

## Antiques

Eve M. Kahn

### Potters Who Were On Best Behavior

Moravian potters in North Carolina during the 1700s could not misbehave on the job without leaving paper trails. The stern, German-speaking leaders of their communities kept detailed minutes of their meetings, discussing ceramists who gossiped, complained or disobeyed church rules. Transcripts survive, scolding artisans like Jacob Meyer and Rudolph Christ who led a “bad way of life,” allowed apprentices “too much freedom about the selling of the wares” or “heated the kiln too much” and singed the pottery.

“I can’t think of any other decorative arts tradition where we know more about the personalities of the makers,” said Luke Beckerdite, an author of a new book, “Ceramics in America 2009” (Chipstone Foundation), about North Carolina’s colonial ceramists. The volume explores how the potters, while often tattling on each other, produced thick-walled tableware with Germanic-inspired folk floral patterns, as well as bricks, dolls, stove tiles, tobacco pipes and store signs. The Moravians’ best-known works are bottles shaped like animals and people. On Wednesday 40 pieces will go on view at the New York Ceramics Fair at the National Academy Museum, 1083 Fifth Avenue, at 89th Street.

Mainly lent by Old Salem Museums and Gardens, a restored 1760s Moravian village in Winston-Salem, N.C., the green and brown flasks depict squirrels, crayfish, ducks, turtles, women in long skirts, bears and foxes. (One of the turtles, with delicate scalloped trim along its shell, turned up at a North Carolina auction last month; Old Salem bought it for \$100,000.) “This will be the

largest grouping of this kind of material ever presented to the public,” said Robert Hunter, a curator of the exhibition with Mr. Beckerdite and Johanna Brown, a curator at Old Salem.

A few Moravian pieces will also be for sale at the fair. The New York dealers Diana and J. Garrison Stradling are asking about \$35,000 apiece for a bear stomping on prey and a squirrel clutching an acorn.

Irreverent new reproductions, including a squirrel toting a machine gun, will cost about \$4,500 each at the contemporary ceramist Michelle Erickson’s booth. (On Jan. 23 she will give a demonstration at the National Academy of how Moravians shaped bottles with plaster molds and potters’ wheels.)

In September Mr. Hunter’s curatorial team will expand the show with 100 pieces for a survey, “Art in Clay: Masterworks of North Carolina Earthenware,” at the Milwaukee Art Museum. In late 2010 Chipstone will publish another volume about the potters, analyzing various ethnic groups who set up workshops and the ingredients of the buff and pinkish clays that were dug from meadows and riverbanks.

### Dusty Americana

The dustier the storage bin where major Americana turns up, the higher the likely auction price. Collectors prize unpublished, unrestored pieces, that had languished for generations with families that did not realize their value. At the Americana auctions in New York during the next two weeks the high-profile lot that perhaps spent the longest stint hidden away is an early 1700s silver bowl that Sotheby’s will offer on Jan. 22 with a \$400,000 to \$800,000 estimate.

It bears half a dozen C K hallmarks, stamped by Cornelius Kierstede, a Dutch silversmith in New York. About 32 vessels have been attributed to him, many with high-relief flowers, leaves and animal forms. The Sotheby’s lot, which weighs four pounds, is his largest known work and may be his strangest: tiny disembodied eyes and noses are engraved

along the flower petals.

His client’s name is not known: around 1740 someone replaced the original monogram with a cursive B F. By the 1750s the bowl belonged to the Loring family, British loyalists who lived near Boston. In the 1770s, when they fled to England, legend has it that they buried the bowl in their well for safekeeping. The Loring family somehow retrieved their silver after the war and, until last year, kept it in closets or a bank vault.

“It wasn’t used, and the family never had it out,” said Jill Waddell, a silver specialist at Sotheby’s. “That accounts for its amazing condition.”

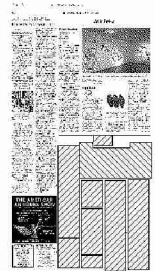
It arrived in New York blackened with tarnish, she added. “I’ve been cleaning it for weeks with a soft cloth,” she said. “It was wonderful to spend that much time with it, as it revealed its secrets.”

### ‘American Pickers’

For an hour a week on the History Channel, starting on Monday, befuddled old men with yards full of rusting artifacts will let two unfazed antiques dealers clamber around the wreckage. The dealers, Mike Wolfe and Frank Fritz, usually take away three or four pieces per visit for resale at their store, Antique Archaeology, in LeClaire, Iowa. This 10-episode reality show, “American Pickers,” will document their inventory-building trips to 60 sites in 10 states.

Guitars blare on the soundtrack as Antique Archaeology’s van barrels down highways to houses with peeling paint. In the first episode the dealers offer wads of cash for gas station advertisements, an amusement park ride, a samurai sword and a giant mechanical bellhop that waves one arm to promote Philip Morris cigarettes. Drama builds when bees swarm out of a ruined motorcycle hull and a trailer’s tires fail, and the repartee is slangy. “We’ll buy anything we think we can make a buck on,” Mr. Fritz tells the camera.

With this unscholarly, anti-



“Antiques Roadshow” approach, “we’re really hoping to get younger people interested in collecting,” Mr. Fritz said in a recent telephone interview, while on location in rural Florida.

Mr. Wolfe added, “People are going to know that antiques are fun, they’re radical, they’re cool.”

## Simpler Times

Before contact with Europeans influenced the design and materials of American Indians’ clothes and tools, the tribes often sewed just a few stripes of beads and quills onto their animal hide outfits, and their wooden bowls and stone smoking pipes were austere hemispheres and cylinders. Only in the late 1800s did they cater to tourists’ tastes with flowery patterns, bright dyes, metal ornaments and machine-made fabrics.

Evidence of the early stages of that cultural transition is on view through Feb. 12 at the John Molloy Gallery at 49 East 78th Street in Manhattan. The exhibition, “Woodlands and Plains Art Before 1860,” includes 30 pieces, including medicine bags made of buffalo hair mixed with a few commercial yarn strands, red cloth leggings perhaps modeled after British Army uniforms and black stone pipes with crisscross lead inlays and traces of European bulbous forms.

Prices range from \$850 for an 1860s black velvet bag, probably made for the first souvenir stands at Niagara Falls, to \$85,000 for 1770s deerskin moccasins with red horsehair fringe. An Irish baronet acquired the shoes while serving in the British Army at Great Lakes forts, and he posed in a similar pair for a portrait around 1800. “He seems to have paraded around in them, going native,” Mr. Molloy said.



SOTHEBY'S

An American silver punch bowl by Cornelius Kierstede, to be auctioned at Sotheby's.