

View from the Salt Box - #45

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, novelty salts became popular. Figurals in the shape of wheelbarrows, sleighs, cradles, anvils and other familiar objects appeared in tableware catalogs. At the same time, combination items appeared on the market. We are all familiar with the knife rest salt patented in 1872 (Figure 1). This provided a place to put your dirty knife so that the white linen tablecloth would not be soiled. There are other knife rest salts, but they are just the beginning of the multi-purpose designs.

The most popular combination judging from the number of different shapes is the toothpick salt. Many doubles were made with toothpick holder handles. A most unusual toothpick salt, however, is the one shown in Figure 2. Here the cover holds the picks lying down, and rotates horizontally to uncover two condiment bowls. A rubber ring underneath the center post holds the cover in place.

The next combination with an open salt is the condiment set. These are usually designed to hold salt, pepper and mustard, like the one shown in Figure 3. There are many varieties of these sets, most of them in china rather than in silver plate. Here again the figural type is very popular. The sets often come with boats, people, vegetables, or the like as the main theme.

About the same time the old catalogs show a variety of Breakfast Sets. These were placed on the tray with your food when the maid or butler brought it to you in bed. The key features were the salt, a pepper shaker and a napkin ring, like the one shown in Figure 4. Some of the sets had a matching small flat dish which looks like a butter pat. We're not sure that is what it was intended for, but it's the only use we can think of at the moment.

Figure 5 is another combination that we believe is for an egg and salt. That is the only way we can figure for using it, in any event. It has the word "Foreign" embossed on the bottom, which one book says is the mark used on goods imported into England about the turn of the century. This is not a common dish – evidently it didn't catch on in a big way.

Last on the list of combinations is the picture from a patent we just found in the Corning Museum Library. It is dated 1878, and claims a "small individual salt holder (combined) with a larger holder adapted to contain celery or a napkin, or by reducing its size, to be used as an egg glass". It is unusual, to say the least, and we don't know that it was ever made. Perhaps we've seen it and overlooked it – it isn't small enough to attract our attention in an assortment of glassware. If you have ever seen one, we'd love to hear about it. If you ever see two, please buy one for us.

We hope you have some combination salts as part of your collection. They are one of the varieties that are out there, and illustrate one of the many ways that salt was served over 100 years ago.



Figure 1

Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6