

NORTH COUNTRY NOTES

Issued Monthly by the Clinton County Historical Association

48 Court Street, Plattsburgh NY 12901, 518-561-0340

No. 312 PRESIDENT: Mark A. McCullough EDITOR: Helen W. Allan September 1994

SEPTEMBER PROGRAM

CCHA begins its new series of Monday programs by visiting the Alice T. Miner Colonial Collection in Chazy, New York on September 12. Curator Fred Smith has invited the Historical Association to spend an evening at the museum where he will present a short introduction to the institution and its collections. CCHA members and friends will then have an opportunity to browse through the museum whose docents will be on hand to interpret exhibits. For those of us who have not had an opportunity to visit the Colonial Collection recently, this is an ideal time to see the museum and enjoy the building and its gardens. Refreshments will be served. Transportation can be provided by car pooling; just call CCHA's staff at 561-0340 and ask to be included in the cavalcade. Cars will leave the County Government Center in Plattsburgh promptly at 7:00 p.m. The program is scheduled to begin at 7:30 p.m.

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

People are still talking about CCHA's grand antiques show and vintage car meet at Clinton Community College on July 9 and 10 - especially those folks who missed it. However, they can mark next year's calendar on July 8 and 9 for the second annual event. Planning is already underway. Meanwhile, Craig Koste wishes to send additional thanks to the people listed below who staffed the antiques show: Lary Shaffer, Gordon Pollard, Jason Pollard, Frances Wright, Patty Bentley, Marjorie Brown, Michael Miranda, Brian Smith, and Adam Bennett.

ANNUAL BANQUET DATE SET

CCHA is pleased to announce that Willard Sterne Randall, author of a recent biography of Thomas Jefferson, will speak on that topic at the Association's annual dinner on Saturday, October 22. Members will remember Mr. Randall as a lively and entertaining speaker who presented a program on Benedict Arnold at a previous dinner. Look for further information and a reservation form in the October issue of NOTES.

REDFORD CROWN GLASS COMPANY, REDFORD, NY

Sometime in the late 1880s John Henry Myers, then vice-president of the Iron National Bank in Plattsburgh, sat down to describe the operations of the Redford Glass Company. His detailed description of the various stages of glass manufacture brings to life a bustling factory in the mid-19th century where men pursued their craft with vigor and pride. Mr. Myers was related to Matthew Lane through his marriage to Julia Lane, Matthew's daughter. Perhaps written as a speech, this document was given to the museum by Margaret Myers Byrne. Some punctuation has been added by the editor to make the piece more readable and a very few handwritten words that were illegible are not shown.

Still in stock in CCHA's Museum Shop is the comprehensive catalogue of an exhibition of Redford glass published by the Association in 1979. The book is titled "REFLECTIONS: The Story of Redford Glass."

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"In 1830 Charles Corning and Gershom Cook of Troy NY formed what was to be known as the Redford Crown Glass Co., continuing until 1836 when Matthew Lane and Frederick Suydam became partners. In 1845 the works stopped and remained idle until 1846. Then Matthew Lane bought the whole intact, started and ran until 1851. Owing to the depressed market, closed and abandoned the works with about 150 cases of unsold glass on hand. Now we will go back 60 years and give a partial description of the plant. They bought a large tract of land about 20 miles SW of Plattsburgh on the Saranac River and built a dam, saw mill, and grist mill and located their glass works and village on a bluff some 80 ft. above the river bed. Now they laid out their village into 44 squares 20 x 20 ea., these squares cut up into village lots on many of which they built tenement houses, a church, school house, hotel, store & store houses. They began work in the spring of 1830 and in Oct 1831 made the first glass. At this time it was all a wild camp. A more particular description of the village: in the center of the village the four squares running north from the river were occupied. First, the one on the bluff or bank overlooking the river by the glass works and drying ovens; 2nd square north by the company's office and store houses; 3rd square north a public square; 4th, manager's dwelling and buildings. The discovery of a sand stone peculiar to the manufacturing of glass led these men to this location as well as the large amount of hemlock wood in this locality.

"Way back in the year 1830 let us wander with our thoughts a while and see what was in the mind of certain men that had designs on that part of Saranac known now as Redford. All then was a wild camp of the first growth, never having been inhabited except by Indians so far as known and yet right here let me say that there was one mile square that lies on the north branch some two miles above that had been apparently cut down and cleared off and grown up to second growth hard wood, all about a uniform size. It was talked when I first went into that country to live that it had been cleared as there were no signs of old stumps and all around the lot there were large pine trees, hardly supposable that this same lot was not similarly covered. About this time a project to build glass works was decided upon the Saranac River.

"For fuel they used hemlock cutting it 3 ft. long and splitting into pieces 2 to 3 in. in diameter, called shidens (sp) which was piled in sheds holding 1000s of cords, where it remained until partially dried and then put into dry kilns and made perfectly dry before being used. This system of kilns used for drying this wood was constructed of brick. There were 12 of them in a row each holding about ten cords of shidens built with a furnace under each and flues to conduct the heat through and around them, not allowing any fire to communicate with the wood. It took about 48 hours firing to dry a kiln. Then they were opened and emptied, as wanted to keep the melters & flashers supplied with fuel, as fast as emptied and refilled & so on.

"Factory: This building made of stone walls 12 ft. high 80x150 with a L for a pot room, all covered with a roof and fully ventilated. In this building there was a brick stack 30 ft. square at base, (lined with fire

brick) which ran up square in form beside shops ending in an immense chimney. On two opposite sides of this stack, the pots for melting glass were set and on the other two sides doors for charging the pots and doors for firing. There was a pit in the basement under each grate where the ashes dropped and were carted away. There was also an annealing oven and much detail that we cannot go into, but will try to take the principal objects of interest.

"The stack mentioned above was divided into 4 separate ovens each holding a pot for melting glass. These ovens were made of fire brick, the clay imported from Sturbridge, England, and made into brick at the works, ovens so constructed that the front could be removed for the purpose of replacing a worn or broken pot.

"It took 36 hours from time of charging the pots until the metal was reduced to glass with a stoker constantly putting in wood which was within his reach. These men became very expert in keeping an intense and uniform heat. An experienced melter or heater can tell by looking through a peep hole into the blaze when the heat is right.

"Ingredients used for glass: The glass was made of sand, subcarbonate soda, white oxide arsenic, manganese, chalk, limestone, nitrate soda, and cullet. The exact mixture or proportions was only known to the execution officer, each charge being weighed with the most minute exactness for upon the nicety of this work depended the clearness and brilliancy of the glass when finished. Next we come to taking the metal out of the pots. This is done by men called gatherers. They take a blow pipe about 7 ft. long 1 in diameter with a small hole about 1/8 of an inch in diameter running lengthwise through it. This pipe the gatherer inserts one end into the melted glass gathering a small ball then revolving & blowing into the other end of the blow pipe, then inserting the pipe again into the melted glass & removing & constantly revolving & blowing. This is done three times by the gatherer before a sufficient amount is gathered. Then he hands it to a man called a blower who is standing on a platform swinging this pipe down & blowing & swinging back and forward, constantly blowing until the molten ball has expanded into a cylinder, something the shape of a large squash. When the size is obtained it is taken one step to a copper plate which is about 3 ft. square by one in thick perfectly true & on which this squash of glass is laid & with a pair of shears the small projecting tip is cut off & to this a man called a flasher attaches what is called a bullion bar with a ball of melted glass on the end which he sticks to this bulb. Then the blow pipe is cut off from the other side leaving a small hole or opening into the squash shape. Now the flasher swings this up on to a (illegible) before the flashing fire, his bar being in a horizontal direction, revolving always in one direction, the open end of bulb towards the fire, the revolving motion and the heat expand this shape until finally it opens & throws the nose of the orifice outwards constantly growing larger in diameter in the form of a flat wheel. As the squash or bulb flattens it is revolving with greater rapidity, & advanced so near to the mouth of the nose hole as to draw the flame outwards, the heat now striking the surface with force. The glass has now taken the form of a large flat wheel from four to five ft. in diameter of an equal thickness except at the center where the bullion bar is attached. Flashing now completed, this plate of glass is swung onto an iron cast which has a (illegible) that this bullion bar fits into & is constantly kept revolving until it is somewhat cooled, moving towards the annealing oven, when another workman receives it on a large flattened fork-like implement. At this moment, the flasher who has hold of the bullion bar suddenly detaches the bar. The plate is then passed through a horizontal slit into the annealing oven and when fairly in is dexterously turned on its edge, here remaining at a temperature somewhat below that required to soften it. Until the oven is filled, this oven is kept at a certain degree until the glass is properly annealed or tempered, then allowed to cool off and when cold removed to the cutting shop, where the wheels are cut into such size window glass as they will make & then assorted & sent to packing rooms, boxed & marked as to quality & size.

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"Pot Room: This room adjoins the Factory and is where the pots used for melting the glass are made. The clay coming from Sturbridge is imported in casks, which by dampness is rendered soft and pliable. It then has to be ground and bolted as fine as flour.

"It is then put into troughs and kneaded by treading with the bare feet until of the proper temper. The greatest care is taken to keep the clay clean and free from any foreign substance, the men who knead it stepping from a foot bath directly into the troughs. They must know the clay to be pure and clean for it would be hard to estimate the damage as it takes months to perfect a single pot. When the clay is properly tempered the troughs are kept covered with a cloth and the clay is taken from them by the pot moulders. These men take the clay in small handfuls and work it with their fingers and hands, every particle (as a piece of dough). Making it into a small roll, this they lay on to a form. Then taking another, in the same way, they add to and build up the pot each separate piece being kneaded and worked into its predecessor and kept in form until the pot is finished, always being kept covered with damp cloths and all of a temper. The pot when finished being about the shape of a tumbler, only some 3 ft. in diameter and 4 ft. high. The bottom about 5 in. thick and sides starting 4 in., tapering to 3 at the top. These pots are then dried perfectly and before they are put into the furnace for use are put into an oven and heated very hot and while hot set in position for use, taking about six months to make and dry each pot. When wanted for use, the greatest care in handling has to be used.

"The sandstone used for the glass is native and has first to be burned, then reduced to a powder by a large iron wheel 8 ft. in diameter 24 in., face set upright in a circular iron trough. The stone is ground to a powder and when perfectly calcined, sifted and bolted, the coarser is returned to the trough and that which passed through the bolt into barrels for use.

"The Redford Crown Glass Co. employed about 300 hands, many of which were skilled workmen and all of the glass men Englishmen, educated, intelligent and skilled in the branch of manufacture, men that supported both church and schools, thrifty, kind hearted and liberal to a fault. They meant something when a fellow-mate had a loss, more than saying 'I am sorry.' There were only two Crown Glass Works in the United States, both ceased to exist about 1848. The Redford Crown Glass differed from the glass of the present day as it was of a greenish tint, had much more gloss and was much stronger. The Redford Co. invested over \$100,000 in this plant to start. They built a saw mill and grist mill the first thing they did, then buildings for men. There was nothing raised there; all had to be hauled by teams from Plattsburgh."