

FIRST PERMANENT GLASS COLLECTION FOR PITTSBURGH

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Many of us who have not known lobbyists hold instinctive prejudices against them. Had we sat in the gallery of the House of Representatives in April, 1820, and listened to Henry Baldwin, of Pittsburgh, we should have felt differently. Thrills of pride and patriotic fervor would have chased themselves up and down our spines at Baldwin's ringing words:

This has been called a Pittsburg, a cut-glass bill, local, partial in its operations; and I have been charged with framing it from interested motives. Gentlemen had better be cautious how they use the word Pittsburg as a name of reproach; it may be like the term Whig—one of pride, and not of disgrace. I tell the House frankly, that I have not lost sight of the interest of Pittsburg, and would never perjure myself if I had; but the charges shall be met plainly, and if you are not convinced that the interests of that place are identified with the nation; that cut glass can be defended on national grounds, then I agree that Pittsburg, its Representative, its favorite manufacture, and the tariff, may go together. I will rest the whole bill on this item, and freely admit that the increase of duty on glass, plain, not cut, is among the greatest proposed. In selecting articles worthy of national protection, none are more eminently deserving of it than those, the raw materials of which are of no value for exportation; the conversion of which into articles for use, produces something out of nothing—turns into manufactures of the greatest value and beauty the worthless produce of the earth—furnishes a market for the productions of the farmer—gives employment not only to laboring men, but boys who would otherwise contract habits of idleness and vice. . . . Will gentlemen tell me who has profited by the change—the farmer, the laborer, our country, or the foreign manufacturer?

It is of less importance that Henry Baldwin was promoting the high protective tariffs advocated by Henry Clay. He was voicing a need business men in Pittsburgh felt and, though he did not know it, was bulwarking a future industry for this area.

In the last few years writers on Pittsburgh glass have quoted other comments on our glass: Lafayette in 1825, comparing it favorably with Baccarat; Mrs. Anne Royall's in 1829, "The beautiful white flint of Messrs. Bakewell, Page & Bakewell is sold from Maine to New Orleans." But somehow we missed a rapier thrust from Frances Trollope in *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, 1832, about Wheeling glass.

"The cutting was very good, though by no means equal to what we see in daily use in London; but the chief inferiority is in the material, which is never altogether free from colour. I had observed

this also in the glass of the Pittsburg manufactory, the labour bestowed on it always appearing greater than the glass deserved. They told us also, that they were rapidly improving in the art, and I have no doubt that this was true."

Had Mrs. Trollope lived long enough she would have found Allegheny County leading the United States in production, and Pittsburgh vying in quality with the best anywhere.

All this nineteenth-century glass was dramatized by Carnegie Museum in the comprehensive and effective show of 1949-50. Since that time, Pittsburgh has taken its place beside other great names in early American glass, and examples have become highly desirable collector's items. Soon after, the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, under the leadership of Charles A. McClintock, decided to establish a permanent collection of Midwestern glass. That collection has now come of age.

Of necessity it has followed lines laid down by the Carnegie show. One could take the Carnegie booklet, *Early Glass of the Pittsburgh District*, published in connection with that exhibit, and see in microcosm this larger exhibition—sometimes even to identical pieces. The case of bottle glass (unpurified silica—green and brown) at the Historical Society mirrors well the early products, bottle and window glass. A visitor can understand how glassmakers made pieces to take home for use, such as the bowls, and ornaments, or whimsies such as the tiny brown hat with a ball cover. The green whiskey glass on display, a family piece from one of Gallatin's workmen at New Geneva, was presented by President Paul Stewart, of Waynesburg College.

In the cut-glass case, the small but handsome plate by Bakewell, and the magnificent Mulvaney and Ledlie amethyst bowl are rarities. The betrothal tumblers, engraved at the Robinson factory in 1835, justify everything commendatory that has been said about Pittsburgh engraving and cutting. They were blown by James Lee, grandfather of Lily Lee Nixon, by whom they are loaned. A man in Clinton, Wisconsin, reading an article on Pittsburgh glass six years ago in the magazine *Antiques*, wrote the editor that he had a Bakewell greyhound tumbler like the one described by Anne Royall on her visit to the factory about 1828. Later he got in touch with Henry K. Siebeneck, of the Historical Society, who bought the glass and presented it.

Two funds at the Historical Society—the Anna Moody Browne Fund, a memorial to David L. Browne (1852-1924), and the Brendel

Fund, a memorial to Violet Swem Brendel—gave opportunities to acquire outstanding pieces. The freeblown, dark-amber pitcher, typical of Pittsburgh and Ohio, embodies charm of color and form, and the solidity and strength of American pioneers. Three notable flasks express the social and political backgrounds of our district and tell of the brisk trade in liquor: an early scroll flask marked "B.P. and B." (Bakewell, Page and Bakewell); the rare General Washington, eagle variant; and the Masonic Arch and Frigate (Franklin).

Last spring, when the Corning Museum was preparing for its summer exhibition of lacy glass, it borrowed from the Historical Society the oval vegetable dish with the individualized cap ring of concave circles separated by ornamented points. The knowledge of origins and patterns of lacy glass is still hazy, but we are certain that the Midwest rivaled Sandwich and Baccarat. The vegetable dish, one of only two known, typifies Pittsburgh design and taste: shells and circles, Gothic arch, thistle and leaf, a stylized ornament like fleur-de-lys or anthemion. Most characteristic are the dots or table rests, which support many Midwestern lacy pieces.

Less showy but just as rare, in the lacy group, is a blown paneled sugar bowl with a typical hairpin lacy base of Western manufacture. The only other known two like it reside at Corning and Winterthur museums. Collectors know how hard it is to find lacy in color, but here the Wheeling three-heart plate glows in green. In the lacy technique Pittsburgh produced cup plates with the best of them: those little glass plates on which teacups rested while genteel ladies cooled their tea in saucers. R. B. Curling & Sons' Fort Pitt eagle should be familiar to every ardent historian. One with characteristically Midwestern cinquefoil was made in 1833 by a friend of Henry Creighton and Jean McPherson to celebrate their marriage. By such historical threads glass is often tied to localities and factories.

Other appealing cases are the Bakewell Thumb Print and the Duncan Three Face. Imagine modeling a girl for a glass pattern, and then frosting the whole design—a good example of the naturalistic tendencies of Pittsburgh manufacturers, and the competitive attempt to gain novelty. The girl involved was Elizabeth Blair, of Steubenville, Ohio; the designer, Ernest Miller, of Washington, Pennsylvania, her fiancé; and the exhibit for which the piece was intended was the Phila-

delphia Centennial of 1876.

Equally popular, probably because it epitomizes an era, is the so-called River Boat glass—heavy, brilliant, durable, dressy. As we look at cruets, decanters, and compotes, we can almost imagine we are on board an Ohio River craft or in an early tavern. A handsome rarity in the case is the domed sugar bowl with the galleried rim.

Also typical of Pittsburgh glassmaking and sheer pleasure therein is the colorful collection of paper weights and cased glass exhibited at the Historical Society. The pink-and-white horn ornaments approach a Dali-like creation. All the gay colors and unexpected striations link the novelty art period of the 80s and 90s with contemporary use of color. The best executed piece—the green, rose, blue, and white pitcher—came to us from California because a collector there happened to read the booklet of the Carnegie Institute exhibition. Another notable specimen of cased glass is the yellow and opaque white compote in the Browne grouping.

The manufacturing technique of cased glass is simple: a bubble or gather of one color is expanded against a metal mold; then a lining of the second color is blown into the first bubble. The union is removed from the metal shell, reheated to melt them together. Often the two-colored article was coated with clear, by simple dipping. The striations, lines of other color, are applied when hot, fused and swirled according to the glassblower's will. The even loops such as are found on the pitcher are made by a tool like a shortened hook, pulled across at even spaces.

Belonging to this same period are the Locke pitchers, decorated and signed. Joseph Locke, originally with the New England Glass Co., in Cambridge, spent his last years working in Pittsburgh as independent engraver and consultant. During his business career he registered twenty patents for chemical formulas, for manufacturing devices and methods, and used over a hundred designs in decorating glass. Today his signed, engraved specimens are in great demand.

With such characteristic examples of Pittsburgh glass craftsmanship on display, it was quite logical that there also be an attempt to represent other areas of American glassmaking. A gift from Michael L. Benedum in memory of his wife, Sarah Lantz Benedum, enabled the Glass Committee to complement the permanent collection with ex-

amples of American glassmaking from other areas beside the Midwest. Pieces in this case are both collectors' and museums' dreams. They even take us to nearly all the important localities of early American glass-making:

From the Stiegel factory, a cobalt blue diamond sugar bowl and a perfume bottle in amethyst, with ogivals above flutes, show how delicate and vivid this glassmaker's art could be.

From Ohio, the ten-diamond, patternmolded amber bottle from Zanesville, and the honey-colored free-blown pan well exemplify early techniques.

The clear, broken-swirled, flip glass is rarely found outside our Midwest district.

From New York State the two-quart green pitcher in lily-pad design carries the background of the New Jersey blowers.

The looped smaller pitcher, bluish-aquamarine, and the stunning amber case with white loopings, a gadrooned bowl and heavy stem, take us down Jersey-way.

The small, deep-blue, three-mold, blown creamer from the Sandwich factory reminds us of American ingenuity in blowing glass of a geometric pattern to compete against foreign cut.

From Connecticut, a dark-green Pitkin flask looks well, balanced against its Midwestern counterpart.

The clear paneled pitcher and the blown sugar bowl with the strong engraving of our own city probably came from the Stourbridge factory. Their lines please with a pioneer sturdiness, yet the engraving bespeaks a gentility and discrimination that marked our nineteenth-century society.

All these pieces given by Mr. Benedum reflect American glassmaking in craftsmanship, in beauty, in individuality. An enthusiast can travel a long way before seeing such a group of distinguished pieces.

All this sounds as though the Historical Society has done a good job of presenting American glass. It has! But the real credit belongs so so many people that it is impossible to enumerate them. With unselfishness, collectors like Dr. Florence Kline and J. Robert Rodgers sold us prize pieces, albeit reluctantly. The Glass Committee worked tirelessly. Carnegie Museum loaned vases and encouraged by giving display material. George S. McKearin searched exhaustively for the right rare

pieces. Benefactors appeared at every difficult point along the way and cleared obstacles. The whole project has been almost as far-reaching and has demanded as much co-operation as Point Park or Gateway Center. For that reason it should leave everyone with a warm feeling—a feeling that Pittsburgh is lucky to have among its citizenry men with a sense of the past and a vision of the future.

1 Mr. Innes is assistant headmaster and teacher of English at Shadyside Academy and, in his so-called leisure time, collector of and authority on American glass. He is the author of *Early Glass of the Pittsburgh District*, which may be obtained from the Art and Nature Shop at price of \$1.00 plus postage.

The collection at the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, here discussed, has been assembled and arranged under Mr. Innes' direction.