

VIEW FROM THE SALT BOX - #5

"You can always tell an experienced collector -- but you cannot tell him anything".

In the August 1990 issue of *Antiques and Collecting*, Harry L. Rinker recalls this old saying with comments that left me saying "Amen". In case you haven't heard of him, Harry is the editor of the annual "Warman's Price Guide to Antiques", a columnist in several antique publications, and a popular lecturer at events relating to antiques. He is an avid collector of several things and communicates with many antique dealers and collectors.

Harry's observation is that as collectors get more and more involved, they become more and more "expert" in their hobby, usually based on the fact that they have seen more of the items than other people. Their "knowledge" is usually unbiased by any research on the topic, and is often a distillation of what antique dealers have told them over the years. In our experience, at least 90% of the antique dealers have a similar basis for their "knowledge", biased by the fact that they want to sell you their wares and justify a high price. How many times have you heard one of them say, "I think" before he tells you the salt is Sandwich or unmarked Libbey?

We are constantly being reminded of our own tendencies in this area. In *Salty Comments* we stated that "All ENGLISH HOBNAIL pedestal salts with the WG on the bottom are made by Summit Art Glass". We have since learned this is not accurate in at least one instance - a ruby red color that Summit never made. We have made lists of "all" the salts a particular company produced. We did this for Fostoria about 2 years ago. Since then people have pointed out 3 that we omitted, and we found a fourth in the LOUISE pattern. We just bought a book on pattern glass that lists (but not illustrates) 2 salt cellars in the Fostoria #676 Priscilla pattern. Evidently they found something else we missed.

We have been fortunate to encounter a few professionals in the area of glass - museum curators whose job it is to study antique dishes. Each of them often uses the words "I think", and even more often the words "I don't know". When they tell you something definitely they can give you the source of their information - old catalogs, design patents, shards found at an old plant site, or carefully documented records. When they write an article it invariably has many footnotes detailing the sources of their information. And they all subscribe to the concept, "The more you learn, the more you realize how little you really know".

When we read a column like Harry Rinker's, we keep nodding our heads in agreement, and proclaim, "He has hit the nail right on the head. We know just the people he is talking about". Then we recall how we pontificate about some open salts we see, and how positive we sometimes sound when stating where an open salt came from. We think we need to re-read the article regularly, while standing in front of a mirror.

Ed Berg