A stove is rarely an object of art, and even more rarely deserving of a place in a great museum. But when one is found that was obviously designed by a gifted sculptor, and is traceable to a rococo castle in Bavaria, where that style reached a spectacular culmination, then it is worthy of rather special attention.

One such stove is in the present exhibition of recent accessions. In form a rococo obelisk, its white faience sides are modeled in relief with gilded trophies suspended from bowknotted ribbons. The pyramidal top is crested with a vase-shaped finial from which emerge in bold asymmetry a pair of wings and tufts of clouds. At each angle of the bombé base appears a sinuous dragon, clasping in its jaws the free end of a flower garland. Borders of C-scrolls and diamond lacings are supplemented by jeweled acanthus leaves. The structure rises impressively above its cast-iron fuel chamber to a height of nine feet eight inches.

Beneath the monumental splendor of our stove there lies an intriguing problem for the art historian. The only definite information that came with the stove indicated that it had been removed from the audience chamber of the Seehof Castle near Bamberg in Bavaria. Records at the castle show that an “animal stove” had been delivered there in 1736. This situation seems to call for clarification, however, both in terms of the dating and the prevailing local style. One cannot escape the impression that our stove might have been made for another installation, and at a later date.

Style, which sums up the story of an object of art, has three faces individually expressive of the geographic origin, the age, and the authorship of the work. Because there is about this stove a
great eloquence of style, to unmask these faces and fit the object into each of these categories poses a challenge. The account that follows is largely based on preliminary studies made in Munich, at the Museum's request, by Arno Schönberger, Hauptkonservator of the Bavarian National Museum. We wish to express to Dr. Schönberger our sincere appreciation.

The first clue pointing to the Bamberg area as the one-time home of our stove is a group of photographs published by J. M. Ritz in 1925, showing this stove (or one identical with it) installed in the audience chamber of the Seehof Castle. Yet the stove did not give an impression of being comfortably related to these surroundings. It was not installed so that its broad sides, which bear the principal ornament, were equally prominent; and it appeared to be a little out of keeping, stylistically, with the setting.

Happily, it can be confirmed through the writings of M. Kämpf that in the park of Seehof the main gallery of a garden house was being outfitted between 1761 and 1763. The structure, begun in 1752 and demolished in 1867, bore the name of Frankenstein Castle. As it was intended solely for recreation, its “audience chamber” was designed in a sprightly rococo mood employing frescoes and plaster ornament heightened in gold. It is reasonable to assume that in such richly furnished quarters a stove specifically designed to conform with the décor would have been installed at that time. Indeed, there is some evidence that a stove did stand there, since Kämpf tells that on September 10, 1762 a young potter from Hollfeld brought to the count-bishop “a little model of a stove in the audience chamber of the garden house.” From this wording one would gather that the miniature was fashioned after a stove already existing there, which in all probability was the one now at the Museum, although it is possible that the miniature may have been a preliminary scale model.

We might add to the findings of Dr. Schönberger that our stove has about it certain elements relating it to the stoves of northern Germany. Most conspicuous among these are the obelisk form, the chamfered corner angles filled with geometric

*The Frankenstein Castle stove, probably German, third quarter of the XVIII century*  Dick Fund, 1959
ornament, and the use of a cast-iron firebox. Bavarian stoves of the period, while incorporating dragons, wings, cloud forms, and C-scrolls, tend to employ these motifs with a less unified result, and they also favor bases of faience rather than iron. How, then, can the seemingly northern characteristics of our example be reconciled with the Bavarian associations claimed for it?

Before exploring this problem it might be well to emphasize that our stove, in terms of its plastic qualities, is the product of a sculptor, not a potter. As a sophisticated sculptural entity it seems to bear the impress not of a locally trained "young potter from Hollfeld," but rather the hand of a master of architectural ornament. And on the basis of composition and personal style one must discount the local sculptor Martin Mutschele, or even Ferdinand Deitz, who worked at Seehof from 1760 to 1773. The nearest parallel, sculpturally, is to be found in the rococo style associated with the palaces of Prussia.

Some light is thrown on the problem in an obscure work on Bamberg literature and art by Heinrich Joachim Jäck, who records that an outstanding rococo sculptor, Johann August Nahl, worked for an extended time after 1760 at Seehof Castle. Nahl in his earlier years had been Director of Ornament of royal buildings and castles at Berlin, and is known for his brilliant work at Charlottenburg and Potsdam. In 1755 he went farther afield in Prussia, to work on the Schloss Wilhelmsthal in Kassel, but his commissions petered out during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). Apparently he filled in part of these years at Seehof Castle, where he could easily have been requested to provide a design for an ornamental stove. An illustrated monograph on Nahl, by Friedrich Bleibaum, offers enough comparative material to support an attribution to this accomplished sculptor on stylistic grounds.

Granting the acceptability of the preceding, the only detail left unexplained is that of the stove's having been photographed at Seehof. Kämpf in the reference previously cited tells of the transferal of furnishings from Frankenstein to Seehof Castle when in 1867 the former was razed. In the light of this it would appear almost certain that the stove also was removed from its original installation at Frankenstein to a secondary one at Seehof.

**Documentation**

**INSTALLATION AT SEEHOF CASTLE**


**ASSOCIATIONS WITH FRANKENSTEIN CASTLE**

M. Kämpf, "Das fürstbischofliche Schloss Seehof bei Bamberg," Selbstverlag des Historischen Vereins, p. 201, ref. 90, also p. 228, ref. 141, Bamberg, 1956.

**ATTRIBUTION TO JOHANN AUGUST NAHL**
