

# A Schlaraffia Owl Bead

by Diane Fitzgerald

Let me tell you the story about my little white pressed glass owl bead (and this is why I love beads – they lead you to all sorts of unusual things). I was given this bead by a friend of my parents who lives in Duluth, Minnesota. He is an antique dealer and found it in the corner of a drawer when he had been called in to sell some items for an elderly couple. I added the bead to a necklace of old beads that I got at a flea market for \$10.

On one trip to the Czech Republic in about 1995, I wore the necklace in the hopes that it would help connect me to other bead collectors or dealers and they would know I was a serious collector also.

various other parts of the hat. We were both amazed that these owl faces matched my own little white owl bead! Eva told me that the hat had been worn by members of Schlaraffia, a very old German-Czech secret society.

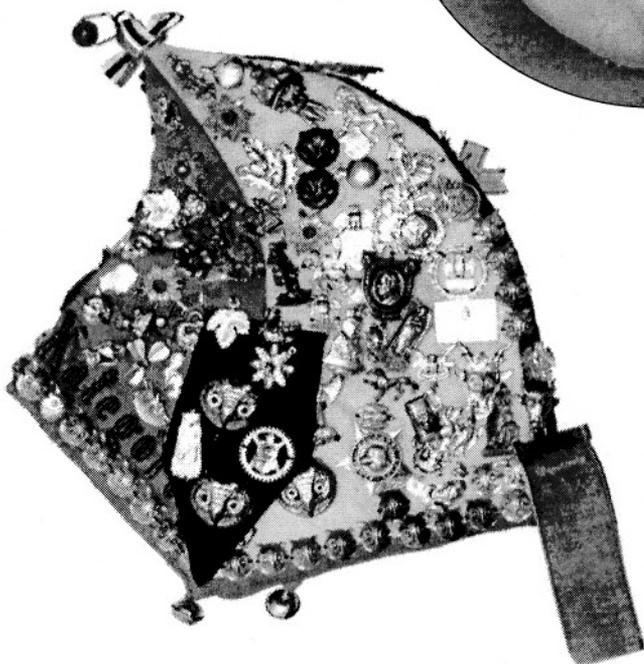
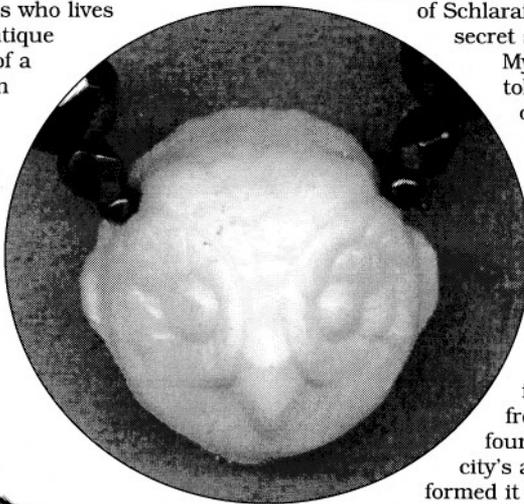
My Czech friend, Christa Petraskova, told me a little about the organisation and showed me the castle-like building where they had held their meetings in Jablonec nad Nisou.

When I got back to the USA I tried to learn more about the organisation. Wonder of wonders, there is a US branch headquartered in Denver, Colorado. When I wrote to inquire about it, I received more information about the organisation from Bill Picker. Schlaraffia was founded about 1875 in Prague by the city's artists and intelligentsia who formed it as a way to make fun of the pompous nobility. The aristocracy would invite artists, poets, actors, singers and scholars to perform at parties and after the performances the artists would get the 'bum's rush' and the nobles would have a real party.

The nobility would bestow medals and confirm the rank of knighthood on each other, so the artists and actors figured they could go around the corner and do the same thing at a local bar. Meetings, which members called 'plays', were full of false pomp that was intended to make fun of the nobles and their pomposity.

Today there are Schlaraffia chapters all over the world and members speak only German at their meetings. The organisation now focuses on friendship, humour and art and is open only to men.

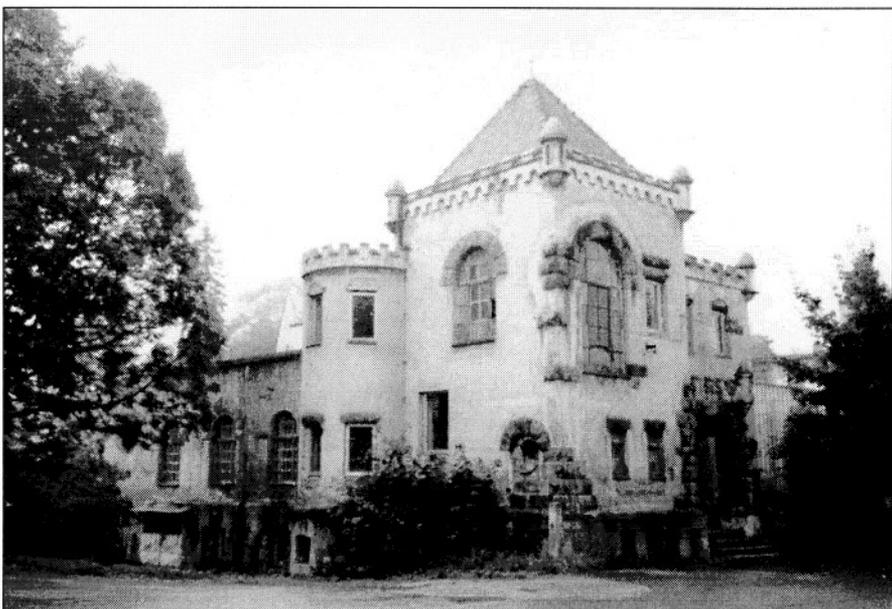
I have never been able to find out for sure if the owl is the symbol of this secret society, but if it is, maybe I can be an honorary member – sounds like fun to me!



Left: The hat is in the Museum at Teplice, Czech Republic

Below: The castle is located near the bus station in Jablonec nad Nisou, Czech Republic.

One evening we visited Eva Rydlova who restores items for museums in Janov nad Nisou because we heard her mother had made Christmas ornaments many years ago. In the course of the evening, Eva noticed my necklace and asked to see it closely, so I took it off and gave it to her to examine. Suddenly, she jumped up and rushed out of the room without a word, but came back shortly with a photo of a piece she had recently been asked to restore. It was a hat covered with many little charms, buttons and beads and somewhat resembled a jester's hat in yellow, blue and red with a bell at the tip. Imagine my surprise when I saw that the hat had a row of owl faces along the edge and several larger owl faces on





Original Schlaraffia Hat in the Museum at Teplice, Czech Republic