

## **Betty Hulburd Hine**

### **Documents Relating To The Patent Potential Of A Ceramic Beverage Coaster**

**(Compiled by Ted Hine – June 2003)**

While learning and experimenting with ceramics in the early 1950's Betty (and/or husband Kirt) apparently discovered that certain un-glazed ceramic materials absorb water and could be made into decorative beverage coasters intended to prevent the condensation which forms on the outside of cold beverage containers from dripping onto table top surfaces. By glazing only the sides and bottom of a ceramic coaster water would be absorbed from the top and prevented from reaching the table top by the glazing.

I was not aware of this till I recently ran into a file among Betty's belongings which indicates that Betty and Kirt seriously considered patenting this "invention". The following letters from 1953 and 1954 show that a patent attorney did a search for "prior art" and that Kirt's longtime friend Bill McKelvy offered to help out perhaps with marketing and distribution should a patent be obtained.

There is no indication as to whether a patent application was ever filed. There is also no record as to whether it was determined that the idea was un-patentable or whether they just never got around to filing for one. In any case, had a patent issued I'm sure I would have heard about it as I was growing up and Betty, while active in making ceramic items well into the 1960's, never produced a lot of ceramic coasters to the best of my knowledge.

In recent years (the 1990's and early 2000's) I have regularly seen displayed for sale in boutique specialty stores and tourist shops numerous examples of this exact "invention": decorative ceramic beverage coasters.

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Letter Requesting Patent Search and Describing Invention – July 21, 1953

July 21, 1953

Patent Service Institute  
945 Pennsylvania Ave., N. W.  
Washington 4, D. C.

Gentlemen:

Will you please make a patentability search on a coaster as described below, the invention of my client Mr. E. K. Hins. The cost of the search should be limited to around \$15.00 to \$20.00.

No drawing of the invention is attached as it is believed that the following description will suffice. The coaster consists of a disc or biscuit of porous clay which is formed and baked in the manner usual for manufacturing ceramic articles. Thereupon, one face and edges of the disc are glazed and baked, rendering the glazed surfaces impervious to moisture. In use, a beverage glass is placed upon the porous face of the disc and condensation from the glass gradually wets the disc and it is absorbed thereby, but the glazing prevents the moisture from wetting the table surface upon which the coaster is placed.

The coasters could be made in a variety of decorative shapes and with decorative coloring. It is known that baked clay has been used for water absorption and filtering purposes. Old French cooking pots were made of porous clay glazed on the inside. We have not seen any devices such as coasters where the glazing is on the outside and where the porous clay is intended to absorb condensation.

Our office will be closed until August 10th so the transmission of search results may be deferred until then.

Very truly yours,

Godfrey B. Speir  
Patent Attorney

GBS:sd

Patent Search Response – August 4, 1953

PATENT, TRADE MARK  
AND DESIGN  
SEARCHES

**PATENT SERVICE INSTITUTE**

945 PENNSYLVANIA AVE., N. W.  
WASHINGTON 4, D. C.

STERLING 6321

**PATENT AND TRADE MARK INVESTIGATIONS**

August 4, 1953

Mr. G.B. Speir  
Caldwell, New Jersey

Dear Mr. Speir,

We have completed a search in the coaster and related art for devices as described in your letter of request of July 21.

We do not find the exact idea as applied to coasters, While porous clay is well known, it may be novel to use same as a coaster glazed as you describe on the outside only. The patents cited are the most pertinent located to the invention. Evaluation for patentability can be made from study of these citations:

169 1882	508 140	536 353
282160326	2 257 264	2 595 961
2 641 911	1 910 139	1 959 134
1 960 606	1 971 337	

Further inquiry is invited.

Cordially yours,

PATENT SERVICE

*S. Norman*  
S. Norman

SN:cw

Letter From Bill McKelvy - May 26, 1954 - Page 1

FORM 1071 A

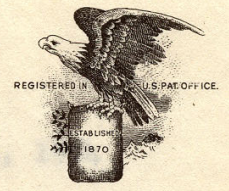
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ADDRESS ALL MAIL TO THE COMPANY

# FULTON BAG & COTTON MILLS

MANUFACTURERS OF  
BAGS, BURLAPS, TENTS & TARPAULINS

P. O. BOX 1726

**ATLANTA 1, GA.**



REFER TO FILE

May 26, 1954  
Air - Mail

Mr. E. K. Hine  
Mountain Avenue  
North Caldwell, New Jersey

Dear Kirt: Both send our very best wishes and please let us know what you decide to do on the coaster.

It certainly was swell to see you and Betty a while back. Please pardon me for not having written a Bread and Butter Letter prior to this time, but I've been waiting until I heard further from our Patent Attorney. Unfortunately, the best I have been able to do seems to be slightly more expensive than what you could find from your man, and it is my suggestion that you go ahead and have your coaster tied up as tightly as you can on a patent, and then decide whether you want me to give it for a try on merchandising it, on the basis of a certain percentage of gross sales, or if you have somebody else whom you feel could do it in a quicker and more profitable manner. In any case, please keep me advised as to the progress of it, as I firmly believe that this item has great possibilities. I think its much too good to let it drop by the side.

Please thank Betty very much for sending down my socks and tie. It seems as though every time I stop at your domicile I neglect to pick up all my belongings.

We did rather poorly in the Spring Series down here, as we ended up with the seventh, having been disqualified in one race and having swamped in another out of a total of five. It was good fun in any case! You would have enjoyed being along the day we swamped, as frankly, I've never been quite so fast in a Sail Boat. She was out of the water completely back to the mast and the leeward bow wave was up at least a foot and a half higher than the gunnel and not hitting the water until passing the transom of the boat. I'd estimate we were doing an easy 20 knot and was it hairy!

Why don't you and "Bett" see if you can't get down this way and take it easy for a while?

FULTON BAG & COTTON MILLS

MANUFACTURERS OF  
BAGS, BURLAPS, TENTS & TARPAULINS

Mr. E. K. Hine

Page Two

May 26, 1954

ATLANTA 1, GA.

May 26, 1954  
AIP - Mail

Mr. E. K. Hine  
Mountain Avenue  
North Caldwell, New Jersey

Mike and I both send our very best wishes and please let us know what you decide to do on the coasters.

Thanks again for your wonderful hospitality.

Sincerely,

*Bill*  
W. R. McKelvy

WRM/hwk

Please thank Betty very much for sending down my socks and tie. It seems as though every time I step at your domicile