

Late Nineteenth Century American Art Glass By Tom Cotter, 2014

It was 1875. The Industrial Revolution was in full swing with huge steps in science and technology. For the United States glass industry this meant conversion from coal to natural gas furnaces, vastly improved shipping via railroads, and great population gains across the country. Oh, and lots of money among consumers to buy products. But several of the major New England companies were seeing their markets eroded by the introduction of soda lime glass by Hobbs, Brokuniar, and Co. in the 1860's. Boston & Sandwich, New England, and Mt. Washington Glass Companies continued with "flint", or leaded, glass, but lost market to the companies from Pittsburgh to the West. What could they do to not only keep in business, but regain their places near the top of the glass heap? How could they change their products to show off better?

Showing off was a mark of success in the late Victorian Era in England and the United States. New England Glass hired Englishman Joseph Locke, who patented and trademarked a formula for Amberina glass in 1883, and a star was born in multicolored glass shading from amber to ruby through reheating. (picture 1) The older "flint" glass companies prospered, if only temporarily. Other companies copied the formula, with slight changes in formulas and names, including soda-lime pressed pieces. Plated Amberina also appeared. Another change or two produced Bluerina, also made by several companies. (picture 2)

British import Frederick S. Shirley tweaked the Amberina formula a bit for Mt. Washington Glass and came out with translucent salmon-to-yellow Burmese. Burmese came in glossy or satin finish. The latter finish required sand-blasting or dipping in hydrofluoric acid. Uranium and gold added to the mixture generated unique color shifts when reheated. After presentation of a set to Queen Victoria, this formula was even licensed to Thomas Webb & Sons in Britain as Queen's Burmese, a rare instance of technology moving east across the Atlantic. Many pieces were decorated with paint and/or enameling, usually with showy vines and flowers. After this success, Mt. Washington also produced Crown Milano, a bone china-like glass with painting and enameling. In the 1890s, Mt.

Washington created stained-glass imitations on glass articles with extensive, extravagant transparent colored enamels as Royal Flemish. Similar techniques from the company resulted in Napoli and Verona products.

Mt. Washington Glass began in 1886 to make “Pearl Satin Ware” or “Mother-of-Pearl,” with satin-finished, 3-layered cased glass. The method called for air trapped beneath the outer surface in geometric designs. Shades of blue, pink and yellow appeared most often. (picture 3) Frederick Shirley revised methods from Britain for this, and Joseph Webb, Jr., another Brit, did so for Phoenix Glass. Coralene, a design of powdered glass the surface of a piece, sometimes appeared on Mt. Washington Satin Ware or Burmese.

New England Glass, with Joseph Locke and Edward Libbey, patented “Wild Rose”, an opal batch combined with gold and reheated to shade from deep rose to white. Soon after, a famous Chinese porcelain vase glazed in a color of “crushed strawberries,” or Peach Blow, sold at auction to Mary Morgan in March of 1886 for the attention-grabbing price of \$18,000. Glass companies rushed to imitate, with Hobbs, Brockunier developing Coral and producing reheated cased glass reproductions of the Morgan Vase with gold-infused shadings from yellow to cherry red. They also made fruit from their process, which closely followed the New England Glass’ Plated Amberina method. Mt. Washington followed with Peach Blow, replacing uranium oxide in Burmese with cobalt or copper oxide.

In 1885, New England Glass introduced Pomona, a crystal glass design on which a resist (wax, for example) was applied and then cut away where a design and stippling were wanted. The resulting piece was dipped in acid to etch around the design and to create the stippling. (picture 4) Agata, a derivation of its Wild Rose with benzene, alcohol, or naphtha applied to the completed glass surface, then left to evaporate in a muffle.

Hobbs, Brockunier and others began to produce Spangled, Vasa Murrhina, and Spatter Glass in the mid-1880s. Vasa Murrhina and Spangled consisted of glass ornamented with colored mica flakes, then sealed in a clear outer casing before final shaping. For Spatter or “Splash Ware,” the blower rolled the molten glass in pieces of other

colors on the marver, then heated and finished the item. The pieces picked up were melted and incorporated into the piece.

By 1888, Boston & Sandwich had shut down, New England Glass had skipped the state for Toledo and cheaper energy and labor as Libbey Glass, and some guy named Tiffany had been making stained glass in New York for about 10 years. The Art Nouveau movement with naturalistic, Japanese, and ancient civilization influences were characterized in the U.S. by Tiffany's products. Using ancient pitted glass with its unique iridescence, Arthur Nash (another British import) created Favrile in several colors (mainly gold and blue) and in remarkable shapes. (picture 5) The artistic luster of Favrile and beauty of Tiffany's stained glass have inspired glass artists from Union Glass (Kew Blas) in the 1890s to Frederick Carder of Steuben, the Northwoods, the Fentons, Thomas Johnson (Quezal), and many U.S. and European firms to expand colors, treatments (including Carnival glass), and finishes.

All modern collectors owe a great debt of gratitude to these pioneers who brought colors, designs, and beauty to the last 20 years of the 19th century. These geniuses paved the way for colors, Carnival glass, intricate etchings, and designs that continued the Golden Age of American glass into the 20th century.

The beauty, variety and quality of American glass are on display in a number of shows, which we hope you will attend. Pieces of everyday and Art glass and pottery are highlighted at 40th annual Rocky Mountain Depression Glass Society (RMDGS) show glass and pottery show on April 26th (10-5) and April 27th (11-4), 2014, in Castle Rock, CO.

Pieces similar to those described here, as well as other vintage American made glass from the 1800's to the 1970's, including Early American Pattern Glass, cut glass, carnival glass, depression glass, elegant depression era glass, kitchenware, mid-century glass will be available at the show and sale. Also included for sale will be pottery such as Fiesta, Van Briggle, Roseville, Franciscan and more. Whether you are seeking a decorative item for your home or trying to complete a set of dinnerware, you will have a vast selection at the show. In addition, there will be a seminar offered by Early American Pattern

Glass expert Frank Blosser, seminars by Bob and Helen Jones representing the Museum of American Glass in West Virginia, and an informative talk by Tom Cotter, glass historian and long-time Cambridge Glass collector. Thirty-three dealers at this show will also offer antiques and collectible items related to the American glassware and china for sale. The show will be held at the Douglas County Events Center, 500 Fairgrounds Road (Exit 181 – I-25) in Castle Rock. Please visit the RMDGS website to learn more about their club and show: (www.RMDGS.com) & ([SHOW](#)). The show will feature an exhibit of Ruby (red) glass to commemorate the Club's 40th Anniversary show. There will also be additional table displays of elegant and EAPG glass. There are hourly door prizes for adults and a special \$25 door prize just for children every 2 hours during the show. The Events Center and vendor booths are easily accessible for the disabled community. Please feel free to submit questions about this article or about the show etc. on the club's website. A club member will get back to you with an answer. The Club will also have members and the extensive Club library available for questions and research.