

CUT GLASS LAMPS ATTRIBUTED TO THE UNION FLINT GLASS WORKS KENSINGTON, PHILADELPHIA

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RELATIVELY little is known about cut glass made in the United States from about 1810 to 1840. It was strongly influenced by Anglo-Irish cut glass designs, both in form and decorative motifs. Generally, most of it is attributed to Pittsburgh glasshouses, notably Baskett's, largely because of references to it by travelers who visited there. Even less is known about the cut glass produced in Eastern glasshouses, though it was extensively advertised for sale.

This paper is an effort to attribute a series of lamps to the Union Flint Glass Works, or, as it was also called, the Union Glass Works or the Union Cut and Plain Flint Glass Works. These attributions are based upon the relationship of the cut glass design on a mug to a fluid burning lamp with a font cut in the same design and a very elaborate pressed glass foot. The mug, now in The Corning Museum of Glass, is one of thirty-six pieces of blown and cut glass, which descended from Richard Synar, one of the founders of that company. This pressed foot is, in turn, related to several other lamps whose fonts also are cut with the same design or closely related ones.

The Union Flint Glass Works was founded in 1826 by William Granville, William Swindell, William Bennett, Richard Synar (or Synor), and William Emmett, all of Kensington, with Joseph Capewell of Cambridge and James Venables of

Boston. Emmett had formerly worked with Thomas Cains in South Boston, then at the New England Glass Works, where Bennett also worked before the years 1823-1826, when he was an employee at John Gilliland's glasshouse in Brooklyn. Richard Synar was probably the same Richard Synor listed in the 1825-1826 Brooklyn directories as a glassblower living at "Henry [street] n. District." A tract of land in the Kensington section of Philadelphia, along the Delaware River, was purchased for \$3,600 on November 1, 1825. Construction of the glasshouse was begun the same month, and the works was in operation early the next year. Granville and Swindell withdrew from the firm before the end of 1826, and Charles Baldren Austin entered it, the firm becoming Charles B. Austin and Company.

Austin, an Englishman, was apparently the Charles Austin listed as a glasscutter in the New York City directories for 1821-1824 and in the Brooklyn directories for 1825-1826 as operating a glass factory at "near District," Brooklyn. Under Austin's management, the firm prospered and at one time employed approximately 100 persons. From 1826 until 1844 it is known to have produced blown, pressed, and cut glasswares. Specimens of its cut glass were exhibited at the Franklin Institute in 1827 and 1831. In 1840 and 1842 the company received special mention for their



FIG. 1. Cut glass mug, part of a collection of more than thirty pieces of glass, including blown, cut, and several blanks for cutting, which descended from Richard Synar, a glassblower at the Union Flint Glass Works, to his granddaughter, Mrs. Laura M. T. Vail, who presented them to the Albany Institute of History and Art in the 1930s. Because the collection had no relation to Albany or New York State history, The Corning Museum of Glass was permitted to acquire it in 1971. H. 9.7 cm. 71.4.83.

work—in 1842 for their colored glassware. Proof of production of pressed glass before 1830 is documented by a more than two-year-long lawsuit with the New England Glass Company for infringement of the 1826 patent for pressing glass knobs. By 1831, the firm of Charles B. Austin & Co. had warehouses at 10 Minor Street and at 23 Dock Street in Philadelphia. After Austin's death in 1840, William Bennett took over, but the firm was torn by internal strife and litigation between various members of the firm and Austin's widow. The firm was dissolved in 1844 and the factory shut down; it was reopened in 1847 by Hartell and Lancaster and operated for many years as a bottle glasshouse.

Among the glass attributed to the Union Flint Glass Works is the mug shown in Fig. 1. Its attribution to this glasshouse is based upon family history and the presence of several uncut blanks along with other fine cut glass which descended in



FIG. 2. Burning fluid lamp with cut font, and an elaborate and distinctive pressed base. The Louise S. Esterly Collection, The Corning Museum of Glass. H. 33.9 cm. 61.4.97.

the family from Richard Synar. While the individual motifs are characteristic of the Anglo-Irish style, their combination to form this design is unusual and distinctive. These same motifs—flat panels, hob-star diamonds, strawberry diamond ellipses, fans, and blaze cutting—all appear on the font of the lamp in Fig. 2 and also are disposed in a very similar design. Because of these factors and the similar quality of both pieces, it seems likely they were both produced in the same factory—the Union Flint Glass Works.

This lamp is related to another lamp in The Corning Museum of Glass, the gift of Preston R. Bassett (Fig. 3). It, too, was undoubtedly made at the Union Flint Glass Works, since the bases of both were pressed in the same mold, and the cut motifs and designs on the font of each lamp are

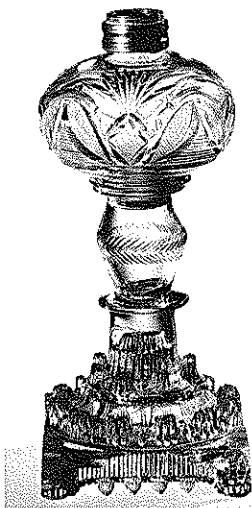


FIG. 3. Burning fluid lamp in the collection of The Corning Museum of Glass. Gift of Preston R. Bassett. H. 24.4 cm. 72-4-37.

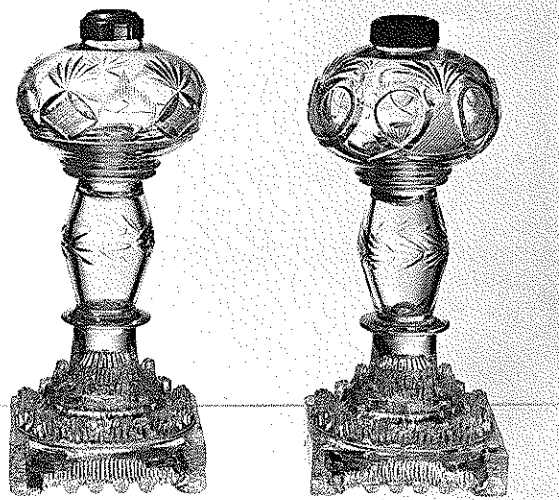


FIG. 4. Pair of burning fluid lamps in the collection of the Toledo Museum of Art. Gift of Mrs. H. G. Duckworth. H. (both), to top of collar, 25.4 cm. 64.72A-B.

very closely related. The Bassett lamp is a distinctive form made up of three principal elements: a somewhat flattened spherical, or "onion"-shaped, font with distinctive cutting; a cylindrical stem of double, truncated conical form with cutting at its center; and a pressed foot of bold and intricate form. It is, in turn, so closely related to the lamps shown in Figs. 4, 5, and 6 (though there are minor variations in the elements of design in the pressed bases of the latter two) that it seems reasonable to attribute all four to the same glasshouse.

The pair of lamps in Fig. 4 are in the Toledo Museum of Art. Though the cut designs on the fonts differ from one another, and from that on the Bassett lamp, the close relationship of all three is clearly evident in every other respect. All three also are closely related to the lamp in Fig. 5 left, though again the cut design on the font differs from those on the other lamps, an understandable variation in any company's production to offer variety and choice to its customers. The exterior

of the pressed base of this lamp was pressed in the *same* mold as the bases of the Toledo Museum's lamps, but the interior of this base differs somewhat, having a deep boss extending downward from its uppermost, inner part, indicating the use of a different plunger to press the interior of its base. This design may have presented technical difficulties in pressing, resulting in modification of the design and use of a different, slightly less intricate design on the interiors of subsequent lamp bases, such as those in the Toledo Museum. The Toledo lamps and the Esterly and Bassett lamp bases were all pressed in the *same* mold.

All of these lamps are also closely related in form and design to a lamp in the Henry Ford Museum (Fig. 5 right). The cut design on the font is almost identical to that on the lamp on the left. The upper tier of the exterior of the Ford lamp varies from all the others in having a series of inverted, pointed "leaves" instead of the upper row of ribbed projections, but the interior of this



FIG. 5. *Burning fluid lamps. (Left) Collection of the author. One of a pair bearing the same cut design. H. 20.9 cm. (Right) Collection of the Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan. H. 25.6 cm to top of collar. 29.2050.*

lamp was pressed with the identical plunger used to form the interiors of the bases of the Toledo lamps and the Esterly and Bassett lamps.

In conclusion, though there are some variations in the designs of the cutting on the fonts and in the pressing of some of the lamp bases, the close relationship of both their overall design, form, and elaborate pressed bases strongly indicates a common origin. In relation to the cut design and comparative quality of these lamps to the mug which descended from Richard Synar of the Union Flint Glass Works, I submit they may all be attributed to that glasshouse and that they were made between about 1835 and the closing of the factory in 1844.