



## News & Views

# Early American Pattern Glass

By Len Waska, THE BOOKWORM

While wealthy folks of the early Victorian era could afford to enhance their homes with fine blown glass from Europe, such luxuries were far beyond the reach of the “average Joe” who worked seven days a week for \$20 a month. But old fashioned “American ingenuity” helped level the playing field in 1821 when J.P. Blackwell received a patent for a process that could press molten glass into a mold.



Blackwell's first pieces were the glass knobs found on the Empire style furniture of the day, but glass houses were soon pressing the molten material into other utilitarian goods such as butter dishes, sugar bowls, creamers and spoon holders. The common man was soon able to replace his earthenware items with attractive pieces of pretty glass, called “Early American Pattern Glass”, or EAPG as it is know my today's collectors.

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Collectors recognize three periods of production. The "Lacy Period", which lasted through the 1830's and 1840's, was characterized by highly profiled designs of fine stippling. The "Flint Period" which stretched from the late 1840's until the start of the Civil War, is known for its simple geometric lines and the addition of lead which gave the glass a brilliant appearance, more weight, and a "ring" when tapped; and finally, the "Non-Flint Period", which started shortly after the War.

The Civil War made lead more valuable for making bullets than for use in glassware - sending the glass industry into a tailspin. True to spirit, faced with having to return to 40 year old techniques, American ingenuity stepped in again in 1852 when William Leighton replaced lead with soda-lime. This began the "Non-Flint Period" and although the glass was lighter, less brilliant and less resonant, it was also much less expensive, thinner, and easier to mold. This resulted in more complicated designs, detail and craftsmanship. Hundreds of patterns and shapes were created that included animal, fruit, fauna and intricate geometric designs

While their dishes and serving pieces were still usually made of Ironstone largely imported from England, the American housewife was able to brighten up her table with beautiful glass table sets, usually consisting of a butter dish with a lid, a sugar bowl with a lid, a creamer and a spoon holder, known today as a "spooner". There were also "extended" table sets available that included a celery vase or tray, a cruet or a jelly compote. Having a celery vase was considered somewhat of a status symbol back then as they were associated with the more affluent segment of society. Some companies also offered berry bowls or beverage sets to match the table sets.



By the 1880's, the national depression caused the glass houses to rethink their production methods and many of the smaller houses joined forces, becoming huge manufacturers. U.S. Glass was made up of eighteen smaller firms, and National was a merger of nineteen. The result was increased production, reworked molds, reissues of earlier patterns and the introduction of cased glass, custard glass, opalescent glass and ruby staining, often engraved with names and dates and known today as "Souvenir Glass". But fires, financial failures and other events caused production to suffer again and, around the time of World War I, production of Pattern Glass essentially ceased.

During its nearly 100 year run, Early American Pattern Glass was produced by almost 100 companies in over 2,000 patterns. One of the rarest patterns is "U.S. Coin", made by the U.S. Glass Company in 1892. Production was shut down by the United States Treasury Department after only a few months be-

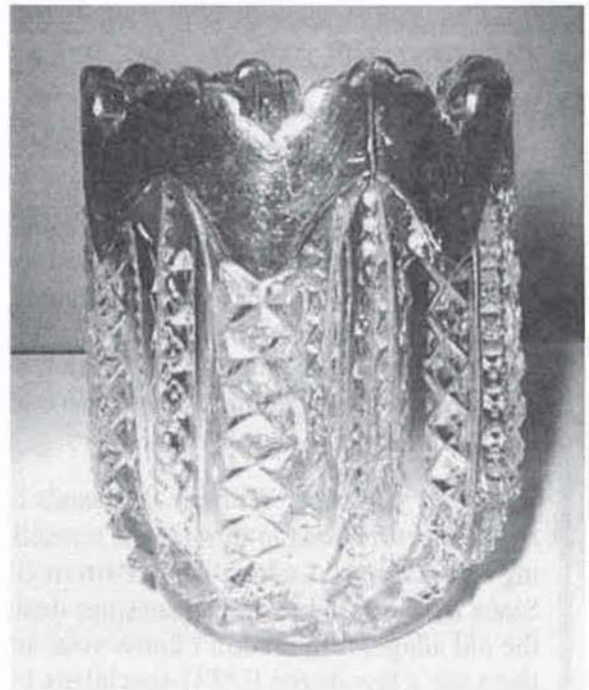
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cause the factory had used real coins to make the molds and it was considered 'counterfeiting'. Today, a Champagne glass in the U.S. Coin pattern brings \$2,500 and a 9 inch compote books for about \$4,500.

Many patterns contained dozens of pieces, such as "King's Crown" which originally consisted of 100 pieces made by two manufacturers. It has since had 66 of the pieces reproduced by five other companies. At the other end of the spectrum are patterns where only one piece was made, such as the rare "Owl and Pussycat" cheese dish, which books for \$400.

While King's Crown has had a large number of pieces reproduced, the pattern known as "Moon and Star" actually has more reproductions and "look alike" pieces than were originally made. Made by three glass houses between 1888 and 1898, "Moon and Star" was originally named "Palace" and had 60 pieces. Today's collector can find slightly over 100 pieces in at least 24 colors. The original late 1800's pieces were made in clear, clear with frosted moons, and clear with ruby stain. Anything else, although pretty, should be considered reproductions. As proof of its popularity, Moon and Star is the only EAPG pattern that has its own dedicated price guide.



Another very interesting facet of collecting EAPG is the series by U.S. Glass known as the "States Series". Although no records exist to explain exactly why the series was started, whether it was a shrewd marketing ploy or just a whim, the large number of pieces offered in each pattern made these some of U.S. Glass Company's most popular lines. Introduced in 1897, patterns called "Indiana", "Ohio", "Pennsylvania", "Maryland", "Kentucky", and "Illinois" were produced in clear and emerald green, either plain or gilded. (Indiana was only issued in clear.) In 1898, they added "Louisiana", "Massachusetts", "Minnesota", "Florida", and "Colorado", and by 1902, twenty-five additional state designs were introduced for a total of 36 patterns in only seven years. An excellent book entitled *U.S. Glass, the States Patterns* was written by Jenks and Reilly in 1998 and, although out of print, it's a must have book for the serious EAPG collector.

Due to the lack of factory records or literature, many early researchers assigned their own names to the patterns over the years, ignoring the fact that earlier researchers had done the same. The end result is that numerous EAPG patterns have several different names. The pattern now known as "Cut Log", for example, was originally called "Ethol" by the manufacturer. It is also known to collectors as "Cat's Eye" and "Block". The pattern "Ashburton" has fourteen other names. The large number of names assigned to each pattern makes identification extremely difficult. An out of print book, but one that can still be found, that helps with pattern identification is *The Collector's Encyclopedia of Pattern Glass* by Molly McCain. This book helps identify approximately 2400 patterns by their primary characteristic, such as animals, birds, circles, facets, flowers, shells, etc. This is another must have book, even for the advanced collector.

While on the subject of out of print books, to serious collectors, the "Holy Grail" of EAPG reference books is *Pressed Glass in America* by John and Elizabeth Welker. This book covers the history of pressed glass from

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1825 to 1925 in minute detail, including patent drawings of machinery and molds used to produce this fine glassware.

Several reference books on EAPG have been written over the years by authors such as Ruth Webb Lee, who wrote over a dozen books in the 1930's, and Minnie Watson Kamm in the 1940's. At the present time, there are four reference books currently available on EAPG. One is written by Mike Carwile, who identifies and prices approximately 1,200 patterns. Another one written by Jenks and Luna, covers the 248 most popular patterns as well as listing all known reproductions in each pattern. *American Pattern Glass Table Sets* by Gene & Cathy Florence and Danny Cornelius and Don Jones identifies and prices table sets in 425 patterns. The most recent addition to our knowledge of Pattern Glass is again by NDGA Director Danny Cornelius and Don Jones and is entitled *Early American Pattern Glass Cake Stands & Serving Pieces, Identification and Value Guide*. The book contains 1,150 photos of 465 known patterns and 20 unidentified ones from 64 manufacturers.

Where do you start? With the thousands of pattern glass reproductions and "look alike" on the market, the new collector needs to familiarize himself with the many pitfalls by learning as much as he can from talking to dealers who specialize in Pattern Glass, or by picking up one of the many price guides available. Since it's impossible for an antiques dealer to know everything about every type of antique on the market, the old adage, "If you don't know your antiques, know your antiques dealer" is very applicable. While there are a few dozen EAPG specialists in the country, a good place to start would be by contacting NDGA Director Danny Cornelius who, along with Don Jones, has authored the two latest books on EAPG.

(Editors note: Danny & Don will be doing a seminar on EAPG at the Danbury Convention - what an opportunity to learn from the masters!)

### Glass Articles Needed

Why not share your knowledge about glass with others?

*This extra section depends upon you. If you want more glass education articles, you must submit them.*

The only thing glass collectors love more than buying glass, is talking about it.

We'd love to have you teach us about the glass you collect.

Please send your articles to me at [editor@ndga.net](mailto:editor@ndga.net). Remember, I can't print what I don't have.

Rosemary