

McCLELLAND BARCLAY: HIS JEWELRY: A DETECTIVE STORY

by Patricia Gostick

Collecting is a beautiful obsession. It helps to focus the scattered and far-flung buying that most of us start with. Antique stores, flea markets, and second hand shops were overwhelming, because I used to look at everything with the same intensity and passion. But all that changed, once I discovered McClelland Barclay!

Although I had loved vintage costume jewelry all my life, I officially started educating myself about it only seven years ago when I bought Fred Rezazadeh's very useful 1998 primer, COSTUME JEWELRY: A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK & VALUE GUIDE. His opening admonition about McClelland Barclay grabbed my attention: "If you ever come across a piece of jewelry marked McClelland Barclay, buy it without hesitation, for if you don't you may never see it again. Barclay jewelry is not only extremely rare, but also among the very best costume jewelry ever made in America." (p. 111) And the two pieces of jewelry shown were so different: a gold plated Art Deco style necklace with red and clear rhinestones and a sterling silver wishing well pin. Luckily for me, eBay made McClelland's jewelry accessible, although scarce, and I was able to buy many of his pieces. And yes, it is true: the more you handle or wear a person's work, the more you come to know it. With this in mind, I would like to share a few observations about McClelland Barclay's jewelry. Specifically, I will look at two areas:

- how McClelland Barclay jewelry is signed and
- the different categories of his jewelry.

After Mr. Rezazadeh had whetted my appetite, I continued buying books on the topic of costume jewelry, and always avidly read the section on McClelland Barclay, if there was one. I also conducted print and online searches, trying to learn more about him. In fact, some of my most interesting information came from this very magazine. I would highly recommend Sandra Todaro's article entitled "MCCLELLAND BARCLAY the artist who went to jail," which appeared in the Summer 2001 issue of Vintage Fashion & Costume Jewelry, Volume 11, No. 3, pp. 10 – 13. Sandra provides wonderful background information and anecdotes about McClelland, who seems to have been quite the society man, famous for his paintings of beautiful women, but also a proud patriot, who died on July 18, 1943 while on active duty as a naval artist on an LST (supply ship) in the Pacific. Some of the most visually powerful posters created during both World War I (especially for the Red Cross) and World War II (especially for the US Navy Recruiting Service) are the work of McClelland Barclay. He also designed sculptures, bookends, candle holders, desk sets, dishes and other metal household items, which, according to a rare company catalogue, were produced by his own company: the McClelland Barclay Art Products, Inc., with Central Headquarters in New York, Western Headquarters in Chicago, New England Headquarters in Boston, Southern Headquarters in Orlando and Canadian Headquarters in Toronto. Of course, most of us know him for his jewelry, which was manufactured by the Rice-Weiner Company from his designs. These various facets of McClelland's life show what huge creative talents he possessed and how they served

different purposes: patriotism, art, fashion, and commerce. The more I learned about this man, the more passionate about him I became! Although I will limit myself to McClelland's jewelry in this article, you will see influences from the different spheres of his life on his jewelry.

Most of the books that I read indicated that the full McClelland Barclay signature would be found on his jewelry, to distinguish it from the pieces made by Barclay, another costume jewelry company. This expectation of a full name led me to make some errors and some lucky finds - to miss pieces by him and to discover a few. Initially, I only searched for "McClelland Barclay" jewelry on eBay, Ruby Lane and various websites, until I gradually realized that there were four possibilities:

1. full two name signature;
2. only the surname "Barclay";
3. partial signatures;
4. no marks.

The vast majority of McClelland Barclay jewelry falls into the first category, but there are pieces in each of the other categories, as well.

An example of jewelry in the second category is the "Wings" series, shown in the September 1941 Mademoiselle magazine with the heading: "Fashion Takes to Wings designed by McClelland Barclay." The ad itself states, in part, "Barclay's newest creations- wings of gold and silver plate- reach a new high in jewelry designed exclusively for Rice-Weiner." The ad goes on to list sizes and colour combinations, with the most expensive being \$3.00! The Mademoiselle ad and a photo of a "Wings" brooch are shown on pages 62 and 63 of the 2002 book, A TRIBUTE TO AMERICA: COSTUME JEWELRY 1935-1950 by Carla and Roberto Brunialti. The brooch is only signed "Barclay" followed by the copyright symbol, although my own version does not have the copyright symbol. I have seen other metal with rhinestone Retro Moderne pieces on eBay simply marked "Barclay", and there is a necklace of this type shown on page 171 of A TRIBUTE TO AMERICA. I was able to buy my "Wings" brooch on eBay without the price going sky high, because it was listed as a "Barclay" piece, and "Barclay" pieces are not nearly as collectible or expensive as "McClelland Barclay" jewelry.



"Wings" Brooch

On the other hand, I hesitated too long when the matching “Wings” earrings were offered on a website. There was no photo of the signature, and the earrings were listed as “Barclay.” By the time I realized that they were, in fact, his rare “Wings” earrings and decided to purchase them, they were already sold. Had I seen a picture of the signature, I would have known immediately who had made the earrings, because I have discovered that McClelland’s signature is printed, and the Barclay Company signature is generally in script, although I have also seen it in block letters. However, when an online photo is not sharp or clear, I focus on the letter “a” in the word “Barclay.” The “a” in McClelland Barclay’s last name is like a keyboard “a,” such as all the letter a’s on this page, whereas the “a” in “Barclay” (not McClelland Barclay) jewelry is a cursive or handwritten “a.”



The script “a” in the Barclay signature

I find this helpful when looking at “Barclay” jewelry offered for sale online, as pieces are sometimes listed incorrectly. If there is no photo of the signature, and you are not sure whether a piece is by McClelland Barclay or not, ask to see a close-up picture of the signature, and this will enable you to determine the maker.

The third category of signatures contains partial stampings. Here are some of the partial signatures that I have seen: “Clelland Barclay” appears on a pair of Art Deco style earrings, presumably for reasons of space.

There is also another group of sterling vermeil leaves and flowers items that I never thought to be typical of McClelland’s work, which all have partial stampings: “nd Barclay” on the necklace or “cClelland B” on my second example of the same necklace; “lelland Ba” appears on the matching brooch, “Barclay” preceded by half of the letter “d” on another brooch, and “McClelland B” on the earrings.

Finally, there is another atypical group of sterling vermeil flowers with coloured rhinestones: the necklace and the matching bracelet are both marked “dBarclay.”



Example of a bracelet marked “dBarclay”

(There is a separate plaque on each of these pieces that says “STERLING”.) I would like to suggest that the partial signatures on these sterling vermeil items are not accidental. I suggest this for two reasons: firstly, there is enough room on all of these pieces, except the earrings, perhaps, to have a full signature, so space was not an issue; secondly, the sterling vermeil group has name plaques on the back, rather than an impressed signature, which is a departure from most of McClelland’s sterling silver jewelry, but even the two other sterling pieces with plaques that I have seen- the sterling vermeil “Carmen Miranda” brooch and the sterling wishing well brooch- contain the full McClelland Barclay signature.



“Carmen Miranda” Brooch Front



“Carmen Miranda” Brooch Back



“Wishing Well” Brooch Front



“Wishing Well” Brooch Back

So, why are there only partial signatures on the atypical sterling vermeil sets? Were they McClelland Barclay designs or someone else's? In their first book, American costume jewellery:1935-1950, the Brunialtis state that McClelland sent designs to the Rice-Weiner Company in 1942-1943 while he was on active duty, and these were executed in sterling silver (p. 246). The authors date the “Mexican Head” brooch to this period, and I note that it only has the partial signature “dBarclay”. Perhaps all the sterling pieces from 1942-1943 were marked with partial stampings to distinguish them from the early sterling pieces that appeared in 1938, or was there another reason?

Brunialti and Brunialti explain that, after a split in the Rice-Weiner Company in 1946, Barclay Jewelry was formed, “but didn’t have anything to do with Rice-Weiner or McClelland Barclay.” (A TRIBUTE TO AMERICA, p. 39) The authors further explain that the Rice-Weiner Company continued in the retail trade until 1950, and then produced jewelry for wholesalers, presumably using anonymous designers. But from 1938 until 1950, the designers were:

- Louis C. Mark, head designer until 1946
- McClelland Barclay, 1938-1943
- Natasha Brooks, 1947
- Norman Bel Geddes and Betty Betz, 1950.

There obviously was some cross-pollination among the designers and owners of these companies, as Mr. Mark formed the Barclay Company with Alvin and Robert Rice and was its chief designer. He could not help but bring with him some of the ideas and designs used at the Rice-Weiner Company. Even the name chosen for the new company is deliberately confusing, it seems! Furthermore, when I look at the picture of Natasha Brooks’s elaborate head brooch (shown on page 25, A TRIBUTE TO AMERICA), part of her 1946 “Russian Collection”, I see the face of McClelland Barclay’s “Carmen Miranda!”

In addition, a Barclay flower pendant that I have is very similar to the flowers in the McClelland Barclay sterling vermeil and rhinestone floral set described above. The Barclay pendant is 1/20 12KT. G.F., and the signature is in capital letters, not script,

making it an early piece. What ideas were “borrowed” by whom and from whom? Were McClelland’s designs and/or name used after his death, or only from 1938 until 1943?



The McClelland Barclay sterling bracelet is on the left and the Barclay pendent is on the right. Note the design comparison.

Referring to the McClelland Barclay name, Mr. Rezazadeh remarks that “The Jeweler’s Circular” lists this trademark as belonging to “Rice-Weiner & Co.”, although he does not state the year of the Circular. He suggests that Rice-Weiner “may have been the producer or acquired the trademark after Barclay’s death.” (p. 111) If this is true, for how many years after his death were his designs, or those attributed to him, produced? The Barclay Company was apparently in business until 1957. Did it also use the McClelland Barclay name on any of its designs? Is it possible that the production of McClelland Barclay jewelry lasted several years longer than the five year span normally cited? These questions require a lot more sleuthing on my part!

The fourth group of McClelland Barclay jewelry is comprised of those pieces with no signature. Sometimes the impressed signature is very faint after years of wear, but in some cases, it is non-existent. I have a sterling lamb bracelet that is unsigned, although the matching brooch is fully signed. (And Jane Clarke, owner of the website, www.morninggloryantiques.com, informs me that her identical bracelet is signed in the usual way: “STERLING SILVER/McClelland Barclay.”)



Unsigned Sterling Lamb Bracelet Front



Unsigned Sterling Lamb Bracelet Back

I also have a pair of Art Deco earrings and a small Deco crest-shaped clip that are unsigned. Of the four medium-sized maple leaf clips that I own, three are unsigned; the fourth has the full signature on an applied plaque. As well, I have seen Art Moderne parures, both on Ruby Lane and eBay, which were unsigned, and which looked like authentic McClelland Barclay items. On the whole, though, I would be wary of buying unsigned pieces, because much of what I have seen offered online, does not appear to be genuine McClelland Barclay jewelry. The colours of the rhinestones are not right – McClelland’s were limited to one shade of blue, red, green, purple, golden yellow (amber) or clear - alone or in combination. Pretty turquoise, peridot, lavender, pink and other pastel shades are Barclay signature colours, and not McClelland Barclay’s. Sometimes, the design is not close enough to his, although I am amazed at how many new Art Deco and Art Moderne variations keep popping up on eBay! McClelland Barclay jewelry does not contain pearls, lacy filigree or enamel work, and although different chains and clasps were used during the period in which his jewelry was produced, here too, the range is limited and recognisable. So why were some authentic pieces unsigned? Did they mistakenly leave the factory unmarked, or is there a more sinister explanation? Again, further detective work will be required!

When I first started collecting McClelland Barclay jewelry, I had the impression, based on the photos in my costume jewelry books, that there were only two types of jewelry by him: the gold or silver plated Art Deco and Art Moderne pieces with rhinestones, and the sterling silver ones (including the sterling vermeil pieces, some of which have a rose gold coating, as well as yellow gold, such as the Carmen Miranda brooch.) In fact, there is also a third group of jewelry, which is made of metal, unadorned by rhinestones. In this group, one might include the double maple leaf variant without the rhinestones, the “Wings” pieces, some floral brooches, a flowers and wheat sheaves pin, a coiled “rope” pin, a golden mesh tassel pin, a single horse head brooch, a double horse heads pin in silver and copper colour and a double fish pin.



Coiled Rope Pin



Double Horse Head Pin Silver & Copper

This third group is so eclectic as to be largely unrecognisable as McClelland Barclay jewelry. Mac, as he was known to his friends, was appointed a Lieutenant in the USNR in September 1940, so he was in active wartime service when he designed the “Wings” series. The coiled rope brooch may also be inspired by nautical thoughts, and the tassel brooch has a coiled wreath from which the tassels fall, so it might have the same inspiration. But the wheat sheaves brooch is quite ugly, and definitely does not look like a McClelland Barclay design, although it has a plaque on it bearing his full name.



Wheat Sheaves Brooch

My favorite in this group is the double horse heads pin. The manes of the horses and their fiery nostrils are very similar to those seen on the horses in McClelland’s horse bookends. In fact, this brooch is more typical of McClelland’s sterling silver jewelry, which is my preferred category. With the exception of his few figural designs, Mac’s sterling pieces depict animals, birds and natural forms, such as flowers or grapes. (I would recommend Jane Clarke’s “Jewel Chat” article on her website, www.morninggloryantiques.com, for a comprehensive list and photos of the sterling pieces found to date. The exciting thing is that new designs keep being discovered, as with McClelland’s other jewelry lines.)

In the sterling pieces, form reflects content, and I like the soft, curving lines. These pieces have, to my mind, a more feminine aesthetic, comparable to the pictures of the beautiful women, who graced so many magazine covers and ads, painted by this accomplished artist.



Note the “a” in McClelland compared to the script “a” in Barclay.

On the other hand, the Art Deco pieces reflect a more masculine, angular line, similar to the strong, muscular men who appear in Lieutenant Barclay’s WWII posters. I have only seen one sterling silver piece that had sharp lines, and it was an interesting Art Deco man in a crescent moon pin. Again, it seemed very uncharacteristic of McClelland Barclay’s work, in my opinion. The sterling pieces also appeal to me, because the subject matter seems more personal: Mac loved animals and the outdoors. This fact is also evident in the small animal sculptures and the floral dishes, lamps, and so on, that his company produced.



Two Deco McClelland Barclay Cuff Bracelets

I have endeavoured, in this article, to expand upon the information contained in most costume jewelry books, about the ways in which McClelland Barclay jewelry is signed – full signature, surname only, partial signature and no signature – and the categories of jewelry produced – gold or silver plated with rhinestones, sterling silver, and plain metal. I have also tried to portray how multitalented this man was. Indeed, I will be intensifying my research into his life and would welcome any anecdotes or information that readers might have about McClelland Barclay. As for the who, why, where, when questions that I posed about the production of Mac's jewelry, I feel that I am a bit like Steve following Blue's clues (a children's TV show!) A review of the pertinent issues of Women's Wear Daily and other period magazines should provide some answers.

Fred, you really did tantalize me with your short description of McClelland Barclay! And Mac, you compelled me with the force of your creative genius. Now let's see where this beautiful obsession will lead...

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