

## *Christmas Season Miniature Steins*

*by Steve Steigerwald*



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I have always been somewhat surprised that the celebration of Christmas was not a popular subject on antique steins. Over the years I have tried to add as many different Christmas related miniatures to my collection as the budget, and common sense, allows.

The two unglazed steins shown above depict St. Nikolaus with a satchel of gifts slung over his shoulder giving gifts of fruit, nuts and a small toy to a young girl. The stein with the blue background is slightly larger than the stein with the green background. Neither has a lid, a capacity mark or any markings on the base.

The legend of Santa Claus has its origins in a monk from an area that is now part of modern Turkey. Around 280 A.D. a monk named St. Nikolaus gave away all of his wealth and travelled the countryside helping the sick and poor. One of the most popular tales about St. Nikolaus is that he saved three poor sisters from being sold into slavery or prostitution by supplying their dowries. The legend is that for each, he snuck into their home leaving a dowry of gold at night, without telling them it was his doing.

St. Nikolaus died on December 6, the day that is celebrated as St. Nikolaus Day in Germany. Traditionally, St. Nikolaus visits the houses of children dressed in a red coat and hat and wearing a white beard. He brings small gifts to all the children who have been good all year and reprimands the naughty ones. In case he does not enter the house, the children leave their shoes, stockings or a plate outside so that St. Nikolaus can leave fruits, nuts or sweets for them.

Evergreen trees became traditional in Germany decorated with wax candles. Normally there were no other ornaments. Ornaments were added to the trees in the United States and elves were added as Santa's helpers. The traditions of more extensive presents being left by Santa Claus is also attributed to the Americanization of Christmas.

The Dutch brought the tradition of celebrating St. Nikolaus Day to the United States and reports of it made the newspaper in the late 1700s. St. Nikolaus (or Sint Nikolaas in Dutch) evolved to Sinter Klaas which eventually was Americanized to Santa Claus. In 1822, Clement Clark Moore wrote "An Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas" which is responsible for our current version of Santa Claus and Christmas.

The next two steins also are unmarked on their bases and have no capacity marks. The salt glazed stein depicts a bearded and stocking-capped elf-like Santa Claus with an open satchel of gifts approaching an evergreen tree which appears to have fruit beneath it. The sides have cherubs playing drums and a clarinet.



The next stein depicts three elves pulling and pushing a sleigh laden with a sack while the lead elf is carrying an ornament laden Christmas tree with a star atop. On one side is an elf lifting another sack, presumably filled with gifts. The opposite side depicts three elves, one carrying the star for the top of the tree as well as baskets filled with various items.



The celebration that St. Nikolaus Day has become entwined with is the celebration of the birth of the Baby Jesus



to Mary and Joseph in the town of Bethlehem. The front of each of the three steins next shown depicts Joseph leading the beast of burden with Mary atop. An interesting detail is of Mary holding an evergreen Christmas tree.

Each of the three steins shows a side scene of sheep in the field (two show the sheep on the right, one chose to show them on the left). This scene is apparently representative of the flocks left behind by the shepherds who had rushed to the manger to see the Baby Jesus after the angel had appeared to them telling them that the Messiah had just been born.

The remaining sides also differ. Two of the steins have a town scene which may represent Bethlehem. The third has an evergreen tree decorated with candles.

As time goes on, I look forward to possibly adding additional Christmas Season Miniatures and would be interested in others sharing their seasonal pieces.



