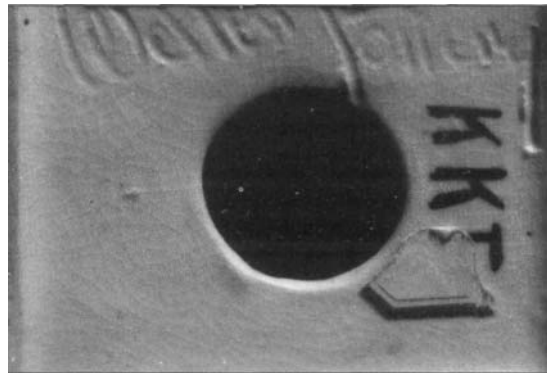
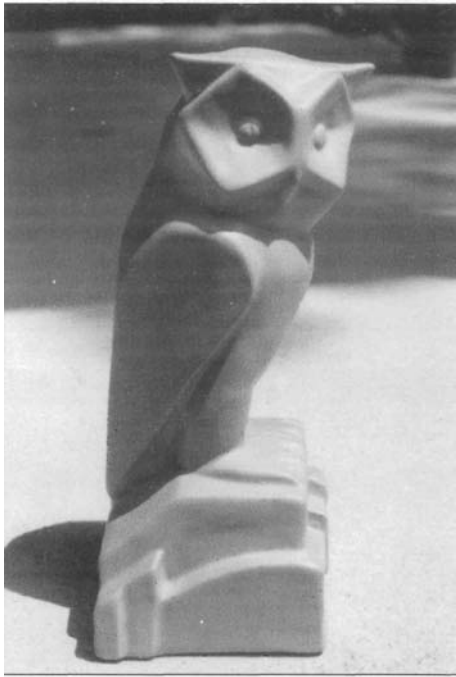


The Journal of the American Art Pottery Association, v.12, n. 11, p. 9, 1996.  
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<http://www.aapa.info/Home/tabid/120/Default.aspx>  
<http://www.aapa.info/Journal/tabid/56/Default.aspx>  
ISSN: 1098-8920

## Weller Kappa Kappa Gamma Owl Bookend Found

by James L. Murphy



The mystery of Weller's "Kappa" vases, which were designed especially for sale by the Indianapolis Alumnae Association of Kappa Kappa Gamma Fraternity during the late 1920s and early 1930s, was solved by Frank Sorrells and Marty Spitzer in 1992.<sup>1</sup> They showed that three Weller vase shapes were decorated with Kappa Kappa Gamma's colors, blue on blue, hand-decorated with blue and yellow irises (the fleur-de-lis being the fraternity's flower), and first offered for sale at the June, 1928, Kappa Kappa Gamma national convention. The vases were available in both a "natural" style and an "all blue" Hudson hand-decorated style. A Kappa bowl, in the Pumila shape, was also offered in natural matte blue glaze.

To qualify as Weller Kappa, a piece must 1) have an all blue background and an iris slip decoration in either two shades of blue or with blue blossoms, green leaves and yellow centers, with standard Weller Hudson semi-matte glaze; 2) be one of the three shapes and sizes illustrated in the Kappa advertisements (or the blue Pumila shape); 3) be marked with the Greek letters Kappa Kappa Gamma on the base, usually with one of the standard Weller marks.

According to Sorrells and Spitzer, the Kappa vases were advertised in *The Key*, the quarterly magazine of the fraternity, from October, 1928, through February, 1933, with a final "close-out" ad in the December, 1933, issue. Beginning in the October, 1930, issue, the advertisement was

altered to include "Owl Bookends, \$5.00 pair (\$3.00 each), 8-1/2 inches high." The bookends were described as "a strictly new item, and delightful in their modernistic design, and even blue tone." The bookends were not illustrated in the revised advertisement and no examples have been known previously. According to Sorrels (pers. comm., July 15, 1995), no examples have come to light since the Volume 12, Number 11, 1992 article was published. Nor is the museum of the National Headquarters of Kappa Kappa Gamma Fraternity aware of any examples.

Recently, an example was offered for sale by Appletree Auction Center, Newark, Ohio, as part of the estate of Mr. Clarence Feil, of Newark. According to a staff member who helped remove the items from the Feil home, the owl sat on top of Mr. Feil's television set.

Unlike the previously described Kappa pieces, which are marked with the circular Weller, the owl is marked with the "Weller Pottery" script mark incised by hand on the base, along with large Greek letters for Kappa Kappa Gamma. The figurine actually measures 8-3/4 inches high, with the base being about 3-1/2 by 4 inches. It is in a light blue matte glaze. Absent its mate or contemporary photographs, it remains uncertain whether the paired bookends faced in opposite directions or whether only a single style was made.

The same shape is illustrated by the Huxfords,<sup>2</sup> an unmarked example in a "green with blue" mottled glaze, which the Huxfords attribute to Weller's Copper tone line, although the colors are somewhat aberrant for Coppertone.

Because the bookend was part of the estate of the late Clarence Feil, of Newark, Ohio, it was at first thought that it may have belonged to either his first or second wife, but checking the membership files of Kappa Kappa Gamma indicated that neither wife was a member. As the Kappa vases and bookends were originally advertised as ideal gifts—"As gifts this pottery cannot be equalled for Christmas, birthdays, showers, weddings, prices, initiations and graduations"—it's very possible Mr. Feil received his book end(s) as a gift. As an old paper label appears to have been strategically placed in order to cover the Kappa inscription on the base of the owl, it is also possible that Weller offered a number of these for sale after they were no longer offered solely to Kappa members.

James L. Murphy is an associate professor at Ohio State University Libraries, Columbus, Ohio. His interest in ceramics include Vance Faience/Avon, Bradford Art Pottery and Ohio Studio Pottery.

## Endnotes

1. Frank Sorrels and Marty Spitzer, "Weller produced special Hudson items for fraternity," *Antique Week*, Central Edition, July 6, 1992, p. 2, 21.
2. Sharon and Bob Huxford, *The Collector's Encyclopedia of Weller Pottery*, p. 295.