

Contemporary Collectibles: In this case, the chicken definitely comes first

by Linda_Rosenkrantz

Collectibles relating to the farm and barnyard have a wide range, from exquisitely decorated Faberge eggs to kitschy cow-shaped creamers. Somewhere in between is the ubiquitous hen-on-nest glass-covered dish - though I must admit that I didn't realize quite how ubiquitous, and varied, this form was before encountering Shirley Smith's new "Glass Hen on Nest Covered Dishes" (Collector Books, \$30) identification and value guide .

The basic form - a laying hen perched atop a shallow bowl - was employed by American firms ranging from Anchor Hocking to Wheaton Industries, and in Europe from Adlerhutzen Glashuttenwerke to Zabkowice S.A. - and by a few Asian firms as well. They were made in colors ranging from white milk to black glass, in a wide variety of finishes including frosting, iridizing, staining, and hand and fired-on painting, as well as in 24 percent lead crystal.

Reflecting the Victorian interest in animalistic and other novelty forms, pressed-glass hen dishes were imitations of more expensive European ceramic examples - porcelain and earthenware dishes in animal form actually originated in China several centuries ago and were used as serving dishes in 17th century Europe. From 1790 to 1820, they were exported by such English firms as Staffordshire to this country, where, though quite pricey, they became a popular novelty.

Pressed glass was first made in the late 1820s, gradually increasing in quantity and range of form and design, and reaching technical perfection around the middle of the century. It was when William Leighton developed a cheaper, more easily pressed lime glass that it came into more general use, and it was found to be ideal for creating finely detailed, realistic animals.

According to author and expert Shirley Smith, the covered dishes were originally brought out as table accessories for hardboiled or scrambled eggs or butter or condiments, depending on their size. Around 1900, a smaller, 5-inch size was used by manufacturers of mustard, spices and other condiments for packaging their goods. These early examples were made primarily in clear glass, clear frosted glass, milk glass and blue opaque glass. Many American firms provided their own variations on the theme, including Anchor Hocking, Atterbury Glass Co. - which produced an unusual opaque black egg cup; Central Glass Co.; Challinor, Taylor & Co., a leader in the manufacture of high quality slag (mosaic) glass; Degenhart Crystal Art Glass Co., known for its wide variety of colors; Fenton Art Glass Co., whose output was prized for its hand-painted and acid-etched decoration; Fostoria Glass Co.; Hazel-Atlas Glass Co.; Imperial Glass Co.; McKee Glass Co. - whose hen dishes are characteristically white; the Boston & Sandwich Glass Co., and Westmoreland Glass Co., who made several opal milk glass, paraffin-sealed containers for mustard, baking powder and condiments.

There were quite a few interesting deviations from the standard form. For instance, standing roosters and groups of chicks and even the occasional fox sometimes took the place of the hens, some of the animals were perched on sleighs or baskets, and miniature salts were seen in addition to full-sized dishes. Also to be found

are glass hen soap dishes, relish trays, toothpick holders, and breakfast sets.

Here are a few of the current market values cited by Smith, who gives a realistic price range for each object she illustrates:

Sandwich hen on nest dish in canary glass, very rare \$1,700-\$5,000.

Extremely rare Challinor, Taylor & Co. hen and rooster set in olive green \$700.

Rare McKee two-headed chick dish \$200-\$500.

Atterbury milk glass hen dish, with bulging smooth rim base, molded eyes, milk glass head \$90-\$200.

Westmoreland 7-inch rooster in iridescent purple slag \$125-plus

Five-inch John E. Kemple rooster on split rib base, end of day slag (rare in this color) \$55-\$85.

Westmoreland hen on sleigh \$56-\$7.5

Scarce L. E. Smith hen dish in almond nouveau slag \$45-\$56.

Linda Rosenkrantz has edited Auction magazine and authored 15 books, including "The Baby Name Bible" (St. Martin's Press; www.babynamebible.com). She cannot answer letters personally.

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