

The McCoy Book Ends Tell Their Story

By Jim and Wil Powers

Just before the McCoy Auction began this past July, we asked to take a look at a couple of pieces in the glass case. One of those pieces was the “Book End” set. As we admired it, we noticed something quite interesting. Thinking about where these pieces had resided for the last decade or more, we imagined that not too many folks had the opportunity to pick them up and carefully look them over. So we thought we’d share our findings with all of you.



Shown in the first photo is the most likely position they would have been displayed and is as shown in the reference books (HNH Vol 2 and Sanford’s’ big red). The second photo shows the back view had they been displayed as assumed.



Given the article photos are in b/w, let us paint a picture of the colors involved. In the first photo, the right hand “End” is glazed white inside and out with a hand painted orange-red cover & Vol II on the vertical book and bright blue on the leaning book all under glaze indicating that it was to be hand painted and therefore more costly to produce. The left-handed Vol VII “End” is glazed in various shades of green inside and out. Certainly, this is a little hard to follow but we will have a copy of this article on the web site in color for those that have access!

There is a significant difference between the two bookends. The Bookend with the green colors has a second “spline” with Vol II in place of the white “page ends” as seen on the rear of the other Multi colored Bookend. On the green example, the white “page tops” are covered and glazed green to avoid drawing attention to the missing “page ends”.



Once the auction began, we forgot about these differences. When the Bookends came up, we were thrilled to be the winning bidder, so excited in fact that we immediately wrapped them in bubble wrap and placed them in a tub for safe keeping. Hours later the explanation for the differences popped into our minds. It would seem most likely that the multi colored version with the white “page ends” was the first casting. We can imagine that, as it was being critiqued, someone realized that if they didn’t make a second mold they couldn’t use the first mold for both sides of a set, as you would have the white “page

ends” showing on one side (photo 2) vs two “spline” ends seen in (photo 1). So, they either made a second mold, or most likely modified the original one by placing a second “spine” where the “page ends” had been. They then smoothed and glazed the “page tops” and embossed the modified end with a different volume number, Vol VII vs Vol II.



Apparently, this prototype set would seem to be composed of two different test versions. If selected for production, logically we would expect they would have gone with the modified version and just glazed half of the run with a different glaze.



That would have saved on production costs and simplified the packing and shipping process. Then again, if they used two different molds, they would have doubled the usable output from the molds. Sadly, we'll probably never know all the details, but we believe the first hypothesis to be pretty compelling.

Another question is what is the round item between the vertical and slanted books? Upon closer inspection, we believe it is the end cap of a heavy paper tube used to hold scrolled up documents and such.



Once again, it just goes to show us that you never know when or where you'll find the next interesting tidbit about McCoy Pottery.
