

ARTS & CRAFTS METAL NEWS

DISCOVERING The KOPPER KRAFT Shops



ISSUE No. 1

FALL 2024



DAVID KORNACKI & LIBERTY LEHR

Copyright © 2024

DISCOVERING THE KOPPER KRAFT SHOPS

By David Kornacki & Liberty Lehr



arts and Crafts Movement metalwork sellers and collectors frequently encounter unsigned hammered copper objects. So they tend to use an attribution strategy reminiscent of how unsigned furniture was once identified: if there's no shop mark, it must be Stickley Brothers! In the realm of metalwork, any hammered copper with tooled (chased) designs, but lacking a shop mark, is simply attributed to early Craftsman Studios. Foolproof! But seasoned metalwork enthusiasts are aware of this phenomenon and recognize that until more historical documentation surfaces, especially period catalogs and advertisements,

speculative attributions and the accompanying eye rolls are likely to persist.

Fortunately, we have uncovered the identity of a metal shop that was previously unknown but highly productive: The Kopper Kraft Shops of Buffalo, NY, which was primarily active in 1924. The discovery was made back in 2015 while painstakingly sifting through 1920s trade journals in search of Fulper Pottery references. This research surprisingly unearthed advertisements from the Kopper Kraft Shops (KKS), which are featured in this article. These illustrated ads not only showcase various forms produced by KKS but also provide a methodology to help attribute additional unsigned work.



Fig. 1. Possibly the first advertisement for KKS metalwork. This ad features renderings of a KKS desk calendar and "door knocker" bookend. This bookend is perhaps the most common KKS form found today (from *The Gift and Art Shop*, Feb. 1924).

In early 1924, *The Gift and Art Shop*, a monthly trade publication for wholesale buyers of gift merchandise, started featuring advertisements by KKS.¹ The initial ad (Fig. 1) introduced their latest collection of "Useful Metal Objects," showcasing illustrations of two novel designs: the "door knocker" bookend (Fig. 2) and a perpetual



Fig. 2. KKS bookends in the "door knocker" design, 6.25" h x 4" w. This form closely resembles the Roycroft version and the high quality, heavy gauge copper and availability make it a fine entry point in collecting KKS copper. Collection of David Kornacki.



Fig. 3 KKS Perpetual Calendar with trefoil motif; 4”h x 4”w. Note the characteristic turned down peak and heavily chased outline. Collection of David Kornacki.

calendar (Fig. 3). Throughout that year, at least four distinctive KKS advertisements highlighting metalwork were published in *The Gift and Art Shop*.²

Advertisements were reproduced across multiple monthly editions, offering a wealth of valuable information for present-day KKS collectors. They describe a variety of KKS metalwork categories such as desk sets, bookends, bud vases, card trays, wall sconces, candlesticks, cigarette boxes, ashtrays, and more (Fig. 1, 4-6). Additionally, what is not advertised, such as lamps, large vases, bowls, sizable humidors, picture frames, and other forms, may reveal what KKS did not manufacture.

The advertisements reveal examples of KKS production and essential collector information such as the company’s full name, business address, and the cities where retail display rooms were located. KKS announcements in trade publications and local newspapers promoted events such as their Christmas 1924 specials and documented



Fig. 4. Advertisement showing a KKS desk set. Several decorative motifs appeared on KKS desk items including the “6-leaf cluster” on this set. Note the inkwell has the striated “three thumb” holder also used on KKS 9” candlesticks (from *The Gift and Art Shop*, July 1924).



Fig. 5. Advertisement showing the KKS handled ashtray set and matchbook holder. This form was misattributed to Roycroft in a popular collector guide from the 1990s. Note the very basic decoration on the match holder (from *The Gift and Art Shop*, June 1924).

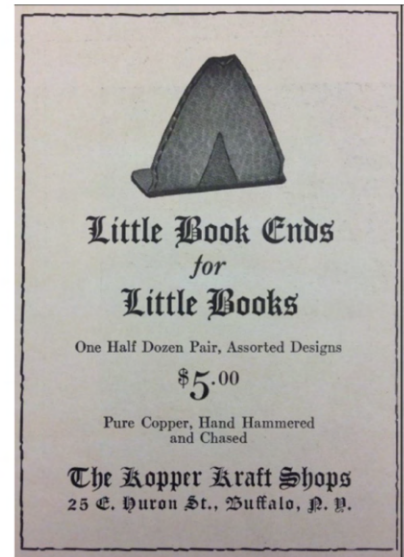


Fig.6. Advertisement showing a simple triangular KKS bookend. Note the characteristic turned down peak, heavy chased outline and polychrome decoration (from *The Gift and Art Shop*, Sept. 1924).



Fig. 7. KKS cigarette holder with polychrome design; 4.25”h x 2.5”w x 2.5”d. (signed stamped mark). Perhaps the finest known piece of KKS with excellent design, workmanship and condition along with the stamped signature. Collection of David Kornacki.

additional metalwork forms (Fig. 8). The last known pictorial advertisement from 1926 shows metalwork made at their new Silver Creek location, southwest of Buffalo, and illustrates a shift in design and quality (Fig. 9). Although collectively these advertisements span a period of less than two years, they provide significant insights into KKS metalwork production.

Shop History



The Kopper Kraft Shops launched in late 1923 as a new product line by Post-Michel Co., Inc., a stationery and greeting card company based in Buffalo, NY.³

Christmas Specials

Hand Wrought Kopper-Kraft Book Ends	
In Plain Panel Design	\$2.00 Pair
In Decorative Floral Design	\$3.50 Pair
In Moth Design	\$3.00 Pair
In Fluted Scroll Design	\$3.50 Pair
In Door Knocker Design	\$5.00 Pair
Perpetual Calendars for Desk in Kopper-Kraft Frame	\$1.75 Each
Kopper-Kraft Pen Trays	\$2.50 and \$2.00
Kopper-Kraft Card Trays	\$1.75 Each
Wall Panel Kopper-Kraft Bud Vases	\$3.00 Each
Kopper-Kraft Bud Vases	\$2.00 Each
Candlesticks	\$5.00 Pair
Panelled Sconces	\$6.00 and \$7.00 Pair

The FRIENDLY BOOKSHOP
39 VERNON STREET

Fig. 8. Advertisement for KKS 1924 metalwork Christmas Specials. Note the \$5 retail price for Door Knocker bookends was the same as Roycroft’s version at the time (from *The Morning Union*, Springfield MA, Dec. 1924).

TO INTRODUCE
— KOPPER KRAFT —
THIS BEAUTIFUL ASSORTMENT OF
HAND HAMMERED COPPER
\$5.00 Net 10 Items

No. 121—Pair Tall Candle Holders	\$.75
No. 122—Wall Sconce	1.00
No. 123—One Flower Wall Pocket	1.00
No. 123—Square Match Holder and Ash Tray	.50
No. 124—Two Extra Trays @ 25c	.50
No. 125—Round Match Holder and Tray	.75
No. 126—Two Extra Trays @ 25c	.50
	\$5.00

THE KOPPER KRAFT SHOPS, INC.
SILVER CREEK, N. Y.

Fig. 9. Advertisement showing KKS copper items made after the move to Silver Creek. Lighter gauge copper and more machine hammering made for lower overall quality (from *The Gift and Art Shop*, Feb. 1926).

Founded in 1915, Post-Michel was a partnership between Fred C. Post, president, and Albert Michel, vice president.⁴ Over time, the company grew to become Buffalo's largest steel and copper plate engraving and printing firm (Fig. 10).⁵ In 1920, Post-Michel moved from Frederick St. to East Huron St.⁶ In the same year, they submitted a stylized logo for "Kopper Kraft Kards" for trademark protection, highlighting their copper plate engraving process (Fig. 11).

The expansion into art metalwork complemented Post-Michel's existing wholesale offerings, which included greeting cards, business cards, envelopes, and stationery.⁷ This new venture focused on hammered copper items for office use, as well as a few domestic products. The initial KKS metalwork pieces, such as the door knocker bookends, were mentioned in their mid-1924 trademark application, which established the official KKS logo (Fig. 12). The stylized script "Kopper-Kraft" was first introduced in September 1923, according to the application.⁸

In January 1925, KKS announced a relocation from Buffalo to a newly built factory on Central Avenue in Silver Creek.⁹ Unfortunately, based on advertisements and actual examples, Silver Creek production was not of the same quality as the work done in Buffalo (Fig. 13). KKS production ceased by



Fig. 13. KKS bookends with trefoil motif; Silver Creek 1925; 3.25" h x 4.75" w. Lighter gauge copper and machine hammering made for lower overall quality. Collection of Doug McFarland.



Fig. 10. Advertisement for Post-Michel Co. Inc. highlighting their key business of copper plate engraving in 1919 prior to their switch to Kopper Kraft Kards (from *Walden's Stationer and Printer*, Vol. 43, Mar. 1919).



Fig. 11. On Oct. 12, 1920 Post-Michel applied for trademark protection on this Kopper Kraft Kards logo. This was three years before metalwork production began, so "Kopper" referred to their copper plate engraving work.



Fig. 12. Application for trademark protection on the stylized script KKS logo was filed Aug. 29, 1924 and indicated continuous use since Sep. 1, 1923 by Kopper Kraft Shops, Inc.

the end of 1928 with the building sold in early 1929.¹⁰ Consequently, although production ran from late 1923 to 1928, items made in 1924 will likely hold the most appeal to collectors.

KKS Workers



he superintendent of the KKS art metal department was Walter Elmer Lenhart (1892-1968).¹¹ A newspaper reference from December 1924 indicates he was also the designer of KKS hammered copper.¹² In 1917 Lenhart was living in Buffalo and working as a molder at a metal casting company. By 1920, he was residing in nearby Lockport and employed as a machinist in a radiator factory. After his tenure at KKS, he was listed in 1930 as a steelworker and in 1942 as an employee at a saw and steel company.¹³

Several names of workers from the KKS bowling team were mentioned in newspaper announcements in 1924, but these individuals have not been further investigated. ¹⁴ Overall, little is known about the individual craftsmen and designers at KKS. It has been suggested that many may have been former Roycrofters, due to the nearby location in East Aurora and some design similarities, but there is no documented evidence to support this claim.

KKS Metalwork

KKS work is likely familiar to many collectors of Arts & Crafts metalwork, as certain pieces have appeared on the market repeatedly over the years. The "Door Knocker" bookends closely resemble Roycroft's similar design, but we can now confirm with certainty that these bookends are indeed KKS. The same applies to the perpetual calendar displayed alongside the bookends (Fig. 1) and the other related desk set items in Fig. 4. Until now, these items might have been classified as "unsigned (insert favorite hammered copper maker) metalwork."

While most KKS copper pieces are unsigned, at least one example features an intact original "Kopper-Kraft" paper label (Fig. 14). Most KKS metalwork was likely signed with paper labels which did not survive. The few KKS marks found stamped into the copper were created using individual typesetting letters rather than a single die stamp (Figs. 15-16).

The company's failure to stamp mark most KKS metalwork presents today's collectors with an identification challenge. However, certain design and construction features unique to KKS provide clues to help make strong attributions even without shop marks. These characteristics include decorative elements exclusive to KKS and construction techniques consistent across their entire metalwork line.



Fig. 14. Rare KKS paper label appearing on the tray with cutouts and striated hammering. Note the two finish options – Antique and Bright – implying that some items were sold without the usual dark finish.



Fig. 15. Rare stamped KKS mark appearing on the polychrome cigarette holder. Note the mark appears to be constructed from individual letter stamps rather than a single die stamp.

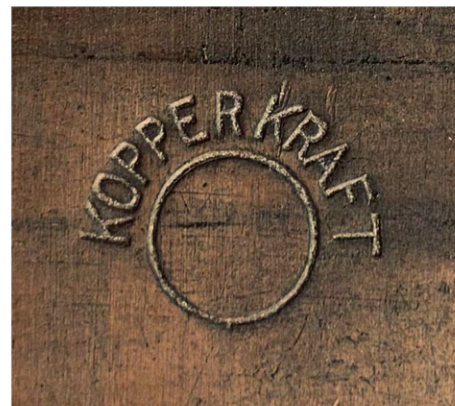


Fig. 16. Rare stamped circular KKS mark appearing on owl bookends. This mark also is constructed from individual letter stamps rather than a single die stamp and has been identified on a few pairs of bookends.



Fig. 17. KKS cigar box with thin leaf trefoil motif: 2.25”h x 6.75”w x 3.5”d; Cigarette Box with thin leaf trefoil motif: 2.25”h x 4.5”w x 3.5”d; KKS boxes such as these represent some of the best designed and constructed and most desirable objects produced by the shop (both attributed). Collection of David Kornacki.

KKS's chased decorative motifs include what we will refer to as the "6-leaf cluster," "trefoil and crescent," "thin leaf trefoil," and "moth design." While these designs may appear similar to those used by other metal shops of the period, a closer examination reveals they are entirely unique to KKS. A notable comparison can be seen in the KKS cigarette box versus Roycroft's version. Both have overhanging hinged lids with centered quatrefoil designs and similar overall dimensions. However, KKS's leaf elements are thinner, flatter, and more compact, whereas Roycroft's quatrefoils are wider, taller, and more voluminous. Additionally, KKS quatrefoils lack the pronounced "lift" seen in the edges of Roycroft's leaves, particularly in earlier

examples (Fig. 17).

The KKS advertisements identify at most ten specific forms from the Buffalo (pre-Silver Creek) era. However, many additional forms can be attributed to KKS based on the decorative elements mentioned earlier. Certain construction features can also aid in making these attributions. For instance, the "turned down" top peak is common across KKS bookends, desk calendars, wall sconces, and more. Additionally, KKS pieces are characterized by their distinctive "heavy" hammered outlines, created from a series of discrete hammer strikes rather than smooth, linework (Fig. 18). KKS bookends typically display



Fig. 18. KKS bookends with butterfly motif; 3.5”h x 4.75”w (attributed). Note the fine chased details in the butterfly (or moth) motifs and like all 1924 KKS bookends the copper is of a substantial gauge and they are quite heavy. Collection of David Kornacki.



Fig. 19. KKS bookends with owl motif; 5.25”h x 4.25”w (signed stamped mark). Roycroft used an extremely similar owl motif on bookends prior to 1920 which probably contributes to misattributions. Collection of David Kornacki.



Fig. 20. KKS candlesticks with “striated thumb” design holders (attributed) and inkwell same design; Candlesticks 9”h x 3.5”d and plaster weighted; Inkwell 2”h x 3.5”w. The use of the “striated thumb” holder allows firm attribution of the candlesticks. Candlesticks (collection of David Kornacki); inkwell (collection of Doug McFarland).

both features, along with generous polychrome highlights, which in some cases include distinctive gold paint (Fig. 19).

Also, some characteristics are likely unique to KKS and can help with accurate attributions of certain forms. For instance, the “three striated thumbs” support seen on some inkwells is also found on the tops of KKS nine-inch candlesticks (Fig. 20). Moreover, the bases of KKS candlesticks are often weighted with plaster, setting them apart from those made by other period metal shops.

A couple KKS forms have been misidentified in popular publications for metalwork collectors. For instance, the smoking tray (Fig. 5) was mistakenly attributed to Roycroft in



Fig. 21. KKS vasette with tulip design; 10.5”h x 2.25”w (attributed). This form was misattributed to Roycroft in a popular collector guide from the 1990s. Collection of Kellie and Nolan Smart.

McConnell’s *Roycroft Art Metal*¹⁵ and the KKS decorated wall pocket (Fig. 21) was also incorrectly assigned to Roycroft in *More Roycroft Art Metal*.¹⁶ Additionally, the “moth tray” (Fig. 22) is occasionally listed for sale and has been inaccurately attributed by dealers to at least three different metal shops.



Fig. 22. KKS tray with moth motif; 6”w (attributed based on design and workmanship). These very attractive trays show up with some regularity and have received a number of incorrect attributions. Photo by acstickley.com.



Fig. 23. KKS bookends with conventionalized moth motif; 4.5”h x 4.75”w (attributed). Note the characteristic heavy chased outlines and the curving tendrils which frame the design and add visual interest. Collection of David Kornacki.

Collector Guidance



opper Kraft Shops objects provide an exciting and affordable entry point for collectors of Arts and Crafts Movement metalwork. These pieces are widely available, often in excellent condition with original finishes, and currently priced lower than comparable works from Roycroft, Craftsman Studios (Los Angeles), Old Mission KopperKraft, Fred Brosi, Hans Jauchans, Robert Jarvie, and others.

The key to successfully collecting KKS is learning to confidently identify and attribute unsigned pieces. Aspiring collectors should study the pictured objects and familiarize themselves with the common KKS features described here to develop a keen eye. A recent example of this approach in action was identifying, attributing, and purchasing the rare and charming giggling frog bookend purchased for \$25 on eBay (Fig. 24).



Fig. 24. KKS bookends with “giggling frog” motif; 5”h x 4.75”w (attributed). Collection of Kellie and Nolan Smart.



Fig. 25. KKS cigarette box with thin leaf trefoil motif; 2.25”h x 4.5”w x 3.5”d (attributed). Note the original dark finish and striking gold polychrome. Collection of Steve Pakiz.

Today assessing the rarity of individual KKS forms is somewhat challenging, since the few collectors “in the know” have only been seeking KKS examples for a few years. It seems that desk pieces and bookends are the most common, while fancy decorated trays, medium-height candlesticks, and smaller cigarette boxes are somewhat rarer. Polychrome cigarette holders, large cigarette boxes, and very large candlesticks are the rarest (Fig. 7, 17, 25, 26). Some decorative motifs, such as the giggling frog, also appear to be quite rare. Additionally, any piece with a stamped mark or paper label should be considered very rare.

Many collectors associate rarity with desirability, but functionality and condition are also important factors. For instance, taller candlesticks and large boxes are very useful and display beautifully in an Arts and Crafts collection, while random desk set items often lack the same visual impact. It’s generally wise to wait for pieces in mint or near-original condition, especially for more common forms like bookends. So, if you come across a piece that looks too polished—like a new penny—it’s often best to pass, unless it’s a giggling frog!

Future Research



uch remains to be discovered about KKS and their products. Potential areas for future study include:

- Additional background on Walter Lenhart, the shop superintendent;
- Identification of individual KKS craftsmen;
- Any connections that may have existed between KKS and Roycroft or Craftsman Studios, given the similarities in decorative motifs;
- The existence of more KKS advertisements featuring illustrated products; and
- Whether any of the "illustrated folders" mentioned in the ads can be found in libraries or private collections.



Fig. 27. KKS tray with thin leaf trefoil motif; 7" w x 7" d (attributed). Note the KKS characteristic upturned corners. Collection of David Kornacki.



Fig. 26. KKS tall candlesticks with thin leaf trefoil motif; 10" h x 3.5" d (attributed). Note the trefoil decoration with polychrome. Like most KKS candlesticks these have weighted bases. Collection of Kellie and Nolan Smart.

Acknowledgements



pecial thanks to: Steve Pakiz, Kellie and Nolan Smart, Connie Wood and Doug McFarland for lending objects; Jon Kornacki and Michael Lehr for valuable editorial review and feedback; Ariana Caruso for her stylish document layout; and all those who "kept the secret" these past few years.

Endnotes

1. *The Gift and Art Shop*, New York, NY, Feb. 1924, p. 122.
2. *The Gift and Art Shop*, New York, NY, Feb. 1924, p. 122., Jun. 1924, p. 122, Jul. 1924, p. 58, Sep. 1924, p. 123.
3. *United States Patent Office*, Aug. 29, 1924, #202020; application for trademark protection on koper-kraft in stylized script; indicates trademark in use since Sep. 1, 1923 by Kopper Kraft Shops, Inc.
4. *Municipality of Buffalo, New York: A History, 1720-1923*, Winfield S. Downs, Lewis Historical Publishing, 1923, p. 450.
5. Ibid.
6. *Geyer's Stationer*, Vol. 70, Sep. 1920, p. 23.
7. See note 4.
8. See note 3.
9. *Dunkirk Evening Observer*, Dunkirk, NY, Jan. 23, 1925, p.11.
10. *The Buffalo News*, Buffalo, NY, Feb. 21, 1929, p. 29.
11. *The Morning Press*, Bloomsburg, PA, Dec.18, 1924, p. 5.
12. Ibid.
13. Ancestry.com for all biographical information about Walter Elmer Lenhart.
14. *Buffalo Enquirer*, Buffalo, NY, Oct. 31, 1924, p. 6.
15. Kevin McConnell, *Roycroft Art Metal Revised Edition*, Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1999, p. 103.
16. Kevin McConnell, *More Roycroft Art Metal*, Atglen, PA: Schiffer Publishing, 1995, p. 99.



Fig. 28. KKS pen tray with 6-leaf cluster and Letter Knife with trefoil motif; Tray 8.25"l x 2"w; Knife 9.25"l x .75"w. Collection of David Kornacki.