

Goofus Glass - What Is It?

By Bill Baab



Here are just three examples of some common type Goofus Glass with it's Gold and Red Paint



Many bottle collectors from time to time have come across large and small clear containers embossed with flowers and sometimes covered in gilt. The larger containers weigh very little despite their more than a foot high sizes.

Back in the 1970s, collectors Len and Margaret Womack, of Estill Springs, Tenn., did some research and shared it with this writer.

"Goofus glass can be defined as a jar that held pickles, is shaped like a vase and featured convex designs of flowers, birds, insects, fruits and other subjects," they said. "Goofus glass jars generally held pickles, but they also contained other products such as relish and mustard.

"They were sealed with sealing wax, then covered with lead foil and the label placed on top of the 'lid,'" their descriptions continued.

"Goofus pickle jars were made as early as 1880 in pre-machine molds. One rare jar features the Statue of Liberty with spread-wing eagle. It was made about 1887."

Gilt was applied to some jars to prevent the pickles from turning white. Painted jars are common, usually with the paint flaking off, although one process allowed paint to be baked on and it was harder.

Credited with making many of the jars was Harry Northwood, who bought his own glass company in West Virginia in the early 1900s where he produced Goofus products from about 1906.

Turn of the century housewives canned their own pickles, so manufacturers had to come up with a way to get them to buy pickles at the grocery store. They came up with the eye-catching Goofus jars, which also were made in milk glass. Pre-1908 jars sometimes turned amethyst from the sun's rays because of manganese in the sand from which the glass was made.

Other glass colors include aqua-blue, light and dark green, amber, opal glass, carnival glass, camphor glass frosted and crystal glass.

The author owns a Goofus lamp bowl with all the electrical fittings, plus jars featuring flowers in baskets, the Statue of Liberty jar, a small milk glass jar and an even tinier jar covered in gilt.

The Womacks' collection included plates, butter pats, cologne and powder jars. They preferred jars with the original paint.

Goofus glass objects are not expensive, except for the older, rarer pieces, and a representative collection can be formed rather easily. Some fruit jar collectors acquire Goofus glass jars as "go-withs."

