

# MARBLE BEADS!

By Lee Linne

Contributed by Bill O'Connor

## Preface

This month, I would like to introduce you to one of the most interesting categories in the marble collector's arena. We are fortunate to be able to reprint an article by Lee Linne, from the IAMC club newsletter, "Marble Beads", great history. Enjoy.

As a marble collector marble beads have appealed to me for the same reasons I collect antique marbles. When my wife and I purchased our first marble beads in the mid 1990s, questions about marble beads kept plaguing me and the answers in the marble world were not there. Over the years you hear bits of information that later proves to be incorrect. This information is passed on as fact and I must say that I have been guilty. Marble Beads are a subset under the classification of BEADS, then TRADE BEADS, then HAND MADE.



Linne Collection

There are books written on BEADS and TRADE BEADS. But not much information on Marble Beads. For this article a Marble bead is a cane made or rod made marble with a hole through the center.

First, were they made as trade beads? I define 'Trade' as bartering with indigenous peoples for goods. They probably were used as trade for bartered items. Although records show that few were shipped to Africa, but many were shipped to Holland and the Netherlands, who were among the biggest world traders. The marble beads were likely used to trade for gold and Ivory. In North American museums no marble beads show up in the archives from trading with the North American Indians.

Were they used to trade for Slaves? Most likely not. The Slave trade ended in Europe and America in the early 1800s with laws banning the import of slaves. As it will be shown Marble Beads did not start production until the 1850s. There were some renegades that still traded in slaves in the 1800s but most went to South America.

## Origin of Marble Beads

When talking with Jamie Allen, a prominent bead collector and author of many articles on beads, Jamie made the comment that it was too bad marble beads did not have the full range of color and design that antique beads have. And he is right, speaking as a bead collector where are the designs and patterns that are



Thomas Stricker Collection

prevalent in antique beads? There are no chevrons or the millefiori. But, as marble collectors have found, marble beads have the same designs and patterns as antique German Swirls. This German connection is further proven by evidence found at factory digs in and around the Lauscha area of Germany.

Here is a sample of the cullet and marble beads that were unearthed in these digs.

## German Marble and Marble Bead Production

German marble production can be traced to the area around Lauscha and Haselbach in the state of Thuringen, Germany.

The town of Lauscha is famous for the production of human glass eyes, eyes for stuffed animals and Christmas tree ornaments. This is an area of eastern central Germany close to what is now the Czech Republic. Glass has been made in this area since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This area is wooded which supplied fuel for the glass furnaces. Most of the people are farmers and some raise livestock. However in the winter months they can't farm so the people turned to glass production. Typically a town or village would build a furnace called a "HUT" and rent out work stations to village families. The number of huts was limited by the supply of wood for fuel. During the heavy winters families were engaged in cottage-work. Father, mother, grandparents and children were all involved.

Thanks to the research of Jurgen Busch a German journalist some of the early history of German handmade marbles and marble beads has been published. According to the information from Jurgen, German marble production started in the late 1840s when Johann Greiner developed the marble scissors in 1848 and received concessions to produce and sell "artificial agate and semiprecious stone balls and in 1849 received a patent from the

Royal Bavarian Government in Bayreuth. The Greiners tried to work in secrecy to keep the competition out of the marble business. The Greiners planned to build their furnace but local competitors protested because of the wood allotment. The Greiners started their furnace in 1853 using only coal as fuel. Their furnace initially had four work stations but was enlarged to ten within months. Ignoring the Greiner patent two other local families started marble production in 1856 and by 1877 ten different units were producing marbles.

According to Jurgen, the production of marbles from Lauscha is well documented. From 1850 to the development of machine made marbles Lauscha was the world leading marble maker. Little is known about the direct production of marble beads. In 1854 a letter from Greiners complained "all sorts of elements were allowed to produce marbles" while his concession (or Patent) was still valid. With this letter, Greiner appeared to get the concession expanded to include marble beads. Attached was a small box marked "colored glass coral beads" (Glaskorallperlen) or in other words marble beads.

A packing list from one glass maker listed "Lochmarbel" or marble beads packed 100 to a carton.

**Holes**

How were the holes made? By investigations with marble makers, bead makers and glass workers, it appears that majority beads were hot punched. Hot punching can be identified on a marble bead by a slightly tapered hole. The hole may not look tapered but it most likely is as the taper enhances punching and removal of the punch. One end of the



hole is usually larger and will be rounded at the edges with a smooth shiny look from fire polishing.

The punched marbles come from the factory site in Germany or from the African trade. There are some marble beads that were drilled.

These holes have straight shoulders where they enter and exit the marble bead and the inside of the hole usually has a rough dusty white appearance. The drilled marbles come mainly out of India, Burma or SE Asia. But, in either instance the marbles all have the same Lauscha / German appearance and characteristics.

Another method, which is difficult to see in marble beads, is to produce a hollow cane. Bead production using a hollow cane or rod is common and well documented in ancient bead manufacture.

The marble beads are pinched or cut from the cane and rounded. Both ends will be fire polished with the edges of the hole rounded.

If you can see into the bead the hole open larger and is not a uniform diameter from end to end.

This is an example of a hollow cane type bead. Some hollow cane beads may have been made in Germany but no hollow cane culet has ever shown up in the factory digs.

There is mention in some literature that there was a marble scissor that would cut the marble off the cane and punch at the same time. However, I can not positively confirm this method.

**Current Source**

Most of the Marble Beads can be traced from Africa. Since the 1960's buyers have been scouring Africa for relics to sell in the European and American markets. The majority of the complete beads come from this trade.

Marble beads have also come from Burma, SE Asia, Borneo, and Afghanistan.

Some of the beads come from the factory digs in Germany along with broken marbles and culet as these from Thomas Stricker.



Thomas Stricker Collection



Thomas Stricker Collection



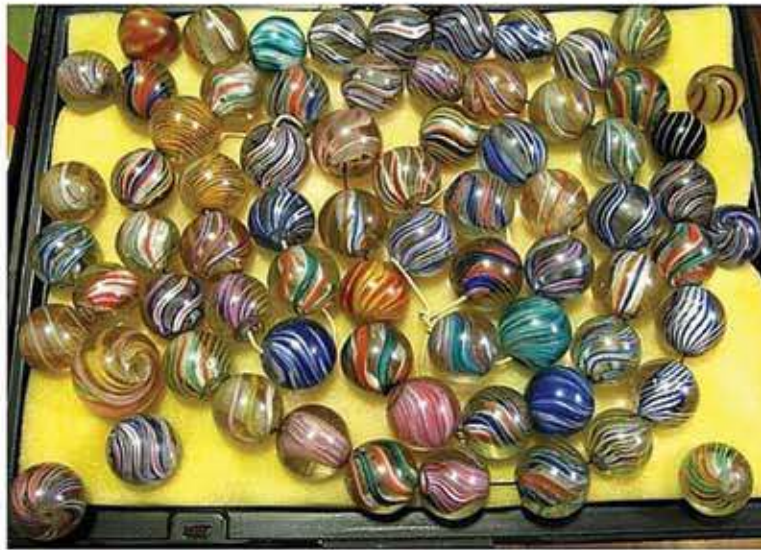
Linne Collection



Linne collection

de Sousa Collection  
Large Beads

Linne Collection



de Sousa Collection  
Smaller Beads 1" and less



Linne collection



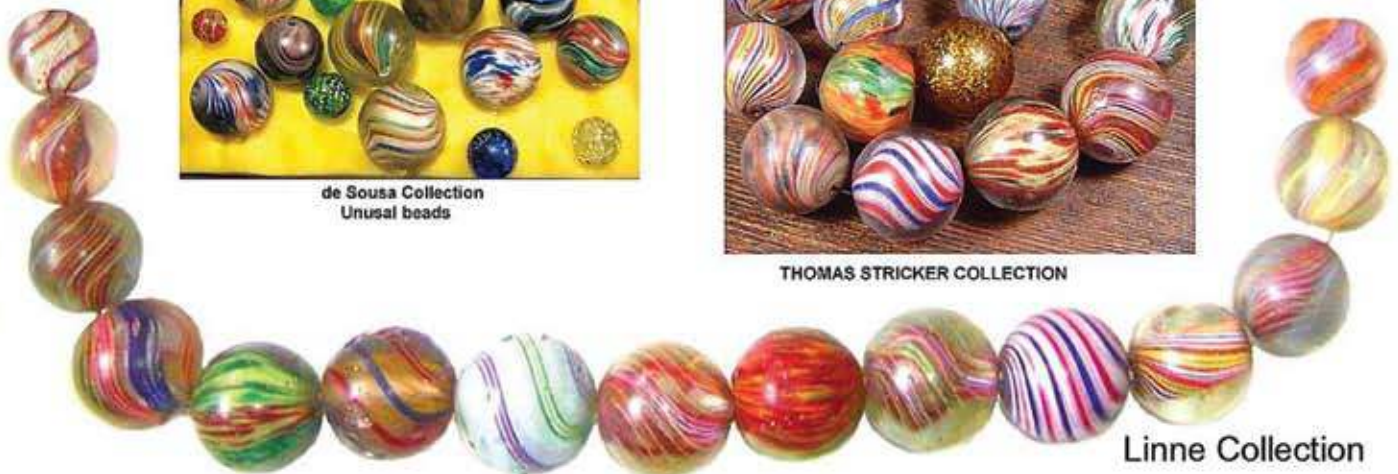
de Sousa Collection  
Unusal beads



THOMAS STRICKER COLLECTION



Linne Collection





**Linne Collection**

I have one strand of Banded opaque beads that can be traced from SE Asia. I have another matched strand of graduated size onionskin mica that could have never seen but a jewelry box.

In Jurgen's closing statement he states that most beads from the African trade are not from Lauscha because the intensity color and design are not the same. But, in examining the beads I have seen these beads are from German origin if not from Lauscha, then from some surrounding artisan.

They are truly a beauty to have and behold.

**Acknowledgements and Bibliography**

I would like to thank Thomas Stricker for his sharing of much bead information and his pictures. To Hansel de Sousa for the contribution of pictures of his marble bead collection. To Jamie Allen for his insight into beads. And a very special thank you to Jurgen Busch for his article "Lauscha Blown Glass and Marble Beads" in Ornament Magazine Vol. 24 No.2 Winter of 2000 and his permission to use the article. Jurgen research was invaluable.



**Lee**



**Thomas Stricker Collection**



**Thomas Stricker Collection**

**A SPECIAL MARBLE**

Recently I received a phone call from a very nice lady, Pam, from Indiana. She was inquiring about marble stands. Where to find one, what type are best etc. We had a nice conversation about marbles. She told me that although she didn't collect, in fact didn't own a one, she thought they were beautiful. So why did she need a marble stand? Actually, it was her best friend that needed the marble stand. She explained that her friend had a very special marble, about an inch and a half. It came with a stand, but somehow the stand had been misplaced. Without the stand, she could not display the marble, and it was very dear to her. You see, the marble contained the ashes of her father. She said her friend's father was a huge marble fanatic there in Indiana, and bought and sold on ebay, went to the shows etc. When her father unexpectedly passed away from a motorcycle accident, he had his ashes enclosed in a marble, one for each child. Have you put 2 and 2 together yet? Needless to say, we were more than happy to send a glass marble stand her way! Yep, 'Indiana has great marbles!'

Marble on Les.

~Dani

Here's one of the marbles...photo courtesy of Bill Tow

