REDWOOD: THE HISTORY OF REDWOOD GLASS

Presented through the generosity of its author, Shirley Carpenter of Clayton and Butterfield Lake

COMMUNITIES IN THE TOWN OF ALEXANDRIA

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The history of Redwood glass acually began about 165 years ago in Redford, New York, a small village on the west bank of the Saranac River in Clinton County. In October of 1831, a factory operating under the trade name of Redford Glass Company was established for the purpose of manufacturing high quality crown window glass.

The principal material used in the manufacture of this glass was a rare white Potsdam sandstone which was obtained in abundance in the Redford area. This sandstone contributed to the quality, rich luster, thickness and strength which characterized the Redford glass. The formula for making the glass was kept a closely guarded secret and was locked away in a secret room in the company office. Incidentally, you might be interested in knowing that Benjamin Cory, editor and publisher of the *Watertown Register*, a local weekly newspaper, in the October 6th, 1933 issue, disclosed to his readers the formula for making Redwood glass as being: 120 parts of sand, 40 parts of purified pearl ash, 35 parts of lead monoxide, and 13 parts nitre or potassium or sodium nitrate.

John Foster, who was the superintendent of the Redford Glass Company in 1832, was a glass making genius, but he had rather expensive ideas for his time, and his employers at the glass company discharged him. In resentment against his Redford employers, John Foster moved to Jefferson County, bringing the secret formula with him, and he soon began to explore the possibilities of establishing a glass factory here.

Foster boarded for a brief time in Theresa, where he learned that Jamesville, a small settlement about seven miles distant, had just what he was seeking--Potsdam sandstone of the best quality for making glass, a bed of limestone within two miles, water power for running machinery, and plenty of wood. He immediately contracted with Francis Depau, a local land baron for whom Depauville is named, for about 10,000 acres of land. He borrowed money from Depau and in the summer of 1833, he erected the first glass factory in Jamesville. At that time Jamesville was a community of a few log cabins and a sawmill constructed on the small stream connecting Mud and Butterfield Lakes. The former, Mud, is about 94 feet above Butterfield, and hence affords a limited amount of water power.

The muddy road which James D. LeRay's men had cut through the forest between Theresa and Alexandria Bay was Jamesville's only connection

with the outside world. The population at this time was less than 100. In all probability the small community had been named Jamesville after James D. LeRay, himself, considering that the Town of Alexandria was named for James D. LeRay's son, and Theresa for his daughter. John Foster, however, had other ideas regarding the name of the settlement. He promptly changed the name from Jamesville to Redwood in hopes that its similarity to the name Redford would enable him to cut into the glass trade of his former employers, who, he felt, had treated him unfairly.

Foster soon had 50 log cabins built on what was known as French Hill to accommodate the many French Canadians whom he induced to come over as wood choppers. On September 30, 1833 the first glass was made. Unfortunately, production did not continue for long. John Foster dropped dead, probably of a heart attack, on January 2nd, 1834, while on a business trip to Watertown. Apparently his efforts in getting the glass industry established in the wilderness had been too much for him. Today no trace of Foster can be found in Redwood. The future of his glass factory had seemed assured, but Foster's untimely death had dealt a hard blow to the newly formed community of Redwood.

As a result of Foster's death, the glass works reverted to Depau, and operations ceased for a time as Depau, by then an old man with no interest in operating a glass factory, had returned to Paris. Anxious to protect his investment, Depau began a search among the best glassmakers in the country to find one who would be willing to come and operate the plant in Redwood. He finally decided upon John C. Schmauss, a New Jersey glassblower, who traveled up to Redwood bringing 19 glassworkers with him. He also brought his wife and family, as well as one of the finest pianos to arrive in the north country. Accounts tell us that his wife was unwilling to leave the more settled regions of New Jersey, but eventually she was persuaded. The piano, as well as the rest of their worldly goods, was loaded on a canal boat, and they proceeded northward to the Hudson River. The trip up the Hudson proved to be quite easy and comfortable and eventually the family arrived in the wilds of 1834 Redwood.

Mr. Schmauss found the natural resources of the new plant all he could ask for. He took charge at once and the company turned out glass which was regarded as unusually fine. One of the drawbacks of the new firm was the shipping of its product into the more settled sections of the United States. But there was good demand for these products at home, for the north country was rapidly being settled. Schmauss ran the glassworks for the rest of his life, and was succeeded by his son, John F. Schmauss, for a number of years. The coming of Schmauss was a turning point in the story of glassmaking in Redwood. He arrived at the critical time when the

industry could either have been made or broken. His ability did much to carry to into an era of prosperity.

It was during the Schmauss era that the Mallorytown glassworks began operation in Canada. The Mallorytown glassworks was the first one in Canada, and it was started in 1839 with help from the glass aritsans at Redwood. A plaque commemorating the historic importance of Mallorytown glassworks was unveiled at Mallorytown Landing recently. The Schmauss era at the Redwood Glass Works ended in 1844 and the factory went through a series of owners until 1859 when William W. Butterfield assumed control of the entire operation. The factory, as originally built by John Foster in1833, extended about 100 feet along the main street and about 75 feet back. The blast furnace was about 9 feet by 16 feet and held eight huge clay pots for melting the glass. The wood used for fuel was in abundance as the land was being cleared for farming. The farmers furnished the wood in 3 1/2 foot lengths. These were called shiders and the area where they were stored was called the shider yard. The farmers were paid $.75 per cord, not in cash, but in trade at the company store.

When the glass factory was in full operation, it furnished employment for about 75 hands. They included 8 blowers, 8 stokers, 1 foreman or master shearer as he was called, 2 flatteners, 2 helpers, 4 cutters, 2 packers, 2 dryers, 1 woodhauler, 2 potmakers, 1mixer, 1 pounder, 1 boxmaker, besides quarrymen, woodchoppers and teamsters. The pots in which the glass was melted were made right there at the factory of German clay which was shipped here in bricks. The pots were large enough to hold about 40 gallons.

In 1922, when H. B. Azurk wrote an article about Redwood glass for the *Watertown Daily Standard*, very few of those who had worked at the Redwood glass factory were still living. However, one of them, a man named Robert Hoffman, who had worked as a glass blower from 1864-1868 was still around and he spoke reminiscently of his experiences. He said:

My father was one of the stockholders in the Redwood Glass Manufacturing Co. that ran the plant from 1853 on. Beside him there was David Slack, who worked as a cutter and sorter and Hiram Gordon who ran the melt and John Braino. When the company went up, Joe Braino, who lived on the Butterfield farm, used to take particular delight in showing visitors to his place a glass cylinder 36 inches high and 24 inches around which he kept in his sitting room.

"See that piece of glass," he would say, "that was pretty expensive, it cost me all the money I put into the glass factory, and it's all I got out of it. When it breaks, I am broke."

I worked in the factory as a blower for four years. We had to be ready, at any time of day or night, whenever the melt was ready, and then we would work steadily until the melt was blown into glass. If we had good luck, we might make $75. a month.

George Roy's father was a stoker when I was there and he was a good one, too. I can see him yet, pushing a two wheeled cart piled high with 3 1/2 foot wood around that furnace, putting a stick first in one end and then pushing his load to the other end and putting a stick in there. He used to walk around that furnace for six hours and never stopped. The biggest glass we made was 24 x 36 inches and that was cut up into little pieces. I quit when the factory burned down in 1868."

William Spies was one of the last mixers in the factory before the factory was abandoned in 1881. He speaks interestingly of the process as it was carried on then.

"The building which Butterfield and Baldwin erected in 1880 to take the place of the one which burned in 1868 was about 100 feet by 50 feet. Besides the blast furnace, it contained the flattening room, the cutting room, packing room, drying room, potmaking room, besides several store rooms. The blast furnace was nearest the road and consisted of an archway about 10 feet long, 8 feet wide and 8 feet high. On this the grates for the coal were placed and into this archway the ashes from the fire were dropped and were carted away and dumped into the road. Above the arch was a double firebox with four clay pots of about 40 gallons each on either side. These pots were entirely covered with curved covers except for a round opening about ten inches in diameter over each pot. Into this opening the blower stuck his pipe and drew forth a ball of molten mass to be blown into glass.

" We usually made five mixtures a week using about two tons of sand, 2,500 pounds of slack lime and 2,600 pounds of soda, to a mixture. This was thoroughly mixed in bins, sifted and then wheeled in barrows to the platform where the pots stood and scooped through the small openings in the clay pots. It took about 12 hours for the mixture to melt so that it could be blown. Then the blowers would be called. They would stand on a raised platform on a level with the pots and stick their blow pipes, about five feet long with a half inch hole, through the small openings over the pots and draw forth a gob of the molten mass. This they would let hang down into the pit beside the platform and gently turn it as they blew it into a cylinder about 2 1/2 feet long and ten inches in diameter. Then laying the cylinder

on a block they would break it off where it joined the pipe and go back for another mass to blow. They often earned about $150. a month. They usually worked at night and people would come for miles around to see them at work. In fact the company built a gallery where people could stand to see them at work. They worked steadily until the whole mixture was blown into cylinders. These cylinders were then cut lengthwise on one side, carted to the flattening room where they were placed on a flattening wheel, heated and ironed into smooth sheets and then carted to the cutting room where they were cut into window panes. I was the last mixer in the Redwood factory. When we quit work in 1881 the work was never started up again."

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