

# The Jewel Aquarium Company

*By Frank Suerth*

Chicago is known for being a leader in many industries, hosting some of the most famous companies in the United States. At one time, it was the largest candy producer in the country, with companies like Mars, Brach's, Fannie May and Wrigley calling it home. Chicago was also home to the Union Stockyards, the center of meatpacking in America for 106 years. Carl Sandburg notoriously dubbed it "Hog Butcher of the World," serving companies like Swift, Armour, Hammond and Wilson. However, many may not know that Chicago led the nation in the production of more specialized lines, such as aquariums. In 1938, one company claimed to be the largest aquarium manufacturer in the country: Jewel Aquarium Company.

Hans Claude Mark Jensen was born in Schleswig Holstein, Germany, on January 7, 1884. He immigrated to America in 1890 and settled in Chicago, where he married Helen C. Ott and they had three children: Carl, Fred, and Gladys. After becoming a naturalized citizen in the 1910s, he established the Hans Jensen Manufacturing Company, manufacturing padlocks at 2857 N. Rockwell Street in Chicago. Around 1925, he stopped making padlocks in his factory and switched to aquariums.



**The original Jewel Aquarium Company building at 2857 N. Rockwell Street in Chicago. The building is still standing, but now apartments/condo are behind those brick walls.**

*Image from the September 1st 1937 Jewel Aquarium Company catalog. Courtesy of Gary Bagnall and the Museum of Aquarium & Pet History.*

At the time, Jewel's ordinary aquariums were constructed with a slate bottom and a welded angle iron painted frame. The glass and slate were held into the frame with a custom aquarium cement, using specialized ingredients like linseed oil to keep it from drying out. After the aquarium was fully assembled, the tank was placed into an oven and the heat would cause the cement to flow into all the crevices so there would be no leaks. While this was the method that Jensen used, he had decided that he was not going to simply make ordinary aquariums; he was going to make ornate pieces that would also double as works of art. He called his new business venture the "Jewel Aquarium Company."



**This is a specially built six-sided dolphin tank with seahorse stand. It was completely bronze plated, illuminated by six seashell lights. A similar Jewel tank was on display for many years at Noah's Ark Pet Center on Oakton Street in Arlington Heights, Illinois.**

*Image from the September 1st 1937 Jewel Aquarium Company catalog. Courtesy of Gary Bagnall and the Museum of Aquarium & Pet History.*

## **JEWEL AQUARIUM COMPANY LARGEST MANUFACTURER OF AQUARIUMS IN COUNTRY**

The Jewel Aquarium Company, 2855-57 N. Rockwell Ave. Chicago, is considered to be the largest manufacturer of aquariums in the country. This organization manufactures a line of aquariums that is considerably advanced both in regards to design and quality of materials. The finest type of aquariums are fabricated in stainless steel, possessing everlasting qualities, equipped with modern lighting systems. For aquariums that are modern and decorative, the Jewel Aquarium Co. cannot be surpassed. Here aquariums may be had in many styles and sizes, characterized by the highest-class craftsmanship. Aquariums are furnished to pet shops, novelty stores, department stores and other merchants handling house furnishings, novelties and ornaments. The Jewel Aquarium Co. by reason of being the largest concern in its line, distributes over a wide area, and manufactures products that are considered to be the last word in aquariums. It solicits the patronage of Merchants, and the assurance is given that customers will be afforded complete satisfaction. The service will be found prompt, reliable and courteous. Its facilities are such that quick shipments can be made. The prices are reasonable in conformity with present day conditions. Prices will gladly be quoted upon any quantities, in any sizes or styles desired. A visit here will certainly prove interesting where there may be inspected many styles of aquariums that will prove to be fast selling items. Inquiries are solicited to which prompt attention will be given. Telephone, Humboldt 3733.

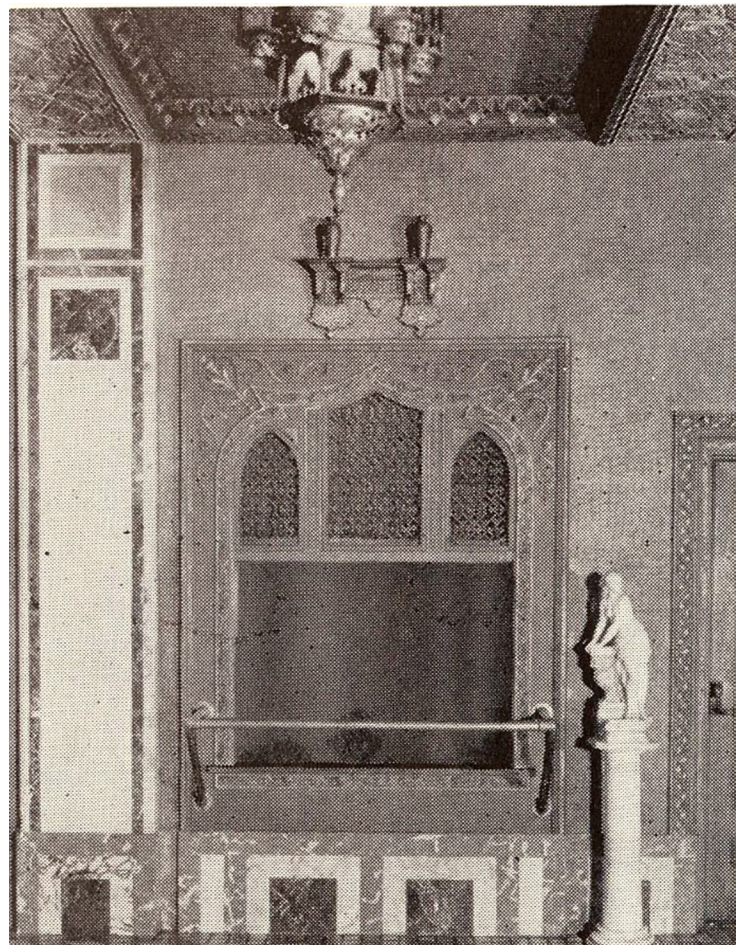
### **Jewel Aquarium Company ad that was placed in major city newspaper in 1938**

Jewel Aquarium Company is known for its elaborate aquariums, embellished with ornate dolphins and cranes around the frame. These castings were attached with bolts and metal plates along with Jewel aquarium cement, and sat atop an ornate stand where the "legs" might be a seahorse or some other heavy hand formed wrought iron. Today, these coveted antique tanks are collectables and fetch high prices in the open market.

By 1937, Hans Jensen's son Carl was president of Jewel Aquarium Company. He and his brother Fred introduced both aluminum and steel framed aquariums to the product line. By that time, they were building custom tanks for hotel lobbies, reception rooms, and even the John G. Shedd Aquarium and the Chicago Theatre lobby.

Besides aquarium and stands, the company also sold aquarium heaters, lights, and glass covers. Cover support corners made of cadmium-plated die cast metal, were also sold to support a glass cover, allowing the cover in sit under the top a the tank to help prevent the glass cover from sliding off the aquarium.

### **Picture of the 5-by-6 foot Jewel aquarium installed in the Chicago Theatre lobby.**



*Image from the September 1st 1937 Jewel Aquarium Company catalog. Courtesy of Gary Bagnall and the Museum of Aquarium & Pet History.*

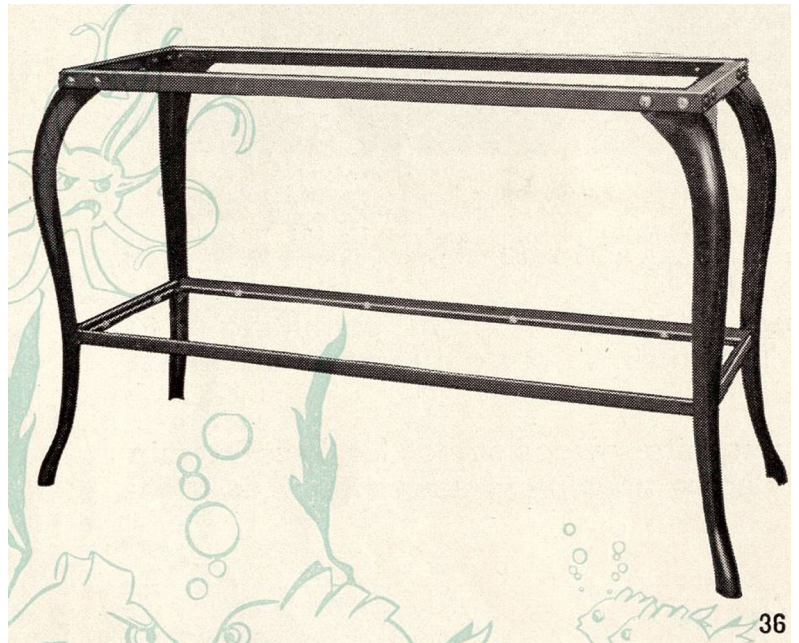


**This is a replica of Jewel's Chicago Bungalow Aquarium made from Jewel Aquarium molds. Sam Robin, from Play It Again Sam's in the Edgebrook neighborhood, located the original molds for this fish tank and the seahorses on the seahorse stands. He reproduced some aquariums and stands.**

*Photo courtesy of Sam Robin*

**Not only did Jewel Aquarium Company build their aquariums using their own aquarium cement, they also offered it for sale in aquarium and pet shops.**





**The above photos are just two of the many elaborate aquarium stands offered by Jewel Aquarium Co.**

*Images from the September 1st 1937 Jewel Aquarium Company catalog. Courtesy of Gary Bagnall and the Museum of Aquarium & Pet History.*

The Jensens sold the company to Maurice M. Schur in 1952, and in the early 1960s, the company was moved to 5005 Armitage Avenue in Chicago. In the late 1960s, a man named Clark O'Dell, from Saginaw Michigan, experimented with a new product made by Dow Corning. The company had introduced a clear sealant adhesive (silicone) that would securely bond glass corners together. Decorative plastic trim, added to the top and bottom, acted as a fixture when assembling the fish tank. This product not only replaced the specialized cement, but it also replaced the slate and all the metal parts, making Jewel Aquariums more costly to produce.

Some time later, the name of the company was changed to Jewel Industries, Inc., likely because the pet trade was not the companies main business anymore. Schools and laboratories purchased most of their more expensive metal framed aquariums.

Neil Schur took over operations of Jewel Industries, Inc, when his father Maurice passed away in 1981. After that, Jewel Industries, Inc. moved to 1946 Raymond Drive in Northbrook, Illinois. Neil died in 1987, and the company was sold to Hubbard Scientific, which retained the Northbrook facility. While the Jewel Aquarium Company is now long gone, their aquariums are still revered and desirable today.



**Jewel Aquarium ad from the 1952 Chicago Yellow Pages Phone Book.**



**CRANE AQUARIUM AND  
SEA HORSE STAND**

*Image from the September 1st 1937 Jewel Aquarium Company catalog. Courtesy of Gary Bagnall and the Museum of Aquarium & Pet History.*



**Close up view of the corner casting on the Jewel Crane Aquarium.**      *Photos by Frank Suerth*



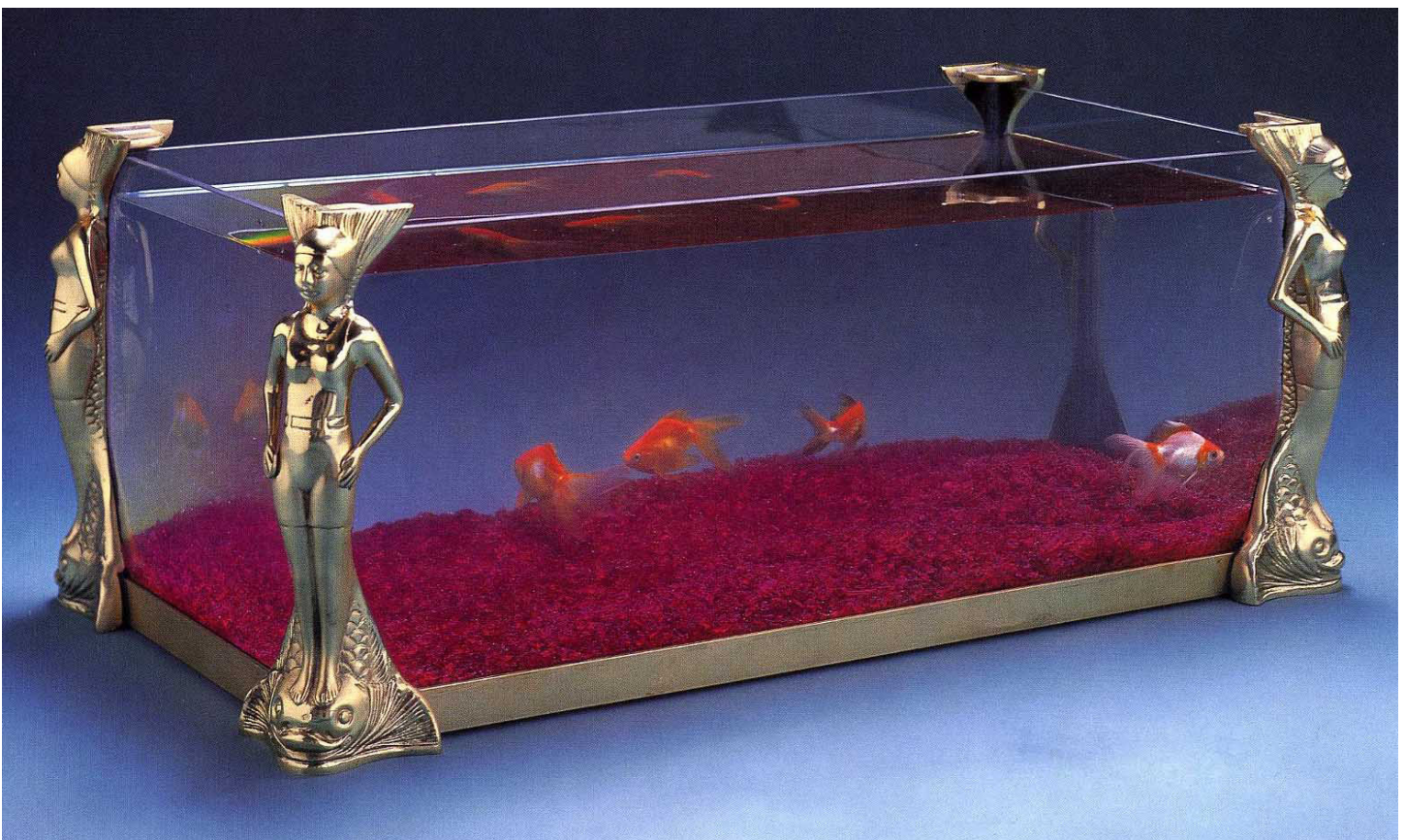
**This is a Jewel stained glass aquarium that was originally owned by Jewel Aquarium President Neil Schur. The aquarium is 5 feet long with lights in each end. These lights both light up the aquarium and the stained glass for an incredible effect at night. Notice the heavy bolts and support pieces on the corners of the aluminum frame, telltale signs that this piece was developed in a long gone industrial age.**

*Photo by Frank Suerth*



Jewel made custom tanks of all sizes. This tank on the left was made with 3-inch angle iron, 1-inch thick glass and weighed over 2,000 pounds. The lady shown in the tank could have easily been the model for the casting on the aquarium shown below.

*Image from the September 1st 1937 Jewel Aquarium Company catalog. Courtesy of Gary Bagnall and the Museum of Aquarium & Pet History.*



**Photo of a replica of a Jewel Aquarium. The four castings show a lady in an old style swimsuit, standing on a head of a goldfish, with the tail of the goldfish shown above her head. Attached to the tail is a shelf used to support a glass top. The original aquarium was inspected by Neil Schur, then owner of Jewel Aquarium Company. While he could not find this fish tank in any of his old Jewel catalogs, he said he believes it was made by Jewel because it was assembled with Jewel Aquarium cement. 8.**

*Photo by Frank Suerth*