

View from the Salt Box - #22

One question that bothers many collectors is, "What will happen to our salts when we pass away or are forced to sell". A few lucky people have a daughter or son who is interested and who would love to build the collection further. Lacking this, most of us want our treasures to go to someone who would appreciate them. We also would like to get a respectable price for them when they go. We ask ourselves how to accomplish this rather frequently, and have developed an answer that may help others considering the same question.

We believe the first and most important thing is to educate our children about the value of our salts. We have computer and index card records which can do this, and we have also made a VCR tape on which we tour the collection and point out special salts that most people might overlook. Our children know how to access the computer data and where to find the tape. They can identify the salts from the tape, from sketches we have on the cards and from book references in the computer. We think this will get them started on the right track.

From there they must choose from several alternatives. If they have the time and inclination, they can price each dish, referring to the book values and what we paid to buy them. They probably won't want to try selling by mail, but they can invite collectors to come in. The various club membership lists and our customer list can give them over 400 people to contact. We think they would get a great turnout.

If they want to put less work into the disposition, they can have an auction. This could be a disaster or a success, depending on the auctioneer. We recently assisted with and attended the auction of Ruth Darmstadt's collection, which we believe was successful. The auctioneer, Dale Putt of Ephrata, PA, asked for lists of collectors from us and from the OSCAR club. He sent fliers to over 200 open salt collectors, including many from outside the region, and also advertised in a number of antique periodicals. These actions brought about 75 people to the sale, including collectors from Arizona, Kansas, Virginia and Florida as well as closer states. The day before the sale he invited us and LeeAnne Gommer to sort the collection into lots. The dishes that were worth most were chosen for selling individually, and those that would bring a few dollars or less were separated into lots of 5-7. On the day of the sale, he auctioned over 700 lots, including about 2800 salts, in about 7 hours non-stop. The prices realized were at or close to collector's levels for the most part. We heard of one antiques dealer who left early, because he couldn't afford to compete. A few other people left early too, probably because there were few bargains. We have heard that the total sale realized about \$28,000, and that the auctioneer's commission was 20%. This should make Ruth Darmstadt happy, because we're sure she couldn't have realized that much by selling to a single dealer.

If an auction is out of the question, the next best thing is to sell to one or more dealers who specialize in open salts. Few or perhaps none of them would be interested in so many all at once, but it could be broken down into a few lots and offered as such. The pricing could be developed from our computer records, hopefully with advice from some knowledgeable collector. We would hope to get about 50% of H&J book value this way.

The last, and worst thing in our opinion, is to sell the collection to someone who does not specialize in open salts. This would realize the least return, and even worse would disperse many to folks who would not fully appreciate them. Perish the thought!

We don't look forward to the day when something like this will happen, but we're a lot more comfortable knowing that we have given it some thought ahead of time.

Ed Berg

October, 1994

P.S. We are sending a copy of this writeup to each one of our kids.

PPS To Ed, Bill, Jim and John - We would be happy to see the documented salts go to a Museum if they would want them in their collection. Some places would sell them to get the money, but there are a few (perhaps the Corning Museum, the Jones Museum or the Wheaton Museum) who would keep the ones whose makers have been identified.