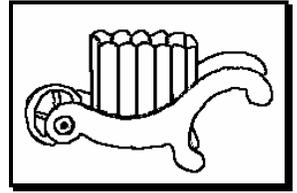


Salty Comments

Facts and Opinion about Open Salt Collecting



Number 55

September 1996

But Is It An Open Salt??



*INVERTED FERN Salt
(Short Version)*



*INVERTED FERN Salt
(Tall Version)*



*PANELLED THISTLE
3 1/2" Comportier*

It started when we found an INVERTED FERN pattern master salt in a collection we bought. For some reason we pulled out the one already in our collection and compared it. The two were quite different! Close examination showed that the rim of the new one had been carefully ground at some time in the past - maybe to remove chips or maybe to convert it from something else. But what was it originally if not a salt?

About the same time someone told us they had found a master size PANELLED THISTLE salt. We said we had never heard of such a thing - what does it look like? They referred us to Ruth Webb Lee's book, "Early American Pressed Glass", one of the bibles among glass collectors. Sure enough, plate 141 shows a Master Salt in the pattern. This discovery went into our "Next Corning Trip" folder, because we knew their library had an old catalog with the complete set of the DELTA pattern, Higbee's name for PANELLED THISTLE. We also put in a note to investigate what shapes resembled open salts in the old catalogs and what shapes could be cut down to create a salt.

When we visited Corning we found the answer to the PANELLED THISTLE question. Higbee thought they were making a 3 1/2" Comportier, a dish to serve stewed fruit. The set had nothing designated for salt other than the little individual size. If my great-grandmother wanted a table salt to go with the Footed Jelly, Iced Tea Tumbler, Sherbet or Wine glasses she had just bought from Higbee, she would have purchased a Comportier for the purpose. It's just that Higbee didn't recognize the full market potential for the dish, probably because table salts were going out of style in 1908.

We didn't find the answer to the INVERTED FERN riddle, however, because there was no old catalog and no way to be certain about who made it. Looking in other books we found pictures of goblets from this era. They were larger and higher, so our salt could not have been cut down from that. We found a photo of a set of INVERTED FERN dishes in a recent pattern glass book which included a salt like our tall version. It had about a half inch of clear rim above the pattern. They called it an egg cup, but gave no reasoning for their designation. The book we trust most - Welker's "Encyclopedia Of Pressed Glass" - really left us hanging. It showed a page of open salts and both the taller and shorter versions were included! Back to square one.



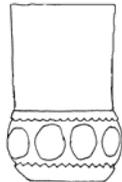
*Egg Cup
Gillinder 1876*



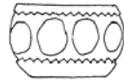
Rustic Egg.
*Egg Cup
McKee 1871*



*Egg Cup
King - 18906*



*KINGS CROWN
Tumbler*



*Round KINGS
CROWN "Salt"*



*Moon & Stars
"Salt"*



*KINGS CROWN
Sherry*



*KINGS CROWN
Pedestal "Salt"*



Sprig Champagne.



Sprig Wine.



Sprig Egg.



Sprig Salt.

Champagne, Wine, Egg, Salt - McKee 1868



Berry Wine



Berry Egg



Berry Salt.

Wine, Egg, Salt - McKee 1880



No. 6 Wine.



No. 3 Champagne.



No. 25 Goblet.



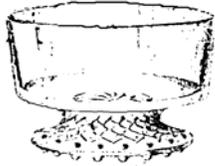
No. 20 Goblet.

Wine, Champagne, Goblet (2) - Gillinder 1876

We then began a search to find out about egg cups and other shapes that could be cut down into open salts. We found the egg cups in catalogs dating from 1860 to about 1880, but not much later. An 1891 U.S. Glass Co. catalog with over 500 pages of tableware showed only one egg cup, though there were a number of master salts. These salts were not the pedestal types, however, but lower, more practical kinds that would be harder to knock over accidentally. We show a number of the egg cup shapes on the left. Their shapes are larger than the corresponding salts and are distinctive enough that we concluded our INVERTED FERN was not one of them.

We still did not know if there was something else that could be cut down to make our salt. We have several things in the collection which demonstrate the imagination of people with a damaged glass object. Until recently we thought we had a round KING'S CROWN master salt, even though the old catalog shows only a rectangular one. Very careful examination of this "rarity" has changed our mind. It could be made very easily by cutting down a tumbler, and we now think our round master has a ground rim hidden under the light flaking. We have another nice pedestal salt in this same pattern which we are sure is a cut-down sherry glass. Our rare MOON & STARS salt with only the stars showing looks like one shown in a very old catalog, but it is the foot of a cream pitcher, turned upside down (See Salty Comments 53). Looking through the old catalogs for shapes that could be cut down, we didn't find any. Most of the old glass patterns had wines, clarets, champagnes and goblets with shapes similar to the salts, but all of them were enough different so that a cut-down version would not look right. Comparing the possibilities we decided there are a few characteristics that differentiate most of the similar shapes:

1. If you are making a drinking vessel or an egg cup, it will have a smooth rim. If it has a scalloped, beaded or otherwise rough rim and is the right size, it is invariably a salt. The reverse does not hold true - some salts can have smooth rims, especially those with covers.



King Co. 3 1/2" Comport



U.S. Glass 3 1/2" Comport



U.S. Glass 3 1/2" Comport



U.S. Glass 3 1/2" Nappy



*LACY DAISY
Child's Dish or Open Salt*



*TULIP & HONEYCOMB
Child's Dish*



Duster Salt or Pepper.

2. Egg cups are usually taller than the salts in the same set. These are not the boiled egg holders that we see today, but rather dishes to hold the edible parts of several soft boiled eggs mixed with toast and butter. In the last century, eggs, butter and salt were good for you.

3. Wines and champagnes are footed goblet-types which have relatively tall stems compared to the footed salts. In most cases they have a broad clear band around the rim.

Two dish shapes that overlap with master salts are the 3 1/2" comport (or comportier) and the 3 1/2" nappy. Many old pattern sets had something like this, often with accompanying larger sizes. We think they were used for sauces or stewed fruit, like the comportier mentioned earlier. We saw one case where the same dish was listed both as a comport and as an individual sugar with matching creamer. The size is right for a master salt, but we did not find any of them listed as such. The shapes of these vary considerably, from low footed kinds to open sauce dish types, but most of them have flaring sides rather than vertical ones. We could argue that they served as master salts if the pattern had no other dish for this purpose, but if we let ourselves adopt this line of reasoning where could we keep them all? The shelves are already overcrowded!

There is one other category that confuses the open salt picture - Children's Dishes. Sets of these were sold which often had a salt-size "compote" or similar shape that is perfect for our collection. The LACY DAISY pattern is a classic in this respect. It was originally issued by Westmoreland as a toy berry set, with a large bowl and smaller salt-size dishes. They later reissued the smaller shapes as open salts, so collectors can rightfully have it both ways. Another child's pattern we recently encountered is TULIP AND HONEYCOMB, which the maker did not reissue. It includes a cute footed glass dish with a 4-lobed bowl which is a perfect size for our collection. Unfortunately the book on Children's Dishes shows a complete set of small dishes with this design, and none of the glass books say the pattern was ever used for tableware. We have yet to take it off our shelves, though - it's still a salt to us.

During our browsing of old catalogs we found a real puzzler that we had overlooked before. It seems to belong in the open salt category, because there apparently is no lid. It is labeled "Duster Salt or Pepper" and looks like it has an open top and a little handle sticking out of one side. It is part of the PRISM AND BLOCK BAND set in the King & Co. 1890 catalog. The catalog picture is somewhat fuzzy, as you can see on the left. If anyone has ever seen one or knows what how it is intended to be used, we would be grateful to hear about it.

(4)

Back to our INVERTED FERN dilemma. Our current opinion is that maybe both sizes are master salts even though the rim of the taller one has been ground. Welker suggests that two factories might have made the pattern, so there could have been two different shapes. Until more reliable information shows up, we are going to keep both in the collection and keep our eyes open for an explanation. As far as other patterns are concerned, we will go by whatever the old catalogs say when we find one for reference. If the pattern shows both an open salt and something similar, we will know which is which. When the catalog shows no open salts but has a 3½" comport or nappy the right size and shape, we will have to use our not unbiased judgment. If we like the design, it will become part of our open salt collection. We may find ourselves competing with collectors of toothpicks, egg cups or children's dishes as well as people collecting pattern glass, but if it's cute we are willing to argue with them. Chances are that they are just guessing anyway - we know we are.

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August 1996

References: Numerous old glass company catalogs in the Corning Museum Library
10 books by Allan B. & Helen B. Smith, "Open Salts Illustrated"
William Heacock & Patricia Johnson, "5000 Open Salts"
John & Elizabeth Welker, "Encyclopedia of Pressed Glass in America"
Bill Jenks & Jerry Luna, "Early American Pattern Glass"
Margaret & Kenn Whitmyer, "Children's Dishes"