

The Tin Feeder - Good or Bad?

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For some unknown reason, I have always been fascinated by tin ware. This goes back to before my wife, Teresa, and I became interested in the challenging collecting field of baby bottles. Maybe this fascination is due to the antiquity of the item, maybe it is due to the handwork that goes into the creation of the tin item by the traveling tinker. I don't really know the reasoning for my interest, but it is really there.

We own only one tin baby feeder and a tin invalid feeder at the present and bought the baby feeder a few years ago from Ros Berman at one of our ACIF (American Collectors of Infant Feeders) conventions. At that time she mentioned that there are some reproductions on the market being sold to the unsuspecting. I listened to her, but didn't actually fully comprehend what she was telling me. Needless to say, we're always looking in antique shops for that rare occasion that I might find one of the tin baby feeders reposing on a shelf at a ridiculously low price — one that no other collector of tin ware has happened upon.

Well, that day finally appeared in an antique shop in Adamstown, Pa. this past spring. The shop had large quantities of tin ware for sale — most of it was being sold by an energetic 94 year old dealer. There it was, that tin feeder hiding on one

of the shelves. Teresa came running to me with the comment: "Lookie, lookie at what I just found." Yup, there it was — a tin baby feeder — not at that ridiculously low price, but at a fair price of about two-thirds of what they are now selling for.

I looked closely at it. I was excited, but deep down I was scared of it. I didn't know why, but I was scared. "Ros, Ros, what was it that you had told me those few years ago?" I don't remember, but I must have listened to you somewhat or else I wouldn't be being doubtful now in my moment of triumph. We just finished visiting you at your wonderful General Store and museum in Cheltenham, Pa. just two days ago. I looked at all of your tin feeders, but never asked you about the reproductions again. It just didn't cross my mind.

Luckily Teresa had Ros's telephone number in her cell phone. I called three times, but couldn't make a good connection. Finally I asked the antique store manager if I could take the feeder outside in the sunlight and photograph it. She said okay and came out and watched me taking photos. By this time I had just about convinced myself that our find was a good one.

While taking photos I looked inside and saw the remains of an oil in it on a very dark surface. I also saw remnants of steel



Doesn't this one also look good? It is the reproduction that we almost bought in Adamstown, Pa. And the price was right — only about two-thirds of the present retail price — very tempting, to say the least.

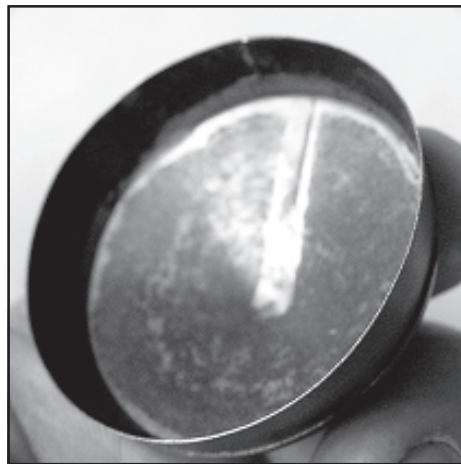
wool from a cleaning. I had already concluded that the outer surface had been overcleaned and the steel wool and oil only verified this opinion.

Again I tried to call Ros and made a good connection from the front porch of the shop. On the phone I described what I was seeing and she convinced me to leave it at the shop for others to be fooled. I did take one of the shop's business cards, just in case I changed my mind.

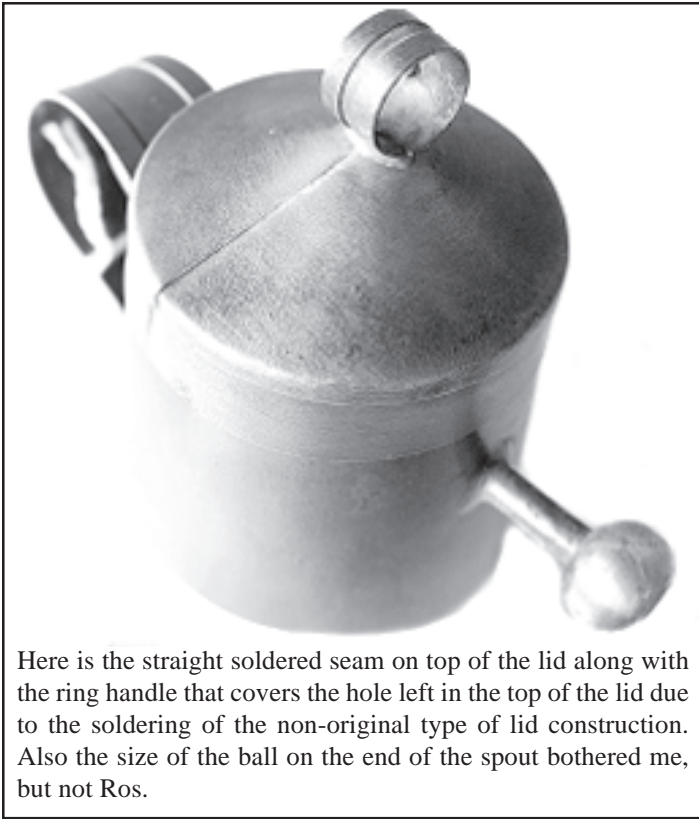
All of the features other than the lid looked good and period. Even the way the spout was fashioned on the inside of the



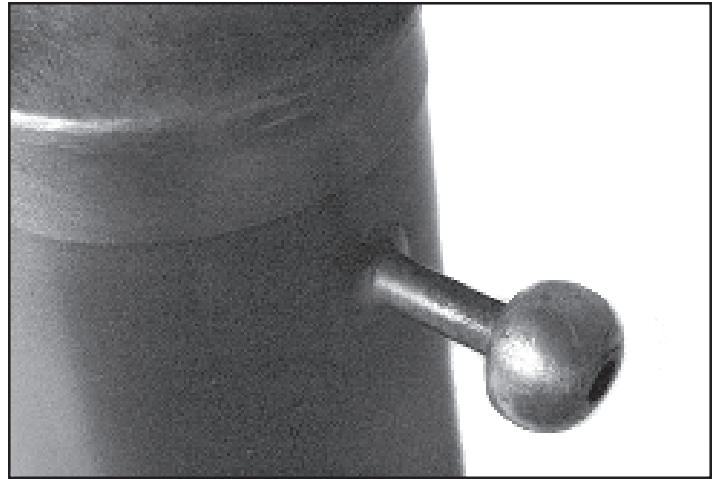
Some of the many tin baby feeders to be found in Ros Berman's General Store. They are all handcrafted by traveling tinkers. Note that no two are alike. The left one has a side spout in relation to the handle. The second one has a flat top lid which is also hinged. The right one has a smaller handle, is taller and skinnier and has a smaller knob on the spout.



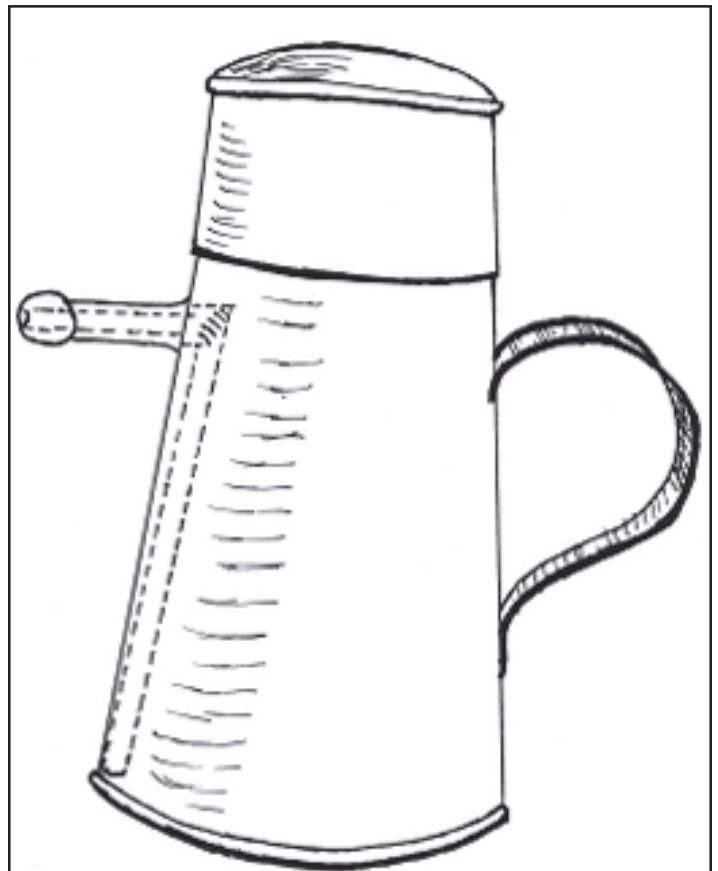
The dark inside of the lid and the old looking solder along with the oil and steel wool remnants almost convinced me that this tin baby feeder was original, just overcleaned.



Here is the straight soldered seam on top of the lid along with the ring handle that covers the hole left in the top of the lid due to the soldering of the non-original type of lid construction. Also the size of the ball on the end of the spout bothered me, but not Ros.



The size of the lead ball on the spout didn't bother Ros, but the size of the hole in the ball did. As Ros said, "The flow from that hole would let enough milk pass to drown a baby."



This sketch shows how the sucking tube or straw is formed on the inside of the tin baby feeder. The exit hole is small to hold down the flow of the milk. Also the straw portion terminates only about $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch from the inside of the bottom to make it easy for the infant to suck all the milk out of the feeder.

body and soldered to the inside skin was correct looking. It terminated about $\frac{1}{16}$ inch from the bottom and was tacked to the front wall for security. The lid may correctly be just a press fit onto the body of the feeder or it may be hinged. The press fit is more common since it takes fewer steps in the handcrafting of the tin baby feeders.

After we finally made it home I sent Ros a set of my photos of the tin feeder. About two weeks later she called me and verified the good decision that we had made on the phone earlier.

The primary feature that pointed to this tin feeder as being a reproduction was the features in the manufacture of the lid. *ALL* of the originals have either a domed or semi-domed lid that is evidently formed in a press of some sort or by hammering. The reproductions are made by cutting a piece of tin, pulling it around to itself at a straight line junction and soldering it to make a dome (see my photos). At the top of this soldered dome on the reproductions is usually found a little circular handle soldered to the lid to cover the hole at the peak.

Another feature that bothered me was the size of the lead knob on the end of the spout. This knob makes a bump that the baby can wrap its lips around. It also creates a knob that the cloth rag, chamois or pickled cow's teat can be tied to and not accidentally pulled off by the nursing infant. It looked much too big for me. The size didn't bother Ros, but the size of the hole in the knob did bother her. She said that large of a hole would let enough milk pass to drown a baby. I'm sure that she was correct.

About the time that we had taken all of our photos, made telephone calls and made our decision not to purchase this wonderfully created reproduction, the lady that was running the shop at the time came up to me and told me that she shouldn't open her mouth, but let us know that we had made a good decision. Well, we didn't come home with our prize — thank goodness, but we did find some other wonderful finds and purchases on our way home. And I actually did make one of those once in a lifetime

buys when I found a \$700 pair of good Confederate Civil War Cavalry spurs in Beckley W.Va. for \$18. Hee, hee. And it only took the shop owner 30 minutes to come back and open the case for me.