

Deco Collector: Manning, Bowman & Company

By Jim Linz

Although Chase is undoubtedly the most-recognized name in Art Deco chrome gift ware, it was neither the first, nor arguably the finest, of the chromium giftware manufacturers. In this authors opinion, that honor goes to Manning-Bowman.

For Chase, giftware was but a sideline, albeit a very successful one. Its primary business was, and still is, the operation of rolling mills to produce brass and copper sheets and rods for the building trades. It established the Specialty Sales Department in 1931, and began marketing a line of giftware designed by the likes of Albert Reimann, Walter von Nessen, and Ruth Gerth. About the same time, it began marketing a line of smoking accessories manufactured for the Park Sherman Company of Chicago. Many of these items later entered the first Chase giftware catalog in 1933.

From its founding in 1832, Manning Bowman produced consumer goods, purchasing its raw materials from other companies. Originally, the company manufactured tin ware to be sold from the backs of horse-drawn wagons. In 1872, the company was purchased by a group of Meriden, Connecticut businessmen. Edward Manning was named President, and Robert Bowman, Vice President, of the reorganized company, which was promptly moved to Meriden.

The product line was expanded to include mounted enamel ware, Britannia, planished tin, and copper goods. Many of these new products were displayed at the 1876 Worlds Fair in Philadelphia. The company won several awards, particularly for its enameled tea and coffee pots decorated with fancy flowers.

The company continued to expand its product line and in the early 1900s Manning Bowman's product line consisted mainly of chafing dishes, coffee percolators, prize trophies, copper tableware with English pewter mountings, plated tableware, and a full tine of bathroom furnishings. Among its innovations in the early 1900s was an "ivory" enameled food pan that could be used interchangeably in a number of its chafing dishes. Manning Bowman became a leader in the production of chafing dishes. Sales growth led to new show-

rooms in New York and Chicago, and the establishment of sales agencies in London and San Francisco.

In 1912, Manning Bowman introduced the "Ellipse" mechanical bread kneader, the predecessor of today's electric breadmakers. Within 3 years, however, Manning Bowman began to develop and market electric appliances, quickly establishing itself at one of the premier manufacturers.

Under the leadership of Reginald P. Tracy, Manning Bowman became a real innovator, introducing such products as an electric cigar lighter, an automatic iron with Westinghouse clicker control, and a waffle iron with bake oven indicator.

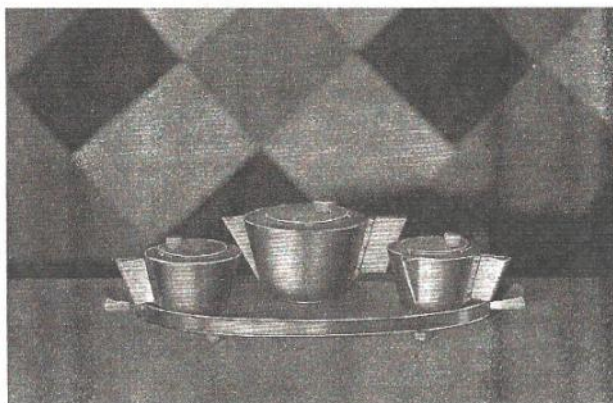
Even as it was inventing and perfecting a wide range of electrical appliances, Manning Bowman was perfecting the chromium plating process. In 1928—3 years before Chase entered the giftware market—Manning Bowman introduced a new line of stunning Art Deco coffee and "Mixer" sets in chromium and catalin. Prohibition was in full swing in 1928 and Manning-Bowman sold "shakers" and "mixers" but never "cocktail" shakers.



The 1928 K0570 Coffee or Tea Service with "Aranium" plating and Jade Catalin mounts.

These early products were clearly aimed at the well-to-do, with prices of \$60 for a coffee service and \$95 for a "mixer" set. Soon after these products were introduced, the market crashed and de-

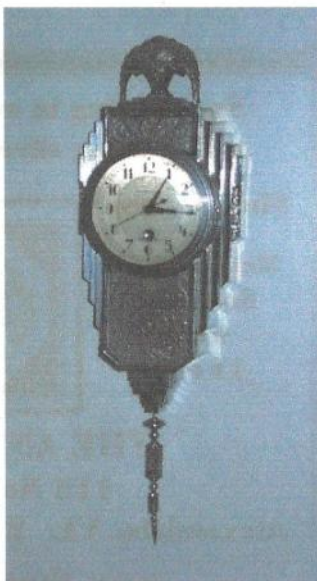
mand for luxury goods largely disappeared.



The 1928 Model K10550 coffee or tea service with Aranium plating and ivory catalin mounts. The bottom of the tray is also Catalin.

Even amid declining sales, Manning Bowman went forward with plans for a new line of electric clocks. Movements for the clocks were purchased from Hammond and the wood cases from Ingraham. It is the chrome and bakelite cased models, however, that are the most collectible. The line lasted only a couple of years, but Manning-Bowman chrome clocks often bring \$600-\$1200 in the market.

Like so many other firms, Manning-Bowman experienced financial difficulties in the late 1920s and early 1930s. It turned to another major Meriden concern—International Silver—for help. Manning-Bowman became a separate division of International Silver, and former General Electric executive Benjamin Tassie was brought in as President and General Manager. Tassie also tried his hand at



Manning Bowman wall clock circa 1932.

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industrial design, designing a vacuum bottle that remained in production until at least 1948. Under Tassie's leadership, Manning Bowman became one of the country's leading manufacturers of electrical appliances, and became the first company to introduce matched sets of kitchen appliances including coffee pots, toasters, waffle irons, and chafing dishes.

By 1933, Manning Bowman was again expanding its product line. Its 1933 catalog introduced a new line of giftware items designed by Jay Ackerman. Ackerman briefly worked for Chase before assuming the role of chief designer for Manning Bowman. Although many traditional designs remained in the 1933 catalog, the popularity of Art Deco designs at the Chicago "A Century of Progress" world's fair resulted in a further expansion of Manning Bowman's Art Deco offerings in the 1934 catalog.

Around 1938, International Silver began selling portions of its Manning-Bowman division. For example, in 1941, the electrical appliance division was purchased by the Bersted Manufacturing Com-

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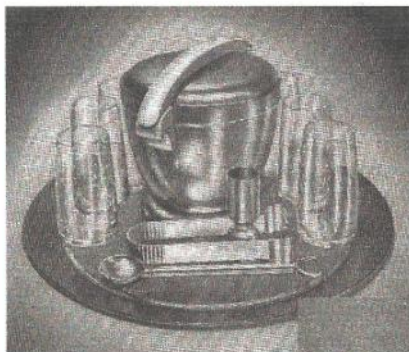
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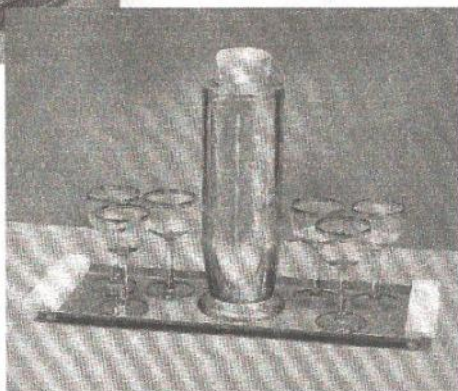
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pany of Fostoria, Ohio. It later became a part of McGraw-Edison.

Like Chase and Revere, Manning-Bowman ceased production during World War II. Unlike its competitors, however, Manning-Bowman resumed production of vacuum ware and giftware after the war. Its 1948 catalog, however, is very limited and most products are pre-war designs. Operations at the Meriden plant appear to have ceased in 1951.



Manning Bowman's 1948 "Tip-top" highball service. (No. 7530)



Manning Bowman's 1948 "Connoisseur" cocktail set (No. 3730).

Similarly, Bersted resumed the manufacture of Manning-Bowman electrical appliances after the war. Later products also bear the Bersted name and show Fostoria, Ohio as the place of manufacture. After Bersted was acquired by McGraw-Edison, the Manning-Bowman name was applied to a new range of electric items including drills, fans, and hair dryers.