**Date Your Mettlach Steins**
by Robert D. Wilson

Occasionally it is of interest to a collector to be able to establish when a particular item was first produced. With respect to the steins, plaques and other stoneware items produced by Villeroy & Boch at Mettlach, it is possible to make this determination for those items which were first produced between 1880 and 1913. This 33-year period of time accounts for the introduction of items with form numbers from 1000 to at least 3420 and decoration numbers ranging from 566 to 1351 or more.

The relationship between the Mettlach form number as well as the Mettlach decoration number and their initial production date are depicted by the accompanying graph. It is only the principal series of form and decoration numbers which have been considered herein. There are several other series of numbers, some of which can be readily related to the year of their introduction. These other series include the "Marke Bavaria" decoration numbers from 400 to 539, introduced between 1905 and 1910, the "Phanolith" form numbers 7000 to 7085, introduced between 1900 and 1908, and so on. However, the principal series of numbers considered herein subsumes the vast majority of all Mettlach production of steins, plaques, vases, punch bowls and similar items most often found in the typical Mettlach collection.

To avoid confusion, it is very important to clearly distinguish between form numbers and decoration numbers. When looking at the number on a Mettlach item, it is easy to make the distinction since, so far as I know, the form number (when present) was always incised, whereas the decoration number (when present) was always printed or stamped. The form number is distinguished from other incised Arabic numbers by virtue of the fact that it is much larger in size. All items have form numbers and, in general, only Print-under-Glaze (PUG) items have decoration numbers.

Unfortunately, PUG items are frequently designated by their decoration number only and this creates the impression that the decoration number is a form number. As one of the many possible examples, consider the one-half liter PUG stein #1164 signed C. Warth 1881, plaque #1770 signed W. Sch. 87, and vase #2446 signed Stahl 97.

In general, with respect to the accompanying graph of Form Number vs. Year of Introduction, the maximum error will be less than 1/2 year. This can be stated with a reasonable degree of confidence because of the very large number of data points which were used in the construction of the graph. The four types of data used to develop the graph are as follows:

1. Correlating the highest form number shown with the date of publication for the Mettlach Catalogs of 1885, 1890, 1894, and 1899, and Supplements 1 and 3 to the Catalog of 1899. Similarly, correlating highest form number with date of publication of the Price List of 1905 and the eight supplements to 1911.

2. Forms which were signed and dated by the designer, such as stein #1164 signed C. Warth 1881, plaque #1770 signed W. Sch. 87, and vase #2446 signed Stahl 97.

3. Forms created to commemorate a dated event such as stein #2222, the "signature stein", with the signatures of the 48 members attending the 75th Annual Founders Day Meeting on July 27, 1895.

4. Checking hundreds of items for their form number and year of manufacture to verify that they were not made prior to their year of introduction as indicated by the graph, allowing for an error of as much as 1/2 year due to anomalies in production sequence versus form number sequence. I have not personally seen any items which are exceptions to this criterion. However, there are two instances where published data appears to provide exceptions. First, in the brochure "Antique Steins at The Paine Art Center", 1969, stein no. 2956 was allegedly manufactured in 1901. Second, in "Keramik 6", 1978, on page 55, stein no. 2692 is alleged to be dated 1896. In both of these instances, I feel confident that there has been an error in transcription or an error in reading a poorly incised number. If anyone knows where either of these two steins are located and...
could check on the year marks, I would appreciate hearing about them.

The Form Number graph is terminated during the year 1913 at form number 3420 due to a lack of sufficient data to permit its further extension. Despite repeated authoritative statements to the contrary, production of stoneware items was not terminated at Mettlach in 1912 or circa 1913. Although the last currently available Mettlach Price List Supplement is dated January 1911 and the highest form number shown therein is 3346, production and the introduction of new items continued for many years thereafter. Specific examples with which I am familiar include an "etched" stoneware candlestick #3437, dated 1916, and a 7-liter "cameo" punch bowl #3515, dated 1927 and signed by Stahl (who was not employed by Villeroy & Boch after 1920). The year of introduction of these last two items is unknown.

Although production did continue well beyond the year 1913, it is apparent that, due to the economic situation during the latter years of World War I and for some time thereafter, production was greatly reduced and items first produced during this period are relatively rare.

As regards the graph of Decoration Number vs. Year of Introduction, the part for the years after 1905 can be considered to be very accurate since this part is established on the basis of correlating the highest decoration number shown with the date of publication of the 8 supplements to the Price List of 1905. However, prior to 1905 the only two data points which can be directly obtained are from the Catalog of 1899 and Supplement 1 thereto.

Therefore, to develop this graph for the years 1885 to 1905, it was necessary to make the following rational assumption: It was assumed that the first (lowest number) decoration used with a particular form was introduced at the same date as was the form. Thus, since the date of introduction of the form numbers has been established, it is possible to establish the date of introduction of the first decoration number used with any given form number. This assumption would certainly be the only probable possibility when considering those forms which always had decorations, such as form 2176, 2384, etc. However, many standard forms used for PUG decorations were also available without any decoration and may have been so produced for some time prior to having been produced with decorations. Unfortunately, all PUG standard forms introduced prior to 1894 were also available without decorations. As a consequence of this fact, the portion of the decoration number graph prior to the year 1894 should be interpreted as showing the earliest probable year of introduction.

The principal PUG steins, used as described above to develop the initial portion of the Decoration Number vs. Year of Introduction graph, were nos. 1526/566, 1909/726, 2140/941, 2176/954, 2226/989, 2384/1035, 2488/1059 and 2702/1128. It is assumed that these decorations are the first ones employed with their respective forms.

For the reader who may choose to refine, modify or extend the resulting decoration number graph, caution should be employed when obtaining the data. For example, Mohr ("Mettlach Steins and Their Prices") lists a 1/2-liter PUG 526/604. There probably is no such stein and it is apparent that it should have been 1526/604. Also, with respect to decorations #673, 677, 682 and 715, the one-half liter form on which they were available (ref. 1905 Price List) was 12 cm in height, whereas the short one-half liter form #1909 was 12.5 cm in height (e.g., 1909/942, 1909/1009 and 1909/1010 — as per the 1905 Price List). Thus, I am doubtful that decorations 673, 677, 682, or 715 were initially used on form 1909. There are numerous instances where a particular decoration has been used on a variety of different forms (e.g., decoration 1143 was used on forms #1526, 1909 and 2384).