

THE INDIAN COOKIE JAR

By Clay Molder

The popular Indian Cookie Jar was released for sale by McCoy Pottery in 1954. The story goes that McCoy designed this Jar originally for Pontiac Motors. They submitted prototype samples but the project was not approved. McCoy decided to tweak the design a little for themselves and released it in their own production offering of Cookie Jars. The photo below shows two examples of the production Jar. In the 1954 catalog image included, you can see it was offered with a “Decorated Birchwood” glazing as well as cold paint accents. The photo of the two Jars clearly shows a difference in the main color tone. The one on the right is rather typical of the birchwood glazing used on a number of McCoy Pottery pieces. The left example has a darker brown tone. Both color tones can be found so many collectors feel they need one of each if they are trying to fill out McCoy Jars with all production options that were made.

NOTE: An all color version of this article will be on the Society web site under Articles Tab after published in Journal.



But in addition to these production Jars, there are actually several other versions of the Indian Jar that are out in the market today. The balance of this article is an attempt to share a lot of interesting and important history about some of those Jars as well as presenting some of them that were just truly “reproduced” to try and fool McCoy collectors.

The Pontiac Indian Jar - By George Williams

During the Pottery Festival of 1989, some of our McCoy Group that were in attendance were invited by Billie McCoy to go to her storage locker to look at items she had saved from her years at McCoy Pottery. I don't recall being one of those that went but was made aware of the many treasures that were viewed as the McCoy Group talked that evening at the Travelodge. Someone mentioned seeing the plaster mold for the Indian Head cookie jar. They also said that this mold did not have the word “cookies” written on the front of the neck. The next day I

talked with Nelson McCoy about the possibility of seeing the mold and possibly producing some examples. He agreed to retrieve the mold and suggested we meet in Roseville at Cookson Pottery. Nelson said Cookson was a small pottery company that used the same clays as the old McCoy Pottery and they would probably be interested in making the jar.

I remember the excitement I felt as Nelson opened the trunk of his car and exposed the mold and die. The die was in good condition and sat safely in the back half of a plaster mold. Nelson could not find a die or mold for the lid. We then entered the pottery and I was introduced to the production manager Betty Williams. We discussed production and how to overcome the lack of a lid. Because of the age of the mold everyone was concerned that it would not produce the single item needed to make new molds for production. After several weeks we were successful in producing that single piece. A solution for the top was to use an existing lid from the jar that McCoy did produce in the 1950s to make a mold for production. Rick Wisecarver was retained to fashion a new top for the jar.

Production costs were determined and I decided that if I made 300 jars and sold them, I could cover all expenses including the multiple trips to Ohio. The sales price was set at \$79.00. Samples were made in 3 variations:

1. Solid brown glaze with color as close to original as possible (See 1st example below L-R)
2. The same brown glaze with a flesh colored face. (Center pix below)
3. The same color but with 24 kt. Gold trim accents (Right pix below)



Additional production cost estimates for option 2 and 3 made it not possible to produce in quantity. Therefore, only samples of options 2 and 3 were produced - I think 6 or 7 of each but I cannot remember exactly.

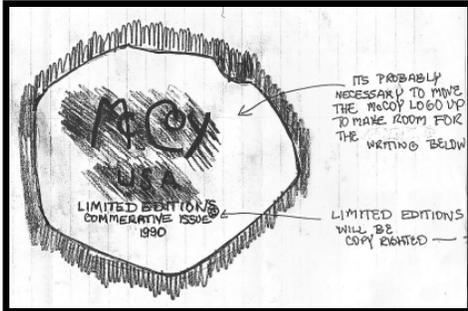
Seven molds were made and production began in the fall of 1990. Once production was complete, I drove to Ohio and picked up the molds and all of the jars. I decorated the basic jars, (again – photo on left above) with various colors of cold paint in the feathers and the square blocks in the hair. Once I released them for sale they sold quickly!

All of the molds were destroyed except for one.

Photo right shows the bottom of these Jars with the following detail:

“Commerative Issue 1990”
“McCoy USA” & “Limited Edition”

Below; original bottom sketch.



Since Rick Wisecarver had asked to make a different example for himself, I agreed if he would produce and sign 10 examples for me at an agreed price. This price was significantly more than the sales price of my jars. The Wisecarver jars are lighter than the Cookson Pottery jars and each one is slightly different. All decoration is underglaze. See photos left and right.



Shirley Corl in Michigan (a cookie jar and pottery artist of the time) made and signed 2 jars. They are lighter weight and decoration is under glaze. She kept one and I have the other in my collection. They look similar to the Wisecarver jars.

The remaining mold and die were destroyed by me in 1992.

An article written by Stan and Karen Zera in *AntiqueWeek*, Sept. 7th, 1992 details much of the same information I have included in this article.

Writing this article brings back many positive memories of the adventure involved in collecting cookie jars and all the friends I made thru this period of time. It was before the internet made the search easier. I had to make trips from North Carolina to the mid-west and to California in

my quest to obtain one of each type of jar that McCoy made. I came close, but you can never find them all!

George Williams

So, to conclude; we must go to other reproduction efforts. These couple of reproduction examples are in the market today and actually have examples for sale on eBay as of this writing late in 2018. Both of these examples command rather pricey \$\$ levels which may relate to the original examples still valued at levels of some significance.



The above example is marked on the bottom "McCoy # 93". It has a white color glazing on the majority of face of the design. The #93 was used to indicate they were made in 1993.



Finally, and definitely leaving the "worst" for last, this example has brown tones and a rough finish surface. Marked with just the word "McCoy".