

Pilgrim Glass Made by Alfred Knobler

How to Identify Pilgrim Glass Collections Made by Alfred Knobler

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Pilgrim Glass is the name of a company and a style of glass production founded by Alfred Knobler, a ceramic engineer. Knobler founded the company in 1949 after he took over the troubled Tri State Glass Manufacturing Company in Huntington, West Virginia. He changed the company name from Tri State Glass to The Pilgrim Glass Company because he was an innovative traveler and likened himself to a "Pilgrim". He was also involved in the gift industry and imported gifts via his company named Knobler International.

Pilgrim Glass created glass products such as bowls, candy jars, ashtrays, vases, and decanters in a style called "crackle glass". Crackle glass, formed through a technique that involved heating glass, immersing it in cold water, and then heating it again, involved hand blowing the glass pieces. Crackle glass colors included sapphire, crystal, green, amethyst, tangerine, ruby, and amber. Pilgrim's crackle product production continued into the late 1960's. Some pieces had clear finishes and others were finished off with satin looks.

In addition, to Crackle Glass, Pilgrim produced "Cranberry" glass pieces from molds used in the 1920's-1940's by "Phoenix and Consolidated" glass. They produced Italian art glass figurines considered "off hand" in the 1950's. In later years, Pilgrim Glass even produced kitchen and other household products.

Pilgrim's Italian figurines, brought to the company by the Moretti brothers (Roberto and Alessandro) included cats, birds, fish, horses, ducks, swans, elephants, and whales in early production stages. Later the brothers added pieces such as rabbits, turtles, deer, snails and owls to their collections.

Getting back to the cranberry glass – cranberry refers to a color used to create certain pieces. It was in 1968 that Pilgrim added cranberry shades to its color line. A technique involved combining gold with oxide was utilized in creating this cranberry color and Pilgrim was one of few glass companies that made use of the technique. With so many glass entities refusing to include cranberry in their lines, Pilgrim managed to become the world's largest cranberry glass producer.

Pilgrim Glass was known for innovation more so than continued reproduction of the same products. Some of its other productions included:

1970's—Kitchen ware such as clear glass salad dishes, platters, and canisters

1980's—Pitchers and vases using the cranberry coloring, ruby, crystal, and cobalt

1985—A collection called "Masterwork" was founded. Masterwork pieces included vases and large 30-inch tall columns. Also introduced in the 1980's, the "Cameo" collection that utilized sandblasting techniques and included colors such as white, green, topaz, cobalt, cranberry and crystal pink. Only these and a few other colors worked well with sandblasting.

1992—Pilgrim purchased glass molds from a company called Phoenix and Consolidated, mentioned above. Collectors may recognize this P&C as the producers of "Lalique Reproductions". From these molds, Pilgrim produced vases with hummingbird, pinecone, dogwood, and dragonfly designs.

Identifying Pilgrim Glass pieces for collection purposes can be difficult because blowing glass by mouth leaves almost no room for trade marking. Most pieces Pilgrim created in the 1990's have etched bottoms, however, and if lucky enough, collectors may find earlier pieces with their original paper labeling.

Collectors with keen eyes may be able to identify Pilgrim pieces through distinctions in their coloring, in addition to their shapes and pontil finishes. To be sure, one might visit an outlet located in Centralia, Washington called "The Pilgrim Glass Outlet". The establishment continually displays verified Pilgrim sample pieces.

Alfred Knobler, who was also an advocator of social issues and racial justice, died November 21, 2007 at age 92. According to a New York Times "Paid Death Notices" November 23, 2007 publication, anyone wishing to make donations in his name was asked to make said donations to the "Center for Constitutional Rights and/or organizations opposing Bush Administration policies."