

Villeroy & Boch, Mettlach, or a Look-Alike?

by Robert D. Wilson
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This article was first published in *Stein Zeitung*, the newsletter of the Erste Gruppe chapter in southern California, in 1987. Considerable information has come to light since this article was first published which allows for some revisions and additions based on more examples. It deals specifically with those identifying characteristics which allow us to distinguish between some steins made by Villeroy & Boch and some almost identical steins made by other firms, one of which until recently had not been identified.

Most Mettlach steins are clearly identifiable by a Mettlach factory trademark (such as a Mercury trademark or an Old Tower trademark) found on the bottom of the stein. However, there are several groups of Mettlach steins which frequently do not have a factory trademark. One such category is the custom-decorated handpainted steins often decorated with fraternal coats-of-arms or various other heraldic devices. Some of the more common form numbers for such steins are 62, 280, 282, 385 and 386. With these earlier Mettlach form numbers (two or three digits), the only manufacturer's trademark that I have seen on the custom-decorated steins is the incised conjoined letters V and B. This mark is present on only about 70% of such steins that I have seen. Additionally, it is not unusual for the date of manufacture to be missing (i.e., not incised on the base). On some of these steins, the quality control number is also missing.

With the less common later form numbers such as 2152, 2197, 2233 and 2413, also used for custom-decorated steins, the normal factory trademark was the Old Tower, and it appears on about half of such steins.

A probable reason for omitting the factory trademark is that these custom-decorated steins were frequently commissioned by a vendor who had his own trademark(s) stamped on the bottom of the stein.

Thus it is not rare to find a custom-decorated Mettlach stein without a factory trademark and only the form number incised or impressed on its base. For such steins, it is necessary to be able to distinguish between the Mettlach and very similar steins made by another manufacturer (see figures 1 and 2). It is important to be aware of and look for those distinguishing characteristics that are essentially objective, easy to under-

1a



2a



Two custom-decorated, handpainted steins which are so similar in general appearance that they raise the question, "Who done it?" This article will explain how to tell which of these steins was manufactured by Villeroy & Boch, and who made the look-alike.

1b



2b



The "fill to" capacity line of the stein in figure 1 is painted, while on the look-alike it is impressed. Note also that the orientation of the belly bands are reversed on the two steins.

1c



2c



The incised 280 form mark and the concentric circles on the base of the stein in figure 1 are characteristic of steins manufactured by Villeroy & Boch. The impressed 433 form number of the stein in figure 2 has been a mystery until recently.

stand and remember, and, above all, observable under all ordinary circumstances where making such a distinction would be necessary. The premier characteristic satisfying these specifications is the configuration of the numerals that are impressed into the Mettlach item.

The incised or impressed numerals

Figure 3 shows several examples of the style of incised numerals found on the vast majority of Mettlach stoneware items made prior to World War II. This same type of incised number is also found on certain types of Mettlach earthenware items such as steins (forms 1526, 1909, etc.), plaques (form 1044, etc.) and coasters (form 144). This configuration of numeral was introduced in about 1880 and within a few years evolved to its "final" form. Actually, there is no specific configuration. Rather, there is a more or less consistent family of similar configurations (compare the 1's, 6's and 9's in these illustrations).



What characterizes these Mettlach numerals is the fact that each digit apparently was hand formed from one or more pieces of sheet metal. Also, apparently, each individual required to use such number had to make his own sets. Thus there was a wide range of slightly different styles. A zero might be a sheet rolled into a closed tube or, in some instances, it was so far from being closed that it looks more like the letter C. Some of the eights are almost like a letter S and other eights are simply a smaller tube on top of a larger tube.



A second type of impressed numerals found on Mettlach stoneware made prior to about 1880 is as shown in figure 4. These very distinctive numbers are apparently

made from cast dies and, therefore, are quite homogeneous and uniform.

The capacity mark

Another characteristic of Mettlach steins (1.0-liter or less) is that the capacity fluid level mark is a painted line (figure 1b) whereas it is frequently an impressed line on the steins made by other manufacturers (figure 2b).

There are many other ways in which the Mettlach in Figure 1 is distinguished from the look-alike in figure 2. However, these other distinctions are either (1) less apt to exist in other cases, or (2) less reliable, or (3) more difficult to make when you find a stein at a flea market and must make a quick decision.

The concentric circles in the base

A characteristic of Mettlach stoneware steins is that the bottom has a multitude of axially concentric circles apparently produced by some spinning and cutting process. Sometimes, when these concentric circles are minimally present or when the glaze is relatively heavy, it is almost impossible to see them except with a very strong light source at a particular angle. These concentric circles are slightly observable in figure 1c. Such concentric circles are not present on the base of the look-alike stein (see figures 2c and 5c).

The orientation of the decorative relief bands

One significant distinction between the steins in figures 1 and 2 is the orientation of the decorations on the relief bands on the stein bodies. All three bands on the look-alike are reversed from the Mettlach. This is most readily seen in figures 1b and 2b which show a section of the upper relief bands. By itself, this reversal of the decorative bands is not a conclusive distinction since such reversals (usually of only one band) will occasionally be found on genuine Mettlach steins.

The glaze

A distinguishing feature that is more difficult to assess is the type of glaze that was used. In general, Mettlach stoneware (but not their earthenware) has a thin matte glaze that is rarely crazed. Although it is difficult to see clearly, comparing figures 1a-c with 2a-c will give a sense of the heavier glaze on the look-alike.

Another custom-decorated example

Figures 5 and 6 show two more custom-decorated handpainted V&B forms 280, this time with a completely different decorations, executed by Friedrich van Hauten & Sohne, Bonn. Note the distinguishing char-

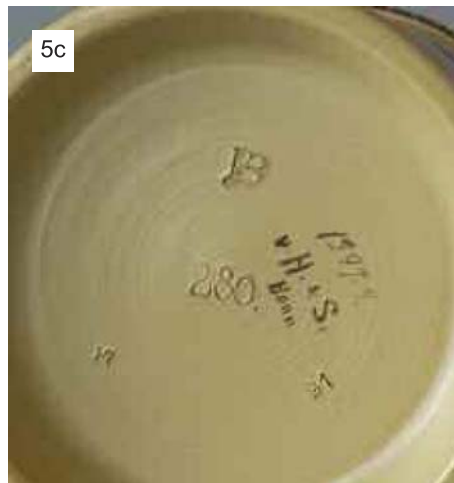
5a



5b



5c





acteristics of Villeroy & Boch – the decorative bands all point to the right, the capacity fill line is marked by a painted line, the style of numeral in the form number – as well as the other base markings – would clearly indicate Villeroy & Boch even without the conjoined V and B.

More Examples

The nearby article by Roy De Selms (“German University Student Steins with Family Coats of Arms”) includes several more examples which are pertinent to this discussion of characteristics of these steins. The steins displaying the arms of von Vincke (figure 4 in that article), the arms von der Osten-Warnitz (figure 7), and the arms von Houwald (figures 9-11), all indicate manufacture by Villeroy & Boch. In contrast, the stein written about by Roy De Selms and Hans-Joachim Loose in the March 2011 issue of *Prosit* (“Student Stein with a Krupp Provenance”) bears the distinguishing characteristics of the “look-alike.”

And finally, an answer to “Who done it?”

Figure 7 shows a stein which recently appeared on eBay and which offers an answer to this question. The student arms on the stein are those of Cimbria at the University of Bonn. The dedication reads “Bonn WS 06/07”, meaning it was pre-

7a



sented during the winter semester of 1906/07. The base also shows the decorator’s mark of H. Schauer of Bonn, in operation from 1883 to 1913, and the trademark of Merkelbach & Wick used from the 1880s to 1921. Although the base does not bear the 433 form number, the stein is a perfect match with the numerous “look-alikes” observed over the years, fitting the detailed characteristics of the “look-alikes” to a T and making Merkelbach & Wick the likely manufacturer of them all.

Buying advice?

When considering buying one of these steins, the decision might best be based on the content, meaning and quality of the decoration, and on the overall appeal of the stein, rather than the manufacturer.

Mettlach Look-Alikes: Epilogue

by Roy De Selms
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As part of this update on the subject, I would like to raise a caution about automatically attributing steins which are marked with the conjoined VB mark of Villeroy & Boch to the Mettlach factory. Of the form numbers mentioned in Bob’s article as being custom-decorated, only #2152 appears in the 1899 “Mettlach” catalog (as a blank body). The other eight form numbers do not appear in any of the known Mettlach catalogs from 1885 to 1905. Many of the early 2- and 3-digit so-called “Mettlach” form numbered drinking vessels have not appeared in the known Mettlach catalogs. While some of these early numbered items can be proven to have been made at Mettlach, unless an item is marked “M” or “Mettlach”, specifically including those marked simply as “VB”, it is not certain that it was made at the Mettlach factory. In the case of the steins seen in this article, it is probable that not including a full factory mark was intentional because the manufacturer had no control over the final decoration that might define the quality of the resultant stein.

Let's Reconsider...

Villeroy & Boch, Mettlach, or Look-Alike?

by Walt Vogdes
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In the September 2011 issue of Prosit in an article dealing "specifically with those identifying characteristics which allow us to distinguish between some steins made by Villeroy & Boch and some almost identical steins made by other firms", some evidence was presented which suggested that the manufacturer of the previously unidentified "look-alikes" was Merkelbach & Wick. While that firm did indeed produce a stein which qualifies as a look-alike, further study suggests that Marzi & Remy was the manufacturer of the majority of

the look-alikes which have puzzled collectors for years.

To recap, a fairly large number of custom-decorated steins have been seen which at first glance appear to have been made by Villeroy & Boch, although they are not so-marked. Most often these steins bear student association coats of arms. Figures 1a and 2a provide a good example of the similarity of these steins. Over the years careful study by SCI Master Steinologist Bob Wilson has revealed a number of characteristics which can be used to differentiate between the steins produced by V&B and those produced by another firm, many of which bear impressed form number 433.

The September article showed a stein which had recently been seen on eBay (figure 3a) and which was marked on the base with the Merkelbach & Wick trademark. This stein was consistent with the



The stein on the left is marked with the conjoined VB mark of Villeroy & Boch, the form number 280. In the center is a "look-alike" bearing the impressed form number 433, and a capacity mark identified to Marzi & Remy. The "look-alike" on the right is marked with the incised trademark of Merkelbach & Wick. All three custom-decorated steins also bear the painted marks of the decorating firms.



The handle shapes and decoration of the Villeroy & Boch stein (figure 2a) and the form 433 Marzi & Remy look-alike stein (figure 2b) are virtually indistinguishable, while the shape and decoration of the Merkelbach & Wick look-alike is distinctive.