



Czechoslovakian bath set is hand-blown with enameled painting. It would cost about \$125 and was made about 1919.

## Book represents years of collecting black glass

Many people like to collect different little items. Some like stamps, others like matchbook covers, coins or beer cans. But Margaret James collects black glass.

And she has become so knowledgeable about glass that she has written a book about the 775 pieces she owns.

James started the collection at 17 when she bought four pieces in her hometown of Plattsmouth, Neb. About 27 years later, she found another piece at a garage sale and her interest piqued.

She was told she could find more pieces at garage sales and flea markets.

"Little by little, I began to build up my collection," she said.

Although she frequents garage sales, James said she gets many pieces when other collectors find them and mail her information so she can buy the items later.

She said she has invested a lot of money in the collection, but it would only be valuable to another collector.

Her book, *The Black Glass Book*, represents 13 or 14 years of collecting and researching. She said the 182 page book would be useful to other collectors to identify their pieces.

She said many companies made black glass in the '30s and '40s when it and other colored glassware was popular with the public. She said it was phased into production after the art deco styles of the '20s faded, but it didn't stay popular too long.

"I guess it was just too depressing for people," she said. "This was in the midst of the economic depression and the people probably just tired of it."

James said the majority of the pieces in her collection come from the '20s, '30s and '40s, but some pieces go back to the 1800s.

Black glass first appeared in the United States in the form of medicine bottles, but about 1860 other black

glass items were manufactured.

She said most of the glasshouses were located in the upper Midwest—Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania—because they had an abundant source of fuel to fire the plants. Because of this, it is easier to find pieces there than in other regions of the country.

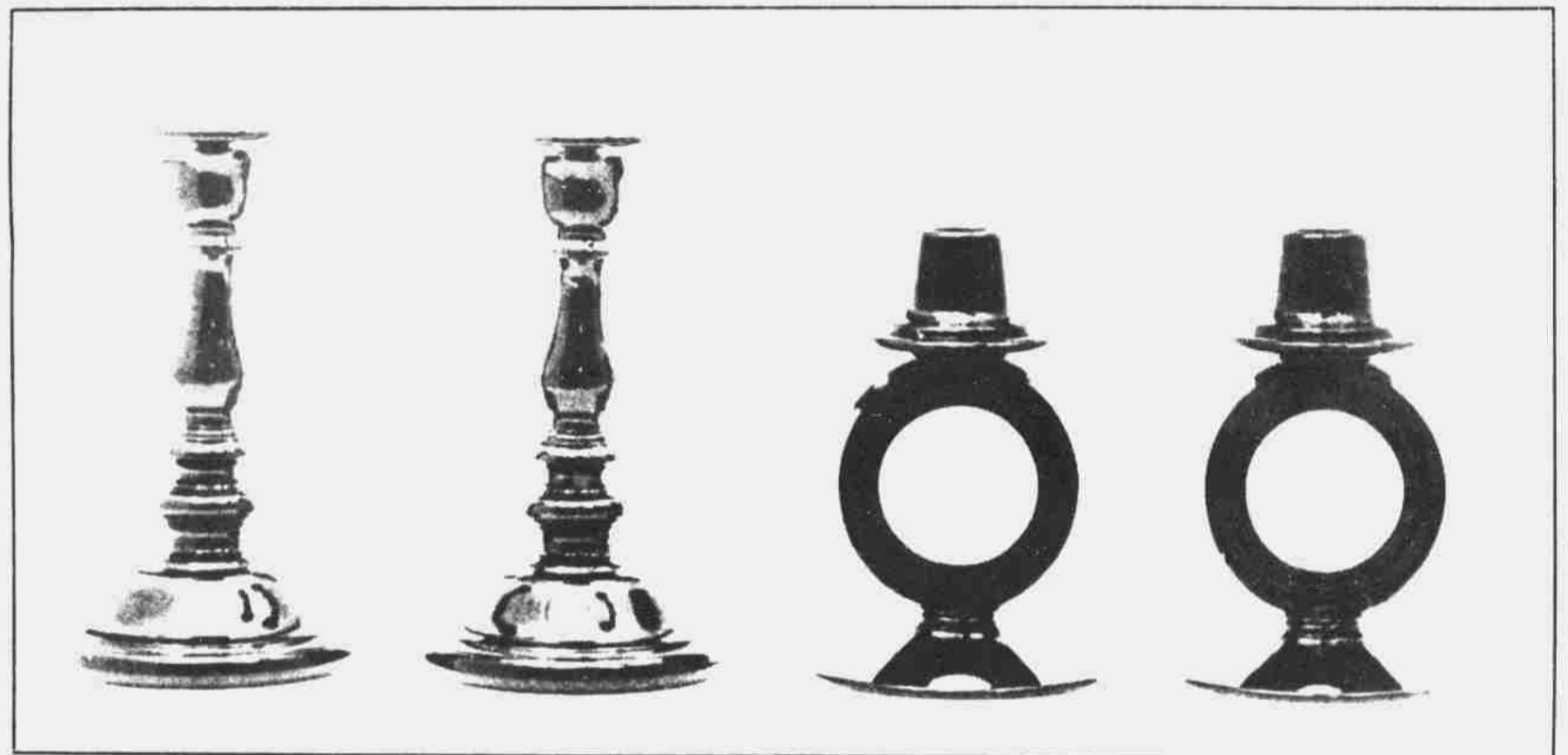
Black glass is unique because if held to the light, one can see through it, as opposed to the opaqueness of pottery or porcelain. James said the chemicals used to give it its color include manganese, which gives it a purple hue when held to the light, and iron or cobalt which gives it a

blue tone.

Many of the companies which manufactured black and colored glass are now defunct, which makes the pieces rarer. Many collectors concentrate on just one or two companies, but James collects pieces made by any firm.

She expects her book to be out in six or seven months. The book contains about 400 photographs with explanations about the pieces.

"It's not like a book that you would read or anything unless you were real interested in this," she said. "But I'm proud of it."



A pair of unidentified candlesticks. In James's book, she named the set on the right "Licorice lifesaver" candlesticks.



Fostoria glass candlestick with clear prisms is a copy of a turn-of-the-century fireplace mantel decoration.



An 80-ounce Cambridge ball jug. An example of good glassware made in the mid-1930's.

Story by Kim Hachiya

Photographs by  
Mark Billingsley