

A RECORD OF CENTURIES: GLASS FACTORIES OF NEW JERSEY

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IN January 1982 the Wheaton Historical Association was awarded a grant from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Historical Preservation for the purpose of compiling a comprehensive listing of the historical and contemporary glass factories and factory complexes within the state of New Jersey and to survey each site. Glassmaking has been a major industry in New Jersey since 1739, when Caspar Wistar built his glasshouse on Alloways Creek in Salem County, New Jersey.¹ Wistar was the first to be attracted by the natural resources of the region. The abundance of sand, forests, and navigable waterways in New Jersey (especially the southern part of the state) provided ideal conditions for glassmaking. Wistar was followed by many others, leading to the founding of at least 224 glass factories in the following 240 years, almost one a year being built on the average.

The history of many of these glass factories, as well as their place in the industrial development of New Jersey and the United States, has often been neglected. In New Jersey, only one site, that of Batsto, has been dug professionally.² Two other sites were dug by organized amateurs.

The purpose of the work being undertaken in this project is to generate a complete list of New Jersey glasshouses and to secure as much standardized information about each as possible. The sites of both contemporary and historic factories will be examined. Contemporary glass factories

will be visited to take site photographs and to obtain standard information. Consultant R. Alan Mounier, a professional archeologist, and members of the Wheaton Village staff will visit all historic sites. The survey team will examine each site, attempting to assess the potential of the location. Visual examination, surface inspection, and subsurface testing will be carried out, as determined by the archeological consultant.

The information will then be combined with documentary evidence for each site to give a standard reference and comparative listing for all known sites in the state, and will provide, through cross-references and evaluation, a picture of the development of the glass industry within New Jersey and a set of references for various research purposes.

In research to date, 224 glass factories have been listed. They were located in seventy towns, the largest number of which are in the southern

1. Arlene Palmer, *The Wistarburgh Glassworks, New Jersey, 1739 - c. 1776*. A project of the Alloway Township Bicentennial Committee, 1976.

2. Bud Wilson, "The Pine Barrens Glass Industry," *Natural and Cultural Resources of the New Jersey Pine Barrens: Inputs and Research Needs for Planning, Proceedings and Papers of the First Research Conference on the New Jersey Pine Barrens, Atlantic City, N.J., May 22-23, 1978*, Stockton State College, pp. 214-224. The Batsto site was excavated by Bud Wilson from 1965 until 1967 and discussed in this article.



FIG. 1. Map of New Jersey.

half of the state. Of the seventy towns, thirty-eight had only one factory and thirteen had two. Surprisingly, four towns—Millville, Vineland, Bridgeton, and Camden—had at least sixteen companies. In fact, Bridgeton, a relatively small town, had nineteen factories, the largest number of any town in the state (Fig. 1).

At this point, the products of all factories are not known. The majority of New Jersey factories specialized in bottle making. The companies with known products fall into several groupings: sixty-seven made bottles, twenty-five produced window glass, fourteen made both bottles and window glass, thirty-nine produced cut glass, six made pressed ware, and an additional fifteen produced other wares such as art glass, hollowware, fiber-glass, and specialty products.

Preliminary findings regarding the thirty-nine factories producing cut glass show that some number of these will probably be deleted from the final listing. In many cut glass shops, the blanks were

NUMBER OF GLASS FACTORIES IN NEW JERSEY IN 20 YEAR INCREMENTS

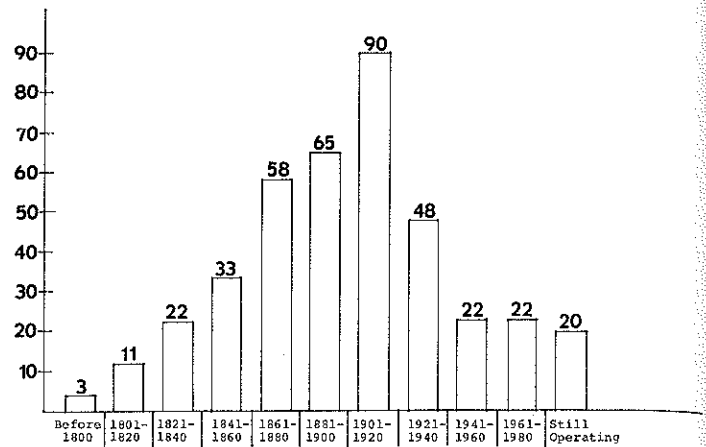


FIG. 2. Graph of number of glass factories in New Jersey in twenty-year increments.

made elsewhere, and glass was not melted on site. The same findings, however, have revealed such interesting new information on little-known cut glass firms such as William Skinner and Sons of Hammonton that an ancillary list of these firms may prove justified.

The time span of the New Jersey glass factories is significant. Wistar provides a starting point in colonial glass manufacturing, and his factory employed many skilled glassworkers who started their own factories after the Revolutionary War. These small bottle and window factories of the early nineteenth century were followed by a rapid growth of the glass industry after the Civil War with the transition to sophisticated fuels and transportation improvements. The introduction of automation in the early twentieth century forced a consolidation of many small works into large capital-intensive manufacturing sites. Today, only twenty glass factories remain in operation in the state (Fig. 2). One of these factories, a sub-

sidiary plant of the Kerr Glass Company in Millville, has had several names, probably the best known of which was the Whitall Tatum Company. It had its beginnings in 1806 as the glassworks of James Lee and is the oldest glass factory in the United States still in operation.

In addition to the sources cited earlier, publications such as state and county atlases provided even more factory site information (Fig. 3). Industrial and business directories also generated other references, although these directories relied on paid subscriptions, and many companies were not included. The Annual Reports of Inspections of Factories and Workshops of New Jersey not only identified factories, but also listed the number of workers and child laborers. In some instances, a glass factory may only have been mentioned once in an obscure source. For example, the Ketchum works, in what is now Linden, can only be found listed in a very brief article in the May 1944 issue of *Antiques Magazine*.³ Survey maps and Sanborn Insurance maps have also provided valuable information.

Fieldwork has begun and many of the historical sites have been surveyed. The sites fall into three categories: above surface evidence, i.e., buildings still standing or being utilized for other purposes; subsurface evidence only, with the site accessible for further archeological study; or the site totally destroyed, i.e., a highway or other structure obliterating or sealing the site. Examples of these three categories can be seen in the work completed. The Estellville Glassworks is an example with above surface evidence, the Winslow Glass Works has subsurface evidence, and the Brooklyn Glass Works is a destroyed site.

The Estellville Glass Works is a well-known site. The factory was started around 1825 by John H. Scott, was later sold to Daniel Estell, and was operated under several different owners until 1877. The building still stands, but in ruin. The site has been preserved because it is situated in a county park and fenced in to prevent further looting. Ironstone and brick buildings remain as well as slag piles and the foundations of workers' houses.

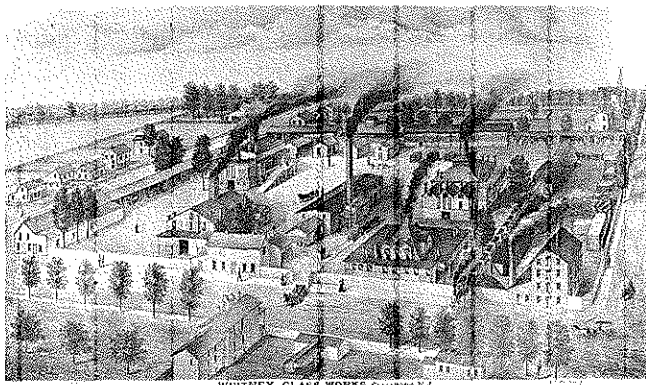


FIG. 3. Illustration of the Whitney Glass Works, Glassboro, New Jersey, from the New Historical Atlas of Salem and Gloucester Counties, New Jersey, Everts & Stewart, 1876.

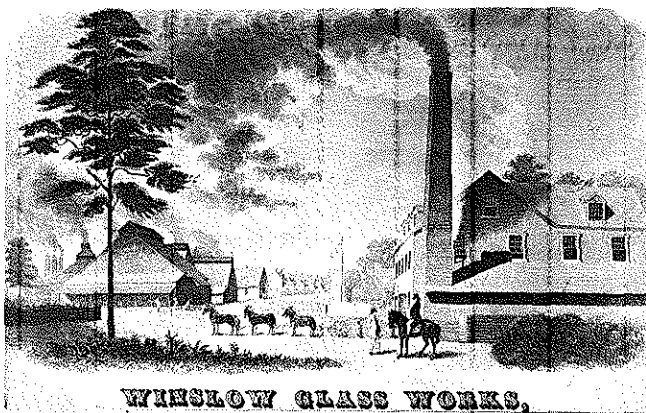


FIG. 4. Print of the Winslow Glass Works which is now under a recreational park in Winslow, New Jersey.

The Winslow Glass Works was founded by William Coffin and his son, about 1829 or 1831, for the purpose of making window glass (Fig. 4). It was operated by many owners until it closed in 1884. The buildings are no longer extant, and the

3. "The Glass and China Cupboard, Ketchum's Glass," *Antiques Magazine* XLV, May 1944, p. 258. Daniel Osborne Ketchum, who had worked for Gilliland in Brooklyn, New York, moved to New Jersey in 1840 and built his own factory. To date, nothing more has been found on this operation.

physical remains are partially obscured, but the building foundation has been located. The foundation is under a graveled playground in a recreational park, and the fill used to level the site has protected the archeological remains. The site could prove ideal for future archeological exploration.

The Brooklyn (also known as Old Brooklyn) Glass Works operated from 1831 until 1856 and produced bottles. The site of this factory has never been pinpointed, but all evidence leads to the conclusion that it has been covered by the Atlantic City Expressway, a four-lane highway constructed during the 1960s.

As a result of the research and listings accomplished so far, some early conclusions are possible. The number of glass factories in New Jersey far exceeds the number generally realized, and New Jersey glasshouses may have made a larger contribution to glassmaking than is ordinarily credited to them. Few, if any, of the still accessible

historical sites are adequately protected, and if detailed archeological research is to be carried on at those sites deemed appropriate, it should be done as soon as possible. Also, a wealth of both historical and contemporary information remains largely unexplored within the state.

This survey may be a more detailed listing for any one state (or region) than has previously been undertaken. It is hoped that it might provide a model for future listings in other areas with concentrations of glass factories.

A selection of the most promising sites for more complete exploration is a main goal as the survey nears conclusion.

The reference bibliography for the listings is currently available through the Wheaton Museum of American Glass. Following completion of the project, the compiled list and additional appropriate information will be prepared for publication.