

MAJOLICA INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

Volume 1, Number 2

Howard Silby, Editor

Winter 1990

The response to our first newsletter was very positive and complimentary, but, sadly, no one has sent any articles for printing. I've received a few suggestions, one "letter to the editor", but nothing else. Therefore, as ~~threatened~~ promised in our maiden tome, here is some neurological filler:



*George Jones Sailor Boy Sardine Box
Factory Number 2274, unmarked.*

Neurological Filler.

PLUMBISM

Have you ever wondered why they stopped making majolica in the early 1900's? There are many reasons, of course, but one of them was the health hazard of lead toxicity that affected the factory workers and decorating artists. As you know, the glazes used by almost all late 19th century majolica factories contained lead. This element was perfect since it allowed the glaze to dry to a high, hard gloss and also acted as a flux (temperature lowering agent). This led to bright and beautiful colors. But inhaling fumes from the kiln or licking the paintbrush by the decorators exposed workers to lead poisoning.



In the adult this is manifested mainly by a peripheral neuropathy. The nervous system is organized like an upside down tree: the root ball is the brain, the trunk the spinal cord, the branches the peripheral nerves, and the leaves the muscles and skin. The messages from the brain (root ball) travel down

the spinal cord (trunk) to the peripheral nerves (branches) which end up in the muscles and skin (leaves). Each major nerve has at least two components: the "motor" part which causes the muscles to move, and the "sensory" part which takes in sensation from the skin and conveys it to the brain. In the case of lead, only the motor nerves are involved and usually only the ones in the arms. The

typical manifestation is of a bilateral wrist drop from damage to the radial nerves, which are the nerves that allow us to raise up (extend) our wrists and fingers. The one positive, if you could call it that, was the loss of job (because of this weakness) and therefore removal from exposure to lead. While there are very good drug treatments today that bind the lead and take it out of the body, such drugs were not available in the late 1800's. The only treatment was to end the exposure. Much of the time this worked, because lead leaves the blood fairly quickly and enters bone. It will stay there until some other disease process occurs that destroys bone and allows lead to return to the blood where it can damage kidneys, nerves or brain.

In children the main manifestation is an "encephalopathy" which means brain damage. This is evidenced by seizures, confusion, or coma. This process usually takes several months or years to develop although acute brain damage ("acute lead encephalopathy") is possible where these symptoms occur suddenly. Such an event was usually associ-

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ated with death. Today, where exposure in children is mainly from eating the old lead based paints (the lead is said to have a pleasant, sweet taste) lead-encephalopathy is a neurologic emergency that needs immediate attention. Today, survival is common, but up to 25% of such patients have permanent brain damage.

One can only imagine the young women and adolescents of the 1880's ingesting large amounts of lead from licking the brush in order to get a finer point. This occurred both before and after dipping their implement into the lead based glazes and enamels. From a health point of view, those who did sloppy decorating by not pointing their brush had a longer and healthier life! Also, since lead poisoning takes prolonged exposure, those who decorated an occasional object or did it for only a few months were almost certainly not affected. Some of these people developed abdominal cramps secondary to lead ingestion, which could be quite severe. Again, one

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can only imagine how many stomach aches in the young women of the day were falsely ascribed to menstrual trouble, anxiety, or "something you ate." In the latter case they were right, but did not know enough to stop the exposure. Those who did no decorating or were not close to or in the kiln had little exposure to lead. As such, the designers, modelers and businessmen were usually spared. The absence of unions meant the workers had no one to fight for their health rights.

There is no evidence that eating off lead glazed majolica causes poisoning; only if the glaze were to crack off and be eaten would one get exposure. Acid foods will cause some lead to dissolve.

Therefore, orange, tomato and other fruit juices, wines, vinegar, tomato sauces, etc. should not be stored on majolica. We have all been exposed to small amounts of lead by the exhaust from lead based gasolines, although this is now less significant because of lead free gasoline. Such small exposures do not cause disease.

The diagnosis of lead poisoning is made on the basis of known exposure to lead, the characteristic symptoms of nerve or brain damage, and proved by elevated levels of lead in the urine. Blood testing is also possible, but the urine test is more often positive.

There are no known reports of lead poisoning, to my knowledge, from the use, handling, collecting, selling, cleaning, or other interaction with majolica in the last half of this century. ■

Next month I will plan an exposition on "The Significance of Free Radicals on the Myelinated Nerve Fibers in the Lateral Spinothalamic Tract". You can avoid this boring indignity by sending me "stuff" to put in this newsletter. Such "stuff" is almost guaranteed to be printed, since ANYTHING is better than the above!

Speaking of "Stuff" . . .

I regrettably left off the Mariann Katz-Marks books in my listing of available reference publications in the last issue. These are excellent books, both volume 1 and 2. Volume 1 was published in 1983, and Volume 2 in 1986 by Collector Books, P.O. Box 3009, Paducah, KY 42001. They have beautiful photos, serve as an excellent overview of what is available, and while the books are by no means complete they serve both the beginner and advanced collector as a good reference. The academic content is very limited, and this is not the book to use for research on the subject of majolica. Mrs. Marks

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presents her books as "identification and value guide", and as the former it hits the mark. However, as price guides they are no longer helpful since prices have skyrocketed on both sides of the Atlantic. If you can find any item in her books at or near the price listed, then you probably have a good buy, especially if the piece is in good condition. It has been my experience that most pieces are anywhere from 20 to 400% or more higher than listed. Also, don't be fooled by the so called "updated" second edition published in 1989. It is exactly the same book as the 1986 edition with no new photos or information. The only difference is that all prices have been increased by about 5% across the board. If you have an old volume 2, don't waste your money on the updated version. Also, since Mrs. Marks' works were published when little was known about majolica, there are a few mistakes in attribution, but these are few and minor enough not to detract from their value. They are highly recommended as additions to your majolica library. These can be purchased at most antique shows where a bookseller is in attendance.

For Your Information . . .

So far we have 95 members, of whom 60 are collectors, 10 are dealers, and 25 both dealers and collectors. There are an additional 160 interested in membership. We are growing with members being added weekly. Please spread the word, and have any interested members contact our president, Mr. Strawser.

What Do We Do Now That We Have So Many Members. . .

As a result of our size, we can now obtain information never before available. For instance, how many pieces are in the hands of our members? How many English, American, or Continental? What unusual marks have been seen? Their identification? What about George Jones, Minton or other factory mark numbers that have not been identified? How many sizes of the same design were made? How many color variations, etc.? Wouldn't it be helpful if members wrote us the factory number or registration

mark (or whatever marks are readable) along with a description and, if possible, a photograph? We could all benefit from this kind of information.

I have devised a fill-in form for your review appended to the end of this newsletter. Please take a little time and fill in any of the information you can, especially about marks, or unusual pieces you own or have seen. Please add anything you think will be of help or value to the membership. And don't hesitate to edit the form anyway you wish. I will then collate the information and report it back to you in the next newsletter.

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words. . .

In spite of all the photos in all the books described in this and the last newsletter, there is still much majolica that has not been photographed. Finding new pieces is one of the charms and excitements of collecting. But to have more pictures would benefit all our members as well as the field of majolica pottery. It would be a wonderful project for our society to marshal photos from member's collections of previously unphotographed pieces into a Society produced monograph. This could serve as a money raiser for our organization, increase awareness and identification of unknown or unphotographed pieces, and complement the many fine books published on this subject.

IS THERE ANY ONE OF YOU INTERESTED IN TAKING ON THIS ASSIGNMENT? Please contact Mr. Strawser. More discussion on this and other issues or ideas can take place at our spring meeting.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR !

SPRING MEMBERSHIP MEETING

By now you should have received an announcement of the second annual meeting. As a reminder, it will be held at:

Holiday Inn
King-of-Prussia, Pa.
April 28 and 29, 1990
1-215-265-7500

The tentative schedule:

Saturday Evening:

6 PM: Cocktail Reception

7 PM: Dinner Meeting

8 PM: Special Honoree

Mrs. Ellis Stern, age 93, will be honored as the First Lady of American Majolica. She has spoken and published widely on American Majolica and is a leading authority on this art form.

8:30 : Featured Speaker

Mrs. Ruth Weidner, Associate Professor of Fine Arts, West Chester University, West Chester, Pennsylvania, will speak on American Majolica. Professor Weidner's master thesis was on the Griffen, Smith, Hill pottery company.

9:30 : Free time

Bring photos of your pieces or the pieces themselves for identification, sale, barter, discussion, etc.



Sunday:

9:00 AM: Business meeting

10:00 AM: Guest Speaker

Mr. William Aberbach, member of the Wedgwood Society and a major, early collector of majolica, will speak on Wedgwood and English Majolica. Mr. Aberbach is retired and presently lives in Florida.

11:00: Discussion of insuring your collection: Help, Hints, and Pitfalls, by Mr. Jerry Leberfeld.

12:00 Sale of American, English, and Continental Majolica by an international array of dealers.

So, as my friends in the South say, "You all come, you hear?!" It will be entertaining, informative, fun, and a chance to have an interchange.

In Other News . . .

☞ Dr. Marilyn Karmason tells me that her and Mrs. Joan Stacke-Graham's book is selling very well. How lucky we all are to have this fine addition to our reference library on majolica.

☞ Those of you in California can see an exhibition of Wedgwood Majolica from the Kadison Collection. This is being exhibited at the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens, from November 7 - February 25, 1990. (This info just came in; the exhibit may be over by the time you get this newsletter.)

☞ Dr. Karmason has an absolutely beautifully photographed article along with informative text in the February 1990 issue of *Antique Magazine*, pages 474-487. Please get a copy; it's terrific! We all owe this lady and her co-author, Mrs. Joan Stacke-Graham big thanks for all their majolica writings.

☞ Dr. Karmason writes that there will be a large and important exposition of French majolica at La Louvre des Autoquaires, Rue de Rivoli, Paris, France from April 6 to July 8, 1990. The exhibition, entitled "In the Footsteps of Bernard Palissy", will include 74 pieces of French majolica and 4 teapots from the collection of Sophie and Robert Lehr (M. and Mme. Lehr are authors of the chapter on Continental majolica in "Majolica", the book by Marilyn Karmason with Joan Stacke-Graham). The exposition catalogue will include three articles. The first, on Bernard Palissy, is written by the curator of the Louvre. The second, on 19th century followers of Palissy, is the work of the curator of the Musee de Tours, a repository of many 19th century pieces of the Palissy School. Robert Lehr is the author of the third, a 12 page essay on Victorian majolica, to some extent derived from "Majolica" (the book) but with emphasis on French majolica.

In addition, Mr. Robert Lehr has been commissioned by the magazine "Connaissance des Arts" to do an article on the Massier family. These prominent French ceramic artists of the late 19th century (Clement, Delphin, and Jerome Massier) were renowned for their introduction of vibrant glazes reminiscent of hot Mediterranean floral displays. The article will appear in the June or July issue.

And a Change of Address...

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE NEW ADDRESS OF THE MAJOLICA INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY IS:

1275 First Avenue, Suite 103
New York, New York 10021

Coming Up...

I'll try to present "for sale" or "wanted for purchase" ads from the membership. However, I type all this "stuff" in my leisure hours, so I'm not sure how many I'll be able to process each newsletter.

A New Feature...

Starting this edition, I will bring to you any auction prices that are sent to me by the membership. Please send in any confirmed prices along with a description of the object, where it was sold, and when. Here is what I've received to date (thanks to Mr. Jerry Leberfeld and Dr. Karmason):

Skinner Auction, Mass.:

Minton majolica jug,
8 1/4", cherub clinging to vine with
figural mermaid handle:

Estimate: \$400-600

Sold: \$1,045

George Jones majolica nut
dish, leaf design with mounted squirrel figure:

Estimate: \$200-300

Sold: \$770

Sotheby's, New York:

Wedgwood majolica pair of Dolphin candlesticks, circa 1868:

Estimate: \$600-900

Sold: \$2,475



Minton majolica figural bowl being held by 2 putti's, circa 1862:

Estimate: \$900-1200
Sold: \$1,925

Sotheby's, London:

English majolica Egyptian slave girl garden seat, circa 1870, 22 1/2":

Estimate: \$6,600-10,000
Sold: \$7,700

Minton pair of majolica cornucopia vases each being held by cherub, circa 1864, 15" high:

Estimate: \$2,000-3000
Sold: \$ 820

Minton majolica game tureen, oak branch handles, cover with hare, duck and pigeon lying amongst oak leaves:

Estimate: \$1,000-1500
Sold: \$ 820

American Pieccs

(auction house not known)
Prices include commission

GSH shell and seaweed humidor: \$2100

GSH square top cheese bell with swan finial: \$1100

GSH rounded-cheese bell with floral finial: \$2300

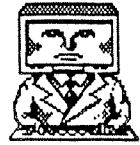
George Morley gurgling fish pitcher: \$150

George Morley owl pitcher, 7": \$75

Nothing is known about the condition of any of these pieces.

For Those of You who are Technically Interested...

The first newsletter was done using WordPerfect 5.0 on a PC AT clone and printed on a Hewlett-Packard DeskJet Plus fooled to think it was a Laserjet Series II by a software package called LaserTwin. This newsletter was printed on the same machine, the text typed into WordPerfect 5.0, and the entire layout (graphics, text, fonts, etc.) done using PageMaker 3.0.



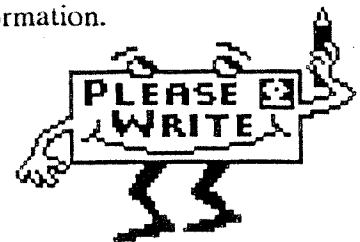
All database information and mailing labels are done in RBase System V on the same AT clone computer. All this database information is exportable to WordPerfect.

That's it for Volume 1, Number 2. Next issue I plan to introduce our "quarterly guest writer." This will be a column devoted to an article by one of our members (collectors and/or dealers) who have a special interest or expertise in some area related to majolica. The first article will be "On Victorian Majolica Tiles," by Mr. Simon Shibko and Mr. Harry Newman, Jr., of Washington, D. C. They are collectors and dealers of majolica and other wares.

So stay tuned.

Send in your information.

And



OFFICERS

President: Mr. Michael Strawser
Vice-President: Dr. Marilyn Karmason
Secretary-Treasurer: Mrs. Joan Stacke-Graham

1275 First Avenue, Suite 103
New York, New York 10021

Database Information Form

Your Name (omit if you wish): JIM TROUT

Years Collecting: 1 1/2 Number of Pieces: 73 AS OF 3/5/90

No. of American: 51 No. of English: 19

No. of Continental: _____ Italian: _____ French: 3

German: _____ Portuguese: _____ Spanish: _____

Other: _____ (Please describe country of origin, if known)

Describe unusual pieces you've seen or have (use extra sheets if needed):

8 1/2" PITCHER - COBALT WITH GREEN LEAVES, WHITE LILIES, LEAF SPOUT, LILY
 (BUD ON TOP OF HANDLE: GRAY BOTTOM - PINK INTERIOR - YELLOW TOP RIM,
 (WATER PITCHER) NO MARK

What unusual marks have you identified? (give as much info as you can):

V V on Bottom of

Describe numbers inscribed on the bottom of pieces with as much detail as possible including colors, dimensions, shape, condition, presence of English registry mark (and its marks), whether signed or not, etc. This is especially important for George Jones pieces where there is a four digit black number written on the reserve on the bottom of the piece (or similar marks on other manufacturers):

Where, or from whom, do you buy your majolica?

LOCAL ANTIQUE DEALERS, THRU THE ANTIQUE TRADER PUBLICATION, ESTATE SALES, AUCTIONS, SHOWS

How do you use your majolica?

DISPLAY + DECORATION ONLY

How do you display your majolica?

5 SHELF BOOKCASE - WALL SHELVES

How do you clean your majolica?

MILD SOAP, WARM WATER, SPONGE, TOOTHBRUSH, SOFT BRISTLE BRUSH.

What unusual pieces ^{DO} have you ~~seen~~ own?

MY MOST UNUSUAL PIECE IS A PITCHER WITH 2 BIRDS IN A BUSH ON ONE SIDE AND A BIRD IN A HAND ON THE OTHER. BROWN GROUND, YELLOW, GREEN, WHITE, PINK INSCRIBED "A BIRD IN THE HAND IS WORTH TWO IN THE BUSH" 6 1/2" HIGH #19 MARKED ON BOTTOM. Please share with us any information you think will be of help: