

#363 Wings Ash Tray



If Frank Capra had been a Heisey collector, “It’s a Wonderful Life” might have had a different ending. Imagine George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart) in that last scene by the Christmas tree, holding little Zuzu while she exclaims,

Look, Daddy. Teacher says, ‘Every time a crystal goblet pings, a Heisey collector gets his Wings.’

Well, maybe screenwriting isn’t my strong suit. Anyway, the movie dates from 1946, while our topic for the day, the #363 Wings ash tray, had been long out of production by that time. Of course, I could have gone for the 1927 movie “Wings,” given the first Oscar Best Picture award in 1929. More timely, perhaps, but not many of us have seen that one. Quickly, now, when’s the last time you saw Clara Bow? Me, neither.

Wings the ash tray actually dates from about 1928 to roughly 1933. Those pesky missing price lists don’t let us date it more precisely, but we do know that it shows up in a 1929 price list (crystal only in that one) and was not in the next fully re-done price list from 1933.

The Wings ash tray doesn’t surface as often as it might, in part because the thing is never marked so it goes overlooked. The relatively short production period also makes it uncommon. Compared to many other Heisey ash trays, the glass is fairly light. If “heavy” and “massive” are among the traits you use to look for Heisey, this one could easily be passed over. The bottom is not ground, so if carefully polished grinding is another

of your criteria, that needs to be shelved too. You see the problem; so many of the traditional clues simply aren’t there. This is a case where you just have to know what to look for before you go out hunting.

The price list makes it clear that this, the lightweight glass, the practically right-out-of-the-mould-ready-for-sale design, was intentional. While Heisey never openly competed with the dime-store trade, they still recognized the need for some low-priced items to stay in the running. So A.H. Heisey & Co. sought to cut corners, but do it stylishly. The #363 ash tray was among the least expensive that Heisey offered at the time. None were cheaper, and #358 Solitaire (*Heisey News*, February, 2012), along with the #1179 Bow Tie and #1200 Yeoman individual ash trays were the same price.

There is no doubt, thankfully, about the identity of #363, unlike that troublesome #362 Bermuda that I wrote about last time. (Heisey did not name #363, or any of those in this series I’m currently covering. As for so many ash trays of the period, the names were added later, often those of tobacco brands of the time. Wings was one of those brands, and the wing motif made it the obvious choice for the ash tray’s namesake. As it turns out, the two shared even more than that. The cigarette brand coincidentally came to the market in 1929 as a low-end price leader, not unlike the ash tray, and almost at the same time. The brand is still being made as an economy-priced item. Alas, not our ash tray.) We are lucky that the original edition of Cat. 109 features an illustration of #363 Wings. The angle Heisey chose to use, nearly straight-on side view, is not the best for

showing the only really distinctive detail, the handles. To make up for the catalog's omission, I've chosen two other perspectives for this article. The handles looked, naturally, very much like wings. (Or fins, if you are bent that way. On the other hand, there was no cigarette brand by that name. Imagine coming up with an ad campaign for that. "You'll get on swimmingly when you smoke Fins!" OK. Let's see you do better.) Now, where was I? The handles. Each wing has five ribs on the upper surface, flat beneath. These are attached at the top rim to a simple, oval, flat bowl. No cigarette rest, so it isn't obvious whether this was intended for parties of one or larger. While Wings probably did function mainly as an individual ash tray, Heisey generally reserved that title to those items that were no more than about 3" across; perhaps this was an industry standard. Wings is larger, even if you exclude the handles.

The Wings ash tray is reported by the Bredehofts to have been made in Moongleam, Flamingo, and Marigold, as well as crystal. I have seen the first two colors, but not the others, so I'll just have to take their word for it. It seems that this series of #357-366 ash trays was too late for Hawthorne, but Sahara has been found in a few others, so it might be possible for Wings, too. I've only seen a few of these myself, and none were decorated.

If some are around, I doubt there would be much more than a metallic band on the rim, or possibly an etched or engraved insignia or monogram on the bottom. It just wasn't the sort of piece that lent itself to being all trolloped up.

Next time we'll look at the #364 Pedestal ash tray, so I better get busy writing it. Unless, of course, Hollywood comes calling first.

Vital Statistics

#363 Wings ash tray

Length, 5 1/4"

Length without handles, 3 1/2"

Width, 2 1/2"

Height, 11/16"

You probably already know that some of Capra's movies were known to the press as "Capra-corn." If you have any wry comments about Heisey, please pass the corn to me at heisey@embarqmail.com

Eric Tankesley-Clarke

