

# Salty Comments

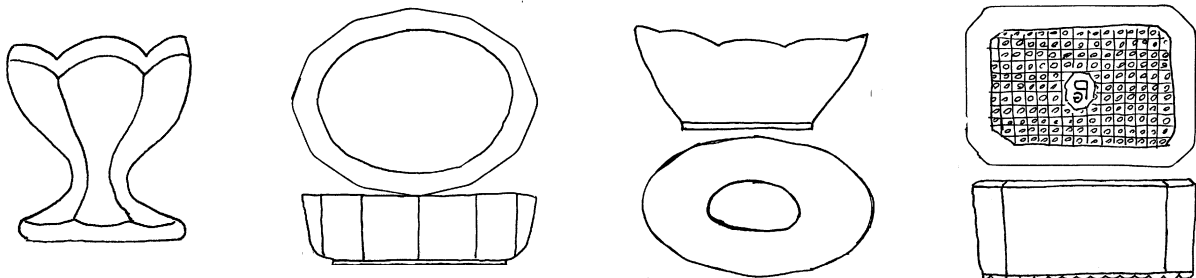
No. 46

Facts and Opinion about Open Salt Collecting

We just realized that we have not covered the activities of the Pioneer Glass Company in Salty Comments. We thought we had included it with other contemporary glass firms, but found that we had written about it only in the OSCAR newsletter.

Sometime about 1988 Bob Simsa, Brad Law and Harold Longden started a small glass making operation in a pot in the old Imperial Glass Co. factory in Bellaire, WV. All three had previously worked for Wilkerson, a freehand glass firm in Moundsville, WV. Their initial line included paperweights and pressed tableware such as sugar bowls, tumblers and candy dishes. We found their wares for sale in the Hay Shed outlet shop at the old Imperial factory. During the first half of 1989 the pot broke down, and they lacked money to replace it. As far as we know they never resumed production.



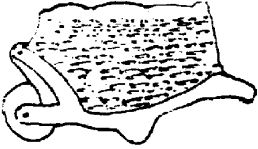
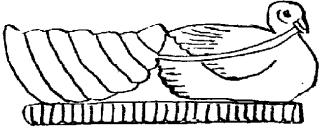

In making their line they undoubtedly used rented or second-hand molds, because new ones are much too expensive. They had 4 salts in cobalt, emerald green, and a light green color, all plainly marked PG. The mark is shown to the right, and the salts are shown below. One of them is a pedestal shape made in the old Fostoria LUCERE pattern mold. The second has an oval bowl with 12 panels around the sides. The third is oval with a contoured rim. The last is rectangular with a grid of rounded hobnails on the bottom.



We recently bought a book by Bonnie Pruitt that identifies many of the glass shapes made by Joe St. Clair. His father and 4 brothers were originally glassmakers working for other companies. In 1941, "Pop" and the boys went into business for themselves in Elwood, Indiana. Joe took charge of the business in 1958 when "Pop" died. He retired briefly in 1971, but couldn't stay idle. He returned to glassmaking in 1974 and continued working until his death in 1987. The business that bore his name is now closed.

Bonnie's book identifies 6 St. Clair salts. We already knew of the Wheelbarrow and Swan Boat, but she shows others that we have never seen. She does not identify when each was made, so we do not know whether they can be attributed directly to Joe or to earlier family operation of the factory. She identifies colors, although we have a couple not on her list. The complete list follows.

(2)

|  | ST. CLAIR NAME           | COLORS   | REMARKS   |
|--|--------------------------|--|---|
|   | Round Salt Dip           | Green Carnival   | Same shape as the Bob Wetzel Holly Salt, H&J 910, Smith 207-5-3 |
|   | Oblong Salt Dip          | Green Carnival   |   |
|   | Wheelbarrow Salt Dip     | Mint Green, Red, Caramel, Crystal, Crystal Carnival, Amethyst Slag, Turquoise Slag, Alexandrite* | H&J 4670  |
|   | Swan Salt Dip            | Cobalt, Blue Carnival, Marigold Carnival, Chocolate, Amberina*                                   | H&J 941<br>Smith 44-8-4   |
|  | Hobnail Elk Salt Dip     | Blue Carnival, Cobalt  | Picture of an elk in the bottom                                 |
|  | Hobnail Kennedy Salt Dip | Same, plus Red, Red Carnival   | Book not clear, probably picture of JFK in the bottom           |

In the above table, the colors marked with \* are not in her book but in our collection. There may be more that aren't listed. The Hobnail Salt Dips are round with sharp points on the outside.

Now that we know about the 4 other shapes we will be looking for them. The prices will run \$25 or higher according to Bonnie's book, but we'd like to have one of each type to keep our contemporary salt collection up to date. If you want a challenge, try getting a complete set of the colors.

Quite often people ask us what we collect. We tell them, "Open salts", and usually add an explanation of just what they are. Lately with the shelves becoming overcrowded we've started asking ourselves the same question, "What do we collect?" We started a list, and are impressed (appalled?) by how long it is.

When we started, we bought anything that an antique dealer called an open salt. We made sure it was small, able to hold salt and priced less than \$10.00. It was a good way to start, and we built a basic collection of a hundred or more. We also inadvertently collected toothpick holders, caster cups, fruit jar immersers and other things. We refer to these early "near miss" purchases as "buying an education", and have a special set of shelves to hold them. The price limit let us accumulate reproductions that added color to the collection. It was these repros that led to our buying higher priced dishes, because we wanted the original salts for comparison.

So what do we collect today? If we could define what we're after, it might relieve our crowded shelves, and would let us know what to pass by when we go hunting. Here's our first try at a list, in no particular order:

We collect bargains. It's hard to resist a salt we don't have when we find it at half the book price. As long as we know it's really a salt we will buy it, and the collection gets larger.

We buy cute little dishes. If we see a nice little porcelain figural that has a salt-like bowl beside the person or animal, we go for it. We draw a line here, though -- if the bowl has a hollow going through into the figure, we won't accept it as a salt dish. We particularly like to get a variety of shapes in glass, porcelain, or any other material.

We sometimes buy interesting dishes that look like salts even though we know they were made for something else. We have a milk glass tooth powder holder which looks so much like a salt that we couldn't resist. We have a Domino sugar cube holder and two Heisey OLD SANDWICH ash trays that we bought for the same reason.

We collect history. We have tried to trace the evolution of the American glass industry with the salts they made. It starts with the Stiegel type, the first shapes made this side of the Atlantic, and the early blown and cut pedestal ones imported from England. The invention of the mechanical glass press in 1825 led to the lacy period, and the many open salts made at the time. Next came the development of soda-lime tableware, replacing the expensive flint glass used previously, and the pattern glass era that lasted until the turn of the century. Then there are the twentieth century glass companies who thrived for a while, but have mostly disappeared or abandoned the tableware business. Finally there are the small glass companies that still use hand-operated glass presses and make repros as well as original shapes. We like to have examples of all of these things.

We collect figural salts -- ones made in the shapes of people, animals, cars, sleighs, cradles, wheelbarrows, and on and on. There were a lot of glass salts like this in the later part of the 19th century, and a few since then. There also are many porcelain salts in this category, ranging from expensive Meissen figures down to Occupied Japan imitations at a much more reasonable price. We think that someday we could find that some were sweetmeat dishes and not salts, but until proven otherwise they remain in the collection. After all, they are the right size and someone could have put salt in them at one time or another.

We collect lacy salts, though sparingly. The price on these limits our interest, because there are always 3 or more other fascinating salts we could get for the price of one lacy. We have bought one now and then, so we own several colored ones as well as one of the rare Henry Clay salts. This latter has all 4 feet broken off so the price was reasonable -- we're not sure we'd want to pay for one in mint condition.

We collect pattern glass salts. For about 30 years the big glass companies made sets of tableware with all pieces having a common design. The number of patterns is tremendous -- the Bennington Museum has a collection of 1400 pattern glass goblets, each one different. We know there weren't that many open salt patterns, but we already have over 350 of them. There are many more to be found, specially in the pedestal master salt sizes. One of our favorite finds is in this category -- an individual open salt in the Fostoria LOUISE pattern. Weatherman's book on Fostoria shows only a shaker in this pattern, and we've never seen another one like ours.

We collect art glass (sparingly). This is beautiful, but unfortunately other collectors think so too. Dishes by Steuben and Tiffany are expensive, but once in a while one for the collection will appear under the Christmas tree. Lately there are several glass artists that have made similar salts at more reasonable prices. The Lundberg studios in California are making Tiffany-like salts (with the Lundberg mark) which they sell at a much more affordable price. Other glass artists have ventured into salts -- Terry Crider made a number of them including the official salt for the First National Convention. His are original designs, however, not imitating the older expensive dishes.

We collect salts made by old glass companies. Our research into old catalogs comes up with a number of open salts that each made, as we have described in previous Salty Comments. Every time we do research on a company it becomes a challenge to match all of the salts pictured in the old catalogs. Often we find that we have quite a few, but every time we add a few more to our "We'd Like To Find This One" list. Some of these shapes we considered "ordinary" before, so we may have passed one of them in recent years. We keep telling ourselves, "We can't have one of everything", but when we see an old catalog picture the list of ones we can't have grows shorter.

We collect porcelain marks. There are hundreds of different ones, many of which don't appear in books we have. The marks can often be dated by the history of the area, if they have words like Prussia, Germany, Western Germany, Nippon, Japan or Occupied Japan. It's always exciting to get a new mark that can be identified, especially if we find the approximate year as well as the maker. The Ceramic Art Co. - Lenox marks are particularly nice this way. We wrote about their mark sequence in Salty Comments #9 and have been able to find salts with almost every one of the marks they used. Another interesting category for porcelain is artist initials or signatures. Around the turn of the century it was popular for ladies to decorate porcelain as a hobby, and they sometimes identified their work. Our favorite in this category is a salt marked "Stewart Kern from J. Root, Xmas 1920".

We collect silver and silver plated salts, though not aggressively. Here we find it hard to resist the figural designs, and also have several caster sets that have a napkin ring and pepper shaker in addition to the open salt. So many simple silver shapes were made that we have stopped trying to get them all. The chore of polishing them is also a deterrent, especially since we keep them in open-front cabinets.

We collect salts made from unusual materials -- things like onyx, wood, plastic, stone, and even coal. Any time someone creates an unusual dish that is the right size for salt, they seem to know where to find us. Our favorites in this category are an open salt dish made of oak by son John when he got a new lathe (Smith 427-2-2), and one made from creek-bottom clay by our grandson when he was in third grade.

We collect celery salts, the kind made in sets with a large tray for the celery. Besides the celery type, we found there were radish sets as well. Dipping vegetables in salt was a popular thing 50 years ago, when everyone thought that you should eat plenty of salt, especially when you perspired. We have avoided complete sets of these -- think of the shelf space they would need!

We collect cut glass salts. Here again there are so many varieties that we don't try for one of each. We do try to collect cut glass marks, one from each maker that we can find. Most salts weren't marked so this is a continuing hunt.

We collect information. We're always trying to learn more about our salts, and each new source we uncover is exciting. We just wish the Corning Museum (Corning, NY) and Jones Museum (Portland, ME) libraries were closer so we could spend more time there.

And last, but most important of all, we collect new friends. The club meetings, the National Conventions, and the phone calls and letters we get from fellow collectors make the hobby worthwhile. There's nothing as satisfying as sharing new salt finds with someone else, and this has helped keep us involved for about 15 years. We hope we can keep going for another 15. If we do, we'll need a lot more shelves or fewer categories on the list.

What do you collect?

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References: "St. Clair Glass Collector's Guide", by Bonnie Pruitt  
"5000 Open Salts", by William Heacock and Patricia Johnson  
10 books, "Open Salts Illustrated", by Alan B. And Helen B. Smith