



CHARTER MEMBER

LINA MAE WHITING

Lina Mae Whiting of Texas has been a camper, Girl Scout leader, hobbyist, businesswoman, Insurance expert, teacher, mother and more. When she calls herself a "life-long Presbyterian," she means more than "regular church-goer." A generous, loving woman, strong in times of trouble, Lina's late husband, Herschel, described her as follows:

"Lina Mae's philosophy is that happiness adds and multiplies when you divide and share your time and knowledge with others. Miles and time are trivial matters when she wants to get the straight word ... "This willingness to share, and Lina's fine sense of humor, is only two of her virtues. She is also a devoted wife, a good homemaker, a loving mother, and a person of many talents, interest and accomplishments."

Born in Parkersburg, West Virginia, shortly before WWI, Lina was youngest of four children, and the only girl. Her father died when Lina was 13 months old, leaving her mother, "a lovely lady and remarkable person," the chore of raising four small children. Perseverance, fine sewing ability and three industrious sons enabled Lina's mother to feed, clothe and educate her children.

Lina attended Business College, and later worked as an accountant, secretary, and Insurance Claims Manager. She married her childhood sweetheart, Herschel Whiting, and raised two children -- Sharon and Herschel III (Buzz) -- in a happy household in Texas City.

"FAMILY" -- was the magic word for the Whitings, and 'togetherness' extended into all phases of their lives. Herschel's hobby of photographing Texas wild-flowers, and Lina's interest in their history and characteristics, led the Whitings to give many, informal slide/lecture programs together, for civic and church groups. The Whitings also planned to publish and sell the photographs and text, profits of which would benefit ministerial students in seminaries.

Devoted to 'children', Lina and Herschel taught in the primary and junior departments in Sunday school, were leaders in Young People's Fellowship, were involved in Little League baseball ... Boy Scouts ... Girl Scouts (Lina's been a registered Girl Scout for 31 years!) ... musical evening at home with Sharon and Buzz ... family camping trips, complete with back-packs and "home-made" nature study courses. These family outings later inspired Lina to write meditative essays, "God and Nature" for Bible and church camp groups.

The "busy years" for Lina included courses at the University of Houston (Home Décor, Color and Design, Apparel Arts, Tailoring, Advanced Clothing, Business English, Communication, and two in Insurance), activities in the Insurance Women's Organization and the National Secretaries' Association, and sewing clothes for herself and her family! Having sewing since she'd been 4 yrs. old (".... For dolls, out of mother's scrap material"), her endeavors now included coats, suits, evening dresses; and shirts for Buzz and Herschel.

Despite hurricanes, wind storms and other Texas City disasters, the 1950's for the closely-knit Whiting family "were filled with growing and doing and happiness." But, in 1961 Herschel died suddenly of a heart attack, and the following summer brought Hurricane Carla, which virtually wiped away all material possessions of the Whitings, including treasured memorabilia, slides, film equipment, diaries, notes, personal remnants of Herschel and Lina's younger years, plans for their flower book ... and the essays, "God and Nature".

"With God as our guide and inspiration ..." recalls Lina; she put her home and herself back together again, to embark on a "new life" as business woman, grandmother ... and thimble collector. In 1965, she received an award and trophy as "Insurance Woman of the Year".



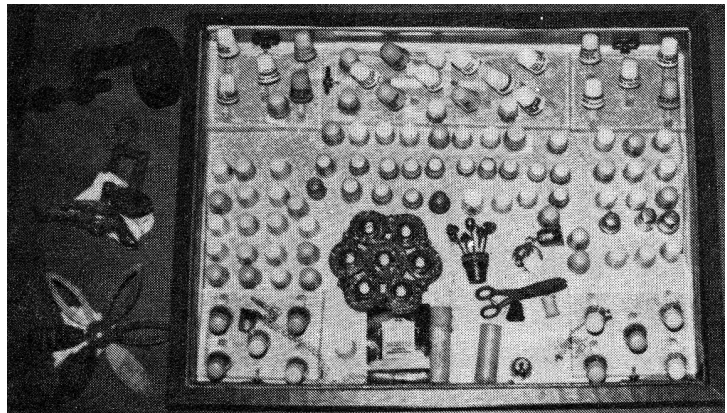
Sewing box (over 300 yrs. old) inlaid with Mother-of-Pearl. This is one of 12 sewing baskets and boxes in her collection.

Now retired, Lina enjoys her hobbies, her children and her six grandchildren at her leisure. Each of her three little granddaughters collects, respectively, thimbles ... spoons ... and cups and saucers. "I helped get them started," chimes Lina, happily. "For the three grandsons, I started coin collections," she adds.

Lina enjoys growing house plants, and accumulating figurines of birds (which began in 1927). "But, thimble collecting has opened up a whole new world for me!" she proclaims. "Not only friends-of-the-mailbox, but reading in history, geography, art and science, lead in many directions," continues Lina.



Partial collection of related handwork items. Tape measures, thimble holders, music box tape measure.



Some of the thimble collection. Cherry wood pin cushion; silver sewing bird and brass quilter's pattern marker.

For many years, she treasured two silver Ketcham & McDougal thimbles – her Mother's and Herschel's Mother's – and a heavy, steel tailor's thimble, hand-made by a Hungarian tailor and given to her cousin in the early 1930's. In 1972, Lina's Thimbling began in earnest, with a Royal Worcester thimble, yellow roses painted on it (her favorite flower), which Sharon sent from London.

Lina Mae has about 500 thimbles, of 45 different materials, made in 32 countries. "I'm very fond of my sterling and ornate brass thimbles, my pincushions and my needle and thimble case." Lina confides.

In Surry, England, Sharon paid \$1.00 at a street market, for a sterling thimble which Lina later found to be assayed in Birmingham, in 1875. This is her jewel! Her sister-in-law sent her a sterling nutshell, with Niello work, tied with an old faded ribbon, and containing a tiny thimble marked "Rilla" in old ribbon-cut engraving.

Recently, Lina found a Pipe Smoker's Thimble, a Lydia Pinkham needle case, an egg-shaped wooden thimble case carved all over, and a nice brass thimble in an old celluloid case, decorated with a housefly and two cubes of sugar. On her sewing room window hangs a thimble-shaped stained glass, about 4" x 5", decorated with fine wire and made especially for Lina by a local craftsman.

Kina keeps her thimbles in two, illuminated wall cabinets with glass doors, and in two shadow-boxes on a table. A 6 ft. tall, glass curio cabinet displays related sewing tools and items, and a mirror-lined, illuminated bookcase holds the overflow. She catalogs her collection on 3" x 6" cards, placed into plastic jackets, in a revolving holder. Each item is numbered; a card with corresponding number records description, story, cost, origin, and picture of the thimble. Related news items, etc., are placed in the plastic jackets. Lina also keeps a file of loose index cards with pictures of available items and thimbles that interest her, information on where to buy them, cost, and so on, which she peruses from time to time, to keep up with market trends.

Between her handwork (Lina crocheted 15 afghans) and her Thimbling, Lina stays active and busy. Her needlepointing days are over, she claims, but quick-point, Bargello, and making metal flowers out of sheet aluminum keep her busy. She taught several classes – "just for fun" – is active in Fiber Designers of Texas, a local Embroiderer's Guild, and the Houston Thimble Group, of which she is Vice-President.

"I wish everyone could belong to a Thimble Group," Lina tells us. "Think of it this way: If three is a crowd, and each one brings another collector, you have a group!"

(Excerpts and profile as written in *Collectors Circle Gazette*, Fall 1977)