

*Northwood master punch set,
in marigold-color Grape and Cable
Pattern, is the largest made
by any manufacturer*



*From Cereal Premium
To Pitchman's Prize
To Boat Ballast...*

'Poor Man's Tiffany' Tells Colorful Story

By DIANE SAMMS RUSH
Staff Writer

They used to call it "The Poor Man's Tiffany." Today, it is known as carnival glass, and collectors around the world cherish it for its bright colors and iridescence.

Roland Kuhn doesn't remember the first piece of carnival glass that caught his eye and caused him to open his wallet, but his collection now numbers about 1,000 pieces.

Kuhn remembers carnival glass from his childhood as the kind of everyday pressed glass that was found in many older persons' homes. His grandmother had a lot of the glass, he said, but all of it was destroyed in a fire.

Carnival glass brightened many a home in the early years of this century. It was manufactured roughly between 1900 and 1925. Its colors were taken from the much finer Tiffany colors that were so popular at the time.

There were three major manufacturers of carnival glass: Northwood Glass Co. of Indiana, Pa.; Fenton Art Glass Co. of Wheeling, W. Va.; and Millersburg Glass Co. of Millersburg, Ohio. Only Northwood put a trademark on its glassware. Of the three manufacturers, Fenton is the sole survivor. The reproductions that Fenton makes now — using only a few of the older patterns — are signed.

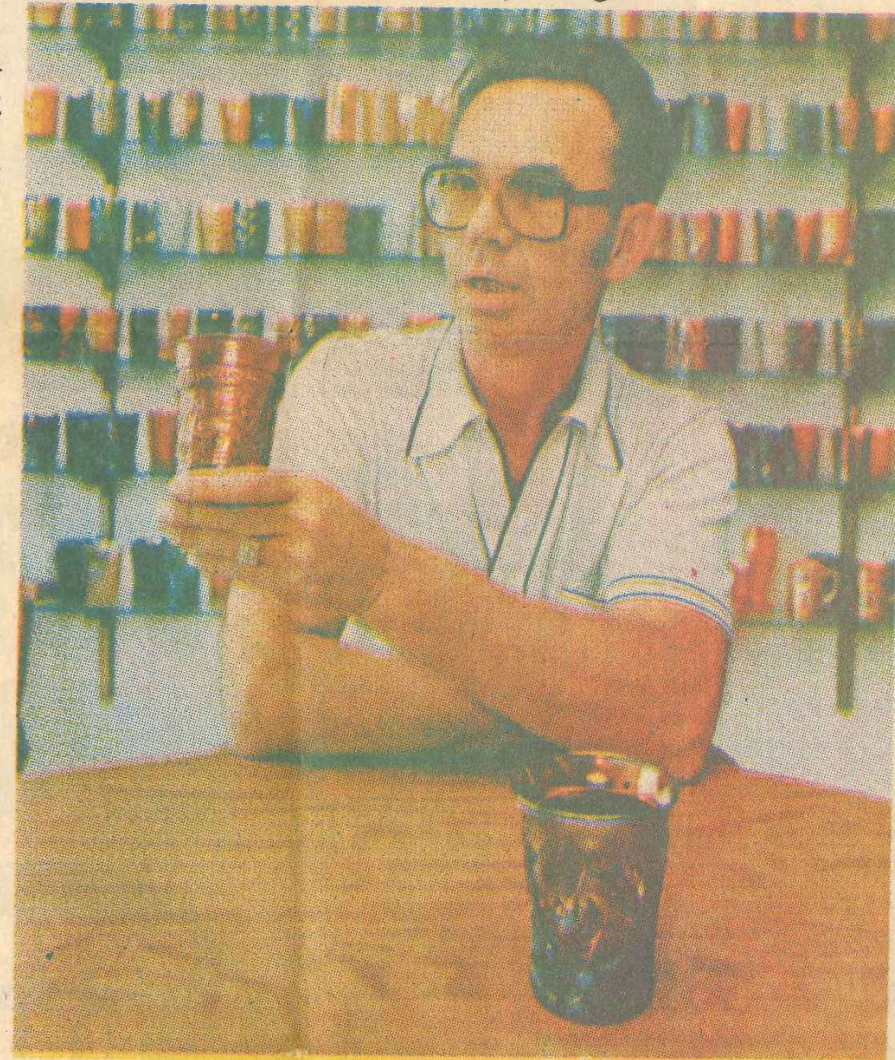
Carnival glass got its name in the waning years of its popularity, somewhere about 1920, when it was sold to carnivals to be used as prizes for games of skill.

KUHN, WHO LIVES in Haysville, got started collecting carnival glass about 12 years ago. "I started out wanting cut glass," he said, "but I couldn't afford that."

As president of the Air Capital Carnival Glass Club and former officer in the Heart of America Carnival Glass Club, Kuhn has become something of an expert in the field.

He is known as "the Wishbone Man" for his interest in the Northwood Wishbone pattern, one of the oldest patterns in carnival glass, dating to about 1900. His collection — more than 30 pieces — is the largest in that pattern.

Kuhn's father's cousin gave him six purple Wishbone water tumblers that had been in the



Staff Photos by Anthony Reed

Roland Kuhn shows detailing on one of his 175 water tumblers

family for years. It took Kuhn about five years to find the purple pitcher to complete the set.

The original family pitcher, he was told, was dropped in a move from farm to town — a

typical fate of so much carnival glass through the years.

Kuhn's collection contains several rare pieces. A purple Harvest Flower tumbler is one of only two known. After Kuhn bought that tumbler, a collector in Texas bought the other one for \$1,000, considerably more than Kuhn had paid for his.

THE THING ABOUT carnival glass is that a collector may believe for years that he has the only surviving example of a particular piece, then someone else finds one in an attic or at a farm sale or such. Hence, the frequent reference to "one of only (so many) known."

Perhaps the most unusual piece in Kuhn's collection, which he shares with housemate Donald Kime, is a bowl the origin of which cannot be explained. The exterior of the bowl is Northwood's Grape and Cable pattern, and the interior is blackberries. Only Fenton made blackberries. Hence, the mystery.

Kuhn thought he had one of a kind when he acquired the bowl about 10 years ago. But since then, two others have surfaced.

It is documented that some glass companies traded molds from time to time because a firm would get tired of making a particular piece or because another firm wanted to manufacture a similar piece in another color. But the Northwood-Fenton bowl can't be explained so easily. Frank Fenton of the firm has examined the piece, Kuhn said, and says it was not made by that company.

WATER TUMBLERS have become a specialty of Kuhn's. He has 175 of them displayed on shelves in his dining area. There are 102 patterns represented, out of the more than 500 that were manufactured. Sunlight danced off the colorful glasses as Kuhn offered a litany of pattern names:

Peacock at the Fountain, Field Thistle, Diamond Lace, Footed Orange Tree, Inverted Strawberry, Paneled Dandelions, Grapevine and Lattice, Butterfly and Plume and Stork and Rushes.

"What you see is what you get," Kuhn said, explaining that the names of patterns reflect the objects of their designs.

After he developed an interest in carnival glass, Kuhn learned through his mother that some of her friends had pieces they might sell.

One of them sold him an Orange Tree pattern centerpiece bowl that she had owned about 60 or 70 years. The woman explained that as a child of 10, she had helped a neighbor pluck chickens and the neighbor gave the bowl to her in gratitude.

KUHN SAID CARNIVAL glass also was given as grocery store premiums, as prizes for selling magazine subscriptions, as Raleigh party sales premiums and as an incentive to buy a certain brand of oatmeal.

At one time, he said, carnival glass was so common that it became almost worthless. European ships, needing ballast for return voyages, would buy barrels of the glass practically for the price of the barrels. As a consequence, much American carnival glass turned up in Europe. American collectors have retrieved much of it in recent years.

English and Australian glass companies also manufactured carnival about the same time the American companies were in full operation. The Australian versions were much heavier, however.

Carnival glass was the stuff of dreams for farm women early in the century. Kuhn bought a marigold Butterfly and Berry table setting, dating back to 1910, from a Mennonite woman in Yoder. The woman had bought the glassware for her hope chest, but she never married. So when Kuhn got the set, it was still in the original boxes, with string securing the feet of each piece.

When the pieces were removed from the boxes, the string had so deteriorated that it disintegrated, Kuhn said. He threw away the old boxes, not realizing at the time that they, too, added to the value of the set.

IT ISN'T OFTEN that one stumbles across a rare piece of carnival glass at a garage sale, Kuhn said. "Most people have wisened up on antiques, anymore." But every once in a while an old trunk will turn up with a piece of the colorful glass inside.

(See CARNIVAL, 5D, Col. 1)

Carnival Glass Has Colorful Story to Tell

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Kuhn approached the floor-to-ceiling shelves lining three walls of his basement. Butter dishes, hatpin holders, vases in many sizes, bonbon dishes, spoon holders, compotes . . . In iridescent colors of blue, green, yellow and red, the glassware made a striking display.

Does Kuhn have a favorite?

"If I had to pick one I couldn't," he said.

Once a month, the Air Capital Carnival Glass Club meets in a member's home. The club was formed in 1980, after Kuhn and Kime moved to Wichita. From the original 10, membership has grown to 38, and more are welcome. Meetings consist of educational programs about types or patterns of carnival glass — often given by Kuhn, because he has been involved in other clubs for years. New finds are discussed, and the group sometimes takes field trips to view other collections.

Kuhn whimsically likened collecting carnival glass to a perhaps more prevalent vice. "It's worse than drinking," he said. "You get hooked on it — but it's a lot more profitable."