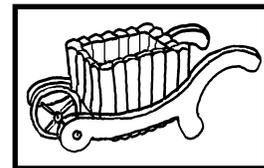


Salty Comments

Facts and Opinion about Open Salt Collecting



Number 67

June , 1999

Noritake Salts

Prologue The MOSS newsletter with its article on Noritake arrived in the mail the day after we finished the draft of this issue. Our first reaction was, "Oh no! Someone has beat us to it!! Murphy strikes again!!!". Our second thought was, "Great minds run on the same track". After reading the article, we decided there wasn't too much overlap after all, and anyway not every one of our readers is a member of MOSS (Midwest Open Salt Society), though they should be. MOSS has a beautiful newsletter with color pictures of open salts to illustrate their articles. If you're not a member, send \$10 to Ed Bowman, 2411 West 500 N, Hartford City, IN 47348 – you won't regret it.

More and more we are becoming aware of the quality of the painting on our china salts. Many are marked "Hand Painted", and others were decorated at home and signed by the person who did the work. The quality varies all over the map. Some are a single color, with maybe a gold rim, while others have exquisite detail that must have taken extremely fine brushes and a magnifying glass to create. Although there have been a few European or American companies like Royal Bayreuth or Lenox that produced beautiful hand painted dishes, the vast majority of this work seems to have come from Japan. We imagine this a byproduct of their language, where writing is done with careful brush strokes and people learn how to control a paintbrush at an early age. Hand decorating of a tiny salt would be a lot easier for them than for someone like me, whose marks in handwriting were a disgrace throughout grade school. According to the books, a hundred years ago Japanese ceramic painters were honored people who were recognized for their ability. The profession attracted the best talent available.

The trail of hand-painted salts led us too look for information on Japanese ceramics. Our first foray into the books on Japanese marks was frustrating. We already knew that "Nippon", the Japanese name for their country, was used from 1891 to 1921. This period started when the McKinley tariff act required a country of origin mark, and it ended when we required that the American name "Japan" be used instead of "Nippon". So our favorite marks book informed us that the Royal Kaga Nippon mark could be attributed to Royal Kaga 1891-1921, and the Chikusa Nippon mark was used by Chikusa in the same time frame. No hint of whether Kaga and Chikusa were patterns, towns, factories or whatever. Other books on Japanese marks were even less help – they concentrated on old things made before Japanese trade with the west was started. The marks they show are in Japanese script, which we can't even begin to read. The best information we uncovered was in books by Joan Van Patten on Nippon and Noritake porcelain. They don't clarify everything, but they do give us some background on certain Japanese salts.



In 1638, Japan isolated itself from the rest of the world. Only the port of Nagasaki was open, and then only to the Dutch and Chinese. Any other foreigner who entered was put to death, and any native who slipped out suffered a similar fate when he returned. Finally in 1852, President McKinley wrote a letter to the Emperor encased in a beautiful rosewood box, written on vellum and sealed with gold, asking that trade be opened up. Commodore Perry delivered it in April 1853 and promised to return for an answer. He came back in early 1854 and a trade treaty was formally signed on

(2)

March 31 of that year. It agreed to the appointment of an American consul and opened two ports for trade. In 1868, a constitutional government was formed in Japan and modernization started.

We next got out the reference cards on all our Nippon and Japanese salts. We were overwhelmed! There are so many different shapes and so many different marks that we could not possibly cover them all in one Salty Comments. In addition we had no information about any company except Noritake. If research has been done on Royal Kaga, Chikusa and the rest, we have yet to find it. Perhaps we could justify a trip to Japan, if we learned the language first. Lacking that, we decided to confine our current investigation to the Noritake Company.

The export porcelain business in Japan started late in the last century. The Japanese were looking for something they could sell in the west to counterbalance the flow of western goods being imported. The balance of trade was the reverse of what it is today – many more goods were coming into Japan than going out, with a net flow of gold from east to west. The firm of Morimura Bros. was established to produce china for export. They later became the Noritake Co., named after the town where they were located. The firm has become very successful, as we all know, starting out with fine porcelain dinnerware and moving into insulators, sanitary ware, and, after World War II, earthenware, abrasives, glassware, and even electronics.

In the Nippon era (1891-1921) when Noritake started, we have open salts with 7 different Noritake marks. The books say the earliest of these are the Maple Leaf and Toki Kaisha (Figures 1 & 2), first used in 1891. The next 3 marks (Figures 3 to 5) were used from 1906 on. The first of these does not have the word "Noritake", but the spider mark is theirs. The letters "RC" in the Figures 4 and 5 stands for "Royal Crockery" or "Royal Ceramic", depending on which book you read. The most common one, the M in a wreath (Figure 6) came into use in 1911 and continued in use when the word "Nippon" changed to "Japan" in 1921. The last Noritake Nippon mark we have on a salt is in Figure 7. This was used on blanks sold by the Company for decorating by someone else. In this case we guess the decorating was done at home by a lady in the U.S., judging from the initials "E.L." shown alongside the mark.

Beyond 1921, we have fewer Noritake marks, not because they produced less china but because there were many more shakers than open salts at the time. We have three marks on salts of that period. The most common one is Figure 8, which resembles the earlier one just above it. The second, Figure 9, is the spider again and the words "Hand Painted" are gone.

The last mark, Figure 10, was used for salts exported to England. We remember reading that this word was required by England during some period of time, but we can't find the reference today. We think it belongs to the Nippon mark era

	
<i>Figure 1</i>	<i>Figure 2</i>
	
<i>Figure 3</i>	<i>Figure 4</i>
	
<i>Figure 5</i>	<i>Figure 6</i>
	
<i>Figure 7</i>	<i>Figure 8</i>
	
<i>Figure 9</i>	<i>Figure 10</i>

There are many shapes of Noritake Nippon salts in our collection, with many of them being celery trays. These were made as part of celery sets, like the one shown in Figure 11. The large dish is made to hold the celery and the smaller dishes with salt in them were set at each place for dipping. The 5 different shapes of Noritake celery trays we have are shown in Figures 12 through 16. There are others we are sure – we just haven't yet tried to get one of each kind. Each of these decorated by hand. The detail is fantastic, with the first two of them having hundreds of closely-spaced raised gold dots as part of the design. The gold on white design in Figure 13 is still popular on dinnerware, though we doubt that celery salts with that design have been made for many years. One book quotes a catalog from the 1920's saying, "The thoughtful hostess provides individual open salt dishes" in an ad depicting them. We doubt if you would see that repeated today.

The next 4 salts are what we call tubs, like those used in the days before automatic washing machines. They have two handles at the sides, and are shown in Figures 17 through 20. One of these has raised gold and blue dots all over the ruffled sides, a tedious decorating job by our standards. The others show no less skill in decorating, but undoubtedly took less time to paint. The one in Figure 20 is the home decorated one mentioned earlier. We guess it was painted early 1900's, when home decorating of china was popular. Other Japanese companies used similar tub shapes – we have several in the collection with marks from other companies on the bottom.

The salt with the unusual "Foreign" mark is shown in Figure 21. It was made for sale in England, and we haven't seen any Noritake ones in this shape it with U.S. type marks. We think it is from the Nippon era, so we include it with these others.



Figure 11



Figure 12 Mark #4



Figure 13 Mark #3



Figure 14 Mark #6



Figure 15 Mark #6



Figure 16 Mark #6



Figure 17 Mark #1



Figure 18 Mark #6



Figure 19 Mark #6



Figure 20 Mark #7



Figure 21 Mark #10

(4)

In the Noritake Nippon collection we have 4 pedestal-shaped salts (Figures 22-25). The first of these has the same elaborate hand painting as the celery trays, with tiny roses and about 300 raised green dots in panels between them. The 6-sided larger one has a lake scene with a gondola (a very un-Japanese type of boat?). The 8-sided one has a decal of the Capitol building in Washington, DC in the bottom. We imagine it was made to be sold as a souvenir piece in that city. The last of this group is round and has a scene with two pagodas that looks more like art than decoration.

The last 4 Nippon shapes are one-of-a-kind in our collection (Figures 26-29). The first is a round dish with 3 legs attached to the outside. The painting on it is rather simple, but the mark is one from the earliest period. The second is a basket with an applied flower, which resembles others from the later period with "Japan" marks. The third is an unusual shape, and has a desert oasis scene inside. The painting does not include the tedious detail of some other decorations, but it still requires an artist to create it. The last is a shape we usually find with European marks. It has hand-painted flowers inside and elaborate gold trim with raised gold dots, typical Japanese style.

Moving beyond 1921, most of the Noritake marks are the "M-in-a-wreath", shown in Figure 8. The words underneath it, can be either "Japan" or "Made in Japan". Two of our salts have the "Noritake and Spider" (Figure 9), with no "Hand Painted" in the mark.

Early in this period Noritake introduced "luster" colors which are iridescent, and which were used extensively until the mid-30's. Blue and orange are the most common of these.

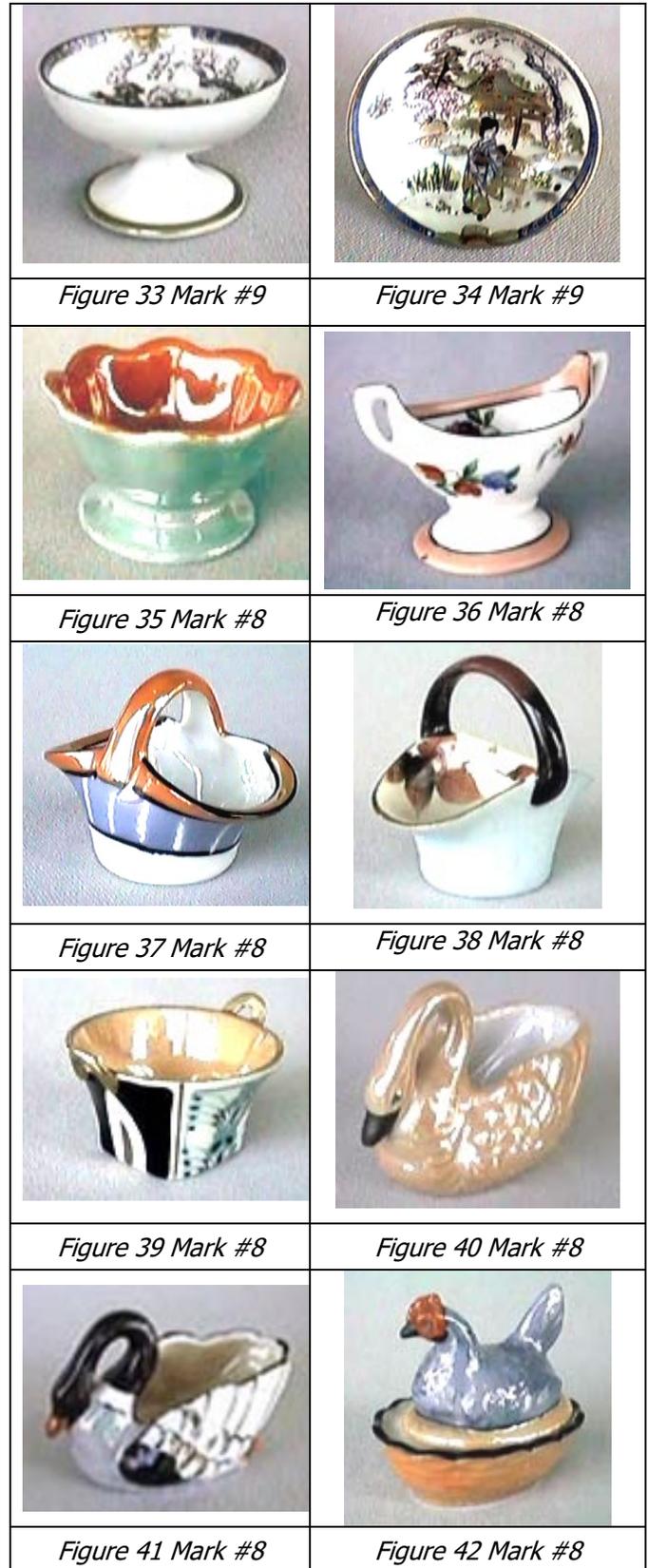
The shapes of this period still include celery sets, with salt trays like those in Figures 30-32. The first of these has their detailed hand painting with two bluebirds and fancy gold trim. The second has a radish for decoration and is part of a radish set. The last of this group is not only shaped like a leaf, but has a stalk of celery painted in the bottom. We have seen a picture of the set, and the larger celery dish has the same leaf-like shape.



Our pedestal salt shapes of this period are in Figures 33-36. The first has an elaborate detailed Japanese scene like earlier salts. Two views of this are shown so you can appreciate detail inside. It is not marked "Hand Painted", however, and we believe it is hand coloring over a decal that outlines the picture. The artistry of the Nippon era seems to be disappearing. The next pedestal shape is luster ware – blue outside and orange inside, with a white flower-like design in the bottom of the bowl. The last is an urn shape with decals for decoration, and no mention of hand painting in the mark on the bottom.

In the basket category (Figures 37-39), Noritake carried over a shape from the previous period but omitted the applied flower. These may be hand painted, though the marks do not say so. The first has simple orange and blue bands for decoration. The second is blue with a brown handle, but the spray of brown leaves inside looks hand done. The last is a different type of basket. It has green decals on two sides, but the orange inside, the black panels and the gold trim are done by hand.

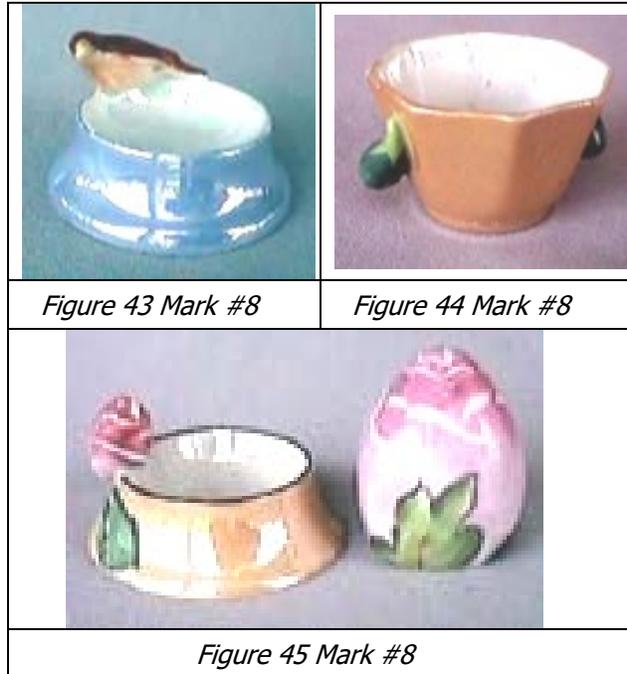
Noritake was also making some bird salts (Figures 40-42). The first swan is orange luster, and was sometimes used as part of an individual salt and pepper set that came on a tray. The second swan is mostly black and white. The book shows it as part of a "swan set", not specifying what end use was intended (we know, don't we?). The blue china hen on the orange nest imitates the Westmoreland glass shape, except the hen is a pepper shaker with holes along the back of her neck and a cork underneath in the hole for filling it. The decoration on all three of these is undoubtedly done by hand, though no claim to such is made on the bottom.



(6)

A familiar salt is the Noritake "Bird On The Rim", Figure 43. This comes in a variety of colors, both on the dish and on the bird itself (is anyone collecting one of each color?). A similar salt has a rose on the rim (Figure 45), which sometimes comes with a matching rosebud pepper shaker. Again the salts are hand painted, but not in the elaborate fashion of the Nippon era. There is a "Butterfly-On-The-Rim" salt which looks like one of the series, but ours has no mark on it. Finally, there is an 8-sided salt (Figure 44) which we call "eggplant handles". Ours is orange with green "things" hanging on two sides. We'll leave it up to you to identify them.

As an interesting aside, we have a "Rose On The Rim" salt decorated with gold all over and marked only "Pickard". We guess this American company imported blanks from Noritake to make it.



Although we have several salts from the "Occupied Japan" period (1946-52), none of them are marked Noritake. We're sure there must be some, though they are not in our collection. If we find a good book about this era, perhaps we can write more in a later Salty Comments.

We have covered a lot of Noritake salts, and we have surely missed some of the ones you have. We have decided that they made lots of them, and that earlier ones are much nicer than those after 1921. There have been many other Japanese companies making china in the same time period. We suspect their decorations show the same changes over the years as we see with Noritake.

We hope you have a nice group of Noritake salts in your collection, and that we have persuaded you to look at them more closely. Many of the Nippon pieces deserve examination with a magnifying glass, and rate a higher value in the marketplace than current prices seem to reflect. I couldn't decorate a celery tray like the early Nippon ones – could you?

Ed Berg
April 1999

401 Nottingham Rd., Newark DE 19711
DEsaltbox@cs.com

References: "The Collector's Encyclopedia of Noritake", by Joan Van Patten
"Noritake Collectibles", by Lou Ann Donahue