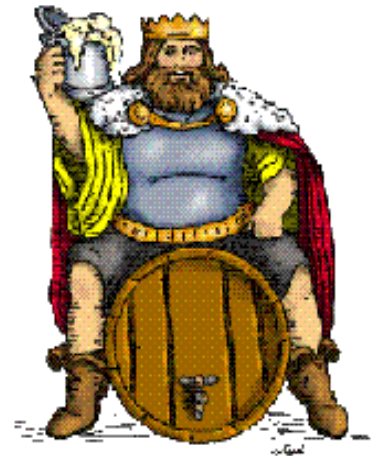


Gambrinus Gazette



Norm Paratore – Editor
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August 2023
Facebook: Gambrinus Stein Club

President's Minute

Hello fellow Gambrinus members. It is with great sadness to report the passing of W.R. Barney, known to all members simple as "Barney". He was a longtime club member, and collector, who was always willing to share information. Additionally, he was a speaker at many Chapter and mini-convention meetings over the years. Barney will be missed by all.

Our German Restaurant meeting back in June was fun for those who attended. Everyone thought the food was excellent. Our next non-meeting event is a cookout on Saturday July 8th. Norm sent out the invite a week ago and all are encouraged to attend. If you need more info, or you want to attend, please contact me at: ericsalzano1@gmail.com or call me at: 240-848-0306.

The August meeting will be held at Norm Paratore's home and he will be speaking on some unusual glass steins. Please plan on attending.

Best Regards,

Eric Salzano

Gambrinus August 2023 meeting information

Saturday, August 12

The Gambrinus meetings are traditionally held on the second Sunday of the meeting months, which are February, May, August, and November. But, this time, Saturday is not a typo. We have several members who can't make Sunday meetings and in an effort to entice them to attend our meeting, we are going to hold the August meeting on Saturday.

Arrival time will be noon, to allow informal chatting, viewing my collection of glass and stoneware steins, setting up of a sale table (bring your own), etc., followed by lunch at 1:00. BYOAB – Bring your own alcoholic Beverage. We will have a supply of ice. Cola and iced or hot tea will be available.

Please confirm by phone or email no later than Sunday, August 5th so we know how much food to buy. The email is SLRShooter@yahoo.com and cell phone is 410-456-0042. Address is: 16011 Jerald Road, Laurel, MD 20707-2653. It is approximately one mile off of Route I-95 and easy to get to. If you don't have GPS, details are below from both I-95 and Route 29.

Following the food we will have the business meeting, followed by the talk, as well as "bring and brag". That last one is a request for members to bring either their latest, greatest, or simply to show off one or two of their favorite steins. Also, if you have a stein you aren't sure of the age, manufacturer, etc., bring it along.

Directions From I-95 South:

1. Take Exit 33B West towards Burtonsville (NOT LAUREL). Stay in the right lane onto Route 198.
2. Go through 2 traffic lights and make your first right turn onto Riding Stable Road.
3. At the 3rd street on your right (approx. 6/10 of a mile) turn onto Jerald Road.
4. Go past the stop sign (after stopping), About three house down, on your right you will find a cul-de-sac and my house is the first on the right corner of Jerald Road and Jerald Court. You can park in the cul-de-sac or along Jerald Road. Leave the driveway open for people dropping off boxes or for handicapped members.

From I-95 North from the Beltway:

1. This is a little tricky as you have to use one of those Container/Distributor exits, which is several miles before Route 198. Watch for the sign that says "Exits 31-32-33". Take that and stay in the very left lane for several miles.
2. Take Exit 33B West towards Burtonsville. Then follow the directions # 2 thru #4 above.

From Route 29 South:

1. After you go over the Patuxent River bridge, watch for the signs that say Laurel/Burtonsville.
2. You will come to a round-about. Take the second exit off the Round-about
3. At the 3rd traffic light (Route 198), make a left (East) towards toward Laurel.
4. Approximately 1 mile, take the left turn onto Riding Stable Road. There is no traffic light but there is a turn lane. If you miss the that turn, simple go to the next light, make a U-turn and come back to first right street, which will be Riding Stable Road. Follow the directions #3 and #4 above.

From Route 29 North:

1. Take the exit marked Laurel and make a right at the light onto Route 198.
2. Approximately 1 mile, take the left turn onto Riding Stable Road. There is no traffic light but there is a turn lane. If you miss the that turn, simple go to the next light, make a U-turn and come back to first right street, which will be Riding Stable Road. Follow the directions #3 and #4 above. .

Note: for those who will be taking I-95 to get home, there will be a handout at my house with direction to take the back way out of the development, which will bring out to a traffic light at 198. Route 198 is very busy and it is dangerous to try and cross all the lanes without a light.

If you are taking Route 29 home, you can simply reverse the directions to Riding Stable Road (at the 2nd Stop Sign), making a left turn that will take you to Route 198. Make a right turn onto Route 198 and follow the signs to Route 29. If you are going to take Route 29 South, get into the left lane as it is a left turn onto 29 from 198.

Treasurer's Report

This month, after a couple of expenses incurred during the transition and the May meeting, plus several more dues renewals, the balance is \$6662.26. Thanks to everyone who have paid for 2023 and beyond. Most members seem to be taking the discounted rate for a three year membership.

I will have the checkbook and data on all transactions at the August meeting and anyone is welcome to take a look.

Update on Barney

Unfortunately, we don't have good news. Barney was diagnosed with a large bleeding ulcer and while undergoing an endoscope procedure to take care of it, he passed away. I am sure many of us are sorry to hear that and we will miss him. Barney was a long time member of Gambrinus and was always a welcome speaker at our meetings. His collection was a bit esoteric but the main thrust of his collection was character steins, both modern and antique.

Serepentine Drinking Vessels

An Introduction to Serpentine Drinking Vessels

By Eric Salzano, Gambrinus Stein Club

I have had an interest in drinking vessels made of unusual materials, so when I first saw Serpentine tankards I was immediately interested in them. Nobody I knew collected Serpentine pieces, but many serious "Early Stoneware" collectors had one in their collections. When I asked collectors about them nobody really knew a great deal about them, most people just knew that they were made in the Saxony region of Germany. The lack of information sent me searching for answers, and I had a few questions.

What is Serpentine?

Where were they made?

When were they made?

How were they made?

Why was that material used?

Why did production stop?

Serpentine is a rock, essentially of a hydrous magnesium silicate, usually having a dull green color and often a mottled appearance. Because the mineral often had the appearance of a "snakeskin" it took on the name "Serpentine" from the Latin word "Serpent-Serpens". Serpentine is relatively soft, similar to marble, making it usable for shaping and turning. It is not considered rare, and is mined in different places in the world.



Photo 1 - Serpentine stone

Where were these vessels made?

My first thought was to investigate the Guilds. Guilds in the 1600s covered every conceivable trade and craft. My second investigation was to get onto a geological website and understand where the actual Serpentine deposits existed in Germany. Interestingly, it turns out that there was only one "Serpentine Turners Guild" in all of Europe, and it was located in Zöblitz Germany. Of course, the place that Serpentine was

mined turned out to be in the "ORE" Mountains in the Saxony region of Germany, the same town the Guild was located in, Zöblitz. Zöblitz is a relatively small town, the current population today is only about 1,600 people. The area was first populated sometime in the 13th century.



Photo 2 - A modern-day photo of Zöblitz



Photo 3 - An earlier photo of Zöblitz
across a Serpentine mine



Photo 4 - A Serpentine mine



Photo 5 - At the mine entrance

When were these vessels made?

The actual turning and making of Serpentine wares in Zöblitz is thought to go as far back as the 15th century. The Guild was in operation for a little over 300 years from about 1525 to about 1825. At it peak the Guild had about 70 members in Zöblitz. The 150-year period between about 1600-1750 is when most of the pieces were produced. This time period is also when the highest quality pieces were produced. The turnings are very finely done, with a variation of shapes and designs. There are some 19th century examples, but they generally lack the quality workmanship and the thin crafted walls of the earlier examples. The industry was clearly in decline from 1750 to its demise in the first third of the 19th century.

Four examples of serpentine tankards are shown above right (Photos 6 – 9).

How were these vessels made?

The Serpentine pieces were “turned” using a treadle lathe (Photo 10); a foot-pedal powered the Lathe and a metal tool was used to cut down and shape the Serpentine. This task took some skill to get the tankard walls thin and fine without breaking the Serpentine while turning it.

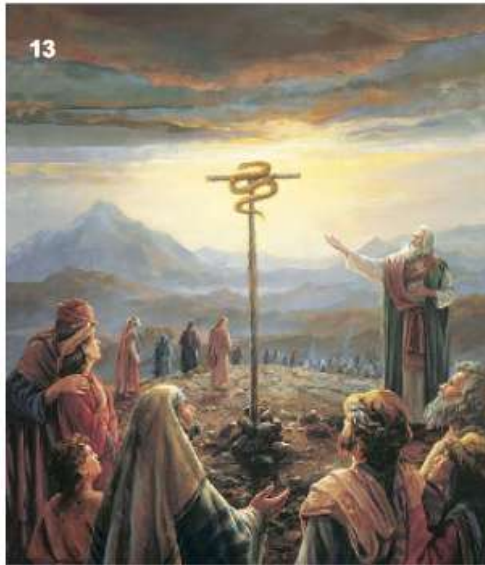


Why was the material used?

Several reasons made this material useful for drinking vessels. First is the material's association to snakeskin and "serpents". On one hand snakes and serpents have represented evil in the Bible, for example with the devil taking the form of a snake in deceiving Eve into taking a bite of the forbidden fruit (Photo 11). Or in mythology with example of Medusa with her head of snakes, which caused onlookers to turn to stone (Photo 12).

However, snakes have also had positive connotations, holding mystical powers, including everything from healing, to protection from evil, and even protection from poisoning. The staff of Moses, known in the Bible as "the staff of God", transformed into a snake (Photo 13). A staff with two snakes, a "Caduceus" (Photo 14), to this day is associated with the medical profession and healing. It is these positive associations which helped lead to the use of drinking vessels made from Serpentine. They were thought to possess special powers of healing and protection for the user of the drinking vessel. This led to their popularity and use by royals and nobles. August the First, 1526-1586 elector of Saxony of the Holy Roman Empire referred, to himself as a *Serpentindrechtsler* and had real love for Serpentine drinking vessels. Relative to other materials used at the time, like early stoneware pieces, Serpentine would have been very expensive to produce, and therefore not as generally attainable for the average person.

The Serpentine was mined in Zöblitz, then turned into various shapes and designs, before being sent out to have either pewter or silver mounts added. We find many different markings on mountings, and a wide range of different configurations, indicating that the mounts were done in a variety of locations to suit local tastes and styles. Many of the silver mounts were undoubtedly custom made for upscale customers.





Why did production stop?

The industry went into a major decline after 1750, and by 1825 to 1850 production of drinking vessels had ceased. The decline was caused by several factors. First the competing materials of stoneware, faience, glass and pewter really made Serpentine obsolete, considering that you might have to pay 15-20 times the amount for a Serpentine piece. Secondly the superstitions of the Middle Ages were more and more being seen as ridiculous folklore by the 19th century. While some ore was still mined and a number of other products were made, the Guild and production of drinking vessels vanished completely.

A few additional notes about collecting Serpentine pieces:

- They are an expensive category to collect. A basic piece can start at about fifteen hundred dollars and up. If the piece has special design and unique turning with silver mounts the price can easily exceed \$10,000
- By its nature, Serpentine has natural fissures in the rock. You may look at a piece and think it's cracked, but often what you could be looking at is a natural fissure in the Serpentine.
- The pewter work on Serpentine pieces very often has old repairs. The reason for this is that the handle is often attached to the body of the piece with a pewter band. If the piece is lifted by the handle that structure must support the entire weight of the piece. It's not uncommon that a 400-year-old piece would have a pewter repair at sometime in its history. I really do not think a pewter repair detracts from the value of these pieces, and should be accepted as a common trait of a Serpentine piece.
- The colors of Serpentine range from a light mottled greenish, to a dark green, into almost black. I personally don't think the color shade matters that much. However, there is one exception: if you find what's called "Red Serpentine," that is the rarest of rare, and commands great monetary value. Supposedly besides the rarity of the red color it was only allowed and obtained by royalty.

Collecting rare and unusual material drinking vessels is something I enjoy. Serpentine pieces do not come up that often, It's a challenging, interesting and fun category to collect.

