

Salamander Bells

by
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Editor's Note: Ruth Mularcik and her husband Mike live in Winterville, Ohio, and recently retired from a local sweeper business they owned. In addition, they have numerous houses that they rent to local individuals that keeps Ruth and Mike busy. Ruth collects all kinds of bells and at last count is over 14,000 bells inside and outside the house. Wow, how does she dust all of those bells.

My first knowledge of the Salamander bells was the bell I found at a flea market. The bell was MRS. PIG carrying her baby piglet and a purse. She was wearing green clothing and a fancy hat. The handle was a twisted copper wire made into a loop so it could be hung on a Christmas tree with one of the lights placed inside. These little bells were to serve as tree ornaments also. Since the bells were made of translucent pottery, the light shines through the bell and creates a warm, soft glow.

The Salamander Pottery Co. was located in Port Orchard, Washington. The business was family-owned and operated and opened in 1980. The owners and originators were Donna and Federico Vacquer. (Federico was mostly the "assistant" to his wife.) In the early years, many of the bell characters were shaped like eggs. Then as time went on, other shapes emerged and the egg shape almost disappeared. All of the bells were shaped and then fired. Some were painted and glazed and fired; others were fired, completely cooled, and then painted. There were as many as five artists that painted the bells. This is why you find the same bell in different colors. No two bells are exactly alike.

1980

In 1980, they made a total of five different bells. They were The EASTER BUNNY, The CAT, MRS. SANTA MOUSE, ANGEL MOUSE, and MR. SANTA MOUSE. They all had the basic "egg shape." Four examples of the cat are shown in Figure 1.

1981

Getting a business up and running is never easy. There were no new additions to the line in 1981.

1982

Nine different designs were added in 1982 and the "Classic" egg shape started to disappear. This year added some interesting pieces—The FISH, The MAN, The LION, The WOMAN, The MAN RED, The ELEPHANT, The RABBIT, The BIRD, and The HOUSE. Two examples of the rabbit are in my collection. (Figure 2)

1983

I spotted four new bells in 1983—The KITTY, The DUCK, The BEAR, and The SHEEP. The number of bells was in direct relationship to the number of painting artists they employed. Some of the artists had health problems and were unable to work full time. (I have two versions of the duck and four versions of the bear.) (Figure 3)

1984

Four more of these wonderful creations were purchased in 1984—The FAIRY, The WIZARD, The DOG, and The DRAGON. Some of these are my favorites. Two versions of the Fairy and two versions of the Wizard are in my collection. (Figure 4)

1985

Three new additions were added in 1985—MRS. PIG, MISS BEAR, and The BOY CAT. The "egg shape" is trying to return with the boy cat. My collection increased to five versions of MRS. PIG and two versions of MISS BEAR. (Figure 5)

1986

Again, only three new bells were added—The BRIDE, The GROOM, and The CAROUSEL HORSE. Note the Bride has the "egg shape." (Figure 6)

1987

This year a total of four new bells were added—The CLOWN, The COW, The OWL, and SANTA'S WISH. Notice how some of the animals are actually animals and some are personified to resemble people. (Figure 7)

1988

Only two bells were added this year. There was MOON MAN and ROBBIN RACCOON. The Raccoon was given the nickname, Robbin. Moon Man had two faces (one on each side). One face was awake and one face was sleeping. (Figure 8)

1989

Only one bell was added in 1989. It was The GIRL. She was one of a few people that was shaped like a person. (Figure 9)

1990

In 1990 the collection increased by two Salamander bells—The JESTER and The PEACE DOVE. The Jester had two faces. Again, one on each side—one face is happy one face is sad. Now I have two versions of the Jester. (Figure 10)

1991

Two more bells were purchased in 1991—SANTA (his head only) and HUMPTY DUMPTY. Santa has two faces (one on each side.) One face is awake and one face is sleeping. The "egg shape" had to return for Humpty Dumpty. Now the collection has two of the Santas. (Figure 11)

1992

Again, had my collection increased by two bells—MR. NICHOLAS and MRS. NICHOLAS. Since these little bells were also tree ornaments, Santa played a big part. (Figure 12)

1993

Again, only two bells were added this year—MR. PIG and The TURTLE. Mr. Pig reminds you of a 1940's airplane pilot. (Figure 13)

1994

This year two more bells were added—The TOUCAN and The PENGUIN. The Toucan does not have a real colorful beak. (Figure 14)

1995

Another two bells were added to the collection in 1995—The FROG and The CHERUB. The Cherub is a strange shape. (Figure 15)

1996

Again, two more bells this year—The BOY HEDGEHOG and The GIRL HEDGEHOG. These were wonderful little animals. Notice the boy is painted blue and the girl is painted green. (Figure 16)

1997

The PANDA BEAR and The PUPPY DOG joined the group. One of the PANDA BEARS was sold in the 2013 ABA auction. (Figure 17)

1998

In 1998, The FLOWER HOUSE and The GARDEN SPRITE came along. The Garden Sprite is the smallest of the bells. (Figure 18)

1999

MR. RABBIT and MRS. RABBIT came on the scene this year. These are two of the fanciest dressed in town. (Figure 19)

2000

Only one bell was made this year—The MILLENNIUM or FATHER TIME as some called it. This bell is very delicate and beautiful. (Figure 20)

2001

Again, only one bell was created in this year—The BIRD HOUSE, a delicate little house and the final bell. (Figure 21)

For some reason, along the way, the SANTA'S WISH bell was replaced with a larger version of Santa and many times this bell was substituted for SANTA'S WISH. (Figure 22)

Each bell is marked on the inside "Salamander" and the year it was issued. The clapper is pottery with a gold stem attached to the bell. (Figure 23)

Salamander Pottery made a total of 58 different bells. The company went out of business in 2001. They had lost their final painting artist and the Vacquers had reached retirement age, so they just closed the business.



Figure 1. **1980**—The EASTER BUNNY, The CAT (3), MRS. SANTA MOUSE, ANGEL MOUSE, and MR. SANTA MOUSE.



Figure 5. **1985**—MRS. PIG (4), MISS BEAR (2), AND The BOY CAT.



Figure 2. **1982**—The FISH, The MAN, The LION, The WOMAN, The MAN RED, The ELEPHANT, The RABBIT (2), The BIRD, and The House.



Figure 6. **1986**—The BRIDE, The GROOM, and The CAROUSEL HORSE.



Figure 3. **1983**—The KITTY, The DUCK (2), The BEAR (4), and The SHEEP.



Figure 7. **1987**—The CLOWN, The COW, The OWL, and SANTA'S WISH. The Santa in this picture is the real Santa's Wish.



Figure 4. **1984**—The FAIRY (2), The WIZARD (2), The DOG, and The DRAGON.



Figure 8. **1988**—MOON MAN (two' faces) and ROBBIN RACCOON.



Figure 9. **1989**—The GIRL.



Figure 13. **1993**—MR. PIG and MR. TURTLE.



Figure 10. **1990**—The JESTER (2) happy face on one side and sad face on other and The PEACE DOVE.



Figure 14. **1994**—The TOUCAN and The PENGUIN.



Figure 11. **1991**—SANTA (2 faces) and HUMPTY DUMPTY.



Figure 15. **1995**—The FROG and The CHERUB.



Figure 12. **1992**—MRS. NICHOLAS and MR. NICHOLAS.



Figure 16. **1996**—The BOY HEDGEHOG and The GIRL HEDGEHOG.



Figure 17. **1997**—The PANDA BEAR and The PUPPY DOG.



Figure 20. **2000**—The MILLENNIUM or FATHER TIME.



Figure 21. **2001**—The BIRD HOUSE.



Figure 18. **1998**—The FLOWER HOUSE and The GARDEN SPRITE.



Figure 22. SANTA'S WISH (two views).



Figure 19. **1999**—MR. RABBIT and MRS. RABBIT (two views).



Figure 23. Salamander mark on each of the bells.

