner service as a gift to Lady Aberdeen, the wife of the Governor-General Lord Aberdeen, and a very energetic promoter of women's rights. The amateur artists selected from across Canada by competition were: Lily Adams, Jane Bertram, M. Louise Couen, Justinia Harrison, Juliet Howson, Margaret Irvine, Martha Logan, Hattie Proctor and M. Roberts of Toronto, Clara Galbreath and Alice Judd of Hamilton, Phoebe Watson from Galt, Margaret McLung from St. Catharines (who later moved to Vancouver), all from Ontario, Alice Egan (later Mrs. Hagen) of Halifax and Annie Kelly of Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, and Elizabeth Whitney of Montreal. The Cabot Service was an eight course service with 24 place settings, decorated with historic landscapes of Canada, Canadian fish together with shells and water plants, Canadian game birds and songbirds, Canadian ferns, wild or cultivated fruits and wild flowers. The farewell gift, which was sponsored by members of the Canadian Senate and House of Commons, was to be completed in 1897 for presentation in 1898 to the Countess of Aberdeen. The service was afterwards taken from Canada to Scotland and placed in Haddo House, Lord Aberdeen's residence, where it still survives complete and unscathed<sup>15</sup>.

The artists who participated in the creation of the historical service included Alice Mary Hagen of Halifax who painted 12 of the 24 game plates. We know that in 1909, she also painted a complete dessert set for a prominent Halifax woman, Mrs. Donohue. (Fig. 3, 4)

Alice Mary Hagen née Egan, perhaps the best known Canadian woman china painter and potter,<sup>16</sup> was born in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1872, the daughter

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<sup>13</sup> A short history of the Women's Art Association of Canada is presented on the Association's internet site <http://www.womensartofcanada.ca/index.php>.

<sup>14</sup> Details of the Cabot Commemorative Service, also known as the Canadian Historical Dinner Service, can be found at <http://www.civilization.ca/hist/cadeau/caint00e.html>. In 1998 the Canadian Museum of Civilization organized the exhibition *This splendid Gift - The 1897 Canadian Historical Dinner Service* displaying most of the service on loan from the National Trust of Scotland, together with a presentation of Victorian table customs, a short history of the Women's Art Association of Canada, the creation of the dinner service and the life and activity of Lady Aberdeen in Canada.

<sup>15</sup> Keith A. McLeod: "The Splendid Gift: Lady Aberdeen & Mary Ella Dignam" *Antique Showcase*, April 1998, p. 46-50.

<sup>16</sup> Alice Mary Hagen is the only Canadian artist included in the survey by Dr. Ilya Sandra Perlingieri, "Paintresses: Victorian Women China Painters and Potters" in *New England Antiques Journal*, March 2007, on the site [http://www.antiquesjournal.com/Pages04/Monthly\\_pages/march07/paintresses.html](http://www.antiquesjournal.com/Pages04/Monthly_pages/march07/paintresses.html).

of Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas J. Egan and Margaret Kelley. She was educated at Mount St. Vincent Academy and at the Victoria School of Art and Design in Halifax. In 1897, she went to New York as a student of Adelaide Alsop Robineau, whose influence is described by Debby DuBay in the article, *Hand painted porcelain: Women played a major role*<sup>17</sup>:

The biggest influence on porcelain art in America during the early 1900s was Adelaide Alsop Robineau (1865-1929). Wanting to be independent at a time when independence and individualism for women was unacceptable, Robineau was a role model for women of the early 20th century. Teaching herself the art of painting on porcelain, she soon became known as a decorator. In order to expand her skills, Robineau studied watercolours with the American master, William Merritt Chase. In May 1899, Robineau and her husband published the *Keramic Studio*. Her goal was to meet the needs of china painters who were "...struggling in their efforts to reach high ideals..." Her publications spurred on the interest in china painting and coincided with the large shipments of blank Limoges porcelain arriving from France"<sup>18</sup>.

After such a prestigious apprenticeship, Alice Mary Egan returned to Halifax, and leased a studio where she taught china painting between 1898 and 1899. In 1901, she married John C. Hagen, and lived with him in Jamaica, then in Halifax and finally Mahone Bay, Nova Scotia. Between 1930 and 1931, she travelled to Britain and France, where she visited a pottery that employed war veterans. She became interested in pottery making, and on her return to Nova Scotia, studied under Charles Prescott, the owner of a small industrial pottery in Fairview. She set up a studio and kiln in her home at Mahone Bay, where she produced pottery and taught summer school for the Department of Education, until about 1950. She died in Mahone Bay in 1972, having lived a whole century<sup>19</sup>. Her work is now in the collections of the Nova Scotia Museum and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, as well as at Rideau Hall, the Governor General's official residence in Ottawa, Ontario<sup>20</sup>. Alice Mary Hagen was a commercial artist, and a breadwinner who worked under commission.

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<sup>17</sup> Debby DuBay, "Hand Painted Porcelain ...", *loc.cit.*

<sup>18</sup> See also: Peg Weiss, (ed.). *Adelaide Alsop Robineau: Glory in Porcelain*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981. Adelaide Alsop Robineau's most important creations can be found at the Everson Museum of Art, Syracuse, NY. At least one of her hand painted works can be admired in Canada, at the Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, Halifax, Nova Scotia, site [http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm.php?id=record\\_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=00000151&rd=98050](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm.php?id=record_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=00000151&rd=98050).

<sup>19</sup> Colin S. MacDonald, *op.cit.*, p. 335-337. In 2002, the local Settlers Museum in Mahone Bay dedicated an exhibition, *Alice and the Painting Ladies*, to this creator and teacher of painting on china. See <http://www.settlersmuseum.ns.ca/exhibits/archive.shtml>. For A.M. Hagen's activity as a potter see [Gail Crawford](#), *Studio Ceramics in Canada*, Goose Lane Editions, 2005.

<sup>20</sup> An extensive presentation of Mary Hagen's life and work as painter and original ceramicist can be seen at [http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm.php?id=record\\_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=00000151](http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/pm.php?id=record_detail&fl=0&lg=English&ex=00000151).

In the first decade of the 20th century, Mrs. M. M. Faill, a very talented physician's wife living in the southern Ontario town of Stratford, named after Shakespeare's home town in England, was practising her china painting abilities as an amateur. She left an impressive body of work, some 500 pieces which were recently sold by the estate and dispersed. From the few pieces available, we conclude that she used mostly Limoges blanks, which were the most common, and least expensive at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century in Canada<sup>21</sup>. (Fig. 5)

A fruit bowl, dating from about the same period was painted and signed by another amateur artist, a lady named Myrtle Zoe Thomas who seemed to have moved from Brampton to Galt, Ontario, as testified by the inscription in black on the bottom: "Myrtle Zoe Thomas/ Started in Brampton/Finished in Galt". (Fig. 6)

The amateur china painter Ada B. Sparks was probably from Ottawa<sup>22</sup>. A 12 inch vase she decorated in 1920, displays a geometrical lustred pattern, which seems inspired by the emergent Art Deco style and the stylistic tendencies of that period. (Fig. 7)

Teaching china painting privately was a lifetime vocation for Gwladys Williams Menzies, who was born in 1891 at Carleton Place, Ontario, but at the turn of the century, moved with her family to Ottawa. Gwladys' artistic talent found expression in china painting at a relatively early age, and after only a few lessons, she set up her own studio. The first pieces she signed are dated 1912, at the age of 21. Gwladys soon became the foremost teacher of china painting in the Ottawa area. She married John Menzies of Ottawa and had two daughters, but she continued with her painting and instruction. She produced many complete lunch, tea and dinner sets for her family, but did not accept commissions. She favoured fine china blanks, usually Limoges, although occasionally she used Beleek or English factories. On completion, she signed, dated and numbered each piece chronologically on the back over the glaze. Her first two finished pieces were plates, numbered 1 and 2, and dated 1912. She viewed herself as an artist and teacher, and was not interested in turning her hand to commercial enterprise. Her work combines an amazingly skilful technique with originality of design. She painted entirely freehand, with a remarkably steady hand and a keen eye. She could divide a plate into five or six sections with unbelievable accuracy, using only her trained eye. She loved to paint flowers and butterflies, both true to nature and stylised. But she also produced fine geometric designs showing the influence of the Art Nouveau and Art Deco movements. Gwladys maintained her studio until about 1930 - her last pieces are dated 1933. She remained in Ottawa, until her death in 1977, at the age of 86<sup>23</sup>. (Fig. 8, 9)

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<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Collard, *op.cit.*, p. 319.

<sup>22</sup> Conclusion based on the fact that the vase was acquired in Ottawa, and the name of the artist is an important one in local history.

<sup>23</sup> This information was provided on a presentation sheet written by Dr. Paul Robertson for the temporary 1999 exhibition at Ottawa City Hall, titled *China Painting: The Art of Master Painter Gwladys Williams Menzies*.



In many cases, young female students were given instructions in convent schools. This is confirmed by a Limoges tea set bearing, on the bottom, the inscription: "This set was done in the month of May of the year 1919 at St. Mary's Academy, Winnipeg, Man., with Sister Michfield's assistance. Irene La Berge"<sup>24</sup>. After learning the technique of china painting in a school or a studio under a private teacher, the students were given blanks to test their ability. (Fig. 10, 11)

Dorothy Kamm's book, *Antique Trader's Comprehensive Guide to American Painted Porcelain with Values*<sup>25</sup>, published in 1999, organizes the painted china pieces exclusively according to functionality. The same type of classification is embraced by Debby DuBay in three of her more recent publications<sup>26</sup>. This approach eliminates the dilemma of establishing provenance, sometimes impossible to discover for this kind of collectibles. The decorative pieces include: portrait and landscape chargers and plates; vases, decorative bowls, etc. (Fig. 12, 13) Utility pieces are made up of table, luncheon or tea sets, celery trays, mustard and confiture sets, salts and peppers, etc., as are illustrated below. (Fig 14, 15)

Following the Kamm classification, the objects could also be considered according to their use in the household, in other words their functionality relative to different parts of a house (card treys for the front hall, dresser sets or pin dishes for the bedroom, tobacco jars for the library, lemonade sets and bonbon dishes for the parlour, breakfast sets for the small dinning room, etc.), thus covering a great variety of objects, ranging from large size platters illustrated with majestic scenes of historical events to humble hair receivers or hatpin holders<sup>27</sup>. (Fig. 16, 17)

Sometimes these art objects will find a new home in the house of a relative. A case in point is the production of Louise Mahala Smith who was born in 1870 to Joseph Henry Smith and Elizabeth Markle near Dundas, Ontario. Her niece Sherry Ruch keeps the creations of her aunt with the greatest care, in her home in Ottawa. Louise Smith was a professional artist who worked in oils, watercolours and pastels. Her subjects were preferably flowers and sometimes landscapes and sailboats that she saw when she lived for a while in Boston, Massachusetts. She also painted china, mostly in the Hamilton area, usually on Limoges blanks. She died in 1947<sup>28</sup>. (Fig. 18, 19)

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<sup>24</sup> Information found on a piece for sale on eBay #1211360347, January 29, 2001.

<sup>25</sup> Dorothy Kamm, *Antique Trader's Comprehensive Guide to American Painted Porcelain With Values*<sup>25</sup>, Norfolk, Virginia: Antique Trader Books, 1999, 191 p. Dorothy Kamm's catalogue includes a large number of blanks by different manufacturers, as opposed to Debby DuBay works that concentrate only on Limoges.

<sup>26</sup> Debby DuBay, *Living with Limoges*, Atglen PA: Schiffer Publishing Co., 2001, p. 15-210; Debby DuBay, *Antique Limoges at Home*, Atglen PA: Schiffer Publishing Co., 2002, and Debby DuBay, *Antique Trader Limoges Price Guide*, Iola WI: Krause Publications, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Dorothy Kamm, *op. cit.* The author structured all the chapters of her richly illustrated catalogue on the functionality of the pieces.

<sup>28</sup> The information was given to the author by Sherry Ruch who was kind enough to let me photograph some of her aunt's creations.

Museums sometimes host collections dedicated to a specific artist, as is the case for the china paintings and pottery production of Alice Mary Hagen, which are found in the Nova Scotia Museum. Likewise, the Museum of Civilization holds the complete Griffiths collection<sup>29</sup>.

Born in England, the Griffiths brothers learned the craft of china painting in the Minton factory, at Stoke-on-Trent. John Howard Griffiths, the better known china painter of the two, credited his brother James for establishing critical standards for judging the quality of painted decoration on china in Canada. It was also James who induced provincial exhibition committees to include china painting as a category on their prize lists. John Howard had come to Canada as an investor and possessed his own farm, though he was a reluctant farmer. He made his mark as the china painter and also as the teacher who prepared many women to earn a livelihood by decorating china in the later years of the century. Roses of all varieties were his preferred subjects, and it was in the treatment of flowers that John Griffiths reached the peak of his skills on porcelain. He also painted figures and bird themes, as well as arrangements of fruits and various other flowers. The prizes he took at exhibitions, both in Ontario and beyond provincial borders, established him as one of the best-known china painters in Canada. In 1887, he painted a tea set that was one of Canada's official gifts to Queen Victoria on the occasion of her Golden Jubilee. Before it went off to London, England, the set was displayed in London, Canada<sup>30</sup>.

Another museum collection is that of Jennie Carson Hele preserved in the Dufferin County Museum and Archives in the Mulmur Township, Ontario. Krista Taylor tells her story in an article published in the *Antique Showcase* magazine. She was born in Newbridge, Ontario, in 1865 and studied china painting in New York. In 1883, at the age of 18, she married William Hele of Elora, and settled in Wingham, Ontario. Jennie began to use her talent as a means of support, selling her paintings locally to make extra money for the entire family which now included two children. In 1900, she left her husband, and moved to Toronto where she painted china as a means of earning money for herself and her children. With her New York training, she was able to find work with a ceramics painter. She then opened up her first studio on Yonge Street, and moved to 15 Bloor Street ca. 1905. Her studio had a large bay window facing the street, perfect for displaying her work, which was characteristic of the Art Nouveau era. Jennie's talents were not restricted to ceramic painting. She was proficient in watercolours, pastels and oils. However, china painting remained her main source of income. She died unexpectedly on May 31, 1933<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Some of the works of the Griffiths brothers can be seen at the Canadian Museum of Civilization site [http://www.civilisations.ca/hist/poterie/cda\\_19\\_e.html](http://www.civilisations.ca/hist/poterie/cda_19_e.html).

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Collard, *op. cit.*, p. 315-319.

<sup>31</sup> Krista Taylor, "Jennie Carson Hele - Porcelain Was Her Canvas" in *Antique Showcase*, March-April 2000, p. 32-35.

China painting almost disappeared in Canada and the United States as an art form during the Second World War, due to the hardships of the time, and also to the disappearance of cheap imported blanks. In the United States, Nettie Pillet's publication of *The China Decorator* magazine in 1956 ensured that the fine art of china painting was not lost.

Currently, there are two major organizations that promote the art of painting on porcelain: The International Porcelain Artists and Teachers Inc., widely known as IPAT Inc., and the World Organization of China Painters (WOCP). These organizations publish *Porcelain Artist*, and *The China Painter*, respectively, which are, along with *The China Decorator* newsletter, the major sources of information for the china painter today.

Individual professional artists who work and teach presently in Canada are numerous, of whom we can only name a few: Amy Boyer and Steven Crouse of Fredericton, New Brunswick, Sol Lobos Brian and Betty Grothe of Montreal, Louise Savard of Beausejour, Aline Crête of Magog, Quebec, Sundus Abraham and Maria de Lourdes Barradas of Toronto, Patricia Burt of Mississauga, Evelyn Piriano of Dundas and Barbara Gibson-Dutton of Merrickville, Ontario, Betty-Anne Binstead of Chilliwack, Anne Millar of Victoria and Mary Jane Phillips of Surrey, British Columbia. These artists all continue the noble tradition of china painting in Canada as well as teaching the skill, which is as much an art as it is a specialized craft<sup>32</sup>. **(Fig. 20)**

From the 1940s to the 1970s, only sporadic hand painted china was produced by amateurs, as is evidenced by the scarcity of pieces from that period. At the end of the 1970s, trade was resumed with China, and blank porcelain pieces once again became readily available to the china painter. Amateur china painters became active again in all Canadian provinces, as exemplified by a tea set by Ann Skuse, an amateur china painter from British Columbia. On the pieces shown here, she used Chinese and Spanish blanks with small chips and cracks on the rim of the creamer and sugar bowl. She covered these defects with gilding and decorated the set with pink rosehip flowers. The set was evidently painted for family use. **(Fig. 21)**

Stylistically speaking, there is an evolution of taste and motifs in china decoration over the decades, and it sometimes helps with dating unmarked pieces<sup>33</sup>. Also the maker's mark can give an indication of the period when a piece was created. But all too often, the lack of background for this kind of artefact makes impossible any accurate speculation as to the artist, place or time of

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<sup>32</sup> The majority of these artists have individual web sites, most of them registered with the PPIO: Porcelain Painters International Online China Painting ( Porcelain Painting or Overglaze on Porcelain). Information on the Net <http://www.ppio.com/index.html>.

<sup>33</sup> Debby DuBay, *Collecting Hand Painted Limoges Porcelain ... loc.cit.*, p. 16-17, outlines the evolution of the colours, tones, subject matters, patterns and composition of the styles, movements and fashion trends that shaped the creation of American porcelain painting artists in the 19th and 20th centuries. Her observations often apply to Canadian artists.

creation. These pieces are inscribed with the name and the year of the creation in the best of cases, but when a piece has none of this information, there is not much left to work with<sup>34</sup>. In most of cases, the place of acquisition is the only clue as to geographical background and, as a result, the only type of classification that can be used is functionality<sup>35</sup>. The intrinsic beauty of the piece is often the only motive of acquisition for the hardened collector.

How does the collector recognize hand painted china? The most important clue is the inscription appearing underneath, usually the name of the artist or initial, the date, and sometimes the place of execution. The body is almost always hard-paste porcelain, and therefore translucent. Manufacturers are frequently famous names such as Limoges. Printed outlines within which to apply the paint are rarely seen<sup>36</sup>. Often, pieces can be recognized at a distance by the gilding, which, in the majority of cases, is not burnished, and has a characteristic dull appearance.

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<sup>34</sup> This is the case with several pieces in the author's collection.

<sup>35</sup> Dorothy Kamm, *op.cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Manufacturers such as Wedgwood sometimes sold blanks with a marked pattern to be enamelled by the amateur painter.