

Collectible Cody

H. A. Cody's bestselling books of the 1920s and 1930s
are sometimes worth as much as \$800

COLLECTORS have cherished the writings of New Brunswick writer H. A. Cody for many reasons. Some of them have their origin long before his novels appeared on the Canadian bestseller lists during the 1920s and the '30s.

These early collectors include family members, who collections began with bits of poetry from various publications.

The first of these verses appeared in the family newspaper, started by him and his sisters in the 1880s, when they were still living in Queens County's Washademoak area:

*Our dear old duck of age and pride
Sat down in the dooryard one day and died
Mr. DeWinkle took him hence
And threw him over the garden fence.*

Hiram Cody was little more than 10 years old at the time and wrote under the name of "Mr. DeWinkle", a *nom du plume* given to him by his sisters because of his excessive winking habit.

According to Ted Jones' biography of Cody, *All The Days of His Life*, "The little paper was the beginning of H. A. Cody's literary efforts and he was soon writing 'verse by the yard of a stirring and often an heroic nature.'"

Later, parishioners began to horde the words that flowed from the prolific pen of this author whose first published book, *An Apostle of the North*, appeared in 1908. His last, *Storm King Banner*, was published in 1937. Throughout this time he carried on his duties as a parish priest, and then as an Archdeacon, in the Anglican Church.

CHARLES Smith of Saint John, a dedicated collector, backed into the hobby when he picked up a book belonging to his wife, Dorothy, one rainy day. "I was just browsing through some of our old book and I opened the cover of *Fighting Stars*, a 1927 first edition, and inside it said: "To Mrs. P. J. E. Haslam with all good wishes H. A. Cody, Sept 28, 1928."

"So I asked my wife why H. A. Cody would be autographing a book to her mother."

His wife began telling him stories of how the author used to stay at her family home when she was a little girl and soon Smith became intrigued with the author and his books.

Dorothy Smith's father, like Cody, was an Anglican Priest. As was the custom, local clergy acted as hosts to visiting clergy.

"When he came to Bay du Vin for Deanery meetings, he always stayed with us," she said. "I don't remember a lot about him. I was quite young at the time, but I remember he used to like to shave in the kitchen. . .and oh, yes. . . my sister Constance was named after a character in one of the books!"

Dorothy Smith says a friend, Florence Britain, had a more vivid memory of a time when he stayed with her family.

"It was in the days when houses only had one bathroom (if they had any!). Thinking a brother was in theirs too long to suit Florence's needs, she rapped on the door and told him to 'Hurry up.' The offender was none other than the Venerable Archdeacon. I gather he did hurry, that is, apologizing profusely!"

To Charles Smith, the collecting of H. A. Cody books is both a hobby and a bit of a business venture from time-to-time.

"I buy them, Dorothy reads then," he says.

He also sells them. There are 25 volumes in a set of H. A. Cody books and, at any given time, Smith may have duplicates of several.

Just how collectible are they?

Smith says he has paid as little as \$40 for one at auction. Ironically, it was for a copy of *The Red Ranger*, published in 1931, the one



Charles and Dorothy Smith show off two of H. A. Cody books among their complete collection. The book held by Mrs. Smith is a first edition of *Fighting Stars*, signed and inscribed to her mother in 1928, "To Mrs. P. J. E. Haslam with all good wishes" during a stay at the Haslam home in Bay du Vin. (Dorothy Dearborn photo)

book he needed to complete his original set and the one he found hardest to locate. He paid more than \$300 for *Songs of a Bluenose*, Cody's poetry collection published in 1925.

“Like anything in the market place, it just depends on who's looking. I bought a copy of his first book, *An Apostle of the North*, for \$400. I had already sold a copy for \$800 that I bought earlier for \$200.

Terry Keleher, a respected Saint John second hand book dealer, says H. A. Cody books are true collectors' items, not just in New Brunswick, but across Canada and, to some extent, in the United States.

“Mr. Smith is right when he says the price depends on the market and. . . according to my observations. . . on who is selling it. I've watched auctioneer Russel Bond standing under an apple tree in Queens County pitching the sale of an H. A. Cody book, and he always gets good prices, more than any dealer. They start usually at around \$100.”

It is Keleher who has set Smith on yet another book quest, albeit one somewhat related to H. A. Cody books.

“I have started collecting work by Egerton Young, an American who titles are very similar to Cody's,” Mr. Smith says. “For example, Cody's *On Trail and Rapid by Dog Sled and Canoe*, published in 1910, is very similar to two of Young's earlier books, *On the Indian Trail* and *By Canoe and Dog Train*.

Similarly, in 1899, Young wrote a book about Rev. James Evans' experiences in the north (Alberta and Saskatchewan) and titled it, *The Apostle of the North*. Cody's first book, *An Apostle of the North*, was published in 1908.

Was there any connection between the two writers?

Keleher says he doesn't think so. It's always possible Cody may have read some of Young's writing and, years later, have written his own book with the memory of the earlier stories at the back of his mind.

The thought that Cody might have been publishing in the American market under the pseudonym of Egerton Young is far-fetched, he says. Regardless of his juvenile propensity for the *nom de plume* “Mr. DeWinkle,” Keleher says it must be a simple matter of coincidence.

Dorothy Dearborn (1927-2014) was a Hampton author and journalist
Terry Keleher (1943-2014) was a respected Saint John Collectors Club book dealer