

## Telling the Old from the New: Schierholz Character Steins

by Mike Wald

In January 1989 all members of *Stein Collectors International* received a color photo and price list from Werner Sahn-Rastal in Germany, offering 15 different porcelain character steins that he is having produced by *Porcelain Manufacturers Plaue*, once known as *Schierholz & Sohn*. Under the *Schierholz* name, this factory manufactured some of the finest character steins of the 1890's. These 15 steins being offered for sale for \$400 to \$500 are being reproduced from the original molds still being stored at the factory, located in East Germany. They are hand-decorated in the same manner as the 19th century originals, using the same type of china paint, by top decorators. The steins that appear on this catalog sheet include the animal heads of the Gentleman Dog (ECS 20), Gentleman

Rabbit (ECS 62), Gentleman Fox (ECS 32), Gentleman Rooster (ECS 129), and a Stag with a monocle and neck ribbon (no originals have yet been discovered of this stein). The famous personalities offered include Uncle Sam (ECS 143a) in either honey or full color, Wilhelm I (ECS 148) in full color only, Wilhelm II (ECS 150) in honey, Frederick III (ECS 140), von Moltke (ECS 145), and Ludwig II (ECS 143). Others available and shown include Caroline (ECS 292), Mephisto (ECS 413), Dutch Boy (ECS 166), and the Nuremberg Gooseman (ECS 173).

These steins are advertised as new pieces, *but are not marked as such*. The factory is trying to reproduce these 1890's originals as closely as they can, down to every detail. Our requests to have them marked as reproductions have not been heeded.

The quality of these re-issues, which carry the identical old base markings, has caused some concern among character stein collectors. Many are afraid to purchase *original Schierholz* pieces for fear of getting a new one that has gone undetected or has been misrepresented. There is a great deal of confusion in the marketplace regarding these reproductions.

I have had a chance to study most of these re-issues along with the originals, and would like to present my findings in this article to help the collector recognize the differences.

To be able to identify the new character steins by *Schierholz*. I have divided the differences into two categories, "General Similarities & Differences" and "Specific Individual Similarities and Differences."

### General Similarities & Differences

#### Base Markings:

On an overall basis, these re-issues are difficult to recognize at first glance, but there are subtle differences that can tell them apart. The base markings on the new pieces always include *both* the green "Musterschutz" stamp and the blue "Crosshatch" or "tic-tac-toe" stamp. Both marks are glazed over. This glazed portion covers the entire inside base of the stein, not just the marks. These methods are also variously used on some of the original steins. Originals sometimes carry both of the marks, sometimes carry only the Crosshatch, sometimes only the word "Musterschutz", and sometimes carry none of them. Also, the glazed area on the originals sometimes covers *only* the marks. It is not uncommon to find only a Crosshatch mark just barely covered with glaze. But some originals also carry both marks and are completely glazed over. In some cases, the blue old Crosshatch mark feels uneven or "pocked" to the touch. We do not as yet know why this happens, but this phenomenon never appears on the new issues. On some of the later reproductions, the decorator's name appears in black near the marks. This name is put on *over* the glaze and is easily removed. While these differences should be noted, they cannot be used as a single reference distinction. It is very possible to find an early example with both marks, the inside base fully glazed, and the Crosshatch mark not pocked. The extreme outside edge is always unglazed in both the originals and the reproductions. In some instances, the early characters also carry a number written

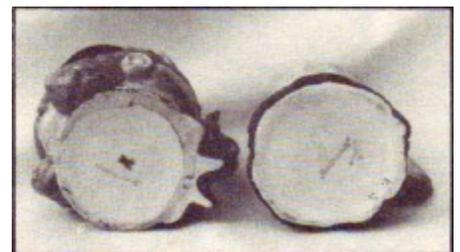
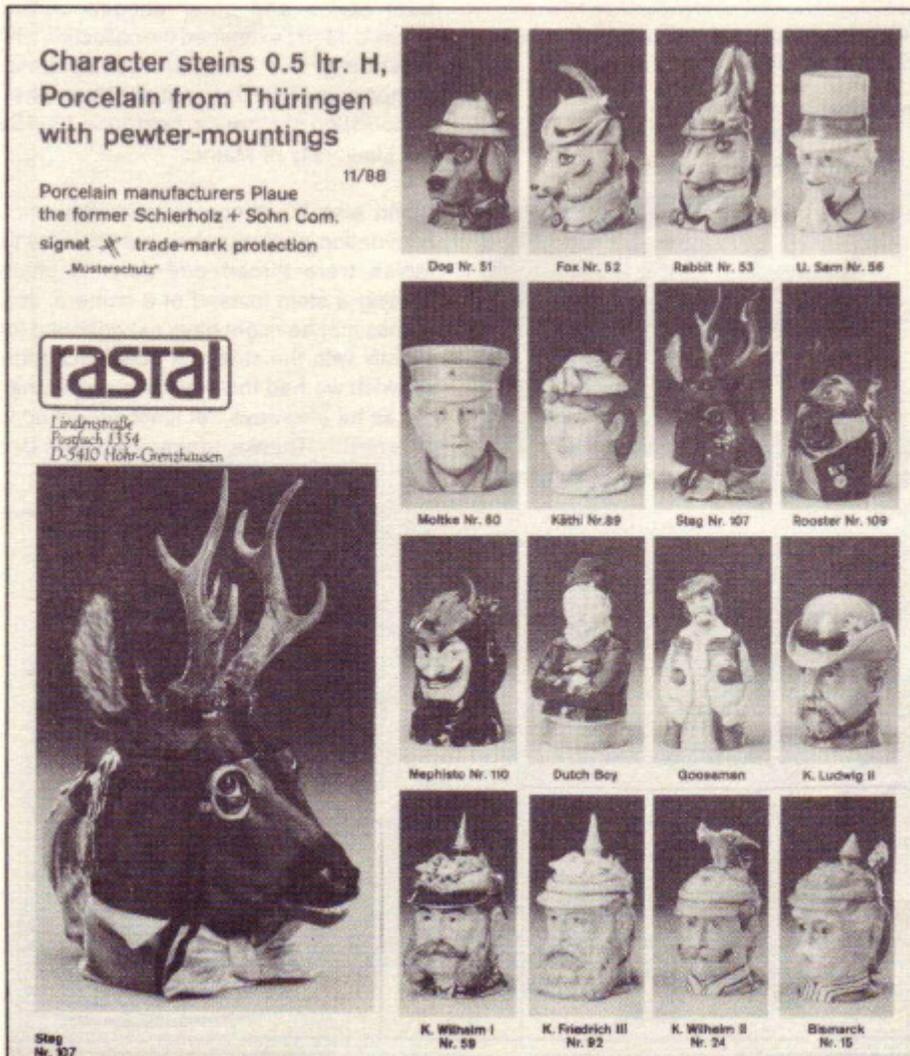


Fig. 1. Schierholz stein bases and markings: The re-issue is on the left, the old original on the right; (Note: This is the reverse of the positioning in later photos!)

in beige on both the stein base and on the inside of the lid. This number, or bench mark, is used to identify the decorator. While it is found on only a small portion of the originals, the lid marking never appears on the new steins. On rare occasions, an incised number can be found on an early piece, but this number is apparently not on any of the new ones.

### Pewter Mounts:

The most significant difference between the early characters and the reproductions can be found in the pewter mounts. We believe that *Schierholz* did not do their own pewter work: All of their pewter work was apparently farmed out to outside pewterers. The new steins are brought out of East Germany without pewter, and are assembled by *Rastal* in West Germany. This new pewter is then chemically aged, which gives it an almost bluish-grey cast. This is in sharp contrast to old pewter which has a brownish-grey hue. We must keep in mind that, as the years pass, the normal oxidation process will make this trait less discernible, as the color will change. After 20 years or so, any color difference may not be evident. We must also be aware that pewter mounts can be easily changed. It is not a difficult job to remove the pewter from a broken early *Schierholz* character stein and transfer it to one of these reproductions.



Fig. 2. Thumblifts: The common thumblift used on original *Schierholz* character steins is shown on the left, the one used on the re-issue is on the right. Note the ridged effect on the reproduction thumblift on the right.

### Liter Capacity Markings:

You might think that the Liter markings normally found on the inside of old *Schierholz* character steins might be missing on the newer ones, but in order to make a good copy, the manufacturer added even this detail. Even here though, there is a slight difference if you look closely: On the early steins, the capacity line was necessary as a guide mark for the barkeep. The marks on the current reproductions were applied strictly to copy the originals. The capacity lines on the early steins were generally long and bold, while the new copies are shorter and thinner. But we must remember that these lines were applied by hand and, as

such, will vary from stein to stein, old or new. So this also cannot be used as a sole differentiator.

### Bisque Line:

When examining an early *Schierholz* character stein, you will very often detect a thin bisque line on the inside and outside of both the top of the base and the bottom of the lid, just where the two meet. It is more noticeable on the inside where it is not decorated. This line is not as apparent—or is missing altogether—on the re-issues. But these bisque lines vary in intensity even on the early pieces, so this, too, is not an absolute distinction.

### Metallic Colors:

You can surely spot a difference when examining a character stein that contains metallic colors such as silver or gold. The colors used today are flat. When we examine an early Bismarck head in full color, we are drawn to the vivid use of shiny metallic glazes on the helmet. However, when we look at a new Wilhelm II in color, the helmet's silvers and golds are dull and flat.

This takes care of the general differences between the old and the new *Schierholz* character steins. Now we will examine the individual differences between them. Once we have done that, we can combine all of this information and better be able to spot reproductions.

### Specific Individual Stein Similarities and Differences:

**Stag #107:** Although this character stein appears in the original *Schierholz* catalog, none of the old versions have yet been discovered. Therefore it could be assumed that either very few—if any—of the old ones



Fig. 8. Re-issue of the Stag with Monocle, #107

were actually ever manufactured, or possibly that in fact the only ones overproduced are the current 1980's versions.

**Dog #51:** The original dog was decorated in a variety of facial colors. The new version is only decorated in a medium brown. The pipe on the new version is decorated very poorly on most copies. Also, when comparing the two versions, we notice that there is an extension on the left-facing frame of the earlier character's eye glasses. This was obviously an extra mold piece that was left off the newer model.

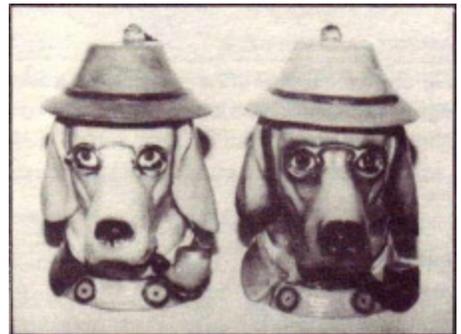


Fig. 4. The original Dog on the left, the re-issue (#51) on the right

**Fox #52:** The most obvious difference in the two foxes is the cigarette. The original model has the cigarette slyly coming out of the side of the fox's mouth. The newer one depicts it coming out straight. This, too, is a separately molded part that was inserted incorrectly and can easily be changed, as it is too vulnerable in this new position. Look for this to be changed in future issues. You may also notice that the hat feather appears to be at a different angle. As this is also a separate mold piece, the angle varied even on the originals.

**Rabbit #53:** This is a very well-done reproduction. The facial coloring is very light, almost a cream color. If we compare this new version to an old original of the same light coloration, differentiation is difficult. However, the Rabbit was probably the animal head that was made with the



Fig. 3a. Original Fox is on the left, re-issue (#52) is on the right

widest range of facial coloring. The accompanying photograph shows three original Rabbits, all with color variations. So far we only have to be suspicious of the cream-colored version.

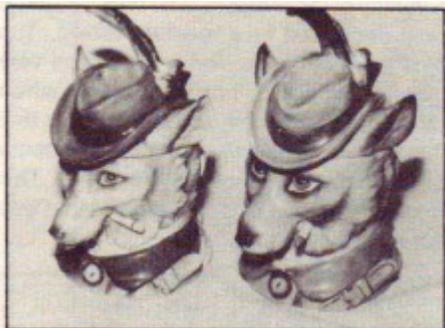


Fig. 3b. Another view of the Fox character steins, again the original on the left, re-issue on the right

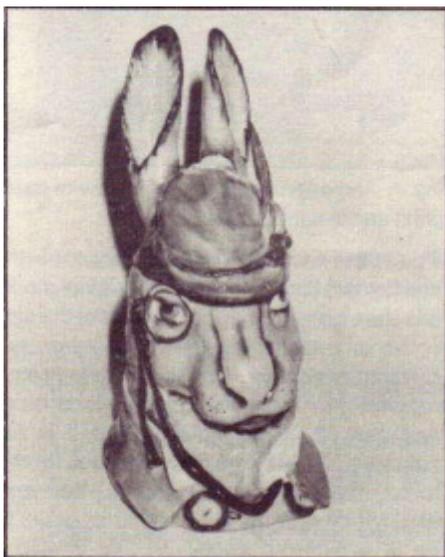


Fig. 5. Re-issue of the Gentleman Rabbit, #53

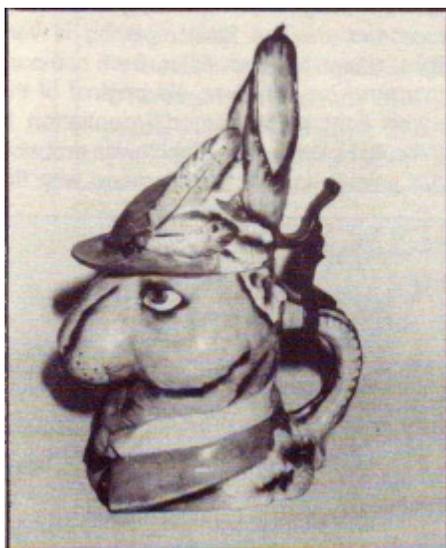


Fig. 6. Side-view of the Rabbit re-issue

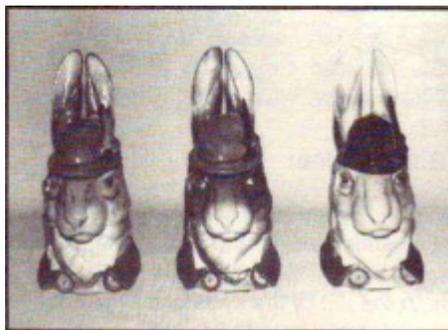


Fig. 7. Three original Gentleman Rabbit steins—each with different coloration

**Rooster #109:** On this reproduction, *Schierholz* made no attempt to copy the coat colors of the original. The coat is usually a green color on the early version, while the newer one sports a dark color.

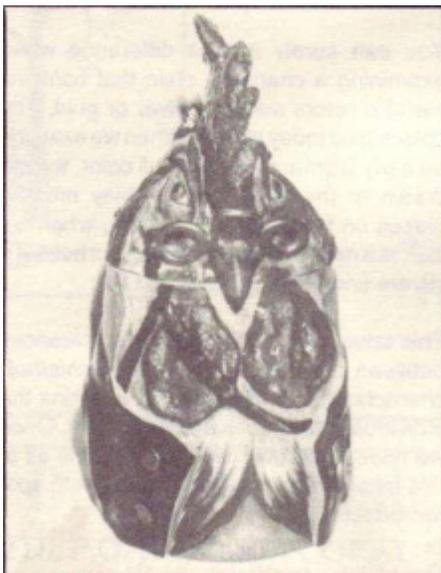


Fig. 9. Re-issue of the Gentleman Rooster, #109

**Wilhelm I #59:** This stein has only been re-issued in full color so far. There have not been any originals found yet in color. Even if one did make an appearance, this figural stein would surely wear a helmet with metallic



Fig. 10. Re-issue of Wilhelm I, #59, in full color

golds and silvers. As stated earlier, the new issues are not glazed with anything but flat, non-metallic colors.

**Wilhelm II #24:** This stein was re-issued only in the honey-colored tones. It looks very good but is easily detected: The eagle finial on the Garde du Corps helmet is attached with a small machine screw on this new version, whereas the original eagle was attached by means of a dab of pewter. The new copy that I saw also had an uncharacteristic scooped-out base.

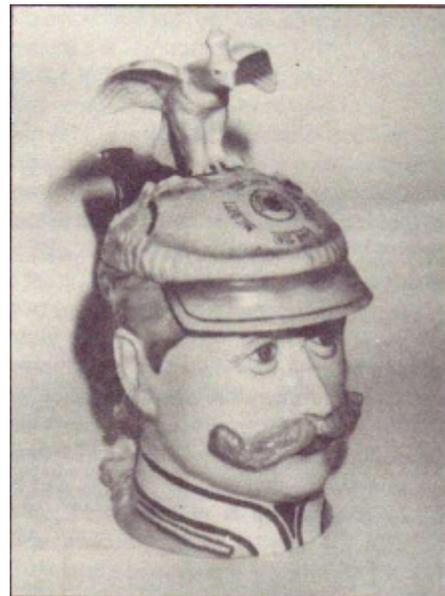


Fig. 11. Re-issue of Wilhelm II, #24, in honey tones

**Frederick III #92:** I have not been able to examine this reproduction. A collector who purchased one reports that it is a very good version.

**Ludwig II:** The honey tones on this re-issue do not even come close to the original. The early version has never been seen with any of the *Schierholz* marks. In fact, we never attributed it to this factory. The original has always been seen in a bisque finish, always has a lithophane, and was always colored in light, honey and white tones. The new version being offered is highly glazed, fully marked, colored in a much darker combination of honey and orange-like colors, and, even though it is advertised with a lithophane, the copies I have seen do not contain one. Also, the wording "Jos. M. Mayer München," which appears incised into the stein handle on the original version, is missing on the reproduction. The many differences in the stein's details make me wonder if this is made from the same mold as ECS 143.

**Von Moltke:** This cream and honey-toned re-issue appears exceptionally good. I noticed an absence of a thumbflint on the copy I observed. This cannot be used as a

difference, as many original *Schierholz* character steins appeared this way. All of the other *Schierholz* reproductions I have seen did have a thumblift.

**Uncle Sam #56:** This re-issue is being offered in either honey color or full color. Both of them are very well done. The coat color on the full color version is a lighter blue than the original. However, we have only seen one original in color, and therefore comparison is difficult. (The chances of obtaining another original ECS #56 in color is unlikely.)

**Caroline #89:** This honey-colored copy is very well done also. But it is priced at \$400, when an original can easily be purchased for \$500 to \$600. This small price difference should hold down the number of reproductions reaching the marketplace.



Fig. 12. The original Caroline is on the left, the re-issue (#89) is on the right

**Gooseman:** The coloration on this new figural is a dead giveaway! Instead of using the correct honey and white colors perfected on other reprints, the colors on the ones I have seen contain much more of an orange hue similar to that used on Ludwig II. But this can and probably will be changed on future issues. But the originals always contained a lithophane in the base, whereas none of the new ones have been offered with a lithophane.

**Dutch Boy:** This full-color re-issue is very well done. I have noticed several color variations in comparing it with an original. The cap on most early models is a dark brown, while the newer one is black. The color on the area beneath the jacket is generally a beige tone on the old steins, while the newer ones are bluish-grey.

**Mephisto #110:** The decoration on the latest reproductions I have seen appears flat and one-dimensional. This is in sharp contrast to the 1986 models. The artist decorating the one I examined may have just been lazy and made a poor copy. However, this may be the way all the newer Mephistos are being decorated. I must also point out that there is a wide variation in decoration quality, even on the originals.

Of course we cannot use the color variations or mold applications described above as a single criteria in determining whether the figural is old or new. As stated earlier, there are many color variations even among the early pieces. Because all mold application and decorating were done by different artists and at different times, early variations were prevalent. We must also realize that the artisans of today have the ability to duplicate the colors exactly if they have an original in front of them to guide them and wish to take the time and effort to do so. We must assume that as collectors are reading about these color variations noted above, so are the people responsible for their manufacture and decorating. So don't be surprised to find changes in future offerings.

## Summary

Thus, in examining a *Schierholz* character stein for the purpose of determining its age, you must take all of the characteristics mentioned in this article and use them to evaluate and study the stein, as no single difference in appearance can give you a complete or definite answer. I am not naive enough to state that the differences noticed by me in my limited examinations are complete. I welcome comments and other differences noted by our readers, so we can continue to update collectors on this touchy subject. I strongly recommend that the prospective buyer study, handle, and learn as much as possible about the original *Schierholz* character steins, as well as their reproductions. For this study I have obviously dealt with individual steins offered for sale at the present time. But it is my understanding that all of the original *Schierholz* molds are still being stored at the factory in East Germany and that any or all of them could eventually be used to commercially reproduce the old character steins and bring them to the marketplace.

I also feel that collectors should not shy away from acquiring some of these works of art because some of them have been or are being reproduced. They are still, by far, the finest character steins ever made.

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## Ask Ron

by Ron Fox

"Dear Ron:

Since your research discovery of the *Schierholz* character steins, I have heard that they are producing new steins from the

original molds. Have the prices of the originals been affected? And, if not, will they?

S.E., Cal.

These new porcelain character steins were first offered three years ago. I, too, was curious as to what would happen to the market. In analyzing this effect, I have noticed a steady increase in the price of *mint Schierholz* characters. As an example, the Gentleman Rabbit (ECS-62) sold for \$2640 in 1988 and for \$3190 in 1989 (which I believe is an all time record). Also in 1989, Frederick III sold for \$2860. Both of these steins are offered new at \$400. The Masquerade Lady (ECS-294) brought \$4620 at the 1989 convention auction. The only *Schierholz* steins that sold for less were damaged or repaired pieces. This would indicate that the new offerings by *Schierholz* have not affected the stein market.

It seems to me that collectors of antique steins tend to stay with them and are not swayed by new offerings, no matter how good they might be. The antique character stein collector has no trouble in spotting the new versions. Back in 1976, *Villeroy & Boch* launched an extensive campaign introducing steins made in the same styles as their originals. They were first offered at \$250. Despite all of V&B's efforts, these steins can now be purchased for half of that price. I expect to see this same trend on the new *Schierholz* offerings.

The collector of new steins will certainly be reluctant to spend \$400-\$500, no matter who the maker is or how good the steins might be. In many cases they don't even know who *Schierholz* was.

We seem to think that *VEB Porcelain Manufacturers Plauen* (formerly *Schierholz*) are just making new character steins. They are highly successful manufacturers of fine, decorative porcelain items and have little time to concentrate on new beer steins.

The stein market works on supply and demand. These two factors have remained constant. I do not see any negative changes in the near future with regard to original *Schierholz* character steins being affected by the new ones being offered. In fact, these old steins appear to be increasing in value as the true antique beer stein collectors vie for originals.