

A TALE OF TWO MATCH HOLDERS

By Neil Shapiro



At first glance, except for the pipe in the mouth of the figure on the right, the two pictured match holders look very similar. But take some time to study them and you will find differences that reflect on German metalworkers skill and business practices that applied in Prussia around the time these match holders were made, circa 1845-1870. (Note: Germany officially unified and became a country in 1871)

The match holder on the left is made of bronze and patinated. There is no maker's mark and the base is square with semi-circular additions at each corner. The striker, on the edges of the base, has striations all around. It is 4" tall and 1 1/2" at it widest.

The holder on the right is made of iron and is also patinated although there seem to be traces of rust remaining on the lid. The base is round and the maker, E.G. Zimmermann, of Hanau, is marked on the bottom of the base. The striker is a series of cross-hatched lines on the circumference of the base. It is 4 1/2" tall and 1 3/4" at it widest.



Left: Bronze Right: Iron



Zimmermann mark on top

The holder on the left, by the unknown maker, obviously, has no pipe, but does have an opening in the crook of his left arm to hold a match. The holder on the right has a pipe with an open bowl that can easily accommodate a match. Why the differences between the two holders?

I think the answer lies in the lack of enforcement of property or design ownership in early and mid-1800s Prussia. In fact, the use of copyrights, and trademarks were in the

early stages of development at this time and were rarely used. The use of a maker's mark by the E.G Zimmermann foundry, while not unusual, was not common. It was not considered dishonest or disreputable to recast models from existing models made in other foundries and it saved the expense of hiring a modeler to sculpt the original match holder.

With some foundries, financial interests, rather than artistic, were paramount so producing inferior copies of fashionable items was an easy way to make greater profits. The results of this copying produced less well executed items but items that could be sold for less money.

One rather easy way to tell if the item was copied from an original is to measure the item next to the suspected original. The copied items were always smaller than the original item. Because of the casting process the difference in size between model and cast is usually 1.4 %. (*Cast Iron from Central Europe, 1800-1850*, "A History of Cast-Iron Technology and the Prussian Iron Art Industry," Pryritz, A. 1994, pp.149-150)

So I believe that the Zimmermann match holder- which is larger one, and the one with the pipe - was the original casting and another foundry used it as a model and to save even more expense created a small opening in the arm area to hold a lighted match rather than casting another piece of metal for the pipe.

Besides scrimping on expenses, notice the lack of definition between the two faces. Below is a close-up of the match holders faces and there is a discernable difference in the detailing of the eyes, cheekbones, chins, and the clothing.



Close-up of the holder's faces

Only with a side-by-side comparison can most people distinguish between the two match holders. But with this type of comparison is easy to see the differences between the artistically and technically brilliant works of the Zimmermann foundry compared to the imitative foundry.

