

Czechoslovakian Collectors Association



Spring Newsletter
May 2015

NEIGER BROTHERS

[This article is based on a panel discussion including Rosie Bodien, Verna Kocken, and Paula Walker, given during the IPBA convention in 2013.]

Rosie

Norbert and Max Neiger moved to Jablonec nad Nisou (Gablonz), Bohemia after 1883; both were born in Krakow, Poland. Jablonec was known for its glass and jewelry industry and that is what probably attracted their parents. Both had training as metalworkers or gurtlers, which was an important skill, since they created/designed jewelry and jeweled perfumes.

Norbert, the older, a graduate of the Gablonz Technical School bijouterie classes, first started designing jewelry, making the products in the basement of his family's home, probably around 1902-1905. His younger brother, Max joined him. Then they moved to Bergasse Street prior to World War I...perhaps 1911-13 (the move to the larger facilities was due in part to the demand for their product from England and America).

After World War I, Norbert became the business manager, and Max was in charge of the workshop and was chief designer. They were very successful with many jewelry lines (they employed a staff of 24) — until the Nazis forced this Jewish family to flee Gablonz.



In October of 1941 the extended Neiger family was transported by the Nazis from Prague to the Lodz Ghetto in Poland. Norbert's daughters, Charlotte and Catherine "Katja" survived the ghetto, but sadly other members of the family (Norbert and his wife Greta, Max and his wife Anna and their daughter Zuzanna) perished in the ghetto. Norbert and Greta's daughters eventually settled in Canada and the USA. Norbert's daughter Emilia was not found in the Lodz Ghetto records, but did live to marry and live near her sisters.

Verna

What we are trying to do is to begin with known Neiger pieces and see if we can find commonalities in design, shapes of stones, types of stones or beads, commonality in material or style of chains, common workmanship, technique, and markings.

Neiger was best known for its exotic Egyptian and Oriental jewelry. For example, Sibylle Jargstrof, p 89-93 of **"Baubles, Bangles, and Beads The Heritage of Bohemia"**, shows photo plates of Neiger jewelry, the backs of which are finished. Pieces have enameled detailing and jewels are bezel-set. A double page shows very colorful brooches, pendants, and bracelets in oriental and Egyptian revival designs featuring metal overlapping opaque stones. What she does not show is any markings.





I will be asking people who have jeweled bottles or jewelry that is marked Czechoslovakia if we can tie certain types of marks with the Neiger factory. This is new ground for me and I am hoping that we can discover and tabulate common qualities and draw some conclusions. There is so much that we do not know.



Paula
 I'm focusing my part of the roundtable on the Czech perfume bottles we prize today with Egyptian decoration and jewellery, dating from around the time of the discovery of King Tut's tomb in the 1920s. These bottles are relatively rare and pricey when found and highly prized by Czech collectors.



Clear blue large bottle by the Franz Josef Vater Co. – Neiger decorative elements: 1) almost every bit of metalwork on this bottle can also be found on Egyptian-themed brooches that are attributed to the Neiger brothers, 2) the tall, skinny amber-colored stones can be also found on jewelry attributed to the Neiger Brothers.



Clear purple bottle by the Josef Schmidt Co. – Neiger decorative elements: almost every bit of metalwork on this bottle can also be found on Egyptian-themed brooches that are attributed to the Neiger Brothers.



Clear smoke-colored bottle by the Josef Schmidt Co. – Neiger decorative elements: practically every element on this bottle—can be found on other costume jewelry attributed to the Neiger Brothers.

After almost a year of research, and after purchasing one of these bottles, I found that the design of these Egyptian-decorated bottles has been attributed to the Neiger Brothers of Gablonz (Czech: Jablonec nad Nisou), Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic). With further research, I found that the Neigers not only decorated perfume bottles but also were prolific jewelry designers. Unfortunately, they did not sign their work in any way to set it apart from other Czech designers. We must look for similarities of design in the attributed bottles/jewelry to the same designs in unacknowledged bottles/jewelry to find the link to recognize their work.

I am starting with photographs of these Egyptian-decorated bottles and with Egyptian and Chinese-themed costume jewelry brooches (also long attributed to the Neigers). I will be linking characteristics (or elements) found in these bottles/pieces to other perfume bottles and jewelry not currently acknowledged as Neiger-decorated.



Black bottle is by Josef Schmidt Co. and blue bottle is currently maker unknown. Neiger decorative elements: Black bottle – 1) iconic bow at neck, 2) half circle stones, 3) oblong stamped plaque; Blue bottle – 1) half circle stones below main stone, 2) bridge stone as main focus, 3) enamel flourishes of a certain shape.

Bottle by Heinrich Hoffmann Co. Neiger decorative elements: 1) enamel flourishes of a certain shape, 2) triangle stones. 3) center stone is a plaque used on other costume jewelry attributed to Neiger.



Two bottles by Franz Josef Vater & Co. Neiger decorative elements: 1) applied early plastic and glass flowers and leaves in this and similar designs.





Three bottles by the Josef Schmidt Co. Neiger decorative elements: Green bottle - 1) bow at neck, 2) triangle stone, 3) crescent shaped stones, 4) two trumpet shaped metal elements, 5) thin rectangular stones. Pink bottle: 1) L-shaped stones, 2) ball feet and ball motif. Smaller green bottle: 1) looped 'ribbon-like' metalwork, 2) graduated and stacked ball elements.



Four bottles by the Franz Josef Vater Co. Neiger decorative elements: From left to right, Bottle #1: 1) looped "ribbon-like" metalwork, 2) half circle stones, 3) bridge stones, 4) bun feet. Bottle #2: 1) all stones are typical Neiger stones, 2) metal leaf-shaped elements. Bottle #3: 1) triangle stones, 2) rose plaques, 3) bow at neck, 4) bun feet. Bottle #4: 1) all the stones are characteristic Neiger stones (note the W shaped stones, commonly seen on Neiger Chinese-themed brooches), 2) bun feet.



Two bottles by the Josef Schmidt Co. Neiger decorative elements: Pink bottle: 1) metal 'flourishes', starting above each foot and extending toward the center of the lower part of the bottle, 2) 'lipstick' elements as the feet of the bottle -- Black bottle: 1) 'lipstick' elements as the feet, 2) triangle stones.



Two bottles from Franz Josef Vater Co. Neiger decorative elements: Green bottle: 1) blue enamel flourishes, 2) thin, rectangular pressed plaque with flower design. Pink bottle: 1) Y-shaped stones, 2) bridge stones (or half-rounds) in Peking green, 3) half-circle stones (another variation of the half round stone) in faux lapis, 3) bun feet, 4) flat, rectangular panel stone – NOTE: both bottles have this element.

Although we may never know the full extent of the Neigers' designs, hopefully, at the end of the roundtable, we will be better able to recognize some characteristics of the Neigers' work. Although these men were among the most successful costume jewelers/decorators in Gablonz while they worked there, their story has a sad ending. Because they were Jewish, they did not survive the Holocaust. Their accomplishments are long overdue for recognition.

Editor's Note: When Paula sent me her photos, I had not read the captions for each and I wrote to her that I would have thought that the bottles were made by Hoffmann. Here's her reply:

"If you thought that all the bottles you saw were Hoffmann, you are definitely not alone! In the IPBA, Rosie, myself and some of the others are trying to educate Czech collectors on the diversity of bottles and designs produced by various companies in addition to Hoffmann in the time period between the two world wars. Of course, the confusion started when the Communists nationalized all businesses after World War II and lumped their re-issue of old molds gained from this under the Ingrid/Schlevogt name. And, to complicate things, Heinrich Hoffmann died in 1939, I believe, just when his company was financially struggling. Reidel, who pressed Hoffmann's glass (and most everyone else's!) took payment for the debt in the acquisition of Hoffmann's molds and even produced bottles from those molds, which further confuses collectors.

"Rosie and I have been trying to study the decorating of perfume bottles by various costume jewelry companies. I don't have documented proof but from my observation of a lot of bottles, I believe that Hoffmann did decorating work in-house during some of the life of that company. At other times, they possibly sent bottles to Austria. It is possible that the Austrian jewelry firm of Tellier & Bardach decorated some of Hoffmann's bottles. They may be the source of a paper label "T&B Austria" found on some Hoffmann and Josef Schmidt Co. bottles. Whenever a T&B label is found, I never associate the work with what I think is recognizable Neiger work. However, most importantly for your article, at times Hoffmann also evidently contracted with the Neiger brothers to decorate bottles. My guess is that this happened in the 1930s but it could be earlier.

"The Josef Schmidt Company was in business a long time and was a well established business by 1900. They followed the same pattern as Hoffmann did. I know they used several decorators over the years. Some of their bottles are marked "Austria" and these are not Neiger work that I recognize, even though that work is very high quality.

"Franz Josef Vater Company has a much less obvious history. I don't know as much about them but what little info I do know is that they evidently produced 'blank' bottles and relied on the decoration for their appeal. Unlike Hoffmann, rarely do you see any molded design in the bottle. They had fewer shapes that they used for their bottles and used only about 3 different stoppers. It seems to have been all about the decoration with this company! Vater apparently used Neiger for their decoration exclusively. I have personally never seen a Vater bottle that I didn't think was decorated by the Neigers. We have some evidence that the lavishly decorated Egyptian bottles that can be found were actually produced to be sold to the tourist trade in Egypt.

"I also believe that the Neiger brothers may also have decorated bottles for the firm of Johann Umann but I don't have a bottle with what I think is undisputed proof of decoration by the Neiger brothers.

"Interestingly, I don't think the Neiger brothers ever decorated for the Schlevogt/Ingrid line. I find that although the Ingrid line included some of the best bottles in terms of design, they tended to focus on that design and not on 'gilding the lily' so to speak. Their metalwork decoration is relatively insignificant. I understand that Schlevogt did their work in-house also.

"It is so frustrating to search for answers to these questions about the Neiger Brothers. Whatever records might have survived concerning their company were certainly not valued at all by the Germans and may have been destroyed at that point [or later by the Communist Czechs]. However, if anything about their production did survive, it has probably ended up in the Czech Republic's central archives in Prague. To search those archives would take a knowledge of Czech and German."

President's Report Spring 2015

From Dave Phelps

As I write this, it is hard not to just look out the window and enjoy the first real days of Spring. We finally had several days of warm weather and with the rain last night, my daffodils have popped open. It's really hard to think about finishing a few tasks when I would rather be planning a few antiquing trips now that the weather is nice.

One task I don't mind is to make plans to attend Convention. We are centrally located in the United States this year, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Mark your calendars for June 4-7th. The agenda and registration forms have now been posted on the website. We have great activities planned: from a tour of the Czech Museum to an authentic Czech meal. For those of you that would like to sell some of your things, we will have a lot of room for dealers. The dealer form is also on the website so be sure to fill it out and either mail or email it to me as soon as possible.

As I leave office, I think back on the years that I have served in various positions. It has been an interesting time through the country's financial crisis that affected even our small club. I feel we are recovering, seeing new and returning members. One of the tasks of any board is to work to assure the ongoing health of the association. Obviously finances is one important aspect, but not the most important task facing the CCA. Financially we are sound and have the funds to carry out nearly whatever project the club may tackle.

Our ill-health, if I may call it that, is participation in club activities. We have so many capable and knowledgeable members that it is hard to understand why so few actually take part in writing articles, attending conventions and serving on the board. Over the past years it has been the responsibility of a very few members to carry out all of the tasks of the club. This can't continue. I've struggled with how to be diplomatic in asking for member participation, but feel the time for that is past.

Your Club Needs You!!

Our association, while increasing membership over the past couple years, is struggling to survive — primarily because members have not been willing to commit the small amount of time to lead the club by serving on the board. We have not even had anyone step up to be on the nominating committee so we had to elect officers at the last convention. We shouldn't have to do that. I'm sorry if this sounds too blunt, but it is simply the truth.

This year there are 4 positions to be filled this year: President, Publicity Chair, Convention Chair, and Nominating Committee Chair.

At the time you read this, you will have a month to consider taking one of these positions. Please let one of the board members know as soon as possible. None are very difficult or time-consuming so please consider serving and it is not necessary to attend the convention to be on the board.

This is my final President's message as my term is up and I will not be serving again. It has been my pleasure to work with great folks who have served on the board. There are too many to name.

Thank you all for your help and support and I'll see you in Cedar Rapids!

Mrazek Pottery, the Mystery of Two Marks

By
Dave Phelps

Most of my friends know I have a special fondness for Mrazek pottery; some might claim it borders on an obsession. It's true that finding an unusual piece of Peasant Art, by which Mrazek pottery is also known, brings me a special thrill. I can't say I regret ever buying a piece, more likely there were times when I regret letting one slip through my fingers. But I now have reached the point in my collecting that I look for unusual shapes, patterns and marks that will add knowledge to the history of the pottery and its designs.

Much is known about the man and the origins of the pottery in NYC, and the subsequent move to Czechoslovakia. (For more information on the history of the man and how the company came into being, get a copy of the excellent book "The Art Pottery of Joseph Mrazek" written by Harold and Robert Mrazek.) Much less is known about the development of the patterns, a topic which I am currently researching.

Most collectors of Czech pottery, not just the Mrazek collectors, are familiar with the origin of the pottery in NYC: The purchase of stock china and pottery in the streets of NY and the painting by Joseph and his subsequently hired staff. These are rightfully called the early years. In fact, the pieces on which the familiar black bird can be found is often called the "Early" Mrazek pottery (1917- ~1921).

Much more common is the pottery produced in the later years, marked with the pattern designations beginning with "A". Note the gap between the move to Czechoslovakia in 1921 and the beginning of production of routine patterns in roughly 1922.

Like most collectors, I always assumed production of pottery began at the factory shortly after the move to Czechoslovakia. This is not the case. I bought the blue piece in Figure 1 because I like covered pieces and the painting is unusual in design. The fact that it had two marks didn't mean anything special to me at the time. As I started studying the marks, it occurred to me that it is odd that it would have the black bird and say "Made in Czechoslovakia" (which was required to be imported into the United States). The question is why a piece made in Czechoslovakia would have the black bird mark if it was made by Mrazek (no need to cover another manufacturer's mark). A second piece was found later, which also is quite interesting due to the unusual pink.

Figure 1



Figure 2



The answer is found in the autumn 1996 CCGI article written by Harold Mrazek. Pottery was purchased until production began in the Letovice factory. A ceramics factory in Kunstat produced the designs of Mrazek. It is likely the black bird was used to signify the pieces as Mrazek pottery. The use of the country name (Figure 2) was required for importation into the US. None of the pieces made in NY are marked "Czechoslovakia". It doesn't make sense to have both marks unless the black bird was used in Czechoslovakia to distinguish the pottery as Mrazek (as was done in NYC). Pieces with both marks are quite rare.



Figure 3

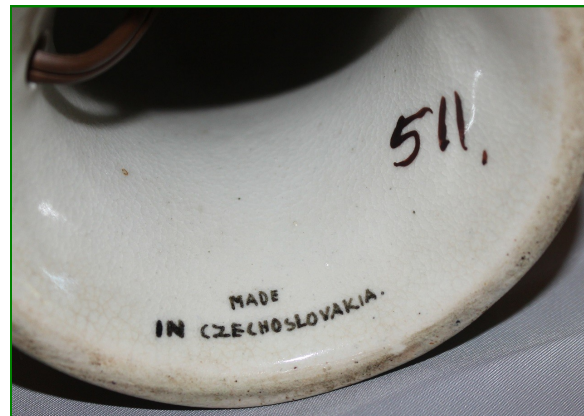


Figure 4

While the green lamp (Figure 3) does not have the black bird, it is thought to be Mrazek. This is based on the nearly identical lettering and the numbers (note the periods after each) (Figure 4). The painting of the flowers is much more like the blue piece than those made in New York and is therefore thought to be made during this same time period. This means there could be more Mrazek pottery out there than thought to be although such pieces are rare. It should be noted that none of these shapes are found on pottery made in New York.

I would love to hear from anyone with additional thoughts, pictures of rare pieces or unusual Mrazek marks. I can be contacted at dave@czechpottery.com.

The flag of the Czech Republic was designed by Jaroslav Kursa.



It was adopted for use originally on March 30, 1920, and then again on January 1, 1993.

PATTI FERGUSON COLLECTS STELLMACHER

Patti Ferguson, and her late husband, Gene, collected a wide variety of Czechoslovakian ceramics. The photos on these pages show one of the aspects of their collection.

Edward Stellmacher was a partner in the firm of Riessner, Stellmacher and Kessel that made fabulous Art Nouveau pottery. In 1905, Edward Stellmacher left that firm to establish his own, which lasted until 1912. These pieces are from the Stellmacher firm. The marks shown were used on a couple of them.





2015 Convention

Plans are made and excitement is building! It's almost time to meet old friends again.

It seems like I have talked to someone every week about plans for coming to Cedar Rapids this June for Convention, several who have not attended in many years. By now many of you will have registered for the convention and the hotel, but if not, don't wait too long as the rooms at our special convention rates are limited.

We have a full agenda this year.

Thursday will be the dealer set up and show preview for members. That evening we will be going to the Fine Arts Museum for a tour followed by dinner at a nearby restaurant.

Friday morning the convention attendees will meet (hotel shuttle is available) at the Czech Museum. There will be a lecture on Bohemian glass followed by a tour. The show will open about noon to the public. Friday night we have arranged for dinner at the Czech restaurant in the Czech village. I've been told they have authentic Czech food. They are also open for breakfast and lunch.

Saturday we are lucky to have two seminars, one by Debbie Truitt on the Lost History of Rückl Glass. You are encouraged to bring pieces of Rückl and any information on the company history that you may have. This will be followed by a lecture on Czech perfumes and other glass collectibles by perfume collector, Judy Myers. Both should be most informative.

After our annual membership meeting and luncheon, the show will open to the public. Our banquet will be held in the hotel restaurant with a view of the city.

Sunday is an open membership meeting to plan for the 2017 convention.

For those of you who might be coming to town early, there are several places to visit before the convention. If you are into antiquing (and who isn't!), be sure to visit the Czech Village. After visiting the many shops, you might want to pick up a kolache at the bakery across the street. There are also a number of antique malls in downtown Marion, which is a suburb of Cedar Rapids. If you have more time and a car, you might want to visit the village of Amana. It is about an hour west, but full of antiques, specialty shops (local wines and fresh fudge!) and wonderful restaurants with homemade food. You could easily spend most of a day there.

See you there!

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