

INSULATOR COLLECTING

Embossing Variations Intrigue Collectors of Insulators Part II

By: Bill Haley

Insulators sometimes have many embossing variations within one CD style and the different markings can be of great interest to collectors. The Embossing Index Number system (EIN) was designed to add to the “shorthand” of the insulator world, and has become the standard across the hobby. Once one learns the shorthand, they can easily converse with other collectors and each knows exactly what piece is being discussed. Or, they can look up their insulator in a price guide. The following is a representative listing from the most current hobby price guide by Donald R. Briel, Price Guide for North American Glass Insulators. The 2011 edition contains over 13,000 embossings and color combinations. I intentionally chose a listing for a somewhat common insulator. The listing is quite involved and contains a lot of information for someone in the know. Deciphering such a hieroglyphic listing may seem daunting, but it is a good way to introduce other insulator terms.

CD145 [210] (F-Crown) [Number] (Arc) W. BROOKFIELD / 45 CLIFF ST. / N.Y. (R-Crown) (Arc) PAT'D NOV. 13TH '883 / FEB. 12TH 1884 {MLOD} SB

Here goes:

1. CD145 is a well-known Consolidated Design (CD) style within the hobby. It even has a nickname, the “beehive.”
2. [210] is the Embossing Index Number (EIN). There are 56 different EIN numbers for Brookfield-produced CD145s.
3. (F-Crown) tells you the embossing is on the upper front portion of the insulator above the wire groove – the crown.
4. [Number] is a shop or mold number.
5. (Arc) tells you the top line of embossing is not straight



CD145 insulators with a simple B marking on the skirt were manufactured by the Brookfield Glass Company in New York between 1900 and 1920. L-R: medium green, light sun colored amethyst, dark aqua, dark yellow green. The dark aqua example with drip points on the base is quite uncommon. This shape of insulator is nicknamed “beehive” in the insulator hobby



These CD145 “beehives” were produced by the Hemingray Glass Company, and come in a wide range of colors. L-R: Hemingray blue, jade milkglass, light cornflower.

across, but in an arc.

6. W, BROOKFIELD is the manufacturer, the W. BROOKFIELD GLASS COMPANY.

7. Diagonal lines are used to denote different lines of embossing.

8. 45 CLIFF ST. / N.Y. is the location of the company. We know that W. Brookfield was located in New York City at this address from 1882-1890.

9. (R-Crown) denotes embossing on the rest of the crown.

10. PAT'D NOV. 13TH 1883 is a patent granted to Samuel Oakman for a double petticoat, meaning this insulator has both an outer skirt and an extended inner skirt. This was in essence an added obstacle meant to decrease electrical leakage by increasing the path it would have to take to reach the ground.

11. FEB. 12TH 1884 was a patent for an improved process of forming the insulator.

12. {MLOD} means the mold line extends over the dome.

13. SB stands for smooth base.

Under each EIN listing are suggested prices for insulators in very near mint condition or better. Ten different colors are listed for this EIN, ranging from \$1 to \$2 in aqua to \$400 to \$500 in yellow olive green.

Color, condition, rarity, popularity of that particular style and other variables, such as bubbles, milky or amber swirls, rocks or other objects in the glass, can add value to any insulator. It is interesting that a great many very early collectors deemed those latter variables as a detriment, thinking they decreased value. Today, many collectors avidly collect insulators with “junk” in them and will pay a premium for the best examples.

As with most collectibles, excellent condition commands the best prices. Weak or illegible embossing and damage to



This crown-embossed “beehive” was manufactured between 1884 and 1890. This photo demonstrates how the tie wire was used to attach the iron telegraph wire to the insulator.

the insulator can result in a drastic decrease in value. Some collectors don't mind a bit of damage, as insulators were working glass and in all probability were often damaged in some way between the manufacturer and the job site, even before a lineman placed several in a pouch and climbed a pole to install them. For some, a damaged specimen is the only way they can own a rare and high-priced insulator, hoping one day to possibly have a chance to upgrade to one in better condition.

THE INSULATOR HOBBY TODAY

In 2011, the insulator hobby continued strong, with more than 20 regional insulator clubs. The latest Crown Jewels directory contains almost 2,000 listings. The National Insulator Association (NIA) plays host to annual national and regional shows and the different clubs around the country sponsor quite a number of shows and swap meets. It is not uncommon for enthusiasts to travel hundreds or thousands of miles to a show.

Compared to bottles, insulator collecting is still very new. Now after our first 50 years, many of the hobby's pioneer collectors have reached an advanced age or passed on. Many of the wonderful pieces they accumulated in the early years have again become available, allowing modern day collectors a chance to acquire real pieces of our hobby's history. One of my most treasured insulators is a 130-year-old piece in as-found condition. It was dug by Bob Roosevelt, a legend in the insulator world. It has a “book value” of less than \$20, but the provenance makes it priceless to me.

One factor that has had a huge impact on the insulator world was not dreamed of in the early days of

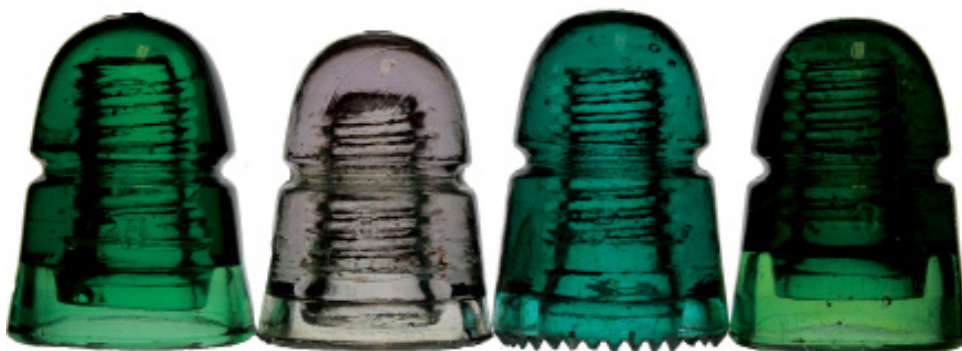
the hobby. Gone are the days when you'd receive a Crown Jewels magazine, peruse the For Sale section, mail a self-addressed, stamped envelope to a seller and wait patiently for a sales list to arrive. You would then make your selections and send a money order, hoping your first choices hadn't already been sold. Finally, after two or three weeks, you'd receive a package and it was like Christmas morning. . . you never knew for sure what you'd get.

The Internet has made communications between collectors everywhere almost instantaneous. The NIA and Crown Jewels of the Wire both have an Internet presence and they have been joined by other sites. Insulators.info, the premier collector's website, hosts a list-serve called Insulator Collectors on the Net (ICON), which is quite popular. Many popular auction sites have benefitted from the electronic media as well, and several offer both insulators and bottles.

The hobby has now gone worldwide, in part thanks to the Internet and the wide reach of marketing sites such as eBay. Foreign insulators are a rapidly growing segment of the hobby and it is a time of discovery as collectors bring new styles to the market from distant lands.

Many folks in the insulator world recognize that the interaction and fellowship with other enthusiasts is one of the best parts of the hobby. Interest in shows and swap meets is still very strong. I am president of the Dixie Jewels Insulator Club which serves the southeastern United States. Our popular swap meets are moved to different venues around the region on the third Saturday of February, May, August and November. Last year, our club has hosted swaps in Alabama, North Carolina and Georgia. The first two swaps of 2012 were held in Florida and North Carolina. Our members offer many tables of beautiful insulators for sale and we often host collectors from seven to 10 states. We'd love for you to join us in the future to learn more about insulators!

In future articles, we will delve into the history of some of the major manufacturers and discuss many other insulator-related topics.



Glass insulators come in a wide variety of colors. L-R: Hemingray No. 21 (Hemingray Glass Co., Muncie, IN) in yellow green, W.G.M. Co. (Western Glass Manufacturing Company, Denver, CO) in medium sea, G.N.W. Co. (Great Northwestern Telegraph Company, Canada) in royal purple, B (Brookfield Glass Co., NY) in dark yellow green.