Alt Heidelberg du feine. . . .
by William Sullivan

So goes the famous little poem by Joseph Viktor von Scheffel which is so familiar to steinologists.

Heidelberg, the romantic university town on the Neckar River, has won almost unparalleled acclaim from artist and poet for almost two centuries, the most outstanding of which was W. Meyer Forster's "Old Heidelberg" which inspired Sigmund Romberg's celebrated "Student Prince". William Faulkner, Pulitzer Prize winning novelist, was charmed by Heidelberg during his stay after World War I and mentions 'beermugs' from Heidelberg several times in his "Intruder in the Dust".

Not the least of those to honor this wooded citadel in the state of Baden was the firm of Villeroy and Boch who produced countless steins, plaques, tumblers and tureens all depicting the glories of Heidelberg. Most collectors are familiar with the Mettlach 1/2 L. stein #1675 and plaque #2362 which show highly detailed and colorful scenes of Heidelberg Castle with the city, bridges and river below. The porcelain inset in the lid of #1675 bears von Scheffel's poem from which this article takes its name.

The main subject of these two pieces as well as most other Mettlach productions, is of course the renowned Heidelberg Castle. This fortification of massive proportions, was founded by Konrad von Hohenstaufen, Count Palatine of the Rhein in the middle of the Twelfth Century, when Heidelberg was the Capitol of the Rheinland Palatinate. The castle was profoundly damaged under French attack in 1693 which accounts for its present condition. Despite the French siege of almost three centuries past, the castle remains the greatest treasure of the old city. Its size, mass and architectural refinement in its place of honor on the forested mountainside above the city make it one of the most beautiful landmarks in Western Europe. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once commented, "Next to the Alhambra of Granada, the Castle of Heidelberg is the most magnificent ruin of the Middle Ages." Since the summer of 1974 open air performances of the musical "Student Prince" have been given at Heidelberg Castle twice daily during August. An added attraction at the castle is the world famous Heidelberg Tun, the colossal wine barrel with a capacity of 200,000 liters. Heidelberg Tun, also depicted on many steins, was constructed in 1591, the last of three great casks.

The two church spires which can be seen in the Mettlach view are The Holy Ghost Church (in foreground) built in about 1400 and the Church of St. Peter (distant view at left) built in 1485. Heidelberg's fifteenth century churches were the only buildings of this period left unharmed by the French sieges of 1688 and 1693.

The bridge spanning the Neckar in the foreground with its graceful portcullis and twin towers with bell shaped roofs is the former Karl-Theodor Bridge. This is the fifth bridge to stand at this point since the Prince Elector erected his to replace a wooden one destroyed in a fifteenth century ice storm. Today this bridge is called the Theodor Heuss Bridge, having been renamed for the first President of the Federal Republic of Germany. The Theodor Heuss Bridge will lead one to the famous Hirschgasse, the street on which once stood the tavern where students of the University held their duels.

No story of Heidelberg would be complete without mention of Perkeo the fabled Dwarf who once attempted to drink dry the giant wine cask in Heidelberg Castle. The legend of Perkeo is another story conceived from the colorful imagination of Josef Viktor von Scheffel. Von Scheffel's verse about Perkeo appears on Mettlach Stein #3200 and reads as follows:

Das war der Zwerg Perkeo
Im Heidelberger Schloss,
An Wüchse klein und winzig,
An Durste riesengross.

That was the dwarf Perkeo
In Heidelberg Castle,
in stature so small and tiny,
in thirst so gigantic.
The porcelain inset in #3200 features a view of the famous cask. Mettlach #2634, a beautiful three liter cameo is dedicated to von Scheffel and his characters and stories based on Teutonic legend.

One of the most sought after Mettlach 'Heidelberg Steins' is #2894 a magnificent turreted piece made exclusively for Heidelberg students. 2894 features the same view of the castle and town below as steins 1675 and 3200.

It would seem that steins bearing legends and views of this celebrated city with its mighty fortress and famed university would make an excellent subject for specialization.