

BLUE AND WHITE FROM ROBINSON OF AKRON

By Jack Sullivan

Let me say right off that I am a sucker for blue and white pottery. That is why it still hurts to think back several years when I spotted an unusual stein at a bargain price that ultimately escaped my owning it.

The stein has a puzzling but intriguing motif. On one side it displays a molded image of a thin twenty-story building, a structure clearly patterned after the Flatiron Building on New York City's Fifth Avenue (Fig. 1). Completed in 1902 and accounted the first skyscraper, the building had captured the imagination of the Nation.

On the other side of the

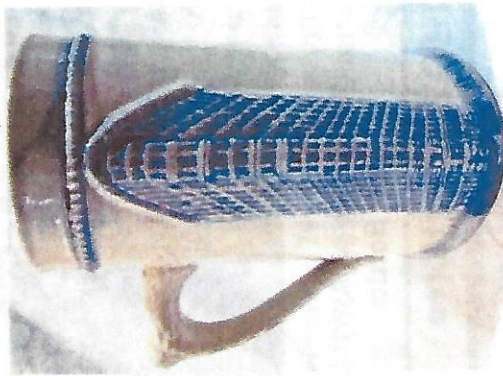


Figure 1

stein in molded blue and white is the figure of a woman, out in the weather and dressed for winter (Fig. 2). Her relationship to the building is unclear. The front of the stein is a narrow leafy design (Fig. 3). Although I had seen this item before, it had always been priced too steeply.

That is why, coming across it for \$11 upon entering a large flea

market, I was interested. But then the "what if" syndrome set in. It happens to every collector: "What if there is something better on the tables ahead and I have dissipated my cash? I can always come back." Yes and some other sharp-eyed collector will have bought it. That's just what happened.

Subsequently I did some research on Robinson Clay Products Co., creator of the stein, and found that the Akron based-pottery (Fig. 4) has its origins back to 1856 when the company of Whitmore, Robinson & Co. was established to manufacture a wide variety of ceramic items. Over time, with many management changes, Robinson Clay Products emerged.



Figure 3

Robinson's Clay Products Company
Akron, Ohio

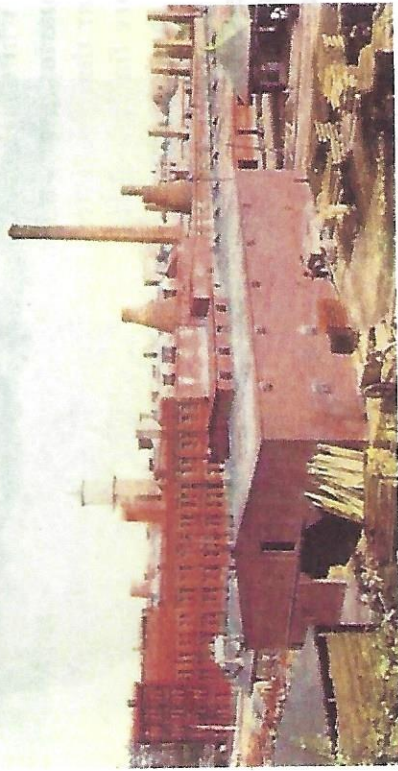


Figure 4

The company made such mundane items as sewer pipe, drain tile, slop bowls, chamber pots, and horse troughs. Along side this utilitarian production, however, Robinson created fine glazed specialties such as "Blue Flemish

Ware" and "Akron Ware." Many of the items bore a pottery mark (Fig. 5) to identify the manufacturer.



Figure 5

The stein I missed has a counterpart piece in a pitcher with a woman molded on it in blue and white (Fig. 6). Comparing the two it is clear that the latter is more finely molded and the blowing of her garments more expressive. Note too that the handle, while similar shaped, has been made to look more like a twig.



Figure 6

Robinson water coolers have a particular fascination for me. The intricacy of the molded images of two deer in a forest on one (Fig. 7) is impressive. So too is the "woman at a well" scene found on another cooler (Fig. 8). Completing these illustrations is a crock or bowl that might have held pickles or hard-boiled eggs on a

pre-Prohibition bar (Fig. 9). A clue lies in the hooded monk with a wine jug in one hand and a cup in the other, held out to the beholder. It provides another reminder of the rich legacy of Akron's Robinson Clay Products Co.



Figure 7

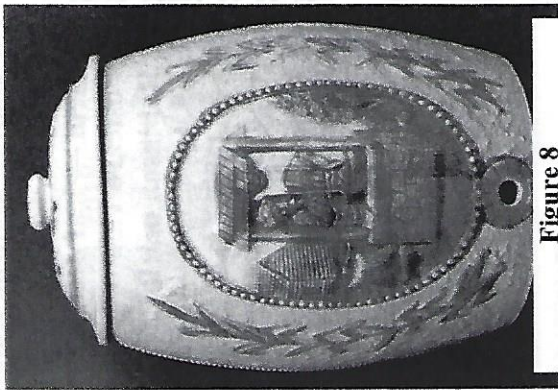


Figure 8



Figure 9

Illustrations:

Fig. 1: Stein — Flatiron Building

Fig. 2: Stein — woman

Fig. 3: Stein — leaf design

Fig. 4: Postcard view of pottery

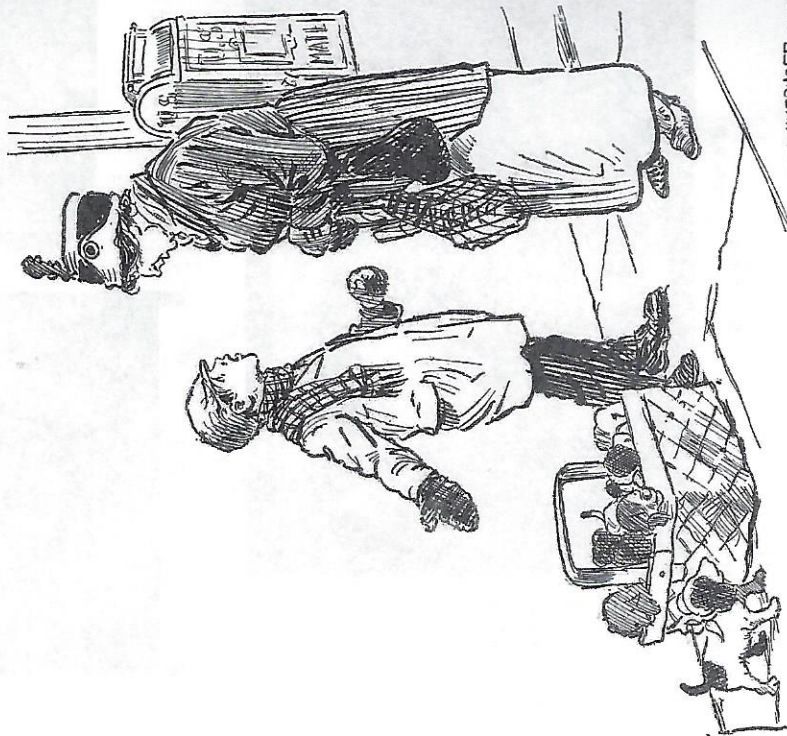
Fig. 5: Robinson mark

Fig. 6: Pitcher — woman

Fig. 7: Water cooler #1 — deer

Fig. 8: Water cooler #2 — woman at well

Fig. 9: Crock with monk figure



OVERCAPITALIZED

"Yes'm, they're all a quarter 'cept one, an' he's thirty cents.
He swallered a nickel this morning."