

A close-up photograph of a glassblower's work. A large, glowing orange-yellow mass of molten glass is being shaped within a dark, industrial furnace. The glass is being pulled out by a long metal rod, forming a bulbous shape. The background is dark and filled with the structural elements of the furnace, with bright light emanating from the opening where the glass is being worked.

New Jersey

The Birthplace of the American Glass Industry

By Maureen Stanley

New Jersey is known for many things. Ocean City is America's Greatest Family Resort, Atlantic City is home to America's oldest boardwalk, and Cape May is the place to discover diamonds (Cape May Diamonds, that is). But did you know New Jersey is the birthplace of the American Glass Industry?

If at first you don't succeed, try, try again

The birth of America's glass industry certainly had its fair share of trials and tribulations. The first attempt at glassmaking in the New World took place in 1608 in Jamestown, Virginia. Three later ventures were tried in New York, Philadelphia, and Salem, Massachusetts. Sadly, these glassmaking attempts within the Colonies also failed and it was necessary to continue to import glass from England.

Then an unlikely candidate became the father of the New World's glass industry. In 1717 Caspar Wistar, twenty-two years old, immigrated from Germany with merely a few

shillings to his name and no glassmaking experience. Before he entered the world of glassmaking, Wistar worked manual labor jobs including soapmaking and manufacturing brass buttons.

Caspar Wistar made several wise personal and professional decisions landing him amongst the wealthy members of Philadelphia society. In 1739, Wistar founded the Colonies' first successful glass company, United Glass Company in Alloway, New Jersey. Wistar, a savvy businessman, recruited four master glass makers from Germany to form a joint venture of United Glass. In exchange for their glass formulas, he provided one-way passage, land and dwellings, servants, and one-third of the company profits.

Quite the nonconformist, Wistar defied English policy forbidding all manufacturing in the Colonies as America was to supply raw materials for England and furnish a market for English goods.

Caspar Wistar's United Glass Company launched southern New Jersey as the epicenter of glassmaking in the early 18th century.

Benjamin Franklin

Founding Father, Glass Aficionado

In addition to windows and bottles, Caspar Wistar's United Glass Company crafted glass globes for scientific research and experiments. Benjamin Franklin's electricity-producing machines used Wistar's glass "electrifying" tubes for his famous research on electricity.



The United Glass Company also made glass tubes for the multi-talented David Rittenhouse astronomer, inventor, and mathematician to use in his electricity experiments.

New Jersey's natural resources

The perfect recipe for glass

Successful glassmaking requires an abundance of natural resources. Silica sand, a fine white grained sand, soda ash, and wood were copious along the banks of the New Jersey waterways. These navigable waterways were essential to transport products to markets including Philadelphia.

After the Revolution, the number of glass factories steadily increased, meeting the needs of the new nation. Altogether, there were over 225 glass factories that operated in the state

of New Jersey (with a concentration in the southern part of the state).

Glassboro, New Jersey

Glassworks in the woods

Glassboro dates its origin with the purchase of 200 acres in 1779 by Solomon Stanger. His mission was to create a "glass works in the woods" named Stanger Glass Works. The Stanger family had migrated from Germany and worked for a time with Caspar Wistar of United Glass Company.

Glassboro was chosen mainly for the availability of oak trees to fuel the furnaces, but also for an abundance of clay and sand. Stanger Glass Works was acquired by Colonels Thomas Heston and Thomas Carpenter becoming the Heston & Carpenter Glass Works. In the following years Heston & Carpenter Glass Works changed hands multiple times becoming the Olive Works, the Harmony Glass Works, and ultimately the Whitney Brothers Glass Works.



Glassblower Bronze Statue – Fernando DeJesus

In 2018, the Borough of Glassboro commissioned a bronze statue of their namesake, the Glassblower, to be made for the Town Square. Glassblowing is a technique that involves inflating molten glass into a bubble (or parison), with the aid of a blowpipe (or blow tube). A person who blows glass is called a glassblower, glassmith, or gaffer.

A love story immersed in glass

In 1805 Ebenezer Whitney, a sea captain from New England, traveled to the Madeira Islands to stock his schooner with Madeira wine. On the way to Philadelphia, tragedy struck when Whitney's ship wrecked off the New Jersey coast in Cape May. Injured and too ill to continue to Philadelphia, Whitney was brought to Glassboro to recuperate. He was nursed back to health by Bathsheba, daughter of Colonel Thomas Heston (once owner of Heston-Carpenter Glass Works).

Enamored, Ebenezer married Bathsheba and they settled in Glassboro. Ebenezer never took part in glassmaking—he was a tavernkeeper. However, three of Whitney's sons worked in local glass works. In 1838, his eldest son, Thomas, purchased the Harmony Glassworks.

The renamed Whitney Brothers Glassworks became one of the most innovative and best equipped glass industries in the nation. In 1885, they filled an order of 7.5 million Dr. H. H. Warner's "Safe Cure" bottles. Items produced at Whitney Brothers Glassworks are now sought by collectors and include vessels shaped like ears of corn, log cabins, Native American queens, and pineapples.

A pharmacist with a vision

Dr. Theodore Corson Wheaton, a pharmacist and businessman, settled in Millville, New Jersey. Wheaton became particularly interested in the manufacture of pharmaceutical glassware. In 1888, Wheaton established a small factory (right) on the outskirts of Millville to manufacture his own bottles. The company became known as the T.C. Wheaton Company.

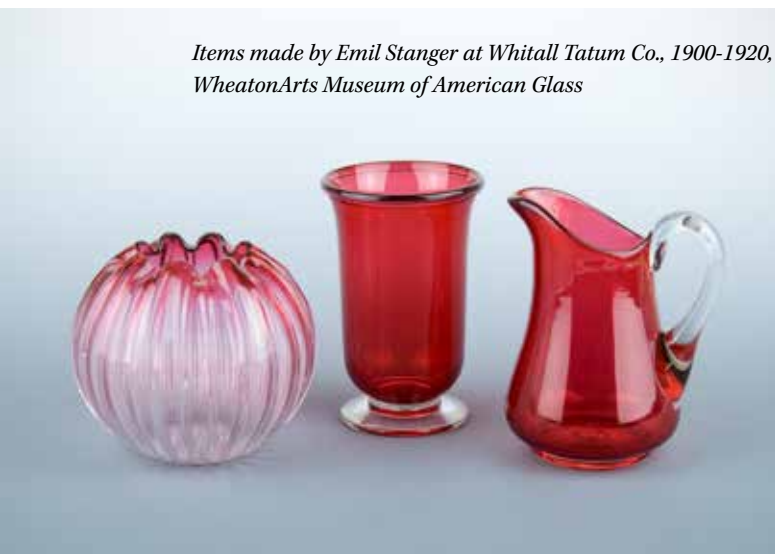


*Bottles made at Whitall Tatum & Company, 1875-1920,
WheatonArts Museum of American Glass*

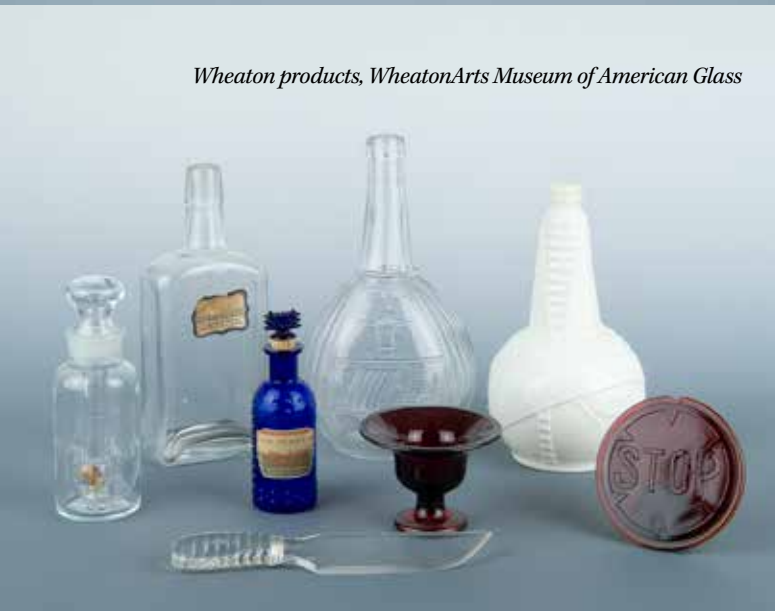




Items made by Emil Stanger at Whitall Tatum Co., 1900-1920, WheatonArts Museum of American Glass



Wheaton products, WheatonArts Museum of American Glass



Take a step back in time

The magnificent history of glass making lives on in these New Jersey glass museums.

Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center

A national treasure

In the early 1960s, Dr. Theodore Wheaton's grandson, Frank Wheaton, Jr., visited the Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, New York. He discovered that much of the glass created and produced in southern New Jersey was displayed in this museum. Wheaton's grandson felt that these treasured museum pieces should be displayed in the areas in which they were produced...Southern New Jersey. This set the wheels in motion for the creation of what is known today as WheatonArts.

WheatonArts, located on 45 wooded acres in southern New Jersey, is home to the Museum of American Glass, an international Creative Glass Fellowship Program, the largest Folklife program in New Jersey, a Hot Glass Studio, and several traditional Craft Studios.

The fully operational Glass Studio presents daily, interpretive demonstrations for the public with artists showing traditional and contemporary glassblowing techniques. In the Artist Studios, artists demonstrate the traditional southern New Jersey crafts of pottery and flameworking. The 1876 Centre Grove Schoolhouse, Museum Stores and the Event Center complete the complex.



Visitors can sign up for workshops and classes in flameworking, glass blowing, glass fusing, stained glass, and pottery.



Museum of American Glass at Wheatonarts

The Museum of American Glass at Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center houses a staggering 22,000+ pieces of glass along with a research library and archives. The Museum contains the nation's largest collection of American glass and includes examples of the earliest glass objects made in America, 18th-century glass, and fine contemporary glass art. WheatonArts Museum of American Glass is less than an hour from Cape May, Ocean City, and Atlantic City.

Visit: WheatonArts and the Museum of American Glass are located at 1501 Glasstown Road, Millville, New Jersey.

Side trip while in Millville, New Jersey

The Glasstown Arts District offers a dozen galleries and studios, the Levoy Theatre, upscale and casual dining restaurants and several shops many with artisan crafts for sale.

Visit: Glasstown Arts District is located at 22 N High St, Millville, New Jersey.



Heritage Glass Museum

Located in Glassboro, New Jersey, the Heritage Glass Museum collection includes examples of over 200 years of South Jersey glass. Featured are the 1784 Heston bottle and examples of Whitney glass. You'll also find antique glass, workers tools, glass company money, South Jersey paperweights including several examples by Paul Stankard, whimsies (made from leftover molten glass), fruit jars, demijohns, Vaseline, and depression glass.

Visit: Heritage Glass Museum is located at 25 High Street East, Glassboro, New Jersey.



Left: Bottles made in Millville, New Jersey, 1930s-1970s, WheatonArts Museum of American Glass.

Below: Heritage Glass Museum, Glassboro, New Jersey



Down by the river

The creation of sea glass

Every beachcomber wonders where their sea or beach glass originated from. A shipwreck? Bootleggers outrunning the law? Or even a bottle that traveled from a buried trash dump to the water?

New Jersey's glass factories were built on or near rivers that fed into the Delaware Bay and Atlantic Ocean. It has been said that companies discarded the end of day glass remnants into the waterways. However, there is no official documentation on glass disposal, so we are left to ponder the journey of the frosted splendors we covet.

The invention of the automatic bottle machine in 1903 eventually put the glass blowers out of work forever. Though the glass industry of Southern New Jersey is no longer prominent, it is a part of New Jersey's rich history and shows its contribution to this country in the beginning of the twentieth century.

Many thanks to Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center, WheatonArts Museum of American Glass, the Borough of Glassboro, Heritage Glass Museum, and Fernando DeJesus for providing invaluable details for this article.



Poetry inspired by the art of glass

American poet Carl Sandburg penned "Millville," capturing the beauty and intense labor of glassmaking. The city of Millville was founded in 1802 along the banks of the Maurice River. Millville was home to many glass manufactures including T.C. Wheaton Company, Whitall Tatum Company, and Millville Glass & Manufacturing Company.

Down in southern New Jersey,
they make glass. By day and by night,
the fires burn on in Millville and bid
the sand let in the light. Great rafts of
wood and big, brick hulks, dotted with a
myriad of lights, glowing and twinkling
every shade of red. Big, black flumes
shooting out smoke and sparks; bottles,
bottles, bottles of every tint and hue,
from a brilliant crimson to the dull green
that marks the death of sand
and the birth of glass.

Excerpt from In Reckless Ecstasy - Charles A. Sandburg - 1904



Victoria Roberts
SEA GLASS JEWELRY
Genuine Sea Glass~Elegant Designs
vroberts1017.etsy.com
facebook.com/victoriarobertsjewelry/
vroberts1017@yahoo.com

