

SALTY COMMENTS #11
(Facts and Opinion on Open Salt Collecting)

During the last century the glass industry in America grew from a few small furnaces making blown glass to an industry involving literally hundreds of companies. Each glass house was started as a small business that grew or failed depending on the skill of its owners. Much of the business was bottles, lamp chimneys and window glass, especially in the earlier years. Glass tableware became popular in the latter half of the century, and open salts were often a part of a tableware set.

While about 1/3 of the companies survived into the 1900's, many of them lasted only a few years. Bankruptcy or a disastrous fire often ended the venture at an early stage. These short-lived factories made relatively few designs, so that less than 5 salts make up their entire known line. Learning about them makes us realize that some of our salts are more special than we thought.

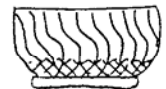
The earliest of these "few-salts" companies is Providence Flint Glass (PFG). They were started in Rhode Island in 1831, and were out of business by 1835. No good records of their operations exist, but the salt they made is one of the few marked dishes of the lacy era. It is shown in Smith 396-3-1, and is about the shape of H&J 3489. The bottom has the word "Providence" on it. This is the only dish known to have been made by PFG. Old advertisements for the company have been found, but nothing that tells anything about their wares. One of these salts may appear at an auction when a major collection is sold, and it will sell for hundreds of dollars or more.



Later in the century the Boston Silver Glass Co. appeared. They had a factory in East Cambridge, Mass., and from 1857 to 1867 made nothing but mercury glass. Perhaps some of the mercury salts we have were made by them - there is no way of telling. In 1867 they expanded into the pressed glass business, but by 1871 they closed their doors. Three of their salts are known today. The Beaded Grape Medallion pattern comes in both table and individual sizes (Smith 334-3-3 and 6-4-3, H&J 2987 and 2522). These dishes are available today, at prices are in the \$15-35 range. The third dish is the Beaded Acorn Medallion, which is less often found and which costs about \$25. Interestingly enough, after Boston Silver went out of business their patent on a silvered glass doorknob was granted. They must have sold the rights to someone else, because doorknobs like this were made - we have one which used to belong to our grandparents.



Another company whose name you seldom hear but whose salt is well known is Windsor Glass. They started in Pittsburgh in 1886, and the next year were destroyed by fire. The plant was rebuilt, but in 1890 they shut down to convert to natural gas. They never got the gas they were promised, because the well produced only cold air. Their glass pots were ruined by the shutdown, and they never resumed operations. In their 4 years of business they made the Jersey Swirl salt, Smith 36-5-1, H&J 426. This is found in clear, amber, blue canary and vaseline, and is relatively plentiful today. Prices are about \$10-20 in mint condition. L.G. Wright made a similar dish in a slightly larger size, but no exact reproductions exist to our knowledge. The pattern glass books also list a master salt in this pattern, but we have yet to see one.

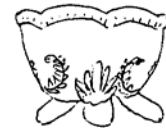


A company which was perhaps named for a railroad is Nickel Plate Glass. They started in Fostoria, Ohio in 1888 at the height of the natural gas boom in the area. Three years later they joined the National Glass combine, and by 1893 the plant

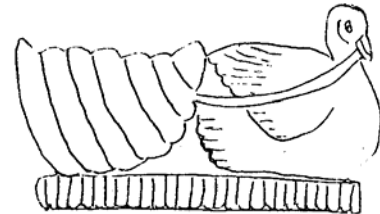
was abandoned. The only salt we know they made is the Seely pattern, Smith 362-3-1, H&J 2576. This dish is seen fairly often, and can be added to your collection for under \$10. If you have one, recognize it as the only design surviving the Nickel Plate Glass Co. venture.



Also in 1888, the Model Flint Glass Co. was started in nearby Findlay, Ohio. This was another Ohio gas boom town - they offered free gas to companies who would move there. The gas ran short rather soon, however, and Model Flint moved to another source of free gas, Albany, Ohio, in 1893. They joined the National Glass combine in 1899, and the plant was abandoned by 1902. This is a rather long life, compared to the firms mentioned previously, but we know of only one salt they made - the Wreath and Shell pattern. This is shown in Smith 99-4-2, H&J 444. It is a very cute dish, and we have seen it in vaseline and blue, each with an opalescent rim. The dish is sought after by collectors, with prices in the \$50-75 range.

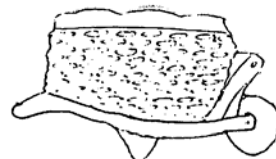


The Mosaic Glass Co. was another Fostoria, Ohio business that lasted only briefly. They began operations in 1892, and were closed within 2 years. The idle plant burned in 1895. Although they made some tableware, the only salt we know of is the swan boat, Smith 44-8-4, H&J 3751. This is shown in one of their advertisements, along with other tableware pieces. Joe St. Clair made an excellent copy of this dish 20-30 years ago. We have what we believe is the original along with a St. Clair one. The most obvious difference can be seen on the straps that the swan carries in his beak. The copy has lines on the straps; the original has a flat surface. In addition, we believe that copies were made only in colored glass, and the original was only crystal. The St. Clair dish is sought after by collectors, and usually carries a \$20-30 price. The original does not seem to be recognized for the rarity it is. If you are lucky enough to find one you may be able to get it for less than the copy. We have seen only one like it in our travels - the one on our shelves.



Perhaps the best known of the early short-lived glass companies is Indiana Tumbler and Goblet. They were located in Greentown, Ind., and their glass is usually referred to as Greentown Glass. They started in 1894, and became part of the National Glass combine in 1899. They continued operations, after the merger, but the plant burned to the ground in 1903, a not uncommon fate for glass factories in those days. They are best known for their "chocolate" color which was developed in 1900 and which was quite popular. A lot is known about their designs because of the efforts of Dr. Ruth Herrick, a physician from Grand Rapids, Michigan. In 1951 she started digging on weekends at the site of the factory dump, and over the next several years she visited there about once a month, often with friends who helped with the project. In the winter she washed the fragments she found and catalogued them. By 1959 she had enough information to publish a book, and the Greentown Glass craze began. There is now an active Collector's Club and a Museum has been established in the town.

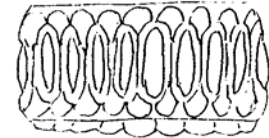
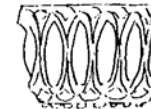
Three salts are associated with Greentown. The first is the wheelbarrow, H&J 4669, no Smith. This is the basket-weave design, reproduced by Joe St. Clair in recent years. The Greentown version was made in clear, amber, blue, chocolate, and Nile green (an opaque color). St. Clair says that all his wheelbarrows are signed, so if you find an unsigned basket-weave wheelbarrow it is most likely genuine Greentown. These are quite valuable, bringing from \$75 (in clear) to \$800 (in chocolate) from Greentown collectors.



Their second salt is the #11 pattern, part of a set of tableware. This is a more common item, but the design is the same as McKee's Champion pattern. We have been unable to find out what the difference really is, since we have no source of an authenticated McKee dish. The salt in the Greentown museum is exactly like one of ours (H&J 3043, no Smith). It has an unusual pattern of rays on the bottom - 8 primary ones with pairs of half-length ones in between. We guess that a McKee salt would have a more ordinary rayed bottom. If you have a dish with the unusual rays, believe that it is Greentown until someone comes along who can really prove otherwise. The dish can be found now and then, usually in the \$10-15 price range.



The third salt associated with this company is somewhat controversial. Greentown collectors call it Honeycomb; pattern glass collectors call it Thousand Eye Band. It is shown in Smith 16-3-1, H&J 2071 and 4646. Some believe it to be Indiana Tumbler because it is found in chocolate color. The Greentown Museum has a candy dish in this pattern on display. Others maintain that it was made by someone else, because no fragments have been found in the diggings. We prefer to believe the Greentown story until such time as direct evidence is found showing another glass company had the pattern. The salt comes in both table and individual sizes. We have seen only one of the larger ones, in clear, and have encountered the small ones two or three times. In clear they seem to be worth \$25-35 (large) and \$15-20 (small). In chocolate, the Greentown price guide lists them at \$450 and \$300 respectively. If you want a needle-in-a-haystack project, try to find a chocolate one for sale.



There were many other small glass companies that came and went quickly in the 1800's. These are the only ones we have found that can be associated with open salts, however. Molds are the big expense in making pressed glass, and we suspect that the revenue from little salt dishes seldom seemed worth the mold expense in the early days of a glass operation. The other interesting thing about factories with a short life span is the nature of their demise. About one in five were destroyed by fire and never reopened. A number went into one of the two glass combines, National Glass in 1891 or U.S. Glass in 1899, and found their factories closed by the combine a few years later. Most others could not make it financially, and went bankrupt. We estimate that about 1/3 of the glass factories started after 1850 were able to continue operations beyond the early 1900's.

You may be interested to see how many of the salts we have discussed you already own. Some are expensive rarities - you are very fortunate if you have one. Others are less costly, but still unusual in their own way. We hope this discussion will help you recognize them, and will let you to appreciate them more when they are in your collection.

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References: "Pressed Glass in America" by John and Elizabeth Welker
"Greentown Glass" by James Measell
"American Glass" by George P. and Helen McKearin
Ten books, "Open Salts Illustrated" by Allan B. and Helen B. Smith
"5000 Open Salts" by William Heacock and Patricia Johnson