Lancaster Glass Company, 1908 – 1937

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For those of you who have read my book you are aware that I bought my first piece of Lancaster glass, the #734/B, pink satined 12” bowl back in 1995. Today, I have amassed a collection of 1,418 pieces of Lancaster about one-third that were cut by the Standard Glass Mfg. Company (two plants in Bremen and Canal Winchester, Ohio) and 122 pieces of Monongah glass – and the collection keeps growing! Who would have guessed that one piece of pink glass that captivated my attention would have grown into a 1,500+ piece collection? And what a journey it has been for the last 16 years as I am sure many of you can attest in your collecting efforts.

The Lancaster Glass Company of Lancaster, Ohio, was not one of the most well-known companies of its time where Hazel Marie Weatherman did dedicate eight pages to the company in her book, Colored Glassware of the Depression Era 2. Also, Sandra McPhee Stout showed pieces made by the company in her series of books in the 1970s.

An interesting fact about the Lancaster Glass Company is that the original plant that manufactured the glass is still in operation. Today, it is owned and operated by the Anchor Hocking Glass Co. who bought controlling interest in Lancaster in 1924. Anchor Hocking eventually dissolved the name Lancaster in 1937.

Glassware made by Lancaster fits the category of Elegant Glass since the glass went through at least one and sometimes two or three finishing processes after it emerged from the kiln unlike Depression glass, which is considered stamped glass that was immediately boxed and sold. Also, Lancaster glass was mainly sold in department stores where the only “give-away” from Lancaster was a topaz luncheon set that one received when he/she bought a Frigidaire appliance during its [Frigidaire’s] 15th anniversary in 1931.

In the early 1900s Lancaster made mostly pressed, crystal-colored glass that was sometimes edged in gold. Many of the pieces consisted of bowls, berry bowl sets, candleholders, cake pedestals and other miscellaneous serving pieces. The explosion of colored pieces came in the 1920s with its Black Rim, Marguerite, and Window Pane lines that were painted orange, yellow, blue, and green. From there, clear colored blanks were cut (mainly by the Standard Glass Manufacturing Company – the master cutters for Lancaster glass) etched, painted, satined, and decorated in silver overlay where some were given patterns names and were marketed as such.

Lancaster was not known for its tableware save it be the Jubilee and Patrick patterns (originally named Patrician by Lancaster – Hazel Marie Weatherman renamed it Patrick after her friend, Patrick McGrain.) Most of Lancaster’s lines and patterns consisted of console sets, bowls, trays, candleholders and other decorative serving pieces. Lancaster also made barware and pitchers that were sold to their commercial clients.

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Lancaster’s most well-known pattern has to be Line No. 906, Open Work. After Hocking absorbed Lancaster they (Hocking) began making Old Colony, which was a Depression glass knockoff and was only made in pink. Pardon my bias but the original Open Work is a much more elegant and delicate pattern than Old Colony. Open Work was made in not only pink but also in apple green, soft green, yellow, black, and an every-so-hard-to-find soft, pale blue. Lancaster also etched and decaled Open Work and branched out in caning the bottoms, which yielded Line 1907.

Again, for those of you who read my book you know my favorite pattern is Sunshine where I have 53 pieces to the line. Gene Florence broadened his inclusion of Depression glass in his Collector’s Encyclopedia of Depression Glass, 17th Edition, by including a broad array of Sunshine. However, I beg to differ with Gene. Sunshine belongs in his Elegant Glass not Depression Glass book.
Other favorites of mine include: Morning Glory, Mermaid and Deco Brocade. Of late, I’ve become enamored with Water Lily, cut by Standard on Lancaster blanks in both pink and topaz. What draws me to the pattern aside from the unique cut is the elusiveness of the pieces. I have 28 pieces, one of which was badly chipped during shipping after buying it from an ill-skilled seller on eBay®. Despite the piece being rendered useless, I cannot part with it since it’s the only piece in that particular line number I’ve found in 16 years. I am sure many of you can relate.

Speaking of eBay® and online auction sites in general, I shared with our News & Views Editor, Sandra Bridwell-Walker, “The best thing for glass collectors has been eBay®.” Followed by, “The worst thing for glass collectors has been eBay®.” Having said that, online auction sites have brought to us collectors pieces of the rarest kind that we otherwise would not have found had it not been for such venues on the Internet. However, it has also driven down the price and rarity of such pieces since these sites are proliferated with myriad pieces. I will tell you that 98 percent of my collection for the book came from online venues. Many sellers, especially when it comes to Lancaster were unaware of what they were selling where in their ignorance either under priced it (to my advantage) or overpriced it (where I refused to buy it.)

One of Lancaster’s most controversial and talked-about patterns, Jubilee, not only gives me angst but also was a running joke during the photography for the book where we called everything Jubilee. Even today, I find pieces marketed online and marked in shops as Jubilee that are not Jubilee. Jubilee was Cut No. 1200, not a particular blank. I will often find a Petal blank bowl being marketed as “Jubilee blank”, which is nothing further from the truth.

To make matters more complicated, Standard Glass Mfg. Co. made their own line of Cut No. 1200 in both pink and topaz, which decorated bud vases, round luncheon plates, and stemware. And if that wasn’t enough to have you in a tailspin, there is Standard Glass’s Twinkle, Tyrus, and Yummy patterns in pink and topaz, which sport a 12-petal, open-faced flower similar to Cut No. 1200 that add to confusion.

Then there’s the controversy over how many petals Jubilee should have. The standard is 12 but there are pieces, such as the candy bowl with scrolled cover that have 11 petals due to the cutters not having room to cut that 12th petal. Pieces adorned with 16 petals are not Jubilee. I named and classified all16-petal pieces as “Sweet Sixteen”, which are all pink except for the mayonnaise bowl and liner, which comes in topaz. I created Sweet Sixteen to differentiate it from the 12-petal pieces. In addition, there are crystal pieces out there with Cut No. 1200 likely done by Standard. So, you really have to carefully examine each cut and match it with similarly cut pieces. The catalog pages I used for the book gave me reason to pause and separate each cut into its own line.
Another Lancaster pattern familiar to most is Sphinx where very few pieces to the pattern were made (Sphinx consists of five pieces). One of the five was made in apple green and all five were made in topaz. The one green bowl became an experimental piece where it was pulled while it was hot to create and Art Deco design vase where no two were alike. I have a photo of one in my book but there are others out there that are similar in shape. The interesting thing about Sphinx is that it is the pattern that commands the highest amount paid for any piece of Lancaster.

In the book I show the one-of-a-kind, topaz Sphinx console bowl priced at $1,750.00. The previous owner in his 20 years of solely collecting the Sphinx pattern found the bowl and has never seen another. He eventually sold it online to a buyer (it was too rich for my blood) who loaned it to me for the book.

I have found that the workers did a lot of experimenting with Lancaster when it was being made. I tout my Open Work pink and blue, satinized footed compote as one of those one-of-a-kind experimental pieces. There are other pieces sprinkled throughout the book.

Writing the book and amassing the collection truly has been a labor of love where I still gasp when I see a piece I don’t have in my collection. That tells me what my passion is.

Along those lines, I have been invited to put on a display of Lancaster glass (250 pieces), which is currently on display at the Salt Lake City Downtown Public Library, 4th Floor, Salt Lake City, Utah. The exhibit began on December 17th and runs through Saturday, February 4, 2012. In addition, I will be giving a one-hour lecture on Saturday, January 21, 2012 regarding Lancaster glass and Depression/Elegant glass in general. The exhibit is free to the public so if you’re in the area I would be more than happy to coordinate a personalized tour for you.

Comments and/or questions can be sent to John, author of The Lancaster Glass Company, 1908 – 1937 Identification & Value Guide, via e-mail at vitreous1@comcast.net.