



# Salty Comments

*Facts and Opinion on Open Salt Collecting*

No. 38



People have always appreciated the combination of silver and glass or china for open salts. The silver provides a luxurious, attractive appearance, while the glass serves the practical purpose of protecting the metal from corrosion during use. There are a great many silver salts with glass liners and a few with porcelain liners. Some of these date back to the 18th century.

About 100 years ago another way of combining silver with glass or china became popular. In this process silver was deposited on the dish electrolytically, bonding it firmly in place. There were many elegant objects made this way, including vases, glasses, tea sets, and fancy bottles. The Glass Collector's Digest article in the references shows beautiful color pictures of some of these. We have found a number of open salts that fit in this category, and recently took a hard look at them to see what we could discover.

The first point we encountered is terminology. The silver is deposited on the salt in every case but one, yet we collectors call the dishes "silver overlay". In the strict technical sense, "overlay" means that the metal is wrapped around the dish and fastened to it after wrapping. A careful examination of our salts shows only one like this. It is round glass, with a perforated silver jacket. The silver is crimped over the upper and lower edges of the glass to keep it from falling off. At first we thought that deposited silver had merely come loose from the glass because we could rotate it, but closer examination revealed a seam in the metal on one side. We have seen two salts like this, both with the same design. The metal has details impressed in it, and bears an SW mark, which we believe is from the Schofield and De Wyngaret Co. about the turn of the century. The Smith and H&J books show one salt design where the glass is actually blown into the metal, fastening it firmly in place (Smith plate 370-3-2, H&J 2034). Unfortunately we don't have one like this. The rest of the metal with glass salts we have are either holders with "removable" liners or silver deposit. The quotation marks are made necessary by one salt where the once loose liner is now corroded in place, and we don't dare to force it free.



**Salt with Applied Silver  
and Its Mark**

The first patent for electroplating silver on glass is dated 1879. Improvements came along over the next 10 years, and by the 1890's the silver deposit ware became fashionable. It continued to be in style until about 1920, and at least a dozen companies used the process. Most of these were decorating firms who used china or glass ware bought from others. To apply the silver, you first need a flux made from precipitated silver, powdered glass and about 6 other ingredients. This is ground for 12-24 hours in a ball mill and then thinned to the consistency of paint. It is applied to the glass or china, and fired for an hour or two to fuse it to the surface. The dish is then put into an electroplating bath to build up a layer of silver. The plating takes another 12-24 hours, depending on the desired final thickness. One reference recommended that plating be continued overnight by "using batteries after the dynamos are turned off". The finished object is polished to give a lustrous finish, and is then ready for shipment.

To create a pattern in the deposited silver, it is possible to coat the dish entirely and then dissolve or mechanically remove the unwanted metal. This requires recovery of the silver being removed, and seems inefficient since it adds another step to the process. The books mention this as if it had been used, but none of the salts and other vessels we have seen look like this was done. The best method is to apply the desired design on the surface either by freehand painting or by a transfer process (like printing), and then build up the thickness. The books also mention that a plating of rhodium can be applied on the silver to prevent tarnishing. Unfortunately none of our salts have this enhancement - we have to polish them regularly or endure the tarnish.

Looking at our silvered salts reveals a wide range of quality in the coatings. Some seem to have had no electroplating at all. The fused flux can be polished to look like silver, but it will wear through rather quickly. This was a way to get a product to market cheaply, and assumed that the consumer wanted

### SOME OPEN SALTS WITH DEPOSITED SILVER

<u>Fig. No.</u>	<u>Dish (Individual size if not specified)</u>	<u>Coating Thickness</u>	<u>Engraved?</u>	<u>Marks</u>	<u>H&amp;J No.</u>	<u>Smith No.</u>
1	Porcelain, mid-size, cobalt, 3 stubby legs	Heavy	Yes	Lenox, Mauser on bottom	1701	159-5-1
2	Porcelain, cobalt, low with ruffled rim	Heavy	Yes	Lenox, Depasse on bottom	shape 1294	shape 42-4-4
3	Porcelain, creamy white, low with ruffled rim	Heavy	Yes	Lenox on bottom Alvin in silver	shape 1294	shape 42-4-4
4	Glass, oblong heavy master, oval bowl	Heavy	Yes	La Pierre, Sterling in silver	shape 3723	411-6-3
5	Glass, plain sides, oval	Heavy	No	Alvin in silver	3871	61-1-2
6	Porcelain, white pedestal	Light	No	None	shape 1519	shape 42-3-1
7	Brown porcelain, silver deposit band on rim	Light	No	Mauser on bottom	shape 1389	shape 105-1-2
8	Heisey EARLY PURITAN pattern	Light	No	Sterling in silver	shape 2630	428-2-1
9	8-sided tab handle tub Duncan COLONIAL?	Light	No	Sterling in silver	3866	61-1-1
10	Pedestal nut dish, wide bowl	Light	No	Sterling in silver	3914	
11	Wide-mouth celery dip by Duncan	Light	No	None	3912	482-4-3
12	Fostoria ALEXIS pattern, pedestal	Light	No	None		200-1-3
13	Heavy 6-sided, bulging lower sides	Light	No	Sterling in silver	3872	61-2-2
14	Mid-size footed pedestal, 8 panel bowl	Light	No	None		
15	Duncan's FLAWLESS salt	Flux	No	None	3870	61-2-3
16	Duncan's THUMBNAIL pattern	Flux	No	None	shape	shape
17	Blue pedestal nut dish, wide bowl, Northwood mark	Flux	No	N in glass	3915	
18	Small pedestal, 8-sided bowl	Flux	No	None		465-6-1

(3)

### SOME OPEN SALTS WITH DEPOSITED SILVER



(1)



(2)



(3)



Detail of (3)



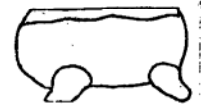
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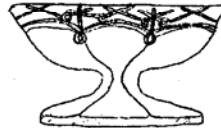
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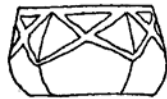
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(11)



(12)



(13)



(14)



(15)



Top View - (15)



(16)



(17)



(18)

a low price rather than durability. Salts of this kind are never marked in the silver - the coating is never thick enough. The next grade seems to be those with a medium silver thickness. These can be marked and one of ours has a little engraving on it. The best ones have a heavy deposit, are engraved to supplement the basic design, and have marks stamped into the silver. To classify our salts we have used the fingernail test. We developed it using a feeler gage which had thicknesses of 1.5, 2, 3 and 4 mils. (One mil = .001 inch). We found that we could feel a difference with our fingernails when the gage was flat on the table. We compared the gage with the feel of the silver layer on our salts. This is crude, but it let us classify them after a fashion. If you want to try it, hold a sheet of paper tightly on a hard, flat surface and feel the edge with your fingernail. Most paper is about 3 mils thick. If the silver deposit on your salt feels as thick as the paper, it is a high quality coating. If the silver is thinner, it is "commercial grade". If you can barely feel the coating at all, it is probably just the flux layer, fired and polished. The best designs will have engraving in the silver, and will be marked. There is one other way to identify the highest grade - by the price. Most antique dealers seem to know good silver deposit work when they see it. For the really good salts you will pay \$50-100, and sometimes more.

Two of our salts seem to have an applied design rather than painted. The first is our most elegant - a rectangular glass master with a gothic R engraved in a medallion on the side. The second is a mid-size glass pedestal salt with 8 panels on the bowl. Four of the panels have scenes of a lady with a basket in an orchard. There is only a relatively thin silver coating on this one with no marks. A scene on one of the panels is shown on the right.



**Orchard Scene**

There were a variety of salts used for silver deposit. The ones we have are shown in the accompanying illustrations. The china ones come from Lenox or it's earlier manifestation, the Ceramic Arts Company. The glass ones we can identify are from Heisey, Duncan, Fostoria and Northwood. We can date the shapes or marks approximately, and they range from 1894 to 1924. All are illustrated, along with some more general shapes whose makers cannot be determined.

Finding marks on silver deposit salts requires a magnifying glass. The ones on china are in plain view on the bottom of the dish. On the glass salts, they are tiny and hidden in the silver. They evidently were punched into the metal after the dish was finished. The marks we have found, besides the word "sterling" and numbers identifying the pattern are shown below. All four companies decorated by electroplating and purchased their salts from glass or china manufacturers.



Alvin Corporation



Depasse Mfg. Co.



Mauser Mfg. Co.



La Pierre Mfg. Co.

There are surely other open salts with silver deposit decorations that we have not seen. We hope that this discussion will inspire you to examine yours more closely, and maybe discover something that we have missed. If you do, please let us know so that we can share the information with other collectors.

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October 1992

- References: Glass Collector's Digest, Vol. III No. 3, Oct./Nov. 1989  
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