

357 DUCK ASH TRAY

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If you've been following the articles on ash trays, you may have noticed that they have been somewhat random. If you think I've skipped around blithely, you'd be right. (Well, maybe not about the "blithely" part. But there's been more skipping than at a jump rope tournament.) If I had every last Heisey ash tray and smoking item immediately available to me, it might have been a different matter. An orderly progression would be a simpler accomplishment. But I don't. When I can, it's better to personally eyeball an ash tray. Catalog illustrations and the like are great, but there is no substitute for seeing the real thing. We've already seen in earlier articles how there are sometimes differences and details not obvious without seeing the real object. It's like interviewing fussy celebrities. A little personal attention can bring out their better qualities and the stories hidden beneath the glamour. If I'm going to write about an ash tray, it's better to establish a personal rapport with the piece, even if it is a one-way sort of thing. You've heard about talking to a brick wall? Try getting cozy and personal with a cold-hearted piece of glass.

While deciding what to write about next, I was reviewing a list of ash trays I had coaxed into sitting for their portraits. That's when I realized that I was virtually set to address a popular and colorful group that many collectors might place

together. For the next few months, then, I'll go through this group one by one, in numerical order, even, or at least as orderly as Heisey News space will allow. That will satisfy the more compulsive among you and make it easier for me to choose a subject for the month. After I've finished this series, though, who knows what I'll write about next. All bets are off.

When I covered the 355 Quator ash tray and match holder (that's the one with the unusual round, hollow cone in the center), I suggested that it may have been seen as part of a series. In Catalog 76, we see the numbers from 352 through 355, plus a few others, all on the same page. Of course, there were pattern lines of non-smoking pieces that went along with these ash trays, so it may have been nothing more than pulling out the smoking gear from those four lines to highlight them. On the other hand, there was pictured, right along side them, the 356 White Owl ash tray. It did not have any obvious affiliation with any other pattern. It leads one to suspect that Heisey had tentatively begun a consecutively numbered set of ash trays.

That was in about 1915. As we progress through price lists and catalogs of the rest of the decade and into the early 1920's, that is where Heisey left it. If there was an ash tray series, it had stagnated. Then along came Catalog 109.

Here, at last, ash trays came into their glory. As we shall see over the next several articles in this series, Heisey introduced a large group of ash trays, numbered from 357 straight through to 366, all more or less at the same time. Not all of them were in Cat. 109, but most were.

The first one in this series is easily the most quizzical and whimsical of the lot, and possibly the most popular. The 357 Duck ash tray is one of the most mirth-inducing pieces of Heisey I know. Strangers to Heisey are immediately drawn to its personality. It has charisma.

For the first half of its history, there were no animals in the glass of A. H. Heisey & Co.

About as close as they came was a tumbler with a horseshoe in the bottom, and this was an item more than likely made because it was already a motif available from other companies. Anyway, a shoe is hardly a horse. By the last part of the 1920's, the time of Cat. 109, the gates swung open and out came, not horses, but ducks, dolphins, frogs, and kingfishers. Swans, lion heads and dolphin feet soon followed. (Have you ever wondered what a dolphin would look like with feet? Me neither. Until now.) In the post-war period, Heisey always had something in the way of animals, either as figurines or as adornments on other items. The amount of whimsy varied, but once animals entered the Heisey design vocabulary, they remained there for the rest of the company's production. The 357 Duck ash tray helped lead the way.

What we have in 357 is a broadly oval ash tray with a cigarette rest at one end and a matchbook holder at the other. (The matchbook holder was not specifically mentioned by Heisey, but surely that notch at the tail was intended for that purpose.) Now, an entirely presentable, no nonsense ash tray could have been produced with those elements. But someone at A.H. Heisey & Co. was inspired in a loopy kind of way. We don't exactly see a duck, but an ash tray with a lot of duckiness. The company did not give the ash tray a name. But, really now, what else could you call it? The head of the Duck has a prominent crest that forms the cigarette rest, and also gives him a humorously pugnacious look. Four uprising ridges sweep around and up the back of the Duck to form his pert duck tail. The uppermost two ridges part just enough to hold that book of matches. One of the ridges gracefully follows the side to end in a scroll or swirl, either to suggest wings or the roiled water as the Duck paddles madly through it. A pair of swirls gives us a set of duck eyes.

The Duck sits on water leveled as a nicely ground ring around the base, with a slightly concave bottom. The mark, which has always been there on the examples I have seen, is on the underneath side of the bottom.

Being introduced in Cat. 109, the Duck is available in color, of course. Besides crystal, I know of it only in Moongleam, Flamingo, and Marigold. Considering the time frame, about 1928-1933, Sahara might be possible. Even though crystal is probably less common than either Moongleam or Flamingo, it generally will cost less. Marigold ones will cost you a wing and a leg.

I have never seen 357 Duck with decorations (although I have seen duck with all the trimmings). That said, one of you may have seen it, and it would be interesting to know just what some other imaginative person did with this ash tray.

Vital Statistics

357 Duck ash tray: Length (beak to tail), about 4 3/8". Width, 2 1/2". Height at head, 2 1/8"; height at tail, 2 1/2"; height at side, 1 1/8". Oval base, length, 2 5/8"; width, 2 3/16". Ground rim base. Marked, on bottom of base.

Sometimes it may talk like a duck, but it isn't. You find all kinds of things for sale touted as Heisey, but some of it is just glass quackery. Tell me your most outlandish story of such flimflamery at heisey@embarqmail.com.