

Love of country life brings duo growing business

By Beth Hemminger
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Just two years ago, Bonnie Thompson and Theresa Raven opened their doors of the Victorian Lace Shop on High Street in colonial Carlisle.

Today their delighted customers find old and new treasures all thoughtfully assembled for a one-of-a-kind appearance. Their specialties include Victorian whites, petticoats, ethnic apparel, antique baskets and a host of other collectibles; the shop also stocks newly-made clothing, sweaters, potpourri and decorative ornaments for the home.

Bonnie and Theresa, both down-home country girls, were bitten by the collecting bug at the tender ages of 16; and almost 15 years later, they merged their talents and gathered their collectibles into an impressive array of Victorian and country antiques and anything else that added the romantic air of long ago.

Theresa from midwest Kansas, Bonnie in the East, a Carlislean, and both from farming backgrounds are evidence of the growing interest in the return to country collectibles for the home and wardrobe.

Theresa said, "I remember collecting the eggs for breakfast, gathering down for pillows and searching for flowers in the fields. I enjoyed those simpler times and easier ways."

Pure enjoyment was the basis for those beginning collecting days

for Theresa. She feels that folk-art decoration and country crafts add a special warmth to anyone's home and bring back a little of her long-ago childhood days on the Kansas farm.

Theresa knew her Kansas country life could not support another family, consequently she entered college to retain a teaching degree.

She arrived in Pennsylvania to begin her career in teaching and during that time added a master's title to her qualifications.

She laughs, "That is when I met the energetic Bonnie Thompson."

Bonnie is a true Carlislean enjoying history, antiques and the Victorian and colonial eras.

"I think I started my collecting at infancy," she chuckles. "No" Bonnie remarked, "It was much later when I began collecting, but for as long as I can remember I have been interested in rural lifestyle and apparel." A designer and business woman since high school Bonnie sees an evident revival of the country world in the home and on the street in apparel.

She stated that much of her interest in collecting has grown from childhood memories living in an old farm house in the country. Bonnie remembers finding toys, decorations and even pieces of fabric and clothing left behind in the old farm house that she cherished more than her new dolls and pretty dresses.

This unusual, but unique, duo met several years ago at an event



Theresa Raven and Bonnie Thompson, the "Victorian Lace," discuss business matters after closing their country shop, "Victorian time."

frequented by both, a public sale.

Bonnie recollects, "Both of us were bidding on the same items, causing the price to rise exorbitantly. Neither of us could afford the merchandise at the present price so reluctantly we joined forces to immediately split the cost and the goods."

After that first brief, and unpleasant encounter, the two country girls continually met at local sales and auctions; always with their eyes on the same merchandise.

"After a while we both looked for the other at these collector spots. During the sales we talked about our interests and discussed our pasts — the farm, the beautiful fireplaces, hardwood floors, lace and frills," said Bonnie and Theresa.

"We had so much in common in interests and background that we joined forces; first as antique collecting partners," added Theresa.

For three years the collecting due continued to travel the auction and sale circuit to gather the country antiques.

"We had accumulated such an impressive assortment, that we needed an outlet" remarked Bonnie.

The collector's rented an old building in Carlisle, which once was a carriage shop, to begin their retail venture.

"The old carriage shop was perfect for our needs," exclaimed Bonnie. The shop expressed the appearance they had hoped for — rustic, antiquated, and all that was needed was the warmth of quilts, rag rugs, and folk-art decorations which the pair had in abundance. The business was underway.

The couple enjoyed their venture, but Bonnie had dreams of adding her collection of antique white clothing to their stock, being on Main Street and having an extraordinary picture window to decorate lavishly.

These dreams of Bonnie's were limited in the back street carriage shop and Theresa too, had a definite interest in retailing the whites and country clothing accumulated during their buying sprees.

The antique dealing team moved

up town into a shop of quaint Victorian appearance. The entrance is elegantly carved. The stark white walls add distinction to the exposed beams and the cobblestone floor covered by an Oriental rug beckons the charm of rural America of long ago.

Bonnie recalls those beginning days, "We had the charming shop, we had the abundance of stock; all we needed was a name! We sat for hours in my farm house thinking, thinking and thinking."

Bonnie and Theresa remarked, "We knew "Victorian" had to be part of the name, naturally, because of the shop appearance and we had collected boxes and boxes of lace and frills. So what would be more appropriate than christening the new boutique "Victorian Lace." Bonnie chuckles and adds, "Not bad for two country girls."

Team work has paid off for these two entrepreneurs; since their opening two years ago the store has grown rapidly in content and clientele.

During the first year the shop was occupied by Victorian camisoles, petticoats and white lace dresses. "Now we have expanded into ethnic looks, handknit sweaters, country fabric, grapevine wreaths, folk art and much, much more. The customers encouraged our expansion with special requests for this style of blouse or that folk art decoration," said the owners.

The shop has not only grown, but has opened up several interesting avenues for Bonnie and Theresa to dabble in. Bonnie remarked, "Who would have ever imagined the two of us coordinating fashion shows." The owners explained that during the past summer several organizations and clubs in the area requested a showing of the beautiful antique whites.

"We pulled together a group of models, our patrons and friends, and provided a show with a conglomerate of antique whites, nightgowns, wedding attire and more that was worn long ago and can be worn today," said Bonnie. The shows were a success and the group of "Victorian Lace Ladies" modeled all summer long at tea parties, country clubs and civic organizations in Cumberland County.

Another avenue was opened up to the shop couple when a cosmetic representative from a well-known company spotted the unique shop and its wares and requested their knowledge, skills to assist in promoting the new cosmetic line. The theme of "Country" was the basis for their ground work for this new adventure.

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Victorian Lace shelves are dressed with nostalgia, a basket filled with teddy bears, a country cotton dress adorned in ruffles, and an 18th century dresser.



In the corner of the shop a handsome armoire is loaded with a collection of handknit sweaters and socks, folkwear patterns and country fabrics.

Homestead Notes