

## **The elusive Griswold #10 grooved handle small trademark skillet**

### **Authentication by Greg Stahl**

There are rare items and one of a kind items and sometimes items that appeared in Griswold MFG Co old catalogs but have not been observed in person. Every once in awhile these "ghosts" do appear. For example, the Griswold #28 bread pan showed up at a local auction, bought for under \$25, photographed by David Smith and then went to auction on eBay and brought over \$20,000. Then a second one appeared shortly after that, but with different markings.

The elusive #10 Griswold grooved handle skillet with the small trademark has been seen in person only a handful of times. Once at a public flea market in the Carolinas and the person thought it was a fake, left it and then went back to buy it, only to find it was already sold. Another was sold in Pennsylvania a few years ago, but the seller does not remember who bought it. Yet another one was shown to Larry O'Neil in Washington state years ago, but it was a faked version of the skillet (thus a repro/fake). So, does that mean that one #10 skillet has made the rounds from coast to coast or are there more than one. At this point, I can say that there are most definitely two #10 grooved handle skillets, one fake and one real as this report will attempt to explain.

In 2001, David Smith was contacted by Jerome Cooper and submitted a picture of a #10 grooved handle skillet. David Smith published the picture in his Kettles 'N Cookware (Volume 10, Issue 3 May/June 2001; page 34) with the caption, "Jerome Cooper submitted this photograph of a Griswold No. 10 Grooved Handled Skillet - proof positive that this piece does exist. How is this to keep you hunting?". Jerome Cooper was a high school guidance counselor/teacher and did not have a lot of money. He wanted to collect the rarer pieces, but could not afford them even in the 1980-2000's when he was actively building his collection. Mr. Cooper passed away recently and left his collection to his son, Shane. Shane has been liquidating the collection on eBay to offset the cost of college for his son. Shane started the auction at 99 cents, as Shane knew nothing of the potential value of this skillet. Of course with social media, word spread fast and several unethical people started telling people that this was an obvious fake, only to poison the auction and not even allow the URL to be posted. Why? Why not discuss the item or better yet look and research the item? Several of these naysayers then posted to others that they wanted the skillet and bid on it hoping to get it for a reasonable price.

How can one know if this is a real or 'faked' skillet? The best way is to hold the skillet in hand, look at it, compare it to other Griswold grooved handled skillets and other early/late handled #10 Griswold skillets. Well I was not going to fly to Colorado, since I'm not collecting anymore, but as a scientist, I wanted to see if I could deduce if this was real or not. I'm pretty good at figuring things out and even without holding or seeing the items in person. I was the first to find the #17 Griswold oval skillet that was discussed on another group's forum where everyone said it was a #15 oval skillet. Now two of these #17 Griswold oval skillets are known to exist in collections.

Shane Cooper, the eBay sell, contacted me and asked me to help him either authenticate the skillet or say it was a 'fake'. Shane sent more pictures of the #10 than those present on the eBay auction site. I asked him to weigh it and also to measure the spout to spout diameter, as well as the diameter of the outer walls. In my opinion, there are two ways to 'forge/fake' a skillet. One could recast a skillet or use another #10 and make your own grooved handle out of the early or late handle skillets by milling the handle.

**RECAST?** First, I noticed that the Grooved #10 skillet has well defined milling on the side walls of the cooking surface (see Figure 1). This was obviously done at a foundry on the grinding wheels as I have seen them used at the Wagner Ware foundry back in 2003 when the Wagner and Griswold Society (WAGS) toured the foundry. These milling marks are not seen in recast skillets as no one has the means to replicate these milling marks for a single pan. Also, a recast usually rough texture, has lettering that is



Figure 1.



Figure 2.

faint or irregular and the overall size is smaller because cast iron shrinks by 1/8 inch per foot as the metal cools. The lettering on the skillet is great and appropriate for Griswold and the texture of the skillet is like other Griswold small trademark skillets as far as quality. The grooved handled skillet is 12 11/16 inches from outside spout to outside spout and 11 3/4" from outside wall to outside wall (Figure 2). A late or early handle small trademark #10 skillet measures 12 3/4" (spout to spout) and 11 3/4" (wall to wall). The casting on the grooved handle skillet is fine, the lettering is fine, there are well defined milling marks on the side walls of the cooking surface and the measurements of the skillet are similar to

the early and late handle small trademark #10 Griswold skillets. Thus, it is unlikely that this grooved handle skillet is the result of a recast from another #10 Griswold skillet.

**Repurposed early or late handled skillet?** It is very possible that someone would take the time to make a grooved handle skillet from an early or late handle small trademark #10 Griswold skillet. It is unlikely



Figure 3. Grooved handle is more similar to late handle

that the early handle skillet could be used for two main reasons. First, the opening of the handle is not correct for converting an early handle skillet into a grooved handle skillet. If you were going to mill out the handle, there is more work to do with the early handle as the opening is not similar to the grooved handle. As shown in Figure 3, the rounded opening and length of the opening on the grooved handle is more similar to the late handle. One may suggest, even argue, that this roundness could be milled with a dremel or other machining device. However, there are several factors that suggest that this is an impossible task. First, the weight of the grooved handle #10 skillet is 5.2 pounds. The average weight (+/- standard deviation of 11 skillets) of an early handle Griswold #10 skillet is 5.12 +/- 0.23 pounds. The range of weights were from 4.95 to 5.53 pounds. Since the grooved handle skillet weighs 5.2 pounds, 8 out of 11 skillets that were weighed could not be used, as they weigh 5.2 pounds or less. The remaining three skillets weighed 5.3, 5.36 and 5.53 pounds I would argue that the amount of material to be removed from the early skillet handle would not be conducive to use these light early handled skillets. Second, the casting of the grooved handle is almost perfectly smooth from the handle to the connection to the skillet wall. Third, the patina matches the patina of the rest of the skillet. I have seen many skillets that have cleaned with very abrasive materials (sand blasting, sandpaper, wire brush, etc.) and you can never match the patina. The grooved handle skillet was found in 2001 and remained in the Cooper collection for the last 17 years and if you look at the picture of the skillet in KNC, the patina matches the patina all over the skillet, as it does in the 2018 pictures.

So that leaves us using a late handle skillet as the model to make a grooved handle skillet. Again, I make the argument that the patina is too perfect to have had that much material removed to make it from a late handle skillet, but let me go even further and present data as well. The average weight (+/- standard deviation of 7 skillets) of a late handle Griswold #10 skillet is 5.59 +/- 0.31 pounds. The range of weights were from 5.3 to 6.01 pounds). Out of these 7 skillets, three could not be used to make the grooved handle, as they weighed in at 5.23, 5.3 and 5.3 pounds. The four other skillets weighed 5.65, 5.8, 5.85 and 6.01 pounds. Thus, only 4 out of 7 skillets could possibly be used, but again for the reasons mentioned for the early handle skillet, it is highly unlikely because of the clean casting and patina. Further, if one did dremel or machine out the handle, why would you take the time to machine in the small casting flaw that can be observed in the groove (Figure 4)? Even this close up picture shows that the cast iron was poured into this groove and not machined.



Figure 4. Smooth handle and casting flaw in grooved handle

**Is it even possible?** Let's imagine that you wanted to take a late handle skillet and machine it to make a grooved handle. Look at the amount of work that would have to be done. After doing all of this work to make this skillet, why would you sell it at a flea market for pennies on the dollar considering the hours you put into making it. The entire length of the handle must be reworked, as well as the connection to the base. Remember this machining would have been done prior to



Figure 5. Differences in late vs grooved handle.

2001, as this grooved handle skillet was bought at a flea market. You can't fake that patina and your hand work must be PERFECT. Even the style of the handle from the late handle to the grooved is slightly different when you put the different #10 handle styles side by side (Figures 3 and 5).

**Conclusion.** I believe this #10 grooved handle skillet to be the real deal. Since we know there is at least one fake out there, the buyers need to be certain before they purchase. Based on all the data that I have collected with the help of others, I find this skillet to be 100% real, and likely the only one known to date, a real #10 Griswold grooved handle skillet and first shown to the collecting world in 2001!

**Where are the others?** I am of the opinion when Griswold made these skillets they lost too many during production in the very first run. Remember the life of a skillet depends on how they are processed. The skillets come out of the sand molds, they are placed in a machine to remove excess sand and then are tumbled with ball bearings to remove as much slag and sand as possible before they are then handled by the worker to grind off slag and mill the inside cooking surface. Time is money and I believe the fragile nature of the grooved handle made the production run less than fiscally feasible. When talking with LODGE employees on the production line during a WAGS tour in 2005 and 2015, they have to be aware of damaged items that they make, as this affects profits. Remember Griswold skillets did not use automated machines to pack the sand and the iron was hand poured. They could not afford to lose many items following the pour. I believe the size of the #10 skillet was not conducive for use with a grooved handle.

What a find!! Happy Hunting!!

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