

Fenton club's agenda sparkles

By Marie McGee
staff writer

CHINATOWN" starring Jack Nicholson is a movie which holds a special sparkle for a little-known group called the Fenton Finders of Michigan.

It should be noted that the organization isn't really interested in movies and has absolutely no connection with the Michigan city of that name.

What the Finders would like to see put on the map, so to speak, is another Fenton — Fenton glass.

The Fenton Finders is a club of people who collect glassware manufactured since 1906 by the Fenton Art Glass Co. from its plant in Williamstown, W. Va.

THE FINDERS, who meet once a month in Livonia, are borrowing the name "Chinatown" to title their special display of "China Yellow" glassware which will be shown at the national glass collectors convention held in August.

The convention is held each year in Marietta, Ohio, across the river from Williamstown where the Fenton Art Glass Co. has been located the past 80 years. The company is the oldest and largest such glass company in the country.

The Finders are part of a nationwide wide chain of clubs, but so far the only unit in Michigan. The club meets the fourth Tuesday of each month at Riley Middle School in Livonia, drawing members from Livonia, Redford, Farmington Hills, Novi, Pontiac and Ferndale.

Their meetings are colorful, to say the least. Each month, a different display of Fenton glass is presented for club members to view and discuss.

The meeting provides an opportunity to keep updated on a hobby that is fun but relatively expensive, depending on the degree of addition of the individual collector.

AN IMPORTANT part of each meeting is the segment that deals with warnings of fake reproductions from such places as Taiwan that can fool even the most discerning eye.

While these look-alikes are nice pieces of glass, they are not made by the Fenton Art Glass Co. and therefore are not as valuable.

Livonia resident Dorothy Frazee, president of the Michigan club, said the club favors "Chinese yellow" for its convention display because the glassware is old and very rare.

There are also enough pieces among the 20 members of the club to have an interesting table display, she said.

At the convention, to be held in August, each club will have a display named after a movie title. The Fenton glass company will make a special piece of glass for the club with the best display.

THE MICHIGAN CLUB won a first prize at the convention several years. One member, Martha Rice of Farmington Hills, has been a prize-winner several times for her collection of a pattern called Lincoln Inn, which includes a complete line of dinner service as well as complementary art glass pieces.

Rice is founder of the Michigan club and the sister-in-law of Ferill Jean and Otis Rice, who founded the national organization in Appleton, Wis. in 1976.

Being a member of Fenton Finders is more than just being a member of a glass collectors organization, Frazee said.

"It's like being part of the Fenton family," she said. "They are real friendly, down-home kind of folks."

THAT FEELING of closeness is reinforced, she said, at the convention where club members "do business" but also have a lot of fun. A tour of the Fenton factory is available and members can learn more the lines of glassware that are constantly being added.

FENTON IS probably best known for creating carnival glass in 1907, Frazee explained. Fenton was followed shortly thereafter by several other glass companies, including Northwood Glass Co. and Imperial Glass Co.

Carnival glass is a pressed glass coated with a

sodium solution and when it's fired, picks up the exterior luster. It was produced until the 1920s. It came in a variety of colors with the most popular being marigold, green, blue and purple.

No one is sure where the name carnival glass came from, Frazee said. "Some say it was because they gave it away at carnivals. Others say it was because the iridescent glass itself was colorful like a carnival."

All Frazee knows is that when she growing up, "you saw it everywhere — in everyone's house. I hated it."

Now, of course, it's a different story.

Fenton Finders of Michigan meet at 7 p.m. the fourth Tuesday of each month at Riley Middle School, 15555 Henry Road. For more information, call 427-4929 or 421-2665. New members are welcome.



Farmington Hills resident Martha Rice has an extensive collection of a Fenton depression glass pattern known as Lincoln Inn. The dinner service is no longer made. Rice is the founder of the Michigan Fenton Finders Club.



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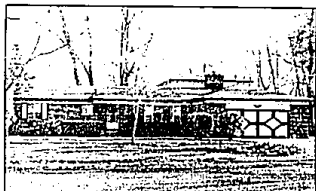


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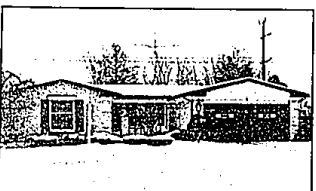
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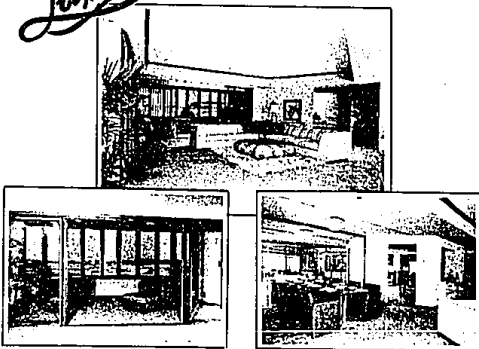


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