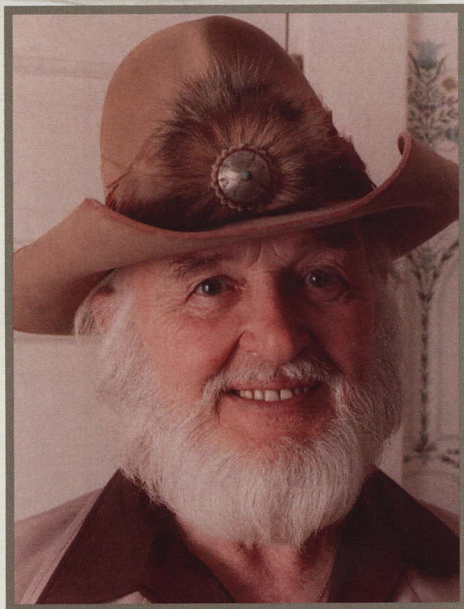


## History — The First 100 Years

Then, early in 1973, the Anchor Hocking Glass Corporation attempted to purchase L. E. Smith, only to have negotiations fail after six months.

The next two years saw new stemware and drinkware lines introduced (Sculptura and Wicker) as well as several new colors (plum, nutmeg, apple green, bachelor button blue, and jonquil yellow). It also saw the return of an old favorite — McKee's No. 75 Colonial pattern, now with more pieces than ever and with a new pattern name (Old Dominion, later to be changed to simply Dominion). The 1975/1976 catalog featured a Bicentennial Collection — six pieces from the Federal Eagle pattern, which had originally come out in 1963, but now were offered for one year only in cobalt carnival.



### Plate 73.

Eric Foster, Smith's designer from 1971 to 1997. This photograph probably dates to the 1970s, when he first began working for L. E. Smith. Photograph courtesy of the Wible family.

### Eric Foster

Eric Foster joined the L. E. Smith Glass Company in 1971 at an age when most men would be looking forward to retirement — but, in fact, was highly insulted when new management took over the company and told him that he had to retire at 65. Three weeks later he was called back to complete a project and stayed for almost another 20 years as a consultant. For more than a quarter of a century he was the designer for L. E. Smith. He created all of the Animates, the Christmas plates, and many other items. In later years, when the company scaled back and discontinued hand-painted decorations, he designed all of the decals that it used in their place.

His wife, Joan Foster, recalls that “he was a designer. He would think about something just for hours and say, ‘I have to do this, but I have to get it in my head, then I can put it on paper.’ He started out as an artist, but he ended up as a designer.” For Eric Foster, that meant knowing

the entire process from beginning to end. For three-dimensional pieces, he started with modeling clay, then did a version in plaster of Paris, with every tiny detail already clear in his head. And this ability extended beyond the design phase into the actual manufacturing of the product. He knew how the molds had to be maintained to ensure that the resulting piece was exactly as he had envisioned it, and if a mold had not been properly cleaned, he had no compunctions about speaking up to someone who hadn't done his job. This may have occasionally caused offense, but he was no more demanding of anyone else than he was of himself.

In fact, he is remembered by the other employees with both respect and affection. He had an outgoing personality and they admired his hands-on approach to the work. At the same time, he was a lot of fun to be around. People recall his tooling about town in the little car he built himself from a kit, always at great speed and always just making it around the next steep curve, and they remember the invitations to go up with him in his own airplane. He was one of the most intelligent men they had ever met, one of the most adventurous, and always full of a passion for life.

So it is not at all surprising to learn that he had a very full life before joining L. E. Smith. He was born in Lyons, France, of a French mother and a British father. His first job was to apprentice himself to a silk factory, where he hoped to learn how to paint flowers on silk, but was disappointed to learn that they expected him to start out by sweeping floors and only then to work his way up.

His parents had separated, so he next went to England, where his father had returned. Here he supported himself for a while by dancing as a busker — a street entertainer, in those days required to perform off the curb and not allowed onto the sidewalks. His uncle had a dance studio, so he also taught there. Eventually he worked his way up to dancing in some of the posher ballrooms in Blackpool. His partner was Annette Mills, the sister of John Mills, the distinguished director and actor.

World War II intervened and he joined the British Army. He was tasked with teaching French soldiers how to drive trucks, so he suggested that he could do that more effectively in France. Accordingly, he was transferred to the Free French and spent the remainder of the war fighting in the Resistance. He participated in the liberation of Paris as commander of a tank group.

After the war, he traveled around Europe as a salesman for Milton Reynolds, introducing the newly invented ballpoint pen to his customers. He then went to work for an advertising agency before being hired by Corn

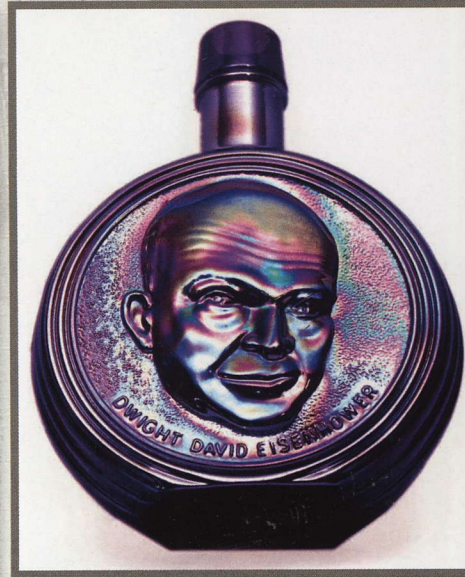
Products, the manufacturers of Mazola oil. He represented this company for a number of years in India before it convinced him to relocate to its home office in Chicago.

It wasn't until 1952 that he finally entered the glass industry, when he went to work for Dearborn Glass. Working with laminated glass, he designed shower stall doors. His widow still has a table with a laminated top with one of his designs in it. He next applied for a job with the Wheaton Glass Company. While there, he designed the first five commemorative presidential bottles issued by Wheaton, beginning with the Kennedy bottle in 1967 and followed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Dwight David Eisenhower, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt. Before most of these were even issued, however, he was let go and moved on to the Washington Company in Washington, Pennsylvania, a glass decorating firm. This company is known to have used Smith blanks over the years, so it is quite likely that he met Tim Wible in a business context. However this came about, by 1971 he had made his final move to Mount Pleasant.

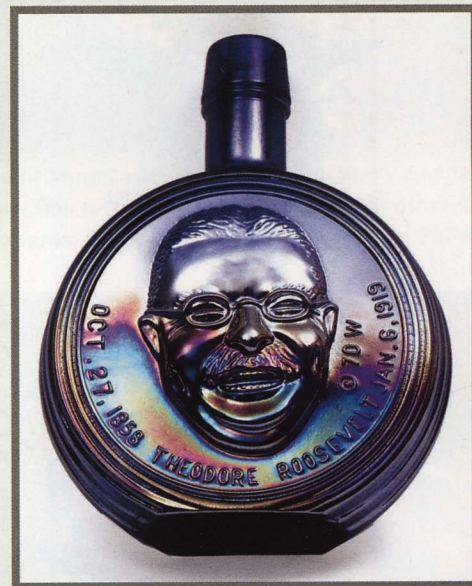
As noted previously, he then became L. E. Smith's designer for over a quarter of a century — though as Joan Foster, his wife, points out, "He wasn't just a glass designer. He was a designer." He designed the company's showroom in New York. He went on the road as a salesman. He frequently led the factory tours. When Smith acquired the Beaumont Company, he acted as the liaison. He was a photographer and took many of the photographs used in the catalogs. He even spent some of his spare time on the other side of the camera, acting as a male model under contract with Docherty Casting in Pittsburgh, where he appeared in print ads, commercials ("You have a friend in Pennsylvania"), even showing up twice on *To Tell the Truth*. Perhaps this Renaissance man is best summed up by Joan Foster, who said, "He loved life. He loved everything." He died in November 2002 at the age of 87.

An exhibition of his work, arranged by Eric Foster himself, is on display at the West Overton Museum in Scottsdale, just outside of Mount Pleasant.

Another very popular line that involved decorations on glass supplied by another company (probably Libbey) was the Animates, which first came out in 1975. These were created by Eric Foster, who had joined the company as a designer in 1971. (See the sidebar for more information on this fascinating man, who was the most important influence on the designs brought out by Smith for over more than a quarter of a century.) Animates were described by a catalog as presenting a "moving picture show...The trick is in the wick whose gentle fluttering brings the scene to life." Like the earlier Romance Lights, Animates were made with a separate candle holder inside a larger stemmed piece. The primary scene was on the interior piece,



**Plate 74.** Dwight David Eisenhower bottle in amethyst carnival, designed by Eric Foster for Wheaton Glass Company and issued in 1968. 8" high. Inscribed on the verso: "Peace with Justice. Dwight 'Ike' Eisenhower, 34th President, 1953 – 1961." This was the third in a series of presidential commemorative bottles. From the Smith factory archives.



**Plate 75.** Theodore Roosevelt bottle in cobalt carnival, designed by Eric Foster for Wheaton Glass Company and issued in 1970, 8" high. Inscribed on front: Oct. 27, 1858 . Theodore Roosevelt. Jan. 6, 1919. Inscribed on the verso: "Speak softly...but carry a big stick." Theodore Roosevelt, 26th President, 1901 – 1909. This was the fifth in a series of presidential commemorative bottles. From the Smith factory archives.

while the encircling layer of glass was either etched or had additional portions of the scene on it, giving a three-dimensional effect. The diversity of designs offered from 1975 to 1993 was tremendous, with 149 different ones appearing in the catalogs and price lists.

Successful as business was, there were more behind-the-scenes events taking place, with the Lancaster Colony Corporation making a bid to acquire L. E. Smith, only to drop it in January 1975. "Current economic conditions" were cited as the reason for this termination.