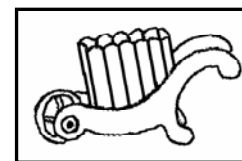


Salty Comments

Facts and Opinion about Open Salt Collecting



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Nice People

Alan Smith, author of the ten books, “Open Salts Illustrated”, was fond of saying, “All nice people are not salt collectors, but all salt collectors are nice people”. We couldn’t agree more. As we look at our collection, we are constantly reminded of the nice people that we associate with some of the dishes on our shelves.

Probably more of our salts remind us of Mimi Rudnick than any other person. She was the “Salt Lady” at antique shows, as well as a big supporter of the open salt clubs. She gave the OSCAR club \$25 to help them get started, even before any officers were elected. We first met her in a show in Cherry Hill, NJ, when our collection was just beginning and before the book, “5000 Open Salts”, was published.. We went into her booth, and here were more open salts than we ever dreamed about, all in one place. She spent over an hour telling us about them, and we were late for our dinner date as a result. A few years later she offered us credit toward one of her open salts if we helped her set up at the Baltimore show. This was her way of getting a chance to talk with other dealers and still be sure that her salts were handled carefully by people who appreciated them. She did this for several other people and at several other shows as well.

Two of the salts we earned credit towards are the malachite glass salt, marked “Ingrid”, made by Heryn Schlevogt in Czechoslovakia in the mid-1930’s, and the egg on a sled whose origin we are still searching for. She also contributed gift certificates to clubs that were presented in memory of people who had passed away. We were privileged to receive one of these – the Alan and Helen Smith Award at the Third National Convention. We chose the blue and white Willow Ware pattern shown. Mimi sponsored the Wilma Guenther award at the New England club, named after a lady who had a huge collection that Mimi had bought. In later years we were fortunate to meet Wilma Guenther’s son, Dick Gloss, at the antique mall in Salamanca, NY. We bought one of Wilma’s salts from him, a lacy Sandwich Peacock Eye pedestal, and it occupies a prominent spot in the cabinets. We met him again at the auction of Shirley Holmes salts last May, where he bought many salts that he now is selling at that same mall. He gave us a present of another Wilma salt – the actual one shown in the picture in Smith 309-2-2.

	
<i>“Ingrid” Malachite Salt</i>	<i>Sled with Egg</i>
	
<i>Willow Ware Salt</i>	<i>Peacock Eye Pedestal</i>
	
<i>Ribbon Pedestal, Smith 309-2-2</i>	

Prominent figures at New England meetings in our early days were Alan and Helen Smith. We saw them once at Ed’s brother’s house, where they were visiting to photograph Evelyn’s salts for their next book. We took notes on the photography setup and later built a similar one for ourselves. We used it to take over 500 pictures which were used in their Book 10. Another time we visited the Smiths at their home, and were surprised to see that Helen’s collection was rather small. She enjoyed buying and selling them, but kept only a few for herself. We bought one from her on that trip – a cut glass signed “Hawkes”, that keeps her memory alive in our collection.



In 1984, we took a trip to California to talk to a joint meeting of the California clubs at Pacific Grove, south of San Francisco. There we met Peggy Bonzi, a lovely lady who was corresponding with Terry Crider and encouraging him to make open salts to sell. She arranged for the Crider salt which was sold at the first National Convention in 1988, and handled all the orders and the mail sales, even though her health did not let her travel to Williamsburg, VA. On that same trip we met Bethy Estes, a collector who had talked with Kay on the phone a number of times. Both Kay and Bethy had the other pictured as a “little old lady” from the phone conversations, and both were surprised to see what the other one really looked like. Our “Bethy” salt is a cradle which she gave us as a present. Our California Trip Salt is a condiment set on a silver stand which has three-layer glass – cobalt cut to white cut to clear. We paid lots for it – more than any one previously – but we’ve never regretted doing so.



In our early collecting days, we made trips to antique shops with Ed’s brother and his wife, Evelyn. At first we had a lot of fun finding salts and talking about them before deciding to buy. Over a period of time we decided it was better if one couple turned to the right and the other to the left when entering a shop. We lost the discussions but avoided the “whose turn is it to buy this one” question. Occasionally we would find a pair so that each could have one of them. A memorable one is the coralline rooster on the edge of a bisque bowl. Evelyn has the hen that corresponds to it. She also has been very generous in giving us presents from her collection. One of the treasured ones is the emerald green individual and master in the EMPRESS pattern. The design itself is scarce, and the green color is even rarer.



One lady that both Evelyn and we know is Ruth Darmstadt in Painted Post, NY. We have visited her several times, and helped her sell her salt collection in 1994 when she needed to raise some money. We helped with the setup to select which salts should be auctioned individually and which could go in tray lots. We also helped publicize the auction, and at least 50 collectors came from all over the country. The salts sold for substantially more than a dealer could have paid, and everyone attending had a very good time – almost like a National Convention. When we visited Ruth later she let us choose a salt from the

few she had held back from the auction. This “Ruth Darmstadt Salt” is one of our prettiest, and it won a shared first place in a “most beautiful salt” competition at a club meeting.

One of the giants in open salt collecting was Patty Johnson. We saw her often – she came to most of the early New England club meetings. She worked with the handouts for the first National Convention in Williamsburg, VA, and came to our house the day before it started to finish her preparations. While she was here she looked at every single salt we had on our shelves. She even took her shoes off to stand on chairs so she could examine those on the top rows. At the Convention, she arranged that each of the speakers would get an open salt as a reward. George Tompkins got a Gorham salt he didn’t have, and I was presented with a Wetzel HOLLY salt with a Williamsburg salt spoon in it. We had been looking for one of these for several years after we had written a Salty Comments about Wetzel. Patty knew this, and managed to find one for us. This is only one of several that preserve her memory with us.



Ruth Darmstadt Gift



Wetzel Holly Salt

While we were buying and selling salts, we used to purchase collections for resale. One of our nicest acquisitions was from Joyce Henes of Painesville, OH. She and her husband had collected salts for years, and Alan Smith had photographed many of them for his fourth book. An antique dealer near Joyce heard about us, and recognized that the collection was much bigger than his shop could do justice to. At his request we went to Joyce’s house and looked at what she had. Her husband had died earlier, and she was planning to move to Salt Lake City. Some of the salts were on display in a large cabinet that was built into the end of the dining room. She wanted to keep these for the moment, but the salts she was selling were packed away in compartmented boxes that her husband had made. There were about 8 boxes in all, each with 3 to 5 layers in it, and each layer with egg-crate dividers to separate the salts.

With this arrangement there was no unwrapping to be done, which made things much easier. She liked our offer, and we came home with all of the boxes and about 900 salts. About 6 months later she contacted us again, and we bought the salts in the dining room cabinet. The outstanding salt in this group was the crystal shell shape on a pedestal with gold-plated mountings. The mountings have about 200 garnets decorating them. When we showed it to the Corning Museum, they thought at first that it might be rock crystal (quartz) but they tested it and it was not. We are still trying to find out more about its origins and purpose.

In 1984 we invited a group of collectors to our home to explore the possibility of forming a club. This was the beginning of OSCAR, the Mid-Atlantic group. There were about 12 people there, and we had carefully blocked off the dining room so that they wouldn’t see our collection until after the business meeting was over. We didn’t count on Matt Fogel, who arrived an hour early. He spent the hour examining what we had and we had a nice discussion with him in the process. We also bought a Russian salt from him. It is really a kovshnik, a souvenir type of piece in Russia, but hey – if it can hold salt and it’s cute, who’s to say that it wasn’t used for sodium chloride somewhere.



Garnet Trimmed Crystal



Kovshnik

We have visited New Hampshire in the summer for many years, and frequently went to the weekend shows at the old Burlwood establishment in Meredith. There we would always see Eleanor Thomas, an elderly lady who set up a booth every summer weekend. We bought quite a few from her over the years, but the one that we remember best is the set of Seder salts, used in the Hebrew religion during Passover celebrations. They are hand-wrought silver, gold plated, in a lined wooden case. We have no idea who made them, but he (she?) was a skilled silversmith. We remember Eleanor every time we look at them.

One of the first collections we bought was from Homer Berry, in Maryland. It belonged to his wife. He collected mustard jars while she looked for salts. We remember one of his mustard jars – the Westmoreland one with the open salt for a lid. His jar had traces of the original mustard in it, along with a Westmoreland sticker. The salt we remember from that collection is our lacy Sandwich wagon. One of the wheels is chipped, but if we are in that good shape after 100 plus years, we will be very happy.

We can't look back at nice people without remembering the Tompkins. They both were active in the New England club, and George was an officer several times. Carolyn collected all kinds of open salts, while he focused on the silver ones made by the Gorham Company, where he had worked before he retired. They had a large apartment in Cranston, RI, with most of the salts in cabinets in the hall. He learned so much about Gorham salts that people persuaded him to write a book on the subject. He talked with people in the Company, and received permission to go through their archives for information. The book, "Gorham Silver Salts", is still available - we are handling the sales for the Tompkins family. In 1992 they decided to sell Carolyn's collection and invited us to bid on it. We visited them and stayed overnight in their apartment. They accepted our bid, and that gave us the "Carolyn Tompkins Salt", a ruby red dumbbell-shaped double which has a knife rest between the two bowls. Over the years we sold George several Gorham salts he didn't already have. Our favorite is the witch's pot – we found a pair and were happy to find that he needed one of them. George died in 1997, soon after the National Convention in Plymouth, MA. Carolyn has been in a nursing home and passed away late last year.

Our salts give us many memories of nice people we have known in the past, but we have many more salts that remind us of the nice people we see today. We won't try to identify them – the list would be too long. We're sure you know many of them and we know there are many more we have yet to meet. Sometime you can try to identify the especially nice salt collectors you know and pick out the salts you associate with them. We think you will find there are more than you realize, and that you have lots of salts you could not part with if you had to reduce the size of your collection.

