



The Grave of Lafayette.

WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL MAGAZINE

Vol. 8; No. 4

OCTOBER, 1925

Price 75 Cents

VISIT OF LAFAYETTE TO THE OLD GLASS WORKS OF BAKEWELL, PEARS AND CO.

To which is added a brief account of the early history of the first successful flint glass factory in the United States.*

By Thomas Clinton Pears, Jr.

Perhaps most of you are familiar with the sketch of Pittsburgh in 1817, made by Mrs. E. C. Gibson while on her honeymoon. A little village of less than 7,000 inhabitants occupies the triangle formed by the rivers and the hills. Above the modest dwellings tower the spires of the churches and the market-house, while in the right background, just before you come to the river's bend, rises a single tall chimney, from which ascends a cloud of smoke. This is the old Glass Works of Bakewell, Pears and Co., or Bakewell, Page and Bakewell, as it was known when the Marquis de Lafayette came to town.

It was during the day following the public reception that Lafayette was shown through the famous old factory. We are indebted for the account to Levasseur, his secretary and the historian of the voyage:

"After having devoted the day of his arrival to public ceremonies, the General wished to employ a part of the next day in visiting some of the ingenious establishments which constitute the glory and prosperity of that manufacturing city, which, for the variety and excellence of its products deserves to be compared to our own Saint-Etienne or to Manchester in England.

* Paper read before the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, May 26, 1925.

THE WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL MAGAZINE is published quarterly, in January, April, July and October, by the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, Bigelow Boulevard and Parkman Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pa. It is mailed free to all members of the Society. Members and others may obtain additional copies at 75 cents each. To public libraries, universities, colleges, historical and other similar societies the annual subscription rate is \$2.00. The annual dues of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania are \$3.00, and should be sent to John E. Potter, Treasurer, Fourth Avenue and Grant Street, Pittsburgh, Pa.

"He was struck by the excellence and perfection of the processes employed in the various workshops which he examined; but that which interested him above all was the manufacture of glass, some patterns of which were presented to him, that, for their clearness and transparency might have been admired even by the side of the glass of Baccarat."

These patterns consisted of two beautiful vases of cut glass, on one of which, engraved in a medallion, is shown a view of the chateau at La Grange, the salon of which they were to adorn, and on the other, the American eagle, likewise in a medallion.

These vases were loaned by a grand daughter of Lafayette to the French Commission and exhibited at the World's Fair at Chicago in 1893.

In the Carnegie Library in Allegheny there is a facsimile of the letter of thanks from the Marquis de Lafayette, a photostat of which I have with me this evening. It is written in English, and reads as follows:

"Pittsburgh, May 31, 1825

Messrs. Bakewell, Page and Bakewell
Gentlemen

The patriotic gratification I have felt at the sight of your beautiful manufacture is still enhanced by the friendly reception I have met from you and by the most acceptable present you are pleased to offer me. Accept my affectionate thanks, good wishes and regards.

Lafayette."

If we would have a proper appreciation of how remarkable it was that a Pittsburgh factory in those early days should be able to produce work of such artistic merit as to challenge comparison with the famous glass of Baccarat, (and should have manufactured articles worthy of exhibition at the World's Fair,) it will be necessary to review briefly the relation of this firm to the historic development of the glass industry in the United States.

For well over a century Pittsburgh has been noted as the centre of the American glass industry. O'Hara's Glass Works founded in 1797, was the first glass factory west of the Allegheny Mountains. Its product was window glass

only. Denny & Beelen, established in 1800, failed two years later. The third Pittsburgh glass house was 'Bakewell, Pears and Co.', or 'Bakewell and Ensell,' as it was first known. It was founded in the year 1808, and enjoys the distinction of being the first successful flint-glass factory in the United States. It continued in uninterrupted operation for nearly three-quarters of a century, or until the year 1882.

It was originally located at the foot of Grant Street on the bank of the Monongahela River. During the great fire of 1845 the works were burned down, but were immediately rebuilt, and continued in that location until the year 1854, when they were removed to the South Side. Here they occupied a site bounded by Eighth, Bingham and Ninth Streets and the bank of the river. The original site is now occupied as part of the B. & O. R. R. depot.

Glass is a substance resulting from the fusion of a combination of silica with various bases, and its quality depends on the nature and amount of the basic material united with the silica. The cheapest glass is that used for bottles, in which the basic material is chiefly lime. Window glass usually contains both soda and lime. But in glass which is to be cut and polished, where beauty is of prime importance, the base is chiefly oxide of lead. This last is commonly known as crystal or flint glass, the name 'flint' being derived from the English process of obtaining their silica from flint. It was from this glass, containing a large percentage of lead, that all the finer articles of tableware, etc., were made.

As to the claim that this firm first successfully manufactured flint glass in America, those of you who are familiar with the subject will at once recall the names of 'Baron' Stigel and Caspar Wistar. But these were colonial enterprises, which did not outlast the War of the Revolution, Stiegel's works failing in 1774 after a duration of less than ten years, and Wistar's in 1780. While justly celebrated for the excellent quality of their product as well as for the artistry of their craftsmanship, they had no successors, and at the opening of the 19th Century, flint glass had not yet begun to be successfully manufactured.

Competent authorities date the rise of the modern in-

dustry from the foundation of Bakewell's works in 1808, and a fairly comprehensive study of the history of the early glass industry leads me to accept the conclusion of the Weeks' Report on Glass, in the Census of 1880,—an exhaustive study of the whole subject—that, "There can be no doubt that Mr. Bakewell is entitled to the honor of erecting and operating the first successful flint glass house in the United States."

It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the serious problems which confronted Mr. Benjamin Bakewell, the founder of the business, which he, in common with all those early glass-makers had to solve, before glass-making could become a profitable industry. "At length," however, as Deming Jarvis says, in his still authoritative *Reminiscences*, "Mr. Bakewell's arduous and untiring labor was crowned with success—and the flint-glass manufacture was firmly established at Pittsburgh. From this first establishment there originated in a few years, many other glass-works.—We may well consider Mr. Bakewell as the father of the flint-glass business in this country for he commenced the work in 1808, and by untiring efforts and industry brought it to a successful issue." And then he adds, "For the skill, judgment, labor and perseverance devoted by him to the progress of the art, he truly merits the 'Artium Magister' so often bestowed on those least worthy of its dignity and honor."

If any further proof were needed, the following it seems to me would be conclusive, this being the only reference to flint glass in the Report on Manufactures to the House of Representatives in the year 1810, by Mr. Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury: "Two works, employing together six glass-blowers, have lately been erected at Pittsburgh, and make decanters, tumblers, and every description of flint-glass of a superior quality."

Boucher in *Century and a Half of Pittsburgh and her People*, says of Bakewell's, that it "became the largest and most noted works in the city, for they manufactured a higher grade of work than had been attempted before. Their specialty was flint glass, and they were the first to manufacture cut glass and did all kinds of ornamenting and engraving in glass work. They sold their product in almost

all parts of the world, but particularly in the West and in Mexico."

A reference in Cramer's *Navigator* for 1813 is not without interest here, as this is the date assigned by Deming Jarvis for the beginning of flint glass manufacture in the East. Referring to Bakewell's, the statement is made that "glass cutting is likewise executed in this place not inferior to the best cut-glass in Europe."

Almost all of the 'Early Travels' refer to this concern in their description of Pittsburgh, and a few examples many not be considered out of place.

"Four glass factories, two for flint, and two for green, are very extensive; and the productions of the former for elegance of workmanship, are scarcely surpassed by European manufacture."

"Mr. Bakewell's glass works are admirable; he has excellent artists, both French and English. His cut glass equals the best I have seen in England."

These two references are respectively from Thomas's *Travel through the Western Country in 1816*, and Fordham's *Personal Narrative, Visit to Pittsburgh in 1817*, while in Fearon's *Sketches of America*, 1818, occurs the following:

"Some of the----manufacturers (of Pittsburgh) may be denominated first-rate. This remark applies particularly to the nail, steam engine (high pressure) and glass establishments. I was astonished to witness such perfection on this side of the Atlantic, and especially in that part of America which a New Yorker supposes to be at the farther end of the world. At Messrs. Page and Bakewell's glass warehouse I saw chandeliers and numerous articles of a very splendid description; among the latter was a pair of decanters, cut from a London pattern, the price of which will be eight guineas. It is well to bear in mind that the demand for these articles of elegant luxury lies in the Western States; the inhabitants of Eastern America being still importers from the 'Old Country.' "

This same note of astonishment persists in the account of Thomas Nutall, quoted in the *Journal of Western Travels*, 1818: "The day after my arrival I went through the flint-glass works of Mr. Bakewell, and was surprised to see the

beauty of this manufacture, in the interior of the United States, in which the expensive decorations of cutting and engraving (amidst every discouragement incident to a want of taste and wealth) were carried to such perfection. The productions of this manufacture find their way to New Orleans, and even to some of the islands of the West Indies. The president, Monroe, as a liberal encourager of domestic manufacture, had on his visit to those works given orders for a service of glass, which might indeed be exhibited as a superb specimen of this elegant art."

A further echo is found in Darby's *Emigrants' Guide* for the same year (1818): "Perhaps of all the wonders of Pittsburgh, the greatest is the glass factories. About twenty years have elapsed since the first flint-glass house was erected in that town, and at this moment every kind of glass, from a porter bottle or window pane, to the most elegant cut crystal glass are now manufactured, at least, to the amount of 200,000 dollars annually."

In fact there seems to be plenty of evidence to support the statement in Wilson's *History of Pittsburgh*, concerning this establishment, that "so excellent was the article produced that the manufacture attained a fame, not only in all parts of the United States, but in Mexico and in many parts of Europe. No finer product could be found anywhere. If a stranger of prominence visited Pittsburgh, he was taken with certainty to Bakewell's glass house."

As an illustration of this last statement, permit me to quote from two letters in my possession, written by Benjamin Bakewell, the first dated July 6th, 1825, and the second August 6th of the same year:

"We expect Clinton and Clay here tomorrow or next day, from the state of Ohio, where they have been to commence a canal from the lakes to the Ohio."

"De Witt Clinton was here and ordered some glass. We had a very respectable company to dine with him, and I think stand fair for Pennsylvania, Jersey and York to start with in 1829. Thomas has sent you a Clinton tumbler."

It was in this same year, 1825, that they won the silver medal of the Franklin Institute for the best specimen of cut glass, in a competition including the whole United States, as it was in this same year, of course, that the incident occurred which is the occasion of the present paper.

Among the many visitors to the Glass House, however, we must not forget that of the Indians, of which Deming Jarvis speaks in his *Reminiscences*:

"One of the amusing incidents," he writes, "connected with the manufacture occurred when General Clark (then Governor of Missouri) took a party of Osage Chiefs to Washington. On their way they visited Bakewell's Glass-Works, and their attention was greatly excited; they watched with great curiosity the process of making various articles, and the mode of affixing the handle to a glass pitcher quite disturbed the equanimity of the head chief, who, after shaking hands with the workmen, said, through the interpreter, 'That man must have had some intercourse with the Great Spirit.' "

In Lyfords' *Western Address Directory* of 1837, there appears a letter from the firm of Bakewells and Co., in reply to a communication, asking for some information of their 'very respectable house---in reference to the operations of their establishment.' The letter is dated, Pittsburgh, 17 December 1836, and is in part as follows:

"Sir—In conformity with your request for some information respecting the rise and progress of our Establishment, for the manufacture of Flint-Glass, we would briefly observe that it is the oldest of the kind now extant in the United States. That at its commencement we had the proper materials to discover—workmen in every branch to seek or make; and many other difficulties, (necessarily attendant upon a new business) to encounter, which nothing but the most persevering industry could overcome.

"We have pursued the business in this city for nearly thirty years—have had the honor of making sets of glass for two presidents of the United States—of making a set of splendid vases of cut glass to adorn the salon of General Le Fayette, at La Grange—of having received the silver medal, awarded by the Franklin Institute, for the best specimen of cut glass—and, above all, of possessing, as we flatter ourselves, the confidence of our numerous western friends, for punctuality and fidelity in the execution of their orders, to a degree not exceeded by any others. Believing that from the length of time our establishment has been known, further particulars are unnecessary.

We remain, sirs, yours respectfully, etc."

I have long been curious to know more concerning the sets of glass made for the 'two Presidents', and recently my curiosity has been satisfied. In the *Pittsburgh Mercury* for November 10, 1818, under the caption 'President's Glass', is to be found this extremely full and interesting description:

"During a visit a few evenings ago to the manufactory of Messrs. Bakewells' and Page, we were much gratified by a sight of the splendid equipage of glass, intended for Mr. Munroe's sideboard. It consists of a full set of Decanters, Wine Glasses and Tumblers of various sizes and different models, exhibiting a brilliant specimen of double flint, engraved and cut by Jardelle. This able artist has displayed his best manner, and the arms of the United States on each piece have a fine effect. The glass itself must either have been selected with great care, or the spirited proprietors must have made considerable progress in their art, for we have seldom seen any samples so perfectly pellucid and free from tinct. Upon the whole we think the present service equal, if not superior to the elegant Decanters presented to the President when he passed through Pittsburgh last year.

"It affords us a most sensible gratification that the patriotic liberality of Mr. Munroe will give us the opportunity of being known to the world, as proficient in some of the most delicate branches of manufactures; as regards cloth, iron ware, and the common production of glass, we consider our reputation as long established; we may now calculate upon increasing this reputation by the addition of the branch of chrystall glass, since such a man as James Munroe looks to Pittsburgh for this article. We cannot forbear congratulating Messrs. Bakewell & Page on this occasion; their meritorious struggles are at length crowned with partial success; may the policy to be adopted by our government be such as, at no very distant day, to insure them that reward, which their urbanity, enterprise and industry merit, and may the 'glass that sparkles' on the President's 'board' operate as a talisman on our representatives, to stimulate them to unremitting exertions in favor of manufactures."

It is needless to remark that this was an early Pittsburgh plea in favor of the tariff.

The other President to whom reference has been made was none other than the redoubtable Andrew Jackson, and again we have recourse to the columns of the *Pittsburgh Mercury*, this time under date of the year 1832.

"President Jackson has ordered from Bakewell, Page and Bakewell of the city of Pittsburgh, a set of glass for his own use. It consists of large and splendid bowls, with and without stands, celery glasses, pitchers, quart and pint decanters, tumblers, wine and champagne glasses, salts, etc., all executed in the very best style of workmanship. The glass is as splendid as crystal, and the beautiful cuttings give a brilliancy of effect not easily described. We understand the order is valued at about \$1,500."

It may be remarked in passing that it is evident that these Presidents flourished in the days before the 18th Amendment.

* * * * *

I have brought you only a few extracts from a mass of material which I have collected with regard to this famous old concern, and I have purposely confined myself to the early stages of its history. Its later history was, however, no less remarkable. When John Palmer Pears died, in 1874, having been for many years the Senior Member of the firm, the resolutions of respect adopted at a meeting of the Pittsburgh Branch of the National Association of Glass Manufacturers, referred to him as their 'fellow craftsman' President of the National Association of Glass Manufacturers, and the oldest person in this country engaged in the business.' My own father is the last surviving member of the firm.

In conclusion, permit me to indulge the hope that the present celebration of Lafayette's visit to Pittsburgh, has furnished a proper occasion for this extended notice of the old Glass Works, the first successful manufactory of flint-glass in this country, and which B. G. Bakewell has described as 'a great institution in its time, but now numbered among the things of a forgotten past.'