



William Goebel's Wonderful Water-Folk

By Sharon Weintraub

In my November 3, 2023, article for this website entitled “Who Made These Mermaids,” I discussed the fact that although aquarium catalogs around the turn of the last century swarmed with schools of mermaids for ornamenting aquariums, typically these finny femmes were marked, if they are marked at all, only with a number and country of origin. However, I also noted that one German company, William Goebel, on occasion actually tagged its creations with its trademark. In this article I look at some of the whimsical water-folk created by this company.



Illustration 1



Illustration 2

Illustration 1 is a mermaid who must be part goldfish, based on her bright orange tail. She displays many of the traits found on Goebel's nubile nixies, excellent rosy bisque and beautiful modeling, deeply molded scales, bright tail colors apparently applied with an airbrush, and a slim oval face with a long, rather prominent nose. She is 5.5 inches long.

Illustration 2 displays the underside of this undulating undine and why she can confidently assigned to Goebel, for she is incised with the crowned intertwined “G” and “W” mark of the company. This mark was used by the company from 1905 until 1949. “Bavaria” stamped in black is also typical of Goebel, as are the neatly cut round air holes.



Illustration 3



Illustration 4



Illustration 5

The wide-eyed little merboy in Illustration 3 is of china and a mere 2 inches long. But despite his small size, he carries a lot of information. Illustration 4 is of the underside. Not only is this minute blue-haired imp incised with the Goebel crown mark, he also is incised "Y.M." The use of two capital letters is another trait of Goebel. He also carries a model number, "107," and the initials "Dep" (partially obscured by one of the round air holes.). "Dep" stands for "Deponirt," meaning that the design has been registered.

The two sultry sea sirens in Illustration 5 display many of these Goebel characteristics, even though they lack the company mark, such as the deeply molded scaled tails in bright airbrushed colors, the oval face with a long prominent nose, and excellent bisque and modeling. The vividly colored coiffures are yet another Goebel trait. Each is 5.5 inches long and the mermaid with the purple tail is stamped underneath in black "Germany."



Illustration 6



Illustration 7

The belle with the blue tail in Illustration 6 is 5 inches long. Although she carries no mark, from the deeply molded scales on her tail to her prominent proboscis, she is clearly a Goebel product.

The mermaid in Illustration 7 looks a bit washed out and may have spent the early part of her existence submerged in a fish tank. Vivid colors on bisque pieces were often obtained by cold painting, rather than firing in the color. The colors on her airbrushed purple tail and tousled green tresses show rubbing and wear. She is 5.5 inches long and is incised underneath with the initials "N.W." and the model number "21."

Another Goebel merbabe appears in Illustration 8, with brilliant blue hair and bright yellow tail, fins, and oddly, lips. Just 2.5 inches long, he is stamped underneath "Bavaria" in black and incised with the initials "N.W."



Illustration 8



Illustration 9



Illustration 10



Illustration 11

The lovely lilac-haired lorelei in Illustration 9 was intended to cling to the edge of an aquarium rather than recline on its bottom. Her hold is rather tenuous and a slight bump or brush could send her falling to the floor, so I suspect that not too many of these delicate damsels survived. Oddly, her tail was only colored green at the waist and the rest left pure white. She is incised “N.W.” and “4” on the front of her waist and is 5.75 inches long.

Another literal hanger-on appears in Illustration 10. She strikes a more daring pose, supported only by her crossed arms. Stamped “Bavaria” in black on her left hip, she is 5.5 inches long.

Illustration 11 is of a rather mischievous merman, who leans over the edge of a fish bowl and, with his distended cheeks, appears to be prepared to blow a stream of water at the fish within. He is painted from neck almost to the tip of his green tail with broad blue and white stripes. Goebel’s bathing beauties often wore painted swim attire of the same blue (or sometimes red) stripes, so perhaps he is meant to be wearing an old-fashioned Edwardian bathing suit. He is about 5.75 inches tall and although unmarked, the deeply molded scales on his tail are clearly visible.

Although easily identifiable, water-folk by Goebel are difficult to hook. Any collector would consider finding one of Goebel’s creations the catch of the day!