

# The Robert and Colette Wilson Mettlach Collection at the American Museum of Ceramic Art (AMOCA)

reported by Roy De Selms and Sharon Cooley



This year's SCI Convention in Los Angeles brought about a hundred SCI members to the American Museum of Ceramic Art (AMOCA) (figure 1) in nearby Pomona, California to see Bob & Colette Wilson (figure 1a) and part of their 3,000-piece Mettlach Wares Collection which is housed there. At this time about 500-pieces including steins, plaques, vases etc. are on display and the rest can be viewed by special arrangement.

Bob started his collection at the early age of thirteen. His parents liked to collect antiques and would take him along to the antique shops on Sepulveda Blvd. in Los Angeles. This was at the beginning of WWII and Bob happened to see a stein in a window while waiting for his parents. Somehow that stein really caught Bob's attention and he couldn't stop thinking about it for several months before he got his parents to buy it for him. That first stein was Mettlach stein #1998 (figure 2) "Der Trompeter von Säckingen" (the Trumpeter from Saeckingen) which is still in the collection. Bob



seemed to like that stein so much that when his mother found a second Mettlach stein (#2097, figure 3) in the collection of an acquaintance, she was given the stein for her son. The acquaintance happened to be J. C. Penney, founder of the famous Penney's department stores. Although steins represent the main thrust of the Mettlach collection, Bob personally favors the plaques (figure 4) because the whole scene can be viewed at once and the vases and jar-

dinières (figure 5) because of the many different forms they introduce.

Bob graduated from USC as a civil engineer and then taught mathematics at USC while working as an aeronautical engineer at Hughes Aircraft. As the years went by and the stein collection grew, SCI started in Southern California in 1965. Bob became a member a few years later and found a lot



of new friends who also were interested in steins and were forming a local club, *Erste Gruppe* (First Group in SCI). Then came the conventions and when Bob and Colette went to the first SCI convention in Germany at Mettlach in 1978, they got to see the Mettlach Museum on site. Bob was impressed of course, but it was that experience that gave him the idea that it was within the realm of reality to expand his own collection and eventually found his own Mettlach Museum. Some 33 years later that came to fruition when David and Julie Armstrong decided to make the Wilson's Mettlach collection a major part of their teaching/ceramics museum, the AMOCA. When Isabella von Boch, the youngest sibling of the family that now manages the Villeroy & Boch - Mettlach Factory, came to the opening of the Wilson Mettlach Wares Collection at the AMOCA in October 2012, she declared that this was the largest and most comprehensive collection of antique Mettlach wares in the world.

Actually Bob will admit that the best thing that ever happened to him was Colette. Colette also grew up in Southern California. Her father was the music director for 20th Century Fox and this connection introduced her to childhood playmate Shirley Temple (figure 6). Colette was so beautiful and talented that Martin Scorsese encouraged her to be an actress, but she decided to go on to college at UCLA and then became a teacher in Los Angeles. During her college years she became Homecoming Queen in 1949 and participated in the many school events and activities (figure 7).



Later when Bob and Colette started their life together (figure 8), she was not only into the Mettlach collecting, but also was instrumental in starting the Royal Worcester collection that is also at the AMOCA and being displayed periodically (figure 9). It would be remiss not to mention the Wilson brick collection that remained adorning the fantastic landscape of their former home in Springville, CA. Bob and Colette had collected about 12,000 bricks, many with maker's names branded on them, and Bob did the masonry work to put them all together over a span of about 25 years.

The Chinese philosopher, Lao Tzu, is credited with the saying: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." So it might be for the beginning collector that his/her collection, no matter what size, could begin with a single piece. Beginning collectors often are dismayed by only having a few pieces, so remember that Bob's collection started with a single stein and it took several years until he accumulated a few more.

