

The Fascinating and True Story of the Ant Palace

THIS story starts 'way up in New Hampshire with a man named Austin.

Austin is a retired citizen who has spent an abnormal amount of time watching ants. A few years ago he started building little houses for them. Two sheets of glass with dirt in between. "Ant Palaces," he called them, which is a ritzy title and has a certain amount of allure.

In the Palaces he had Queen Rooms, Banquet Halls, Watch Towers, Tunnels, and other necessary conveniences.

And now, a few words about these Ants of Mr. Austin's. We can't resist telling you something about them.

The more Austin watched his ants, the more he got to know their private habits—like eating and mating, birth, death, and their pursuit of happiness. He became astonishingly familiar with queen ants . . . nurse ants . . . and worker ants. He found them to be skillful and unselfish and ingenious.

He found that Nurse Ants tend the young very efficiently. And look so much like Nurse Ants they might almost wear white caps and answer to the name of "Nannah."

He also found that if he dropped a foreign ant into the Ant Palace, perfect hell let loose. The Ants would rub their antennae together—their method of communicating the bad news—organize and immediately attack the foreigner. Kill him if possible.

A man named Joe Russell in New York heard a description of an Ant Palace at a fashion meeting early last autumn. Russell felt that there were definite sales opportunities in Ant Palaces as there had been in guppies and fancy goldfish.

So Russell wrote to Mr. Austin and bought an Ant Palace sight unseen by mail. Showed it to his wife. And were they fascinated? They were. All that evening Russel and his wife and Doug Lawder and his wife sat watching the antics of the ants, spell-bound save when they cried, "Look! Look at that one!"

Being business men, Messrs. Russell and Lawder saw great possibilities in the Ant Palace. It was so darn hypnotic it might well, as advertising writers say, sweep the country in no time.

But being busy themselves working Messrs. Russell and Lawder turned over to their wives the idea of Making-The-Town-Ant-Palace-Conscious. Lawder's wife and Russell's wife got in a car and motored belt upright to New Hampshire to see Austin.

They found him. He was very busy. But they talked. . . .

And the gals came away with the New York rights to Ant Palaces.

Well, shortly after they got back to New York with the New York rights to Ant Palaces, Messrs. Russell and Lawder, who by then called themselves "Russell-Lawder, Dealers in Ant Palaces," sold a few Palaces to personal friends, and friends of friends, among them Rollin Kirby, the cartoonist, Florence McGee of The Children's Hour, and a Dr. Goldhorne, head of the X-Ray Department of Mt. Vernon Hospital.

The *New Yorker* printed this item:

Russell-Lawder, 445 East 65th Street:

This is the newly established local agency for those famous ant houses from the Austin Workshops in New Hampshire. They have the Ant Palace, \$5, and the Ant Coal Mine, \$3.50. (Us, we love the coal mine, on account of a whistle which you blow to stir up idle miner ants; it works like magic and confounds uninitiated onlookers.) Also, two styles in cricket houses; same prices Houses come with or without insect inmates. Order by mail or phone (Regent 4-4470). C.O.D.'s; checks in advance, please.

During the ten days following the appearance of the Ant Palace item two were sold.

On December 10 twelve New York-

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NIMROD Tri-Wormer For Both Dogs and Cats

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Breeding stock, foods and accessories furnished.
Shipped any distance. Folder FREE.

May, 1936

ANT PALACE

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er readers wrote, phoned or trudged up four steep flights to the Lawder apartment to purchase Ant Palaces.

On December 11 ten more trudged up, bought Ant Palaces.

It was just the beginning.

During the week of December 11-18 the House of Russell-Lawder got telegrams, letters, air mail messages from all over the country! From Santa Fe and Los Angeles and Aiken, S. C., and Toronto.

People even phoned from Hartford, Conn., Boston and Philadelphia.

Unlike most merchants, Russell-Lawder made their goods very difficult to procure. Anybody who wanted to buy an Ant Palace had to go way over to, 65th Street and the East River, trudge up those four flights, pay \$5 cash, plus postage, and wait at least a week before they received their merchandise.

Thus the Advent of the Ant Palace. As with all new merchandise that is sold to the right people first, the craze for it began to spread like wildfire. One friend told another. The news percolated to the Middle West — to the Coast. — *The New Yorker*.