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Emil Krall - Glass Engraver for Royalty

by George Reynolds

Emil Krall was born on December 19th, 1884 in Haida Bohemia (now Gohr, Czechoslovakia). Haida was known as the "Crystal City of the World" at the time. The Krall family were glass workers since 1648, perhaps longer. From his earliest school days, young Emil loved to create designs on paper. This talent eventually attracted the attention of Haida's glass masters who saw in the ten year old boy, the makings of a genius.

These same masters took little Emil out of public school and gave him the advantages of their vast knowledge. They furnished the funds that paid for his schooling, since he was the youngest of five children, in a family that had been left fatherless and poor. Under Professor Josef Hartnell he learned drafting, designing, sculpting, and engraving. Each afternoon after school, for five years, he studied under Henry Rasche, acclaimed the greatest engraver of them all. In later years Krall said that as a young man, "I devoted myself to nothing but study." Krall spoke of Rasche with reverence to the end of his days.

After ten years of intensive study, when Krall was 20, he was declared a "Mechanic." Then came the greatest honor of all. The glass masters assigned him to the Austrian Imperial Household, which boasted the best craftsmen in Austria, and whose duty it was to supply the royal family with household necessities. When this assignment was accepted by Krall, he took an oath that he would never reveal the activities of the royal family to anyone. Krall was as good as his word and kept this oath sacred to his death.

Assignments to the royal family meant four years of absolute subservience, even to the point of being under guard while on their own time in town. Here for four years, Krall and other glass workers fashioned Austria's crown and crest on



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goblets and other table service for Emperor Franz Josef's personal use. Royal parties were hard on glassware and replacing goblets alone kept them busy.

Quarters of the Imperial Household's craftsmen were located near the castle in a three story build-

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ing. The building housed their shop on the 1st floor, living quarters on the 2nd floor, and a casino on the 3rd floor for their entertainment. Franz Joseph must have been an enlightened Monarch because few rulers, during these times, would furnish a casino for their servants.

Monarchs of other countries were Franz Joseph's frequent visitors. To each of them he gave valuable gifts, often a complete set of crystal table service, engraved with their own crown and crest.

It was while Krall was employed at the Royal Household that one of America's leading glass manufacturers saw his work. He gave Krall a sealed envelope saying "... if you ever come to the United States, come and see me and bring this letter."

When his four year term with the Royal Household ended, he returned to his native Haida and started a shop of his own. He was called into the army in 1906, but returned home shortly afterward when a truce was declared. Krall then married and settled down to a quiet life. After the birth of his first two children, he thought of the sealed envelope given to him by the American glassmaker. This man turned out to be Edward Drummond Libbey, from the famous Libby glass firm in Toledo, Ohio. Based upon Libby's promise of work, he emigrated to the United States in 1907. After a few years with Libby, he went to work for a mirror glass firm in Northern

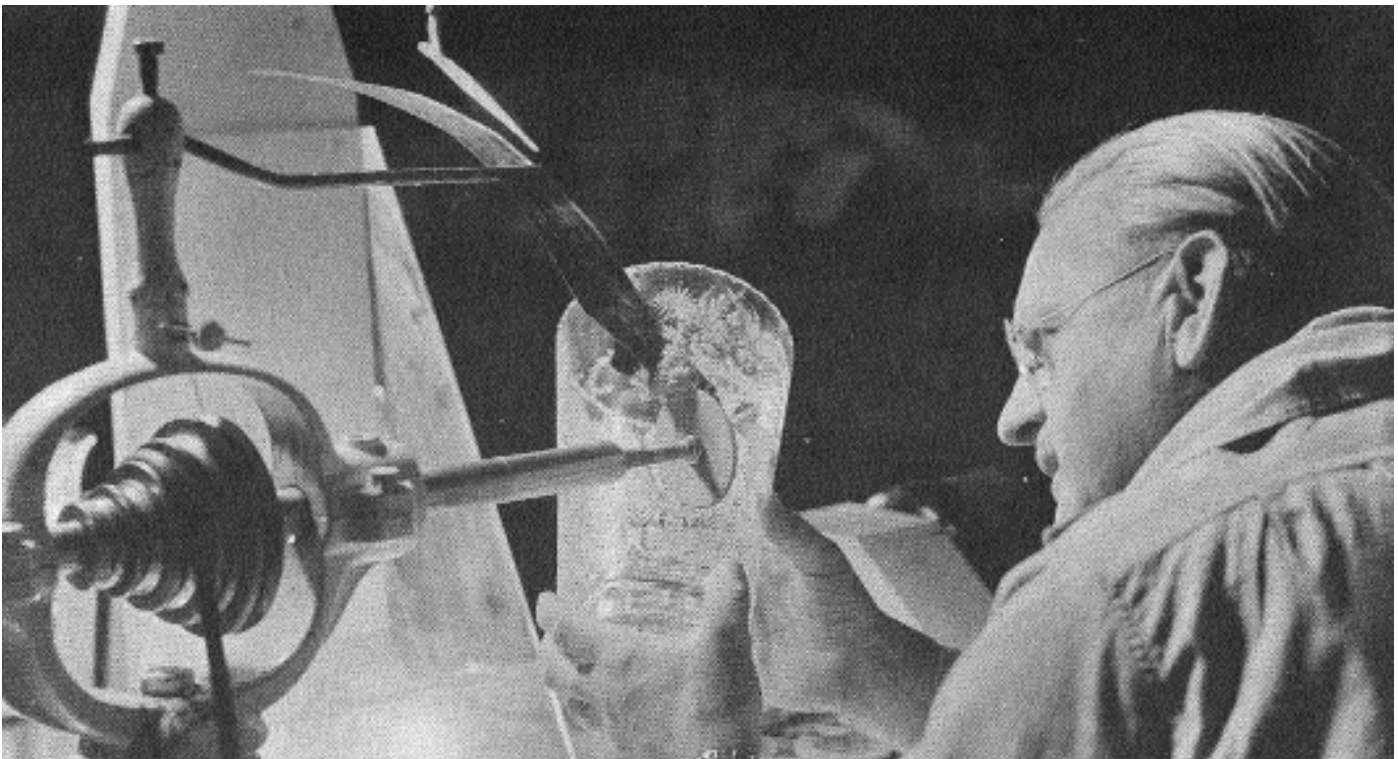
Ohio. There, he engraved beautiful images on the edges of mirrors. This product was much in vogue during that period, however few examples of this work are known today.

In 1931, Krall was employed by the great Heisey Glass Company in Newark, Ohio. His brother, Willibald was also employed by Heisey. Later, Emil's sons, Emil Jr. and Otto also worked as glass engravers, along with Willibald's son Anton.

It was during this period the individual craftsman could become known outside his place of employment. Previous to this era, the company where a great craftsman was employed took all the credit, while the craftsman remained relatively unknown.

Krall worked as the manager of the design and cutting department, doing most for the original work himself. He would design an engraving on paper, then engrave the first piece himself. If there was an order for ten pieces of a particular item, he would engrave the original piece and the cutters under him would copy the rest. Therefore, a purported Krall engraving today, may or may not have been done by him. However, if it was his design, the piece will be exceptional, regardless of who engraved it. The amazing number of designs that came from Krall's mind are impossible to comprehend today. Many of them show the European influence with their graceful curves and lines. Beautiful nymphs, dogs that

Continued on next page



MARCH MEETING

Monday, March 10 - 7:00 P.M.
Potomac Community Library
10101 Glenolden Drive
Potomac, MD

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PROGRAM

Orchid Etch

by **Brian Baker**

Please bring Examples
Whatzits & Finds/Fakes

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looked like they could bark, and countless other designs were produced.

Krall remained employed by the Heisey firm until 1942. During that time, he established a national reputation for his exceptional work. He spent many one or two week appearances demonstrating his talent in the glass departments of better department stores in Columbus, Cleveland, and so on. Heisey was usually sold in these stores, and his appearance was to help the salesman sell the engravings. This great talent designed hundreds of engravings for the Heisey firm. Some of his identified work can be seen at the HCA Museum in Newark, Ohio. Much of his work remains unsigned.

When Louise Adkins was appointed manager of the cutting department, he became disenchanted and eventually left Heisey's employ.

After he left Heisey, Krall opened his first factory at the corner of New Haven and Cedar Streets. Later he moved to an old creamery building on Wilson Street. There, as many as two hundred people were employed during busy times. Since Krall's engravings were rarely marked, it is difficult to tell whether they were produced by his factory or at the Heisey plant. Many, but not all, of his engravings were done on Heisey blanks when he had his own business. Therefore, the fact that a known Heisey pattern was used does not always mean it was done for the Heisey Company.

Always a student, Krall kept a small cutting wheel in his basement. It was a rare evening when he was

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Message from the Prez

Doesn't it feel like Christmas Eve! That's right, the All Heisey Show and Sale is just days away, and I can't wait much longer! Hey dealers, don't forget to bring me a Winged Scroll Custard Cup.

Even though evening activities were not canceled for our February meeting, the weather scared off most of our club. That is fine. We would rather have you safe and healthy, than to risk your life for a club meeting.

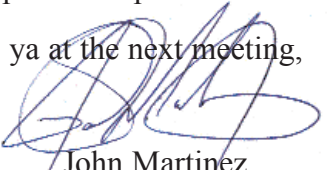
Because of the low turnout, our business meeting flew by with little or no business to talk about. The show prep is going as scheduled. I did make a mistake in the show floor plan, but it has been rectified, and hopefully all of our wonderful dealers will forgive me. I promise I will do better next year.

Unfortunately, if you missed the meeting, you also missed a wonderful display and presentation of Heisey's Orchid etch, given by Bryan Baker. Don't worry about it though, Bryan has graciously agreed to do it again for our March meeting. If you have a special piece of Orchid you would like to talk about, please bring it to the meeting.

For Show and Tell, the Warren's brought in their Flamingo Greek Key Punch Bowl and Cups, which had everyone in attendance "pink" with envy. They also found a Beaded Swag Sugar and Cover in Opal. They were specially happy to find it since our last program was on Beaded Swag.

This month's article on Emil Krall was written by the late George Reynolds in 1991, for the Heisey News. As far as I can tell, it was never published. When the Curley's sent me a box-load of Heisey related information, this article and others were included. Putting together a display of items with Krall cuttings is extremely difficult, but the Heisey Museum does have a nice collection. If you have an item or two, please bring them in to the next meeting, so the rest of us can be spared a trip to Newark.

See ya at the next meeting,


John Martinez
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not at his wheel cutting a design or creating a new one on paper. He liked to point to his head and say "... this is a well that will never run dry." Emil J. Krall died on July 24, 1956, at the age of 75 years.

Today, Krall cuttings are much in demand by both Heisey and Cut Glass collectors. The collector will be wise to ask where the piece came from before spending several hundred dollars. They should obtain a complete provenance from the buyer. His design of the "Bird of Paradise" is unique, and used on many of his engravings. The study of this design will help identify his work when located. I would suggest that any interested person first visit the Heisey Glass Museum before attempting to buy a Krall item. They range in value from \$250.00 to several thousand dollars.

With the death of Emil Krall and other European trained engravers, the art has declined in most glass houses, along with the handmade glass industry. The Steuben Glass firm at Corning still maintains an engraving department, however, much of their work is beyond the reach of the general public.

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Bohrer Park Activity Center
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