

An American Collection of German Guild Records

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SELDOM has one happened upon so complete a set of records of an early guild as that of the Ratzeburg Böttchers' (coopers') Guild, now in the possession of Mrs. William Luebbbers of Homeland, Baltimore, Maryland. I am flattered to think that it was through Mrs. Luebbbers' enjoyment of my *Pewter Down the Ages* that she was prompted to write to me about it. Obviously, the distance that separates us — the width of the Atlantic — is such that I have been unable personally to inspect this remarkable treasure; but the evidence laid before me, which, to make assurance doubly sure, I have submitted for confirmation to my learned colleague, Robert M. Vetter of Amsterdam, convinces me of its authenticity.

The records came to Mrs. Luebbbers as a gift from her husband, who, born in Lübeck, had lived in Ratzeburg during some four years — long enough to establish friendships in the community. Some thirty years ago, Mr. Luebbbers learned that an acquaintance had purchased important guild pewter and other corporation mementos in Ratzeburg. As he was himself much interested in such things, he forthwith persuaded the new owner to part with the prize for a consideration. The transfer was effected, and Mr. Luebbbers presented the entire outfit to his wife.

The collection comprises minute books, seals, letters, and other documents, together with a very fine set of guild pewter. Let us first examine the seals, of which there are two, for they illuminate some of the devices on the vessels.

The earlier, and larger, seal — a rubbing of which may be seen in Figure 1 — measures one and three quarters inches across. A band around the rim bears the words, *DAS. WAPEN. DER. BÖTTCHER. ZV. RATZEBVRGK* (the arms of the Coopers of Ratzeburg). In the centre, upon a fancy shield with hollow sides, appear the working tools of the Böttcher — barrel, compasses, adze, and axe. The date numerals 16-60 occupy recesses between shield and border.

The smaller, and later, seal (Fig. 2) measures one and one eighth inches, omits the shield and the band, but retains the earlier devices, though differently arranged. The date has become

17-39, while around the exergue runs the wording, *DAS. AMPT. DER. BÖTTCHER. IN: RATZEBURG.*

An impression from the larger of these seals occurs on a letter in the collection, which states the requirements for an essay-piece, or masterpiece. Dated 1744, this document is signed by two of the guild *Altermen* — Gräpel and Eggers. The same seal is found on an open letter certifying the admission of an outside master to membership in the guild. This latter, dated 4 October, 1751, is signed by Johan Jürgen Eggers, *Alterman*.



Figs. 1 and 2 — SEALS OF THE COOPERS' GUILD OF RATZEBURG (1660, left; 1793, above)

Turning now to the pewter vessels: standing twenty-seven inches high, in the centre of Figure 3, is the guild cup, or *Wilkommen*, supported upon four couchant lions. Gesticulating from a barrel-shaped knob centred in the top of the curiously domed cover, the tiny figure of a man in the costume of the period probably represents a typical guild member. Originally his outstretched hand sustained a banner, upon which was probably displayed the device of the guild.

Engraved on a wide band encircling the body of the cup appear on one side the guild shield, and upon the opposing side, three towers within a wreath and the date, *ANNO 1654*.

Between these two devices are engraved the names of the two *Altermen* and other officials, as follows: *HANS SCHMIDT, MICHEL FVEST, Altermen*; with *JOCHIM PROVERE, TIES BOCKHOLDT, HARTWICH GARBER, HINRICH LAFRENTZ*, and — probably added at a later date — *C. W. C. EGGERS*. In one of the guild books which records minutes of the meetings (called *Morgensprache*) from November 16, 1655, to 1728, these names constantly recur.

Within the cup, at the bottom, appears the maker's mark, dated (16)33, of Hans Becker of Lübeck (Fig. 4). (*Vide Hintze's Norddeutsche Zinngiesser*, No. 1438.)

The family name of Eggers, engraved on this cup, reappears among the lists of *Altermen*

Fig. 3 — PEWTER OF THE RATZEBURG COOPERS' GUILD In the centre the guild cup, twenty-seven inches high and dated 1654, by Hans Becker of Lübeck. The smaller flagons, right and left, are of the same period. Becker's mark and the Lübeck eagle are shown as Figure 4, below

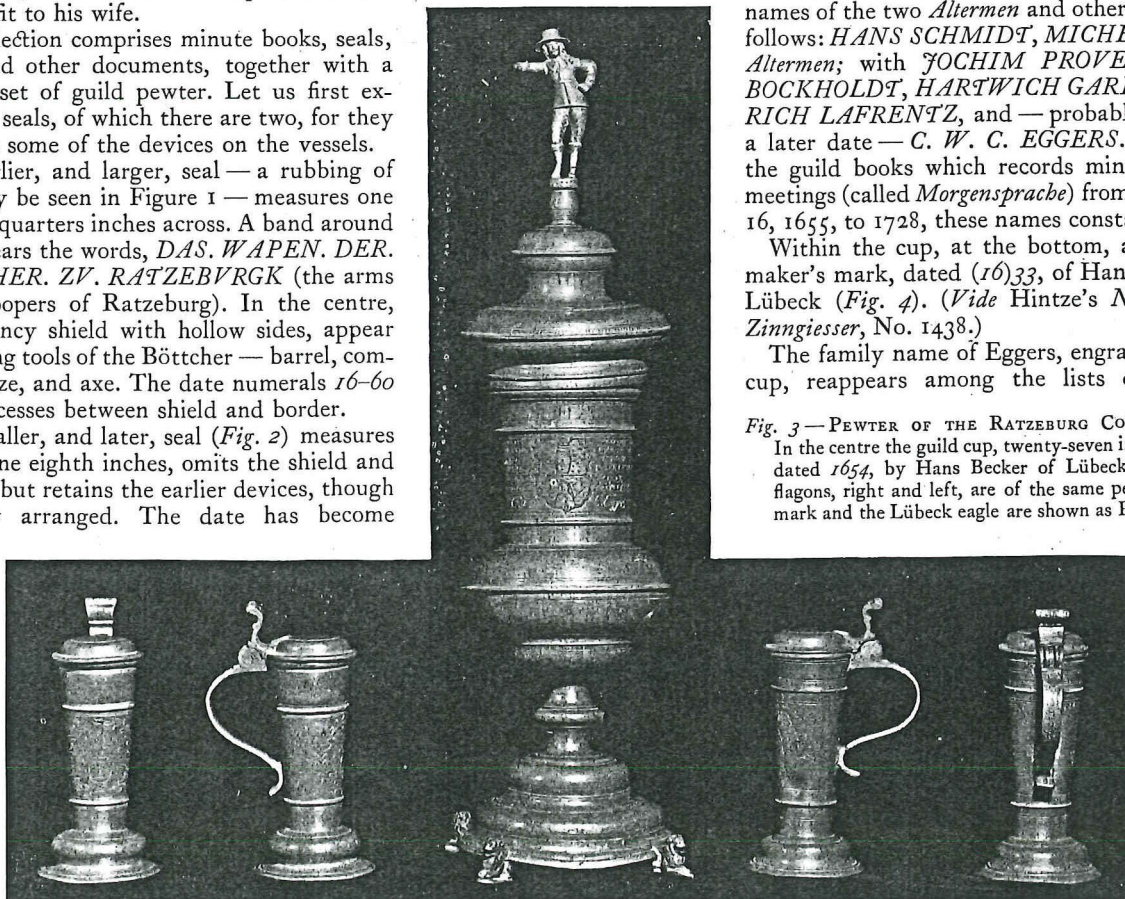


FIGURE 4



FIGURE 6



Fig. 5 — MORE PEWTER OF THE COOPERS' GUILD
In the centre a thirteen-inch flagon dated 1737. The relief decoration of its strap handle is shown in duplicate at right and left, as Figure 6. The small flagon at the left is dated 1832; that second from the right, 1687



FIGURE 6

through generations in a volume of minutes covering the period March 1731 to 1879.

In one of these minutes it is recorded that the four masters, Bauman, Nieper, Marwede, and Lankau, have had a pewter flagon made for (?) with their names engraved upon it. The piece thus signalized is the large flagon, with spout and ball thumbpiece, pictured in Figure 5. It is thirteen and a half inches high, with its handle decorated in

relief, as indicated in Figure 6; while upon the cover is engraved the device and legend shown in the rubbing in Figure 7. Here again we see the guild badge, this time beneath a crown and between palm branches, below which are incised, in script letters, the words *der Botcher ampts Kann, 1737*. Within the lid is struck the mark of an unknown maker, which I have sketched in Figure 8. This is probably that of a Holstein pewterer.

Of the seven smaller flagons, which are of the *Roerken* type, all bear this guild badge upon their fronts and have relief-decorated handles. Four of the group carry, upon the tops of their handles, the mark shown in Figure 9. It is probably that of Philipp von Milow of Ratzeburg, who is mentioned under No. 1809 in Hintze (*op. cit.*), though the mark is not there illustrated.

The mark shown in Figure 10 appears on two other of these flagons, and is probably that of Philipp von Milow of Boizenberg I. Meck (*c. 1670*), who is mentioned, though the mark not given, in Hintze (No. 80).

The seventh and latest of the flagons bears the mark of Christian Hermann Hülsemann of Lübeck (Fig.

11. See Hintze, No. 1512). This flagon stands at the left in Figure 5. Engraved upon its lid is the inscription, *Heinrich Brachmann, 1832*. In the same illustration, the second flagon from the right bears the inscription, *Franz Lefrünt, 1687*. The flagon on the right in Figure 3 is inscribed, *Matteis Bockholt, 1654*, and the one next to it, *Michel Fvest, 1654*.

Among the many interesting documents in Mrs. Luebbers' collection is a letter addressed to the "Fürst von Sachsen, Engern und Westphalia," dated at "Ratzeburg, den 16 Juni, Anno 1657," and signed, apparently in their own script, by Hans Schmidt, Michel Fvest, Joachim Provere, Ties Bockholdt, Hartwich Garber, and Heinrich Lafrenz. The same names appear on the guild cup already referred to. Another consists of the *Amts und Gildebriefe* (official correspondence and charter) in pamphlet form, handwritten and dated 18 May, 1735, Hanover. To this is attached in a tin container the Great Seal (three inches in diameter) of King George of England and Hanover.

Two *Lehrbriefe* (instructions) dated 1781 and 1798, with many other letters, laws, protocols, and so on, complete a wonderful collection, worthy of careful collation and translation on the spot by some responsible antiquary. The guild vessels themselves are of exceptional interest. That they should be accompanied by so great an array of guild documents is extraordinary. So notable a collection merits thorough study.

For such an undertaking I am certain Mrs. Luebbers will afford every facility upon the receipt of appropriate credentials.



Fig. 7 — ENGRAVING ON THE LID OF THE LARGE FLAGON OF FIGURE 5 (reduced)



Figs. 8, 9, 10, and 11 — MARKS (left to right): UNIDENTIFIED, PROBABLY HOLSTEIN; PROBABLY PHILIPP VON MILOW OF RATZEBURG; PROBABLY PHILIPP VON MILOW OF BOIZENBURG; CHRISTIAN HÜLSEMANN OF LÜBECK (late)