

Miniature Steins

By Les Paul

An Introduction

For this first article on miniature steins. I want to define them, show various types of common minis, and discuss their uses and values.

Miniature is a vague term. For example, a miniature horse is huge compared to a miniature dog; and a child's chair may be much smaller than your's, but still big compared to her doll's chair. Anything a lot smaller than the norm is often called a miniature.

In the world of beer steins, a half liter is the most common size. One liter, "ein mass," is still a normal serving size, and smaller 3/10 or 1/4 liter sizes are usually referred to as lady's or children's sizes. I call 1/8 liter and smaller steins, "miniatures." A 1/8 liter stein is too small for any normal serving of beer. It is the size most often used to depict children's nursery rhymes and fairy tales. You could call them small children's or baby's size, but 1/8 liter steins were also used for too many other motifs to label the size anything other than miniature.

My tallest 1/8 liter miniature stein has a figural ceramic lid and measures about 6 3/4 inches tall. My smallest tiny charm with a working hinged lid is only a half inch tall. All the steins in these photos are 1/8 liter (on the left) and then go down to smaller sizes on the right.

I have often heard the myth that miniature steins were salesmen's samples. There is no evidence to support that theory. Unlike miniature cast iron stoves, there was no need to make salesmen's samples of beer steins. Even three to five liter master steins are not that hard to carry or transport. Claims of having seen salesmen's sample cases or exact mini versions of large steins have not been substantiated.

Miniature steins have other purposes. Those with children's motifs, were often actually used by German children. When these steins were made 100 years ago, beer in Germany was considered a liquid bread; more of a food than an alcoholic beverage. Schnapps was only for adults,

but 50 years ago, as a child, I was served a small portion of beer at my German grandparents' home.



figure 1

Pictured here in Figure 1 are three common children's motifs: Hansel & Gretel, Little Red Riding Hood, and Snow White. Some children's steins just have verses like "dem Guten Kinder" or "dem Brauen Kinder" meaning the good or the brave children.



figure 2

Another use or purpose for miniature steins was as souvenirs from traveling. (see Figure 2) A hundred years ago buying a mini stein with a city's name and/or scene was as common as buying a souvenir postcard or t-shirt is today. I've lined up my city steins from A-Z, that's 225 mini city steins from Augsburg to Zurich. There may be a mini stein for any village, any monument or any tourist attraction in Germany. They were also made and widely distributed for many places in America, but I don't personally collect them.



figure 3

Gift Steins (See Figure 3) may be as simple as a verse. When you go to someone's home, as a good guest you may bring a bottle of wine (California please, definitely not French). Or after a visit you may send a card of thanks to your host. In a similar fashion, mini steins with verses like "Wohl beKomm's" and "Zum

Andenken" were used.

Figure 3 also includes a very popular HB souvenir stein of Munich's famous Hofbrauhaus. Other less common miniature steins were used as charms and jewelry, and they will be written about later.



figure 4

Like larger steins, miniature steins were made of all kinds of materials. The most common material is ivory colored stoneware, which we often inappropriately call "pottery." (See Figure 4) Almost any mini in the ivory colored stoneware may have also been made in the blue/grey salt



figure 5

glazed stoneware. (See Figure 5) However, the taller, thinner body type or



figure 6

style with two side scenes (Figure 6) is rarely seen in blue/grey stoneware; and the HBs (Figure 3, right) is rarely seen in the cream or ivory colored stoneware. I don't know why.



figure 7

Porcelain provided the best smooth surface for transfers (Figure 7). It is the material most often used for city scenes, followed by yellow cream ware (Figure 2). Due to its higher cost, porcelain is less common than stoneware or yellow cream ware. Glass is a fairly inexpensive and common mini stein material. (See Figure 8) Miniature glass steins can be decorated in most of the many ways normal size glass steins appear. Mini steins may also be found in most of the other unusual materials that normal sized steins are made of, but less commonly, so they too will be written about later.



figure 8

Most miniature steins cost less than \$100. Sure, there are expensive ivory, silver, Royal Vienna, character, Diesinger, Ringer, etc. Very early 16th to 18th Century minis that can cost hundreds and even thousands of dollars. I'll write more about them later, but for this introductory article and for the collectors with limited funds or rational budgets, these more common types of miniature steins are easy to find and easy to pay for.

I personally don't collect miniature steins made after WWII or miniatures without lids. (OK, I have some exceptions.) But this is where prices would start. Prices from pocket change at a garage sale to \$10 to \$20 at an antique show is to be expected for modern mini mugs. Antique miniature steins with lids should cost \$20 to \$40 for stone or creamware with simple verses, floral, or geometric motifs. Blue/gray salt glazed stoneware for the same stein may be priced higher by 25% or more due to better relief detail and market demand.

Figural, animal, portrait, or other more desirable motifs will run \$30 to \$50 in stone or cream ware. City scenes, again usually on porcelain, are worth \$50 to \$75. Children's nursery rhymes or fairy tales are also of interest to other than beer stein collectors and can run \$60 to \$90. All three of the glass steins shown in Figure 8 are worth \$100 or more.

Sometimes we get "steals" and some

times we see outrageously high prices in antique stores, but after buying and collecting about 700 miniature steins, this is the range I now expect to pay.

It isn't often that I can add a character or early piece to my rather extensive collections, but miniature steins were literally made by the thousands. When friends find a mini for me, there is only a small chance that it's a duplicate of one already in my collection.

There are a lot of advantages to collecting these miniature steins. They are quite available, inexpensive, often beautiful or meaningful, and they don't take up much room. And, my friends, if you really actually use them instead of a 1 liter then you will never get drunk and you will never be fat.

If you have questions or comments about miniature beer steins, feel free to contact me.