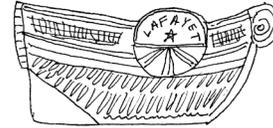


View from the Salt Box - #21

A collector in California recently wrote us and asked, "What is a Salt Cellar?". We remembered seeing the term used some places, but weren't sure why it was selected over the more usual "Salt" or "Open Salt" designations. The question sent us hunting through our books on glass to find out what the exact meaning might be. We found it twice - once in a British book on table glass before 1820 and again in a 1924 book titled "Old Glass". Most of the time it was hyphenated (salt-cellar), but not always. The dishes it referred to were master size open salts, made before 1850. One of the references was the Lafayette boat made by Sandwich. The latest book on Sandwich glass shows this boat in the "Open and Shaker Salts" section, and lists it only as the Lafayette Steamboat.



When we put a name on something, we do it to communicate with other people. We can call it anything that we think others will understand. To reach the largest audience, we need to know what the common usage is if we want to get our point across. An example of this is the term "Master Salt". This is common today, but we have never seen it in any of the many old catalogs we have examined. The makers always called the larger size a Table Salt, or just a Salt if the catalog was issued before the individual size became common. In the early 20th century the term "Celery Dip" appears, usually with a matching "Individual Salt" in a smaller size of the same pattern. Even after shakers began appearing, the catalogs seem to call our dishes "salts", and the others "salt shakers". A recent book published by the Corning Museum has a section on "Salt Dishes", with no mention of dips or cellars.

We looked in the dictionary for help. They define a saltcellar (one word) as a shaker or dish for salt. Anything at all in our collection would fit this, along with the shakers we have in the china cabinet.

So what is a Salt Cellar? I guess the term wouldn't bring any particular shape or size to our mind if someone used it, and we should even be willing to consider that they might be talking about a shaker. I guess we'll stick to "Open Salt", "Individual" and "Master" as terms to use with other collectors, with an occasional "Celery Dip" when an old catalog labels a specific dish as such.

Please don't ask about mid-size!!

Ed Berg June 1994