

## VIEW FROM THE SALT BOX - #6

The other day we had a flash of insight when we remembered something that is obvious to everyone else. We have seen literally thousands of salts for sale, and have turned down many because of damage. This is especially true for glass salts that have chipping and "wear", particularly on the inside rim and on sharp points. What we call "wear" is where the dish has been rubbed against something else, enough to dull sharp edges or make tiny scratches on flat surfaces, but not enough to make flakes or chips. Wear on the bottom is an asset - the experts think it proves the salt is genuinely old. Wear on the sides or rim is not so desirable, because many collectors will accept only "mint" dishes.

We have known for years that roughness and chipping on the inside rim is a byproduct of salt caking in the dish. We once made some salt harden in an open salt dish, though it was difficult because the salt you buy in the store is non-caking. Once the salt was hard, it became obvious that the best way to loosen it was to pry with a knife, leaning on the inside rim of the dish. This damaged the inside rim a little. The damage would have been significant if we had done the experiment several times with really hard salt. So if an old dish has really been used for its intended purpose, inside rim roughness is par for the course. When the rim is damaged, little flakes of glass go into the salt. Our ancestors must have had stomachs tough enough to handle a little ground glass with their food.

Our belated insight was not in relation to rim wear, however. We suddenly remembered that 50 years ago there were no automatic dishwashers! Think about how open salts must have been washed. Unless the family was particularly careful, the salts wound up with the silverware in the bottom of the dishpan. There everything would rub together, and any sharp corners would have ample opportunity for damage. This is one reason that "everyday" salts were heavy and rather simple in shape - they could stand abuse during washing. The "Sunday best" glass needed careful handling to keep keeping it looking like new. The first time the dishes were done in a hurry, flaking and chipping started.

It is not surprising that relatively few pre-1900 pattern glass salts have survived in good condition. Designs with projecting parts or sharp edges are particularly vulnerable - on some of them like McKee's RAINBOW (H&J 2660) we find damage over 90% of the time. Cut glass was equally vulnerable but it was expensive and rated special handling. Art glass was even more expensive - we're sure that no Tiffany or Steuben salts were casually dumped into the dishpan.

The next time you examine an old pattern glass salt, especially one with a delicate pattern, think how much care it must have had to keep it looking good after all these years. If it has no wear on the inside rim, you can wonder if it was ever really used. And if you see an old open salt that you need for your collection, buy it, even if it has some wear or damage. You may never find another like it - the rest may have perished in the dishpan.

Ed Berg  
401 Nottingham Rd.  
Newark, DE 19711 October 1990