

#1503 Crystolite Round Floral Bowl in Dawn— Newark or Bellaire?

By Eric Tankesley-Clarke

A couple of years ago our Heisey study group, the Great Plains Heisey Club, gathered together a large collection of items in Dawn. Fortunately, a couple of collectors in the group really like the color and we had a wide range to show. There were very few Dawn items that we couldn't examine that day, and a more satisfying display would be hard to come by. We had not one but two examples of the #1503 Crystolite 10" floral bowl, seen only occasionally in this color.

The bowl itself (Fig. 1) is not that imposing, except that no other Crystolite piece is known to exist in Dawn. It's only a tad over 2" high. Its diameter is about 10", but if you measure carefully from the extremes of one rib to the opposite, you can pick up another half inch or so. The bowl's base (Fig. 2) is a ground and polished ring 4" in diameter. It encircles a moulded-in star, not the kind with pointy-ended rays that most colonial pieces have, but a star with blunt-ended rays. The bowl is marked. As can be seen in some other star-bottomed Crystolite, the mark is on the outside bottom, embedded in the center of the star. That is not typical; in most Heisey patterns with star bottoms, the mark will occur on the smooth, inner surface of the bottom, directly above the center of the star.



Fig. 1: #1503 Crystolite 10" floral bowl, Dawn



Fig. 2: Bottom of base of floral bowl

The fact that this bowl has a star bottom may help date Crystolite pieces—the plates and three-part relish are ones I think of—that occur both plain- and star-bottomed; incidentally, they share the embedded <H> in their stars, although the rays of the plates and relish are much wider and the relish, at least, occurs both with and without the mark. But first, we have to establish just what is the date of the Dawn Crystolite floral bowl. And that leads us into a thorny discussion of just who made it.

Here is a piece that is sometimes attributed to Imperial (in which case we'd properly call the color Charcoal) and sometimes to Heisey. But who did make it? It has the beginnings of a good mystery—mistaken identities, conflicting stories, missing documentation, unexamined clues, even typographical errors. And, of course, the ultimate question—whodunit? Let's start with reviewing who has said what about this Crystolite bowl.

In the Autumn, 1980 issue of the *Heisey Glass Newscaster*, Clarence Vogel's periodical publication, he illustrates the bowl and has this to say about it:

"The bowl was made by the Imperial Glass Corp. of Bellaire, Ohio, for the Fisher-Silversmith Co. It was a special order made in Charcoal color which is almost identical to the Heisey Dawn. It was made 3-30-60 on a special order deal. This is the only Heisey mould item made for them. It is a salad bowl which is 10" wide and 2 1/8" high....I have been unable to detect any difference between the Heisey Dawn and the Imperial Charcoal."

So that seems to clinch it. There was no hint of speculation in what Clarence Vogel wrote, but absolute certainty.

There is a problem, though, with the description of the item. Vogel calls the item a salad bowl. What he illustrates, however, is a floral bowl. In Fig. 3, I've put a deep salad bowl beside the floral bowl for comparison. We know that Heisey often played around with names for items. When it came down to it they really didn't care what you called it or how you used it so long as you bought it. Nevertheless, there were certain shapes that nearly everyone in the trade agreed upon. Salad bowls were then (and still are) generally more or less cupped, straight sided, or lightly flared at the top and they had some depth to them. They are designed to hold a leafy volume confined suitably for dressing and tossing. The little grey Crystolite bowl loses much of its volume due to its widely flared shape. It is ideal for a floral arrangement that might spill over the edges of its container in an artistic way, but not very good for holding in your typical salad mixings.



Fig. 3: Deep Salad Bowl (left) and floral bowl

So was Clarence wrong? If his recounting of the bowl's history was the only one we had, we might have to leave it as inconclusive. But there are two more sources to consider.

Another source, one that may have been published a few months before the Vogel write-up, is *Heisey by Imperial*. This book, a joint effort by members of the Newark Heisey Collectors Club, was first copyrighted in 1980, with a second edition copyrighted two years later. In both editions page 15 gives a listing of #1503 Crystolite produced by Imperial. Item 13 on the list is a 10" deep salad bowl. A note follows the entry, "3/3/60 special order" but nothing is said about the color of this specific item. At the head of the Crystolite list is the note that the items were made in crystal.

So now we have two references published about the same time that refer to Imperial's producing a salad bowl on special order, rather than for general production. There were two 10" salad bowls in Crystolite. Catalog 31 (1950) has a good profile line drawing of the deep salad bowl (Fig. 4). The same bowl is shown in Fig. 3. It is straight-sided (although the drawing makes it look almost cupped) and

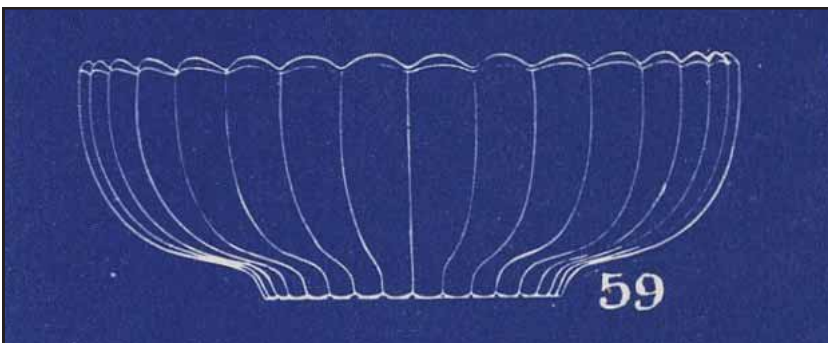


Fig. 4: Deep salad bowl from Cat. 31

has a squat, touraine shape. The deep salad bowl is about 3½" high, almost twice that of the floral bowl. Catalog 212 shows us the 10" spring salad bowl (Fig. 5). This is a simpler shape, essentially a large nappy. The Vogel reference illustrates a 10" bowl but it is not the 10" deep salad bowl or the spring salad bowl. We don't have a good catalog illustration of the 10" floral bowl, although there is one of the similar 11½" size. There is, however, a factory photo reproduced in a Wartime Salesman brochure that shows the 10" floral bowl next to the 10" spring salad bowl. That photo was reprinted in the Heisey News, February 1998, and I've copied it in this article (top of next page)

10 in. Spring Salad Bowl

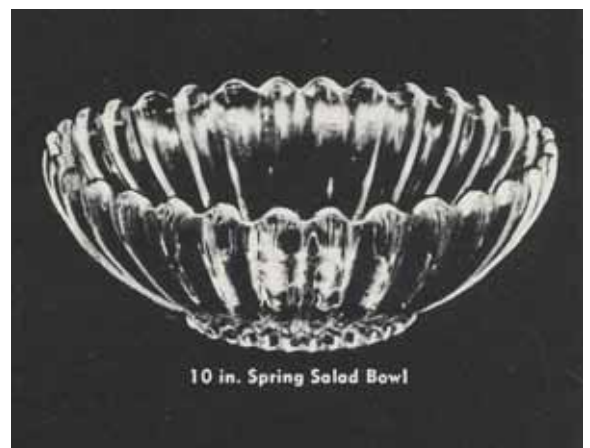


Fig. 5: Spring salad bowl from Cat. 212

(Fig. 6). The wartime example seems to be a bit deeper with the flare starting up a little higher than the Dawn example, but is still essentially the same bowl. Neither salad bowl is likely to be mistaken or substituted for the floral bowl.

One could argue that the dates in Vogel and in *Heisey by Imperial* are different and involve two different orders. Vogel says the date of the special order was 3/30/60. *Heisey by Imperial* says it was 3/3/60, and that's the only special order mentioned. The fact that for both Vogel and the Newark group one special order leapt out and that both of them report the order being for salad bowls suggests there was only one order that they both refer to. The odds are pretty good that the order was on one date or the other and that there is a typo somewhere. Unfortunately, 3/3 was a Thursday and 3/30 was a Wednesday. If one had been a weekend day, we could point

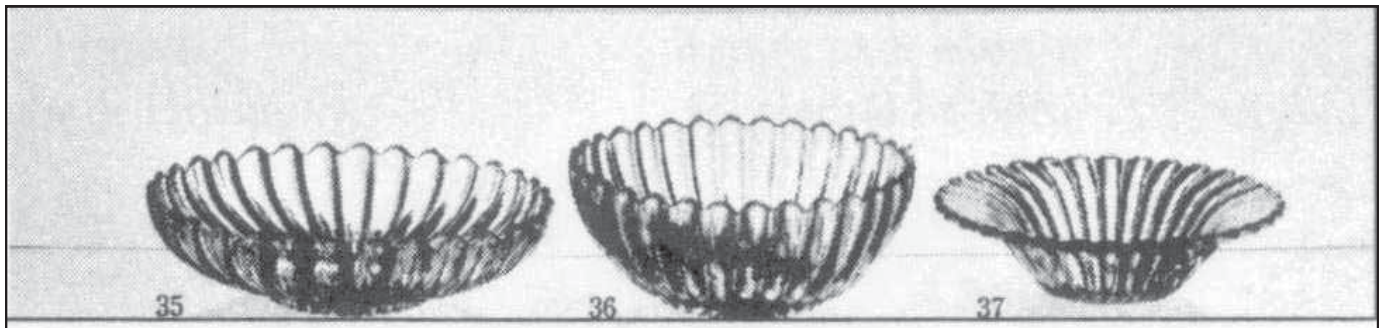


Fig. 6: From right to left are Gardenia, spring salad, and floral bowls from Wartime Salesman

to it as a likely mistake. As it is, either date is a good prospect and there is no way to reconcile them without seeing the original documentation. On checking with the HCA archives, it appears the documentation is not there now, if it ever was. Both Vogel and the Newark club were working when Imperial was still in business so they would have been checking Imperial's office in Bellaire. The paperwork may never have made it to the HCA museum in Newark.

That leaves the difference of color. While the Newark group says only crystal was made, Clarence says the special order was for Charcoal. However, on closer reading, he may really be saying he had found a special order for a salad bowl and then concluded that the Dawn floral bowl must be the same item (since Crystolite is not otherwise known in Dawn). He then went to the trouble of pointing out that there is little difference between Imperial's and Heisey's grey colors and the bowl must, therefore, be Charcoal. After all, Imperial produced some Ridgeleigh in Charcoal—why not Crystolite?

That interpretation, though, may not hold water either. Clearly, Clarence knew more than was published by the Newark group, since they don't give the name of the company ordering the bowl but he does. As it turns out, 1980 was not the first time Clarence had written about this bowl. In his October/November 1972 *Newscaster* he also wrote about it, and there his words are more emphatic: "In March, 1960, the Imperial Glass Corp. of Bellaire, Ohio, made the 10" salad bowl in the Charcoal color. It was a special order for Fisher Silversmith....It is generally understood that Heisey never made any of the Crystolite #1503 items in Dawn and of course we do have the fact that Imperial made it in their Charcoal. According to Imperial records the 10" bowl in Crystolite is the only item in this pattern which they have made in the Charcoal color." Clarence says again that Imperial made the bowl in Charcoal; that's his story, and he's sticking to it.

The tale of the smoky grey Crystolite bowl might end there if it weren't for another, later piece of evidence. In 1993 Louise Ream told a much different story. In the *Heisey News* of May 1993, this is what Louise had to say about the dark grey Crystolite bowl (the italics in the quote are hers):

"Several years ago, I loaned the museum a *Black* #1503 Crystolite 10" bowl.... At the time, I believed that it was made by Imperial. A few years later a former employee gave me some papers which contained a letter dated November 13, 1952, written to Joe Lower who was in charge of the New York City office. It was an order from *Old Silver Classics*, a company that made various

types of silver or silver plate holders for glass bowls of many kinds. Heisey was the supplier of the bowls. Since Heisey did make Dawn, the company had asked for the *Black* 10 inch floral bowls. They also said that they had asked for *Black* before but it wasn't being made at that time. It was then that I realized that I probably had one of those bowls."

The Ream information seems as self-assured as the Vogel statements. What should we make of these very different reports?

One possible explanation, although one quickly disposed of, is that Clarence and Louise were talking about differently colored pieces. One might think that the bowl to which Louise Ream referred was truly black, not Dawn. But it is clear that in this case she took the two terms to refer to the same color. A bit more of her discussion: "(The bowl's) value has increased now that it is known to be a rare piece of Heisey Dawn." Not only that, she correctly refers to the piece as a floral bowl. Which is just the one that Clarence illustrated in 1980. There is little doubt they were talking about the same piece. Whether the 1960 special order was the same piece is another question.

One potential problem with the Ream account is the date when its main event took place, that is, the date the special order was placed. Wasn't this before Dawn began production? Well, maybe it wasn't. The production of Dawn is sometimes stated to have begun in 1955. In fact, we know that Dawn was being made for production items at least by January, 1954. There is a typewritten price list with that date which is a supplement to Catalog 32. (The original Catalog 32 was dated January, 1953.) We know from dated glass formulas documented by Heisey's chemist, E. E. Olson, that experiments with smoke-colored glass had begun no later than October, 1952. A formula actually labeled "Dawn" (as opposed to "smoke") is dated February 26, 1953.

While it does not appear that Heisey was prepared to produce Dawn by November, 1952, the date of the Old Silver Classics order, it may have been ready a few months later. It is plausible that Old Silver Classics placed their special order in November, 1952, knowing they would have to wait for some time into 1953. In fact, more than plausible. Everyone in the trade understood that special orders had to be worked into a factory's production schedule. They could not be expected as quickly as orders for open stock. As Louise reports it, Old Silver Classics had asked for the black bowl before, but it wasn't available at that time. Was it available, or nearly so, by November, 1952? Had the company gotten the word out to salesmen that Dawn was ready for production and now they needed orders? Did the order prompt Emmett Olson to wrap up his research and settle on a Dawn formula? Was this a test production run? Obviously, these questions are not likely to be answered without information that we don't yet have.

It seems clear that Heisey did produce the 10" bowl in Dawn about 1953. It is titillating to realize that not only did Dawn start before 1955, but that the Crystolite pieces could have been some of the first Dawn ever produced.

Here is a nice little chart to summarize it all:

	Author		
	Vogel	Newark Club	Ream
Piece said to be made	salad bowl	deep salad bowl	floral bowl
Piece seen by author	10" floral bowl	n/a	10" floral bowl
Color	Charcoal	crystal	black (Dawn)
Date made	3/30/60	3/3/60	after Nov. 1952

So we have different, but not necessarily opposing, stories. How can we reconcile the different accounts? Perhaps we don't. George McNeil's book, *Heisey Crystolite, A Pictorial Directory*, has this to say: "The floral bowl in the Dawn (smoky) color shown herein does fluoresce the same as Heisey glass, but the Imperial Company also produced it in their Charcoal color so uncertainty remains as to its origin." If you take all the versions at face value, or at least with a good dose of circumspection, there isn't much more you can do.

Now I'm going to throw caution to the winds. While I can't absolutely rule out an Imperial Charcoal floral bowl, I think the special order of 1960 refers to a different piece; I don't think anyone in the glass trade would have mistaken the salad bowl for the floral bowl. Imperial would not likely have produced the floral bowl under the label of a salad bowl. I don't think they'd have grabbed the wrong mould either; the salad and floral bowls are from different moulds so it isn't just a matter of tooling the piece while still warm to form one or the other. A buyer expecting a salad bowl would likely have been disappointed to receive a shallow, flared bowl instead. It strikes me as unlikely that two different companies (Fisher and Old Silver Classics) would special order exactly the same piece in exactly the same color seven years apart. Clarence was certain that Imperial had made a Crystolite piece in Charcoal. If Clarence truly had information that Imperial made a salad bowl in Charcoal, I think the bowl itself has yet to surface.

I've been lucky enough to have examined three examples of the floral bowl in smoke (to choose a factory-neutral name for this color). I've only been able to put one example under UV, but it corroborates McNeil's observation about fluorescence compared with other Heisey, assuming he was comparing this bowl with other Heisey Dawn examples. Authentic Imperial Charcoal has a somewhat different UV reaction under different wavelengths. Another telling feature is that the bottom rim is ground. The mould design almost demands it. While Imperial did grind some bottoms, it was usually coarser or less well polished than Heisey's grinding. The bottom rims of examples I've looked at are ground and well polished to the usual Heisey standards. The overall finish of the bowls is excellent, too, smooth and clean, without any ragged mould marks along the edges or the faint stippling sometimes seen in Imperial pieces. At least one example has just a bit of doeskin rippling, but I have seen this plenty of times in unquestionably authentic Heisey glass, so that isn't persuasive either way. The fact that the bowl is crisply marked with the Diamond H is no help, since Imperial was producing other Charcoal pieces (Ridgeleigh) during the time it was still using the Heisey trademark. All things considered, the bowls I have seen certainly look like Heisey pieces.

In this particular case, the evidence points to the information from the Newark Club book and from Louise Ream as being the most reliable, with the possible exception of the date reported in *Heisey by Imperial*. While Clarence Vogel was an astute observer of Heisey, I think this time he misinterpreted or confused some data. By 1972, he clearly had the bowl and some information from Imperial and had linked the two. His statements to the contrary, I can't help but think that a mistake was made in asserting the Imperial piece was Charcoal, which only led him to then confuse a salad bowl with a floral bowl. Keep in mind, however, what was available in 1972. Not much. First of all, he didn't have the information contained in the letter given to Louise Ream. But mostly, we have to remember that Clarence was doing much of the primary research that we now rely on. He gathered catalogs, price lists, scraps of paper. He interviewed countless people who actually did the work at A.H. Heisey & Co., sometimes getting piles of new facts and stories, sometimes only scraps of memory. He had a mass of information gathered helter-skelter that was only just then being organized into something coherent, and the occasional misstep was simply unavoidable. I doubt any one person could have absorbed all of it fully. We come at it with the advantage of nearly 50 years of work already done.

As in many good mysteries, the answers carry some questions of their own. If someone ever finds a true salad bowl in Charcoal, that would resolve most of them. So far as I know, no one has. In the meantime, we can safely say that Heisey certainly made this bowl in Dawn. Whether Imperial ever made it in Charcoal is a much more dubious proposition.

Can anyone clear up all the questions? Not without a lot of smoke and mirrors. Well, a lot of smoke, anyway.

Vital Statistics: see second paragraph of this article.

If you want to blow some smoke my way, our smoke-signal reception isn't the greatest, so please write me at heisey@embarqmail.com.