

The Robinsons of Zanesville 1893 - 1900

by Marg Iwen

An Early Glass Center

Long before John Robinson and his son, Edwin (incorrectly Edward), built their glass factory in the heart of “clay country,” Zanesville, Ohio, had already recorded a rich glassmaking history. In the early nineteenth century, this small town incorporated in 1814 and surrounded by thick forests, wanted to grow.

Making glass wares helped ensure an increase in population as well as an expanding economic base. The necessary ingredients for making glass—glass sand, potash, and lime could be gotten nearby, as could the coal and wood to fuel the melting furnaces.

The first of Zanesville’s early factories marketed its output in 1815 under the name Zanesville Glass Manufacturing Company (ZGMC), but was also called the White Glass Company. The blowers made mostly hollow ware and bottles, but later under subsequent owners, window glass and historical flasks were also blown. Its life span encompassed some 35 years.

A second factory, Peter Mills & Company (also called the New Granite Glass Company), started by Pittsburgh glass men followed hard on the heels of

the first factory in 1816, producing tableware, but mostly bottles and flasks. Like its predecessor the ZGMC, it also prevailed about 35 years.

Across the Muskingum River from Zanesville in Putnam (later absorbed by Zanesville), the Putnam Flint Glass Works was established circa 1852. Its output consisted of bottles, hollow ware, and window glass. The Zanesville City Glass Works, established in 1864, also made window glass.

These early factories changed ownership many times; some recorded nearly a half dozen owners. Their oscillating histories are punctuated with numerous business failures and occasionally marginal successes, as are the backgrounds of several other factories, ephemeral in nature, that popped up in Zanesville, then faded away.

Of longer duration was the Kearns-Gorsuch Company, which merged with another jar giant, Hazel-Atlas, in 1920. Detailed histories of the Zanesville glass factories have been documented by Barrett, McKearin, and Schneider and Greer.

Although most of the early factories have disappeared, their output established Zanesville early on as the glass center of pre-Civil War Ohio. The highly collectible, and increasingly costly, wares include

blown bottles, bowls, pitchers, candle sticks, cruets, covered sugars, flasks, druggists glass, beer and soda bottles, ink wells, and later, fruit jars. Standouts among these collectible nineteenth century wares include the pictorial flasks, many in vibrant colors, and the Haines family of fruit jars made by the Putnam Glass Company circa 1870-76.

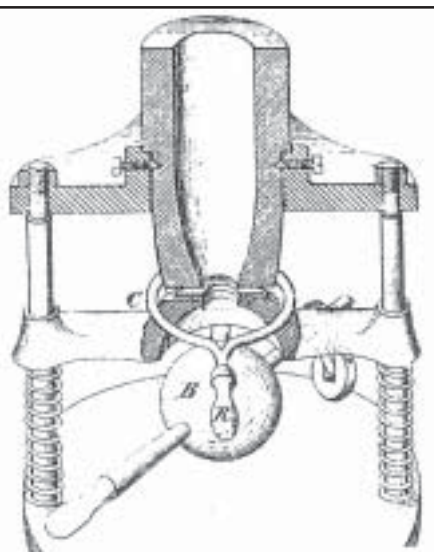
In 1893, a pioneer glass man and his son built a factory to blow stemware, but also to press jelly tumblers and tableware, possibly establishing the first “press shop” among Zanesville’s “blow shop” glass factories.

Who was John Robinson?

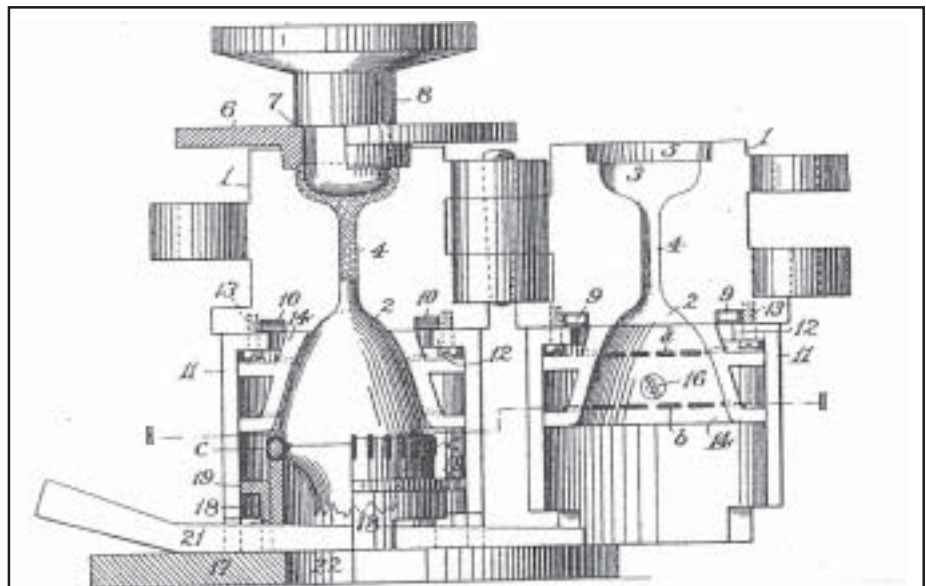
The co-founder of the RGC, John Robinson, was born in Concord, New Hampshire, in October 1844. When he was about seven years old, his family moved to Wheeling, West Virginia, where John went to work a few years later for the Hobbs, Brockunier & Co. glass house as one of the small help called “boys.”

The Civil War interrupted his glass house training. From 1861 to 1865, he served with Company B, First West Virginia Volunteer Infantry. After safely returning from the war, he joined his brother-in-law, Charles Henry Over, Henry Faupel, W. G. Barnard, and Henry Carr to found the Belmont Glass Company, Bellaire, Ohio, in March 1865. A year later he married his wife, Mary.

By 1872, he had become the holder



[Figure 1] Mechanical patent No. 129,679 issued to Charles Henry Over, John Robinson, and Henry Faupel in 1872 for improvements to a lamp chimney mold.



[Figure 2] Mechanical patent No. 588,013 issued to Edwin Robinson in 1897 for improvements to a glass manufacturing device.



[Figure 3] Robinson Glass Company’s first trade journal ad notifying glass buyers of sample rooms in three major cities (CGL, October 4, 1893).

of patent No. 129,679 for improvements to a mold for lamp chimneys with Over and Faupel (Figure 1). Four years later he organized the Bellaire Goblet Company (BGC), Bellaire, Ohio with Over, Carr, Melvin L. Blackburn (holder of several design patents), William A. Gorby, and financier Judge E. G. Morgan. In July 1888, when the BGC moved to Findlay, Ohio, John Robinson became the factory manager.

He resigned his post with BGC soon after it was absorbed along with 17 other formerly independent companies into the U. S. Glass Company tableware combine formed in 1891, the larger of two tableware combines.

John and Edwin (aided by Melvin L. Blackburn and other investors) pooled their resources in 1893 to found their own glass factory, the Robinson Glass Company (RGC). John became the president and Edwin served as secretary-

treasurer. Both men held these offices throughout the seven-year life span of the company.

Robinsons Built on the Muskingum

The Robinsons located their factory on a free parcel of land in Fair Oaks, South Zanesville, at the corner of Muskingum Avenue and Lincoln Street on the Muskingum River. In addition to the land, they received a \$5,000 cash start-up bonus (China, Glass and Lamps [CGL], August 2, 1893).

Both men settled near the factory. Edwin and wife, Ophelia, resided at 149 Muskingum Avenue, while John and wife, Mary, lived at 339 Putnam Avenue, a few blocks west of the factory.

The factory proper measured 80-feet x 80-feet with one 15-pot melting furnace and five annealing lehrs. The main building, a two-story structure somewhat larger than the factory, measured 80-feet x 120-feet. The factory site also supported a 50-foot x 100-foot stock house and a 40-foot x 75-foot batch mixing room. The buildings were constructed of corrugated iron fastened to a wood frame.

The office building, separate from the factory, comprised five rooms plus a sample room. It may have been constructed of brick, a building material commonly used in many glass factory office buildings of the period. Electric street cars carried the glass workers to within one block of the factory (CGL, August 2, 1893).

The Zanesville-area labor pool was sufficiently large to yield experienced glass workers. In 1890, the population of Muskingum County had swelled to 51,000; of that number 21,000 lived in Zanesville (Schneider, 1960). Many of the RGC glass workers descended from families who had been instrumental in developing the city’s early glass industry. More workers may have come from the Pittsburgh and Wheeling areas.

Eight railroads provided service to Zanesville and the RGC, including the Baltimore & Ohio; Pennsylvania Railroad; Columbus, Shawnee & Hocking; Bellaire, Zanesville & Cincinnati; Cleveland, Canton & Southern; Cincinnati & Muskingum Valley; Cleveland, Akron & Columbus; and Zanesville & Ohio River (CGL, August 2, 1893).

When the Muskingum River, navigable to the Ohio River, was not too high, too low, or frozen, it afforded an important waterway for moving raw material to the factory and finished glassware to market.

Charles J. Gill, who had been the secretary at both the Belmont Glass Company, Bellaire, Ohio, and the Elson Glass Company, Martin’s Ferry, Ohio, became the RGC’s western sales representative; Richard E. Miller was named the southern sales representative.

In addition to its roadmen, the RGC placed wares with agents in major cities. The New York agent was Doctor & Company, 58 Barclay Street; in Philadelphia, George R. Reinhart at 619 Arch Street represented the RGC. In Boston, samples could be viewed at 898 Pearl Street.

The RGC turned out its first wares in September 1893, consisting of tableware, bar goods, and novelties, as well as private mold work. During 1895-96, private mold work included pressing No. 1200, Cut Block and No. 1201, Fandango for the A. H. Heisey Company, Newark, Ohio, whose own production was held up by



[Figure 4] Ad showing the four-piece table set of each of the two earliest tableware patterns, No. 1, Fagot, Vera and No. 4, Robinson’s Ladder (CGL, January 17, 1894).



[Figure 5] Assorted forms of No. 90, Robinson’s Puritan, Radiant Daisy (CGL, October 1894.)



[Figure 6] No. 125, Zanesville clear undecorated condiment tray.

construction delays.

The RGC may have been chosen to make Heisey's glass because it was the tableware factory closest to Newark, and was reported to make good quality glass (Bredehoft, 2001; Felt, 1988). The RGC is "... in steady and successful operation and is turning out an excellent article..." wrote *CGL*, January 10, 1894. The same trade paper, in March 1896, cited the RGC for "...the excellence of their glass and patterns that have largely increased their business during the present year."

Trade paper accounts suggest that Edwin Robinson acted as the RGC's "front man." He represented the company on frequent trips to Pittsburgh and at exhibitions and meetings, while his father, a seasoned glass house supervisor, oversaw the day-to-day operation of the factory. Edwin displayed the company's wares every January from 1894 through 1897 at the annual glass and pottery exhibition held at the Monongahela House hotel in Pittsburgh.

Besides his marketing ability, Edwin also proved himself to be a competent designer/inventor. He was granted mechanical patent No. 588,018, issued in 1897, for improvements to glassmaking machinery (Figure 2).

Tableware Patterns Emerge

The earliest trade journal advertisement for the RGC appeared in *CGL*, October 4, 1894, announcing the company's opening to manufacture tableware, bar ware, and novelties (Figure 3).

In January 1894, salesman Charles J. Gill showed Robinson's No. 1, also known as Fagot or Vera (Figure 4), and No. 4, Robinson's Ladder, at the McClure House hotel, Wheeling, West Virginia, an exhibition center for area glass factories (*CGL*, January 20, 1894). No. 90,

Robinson's Puritan or Radiant Daisy was added to the RGC lines in 1894 (Figure 5).

In the following two years, new patterns produced by the RGC included: No. 125, Zanesville (Figure 6); No. 123, Weston (Figure 7); No. 129, Josephine's Fan (Figure 8); and Romola (Figure 9) as well as the No. 43 caster

set (Figure 10).

Edwin Robinson, accompanied by Richard Miller, visited the Union Glass Works (UGW), Martin's Ferry, Ohio, in late March 1896 (*CGL*, April 1896). This firm decorated glassware made by other factories that chose to decorate their wares. Whether Edwin Robinson actually contracted with the UGW to decorate RGC wares is not known.

Of the seven tableware patterns produced by the RGC, only No. 1, Fagot, Vera, No. 90, Puritan, Radiant Daisy, and No. 125, Zanesville were painted with ruby stain, then fired. Some patterns have been found with amber stain.

Collectors of RGC pattern glass find the Zanesville line with the widest array of decorations. In addition to staining, at least ten decorative combinations are known including: enameled five-merous flowers in blue, pink, and yellow; chrysanthemum-like flowers; pansies; and sundry floral sprays (Figure 11).

During the summer of 1896 the RGC actively advertised their line of jelly

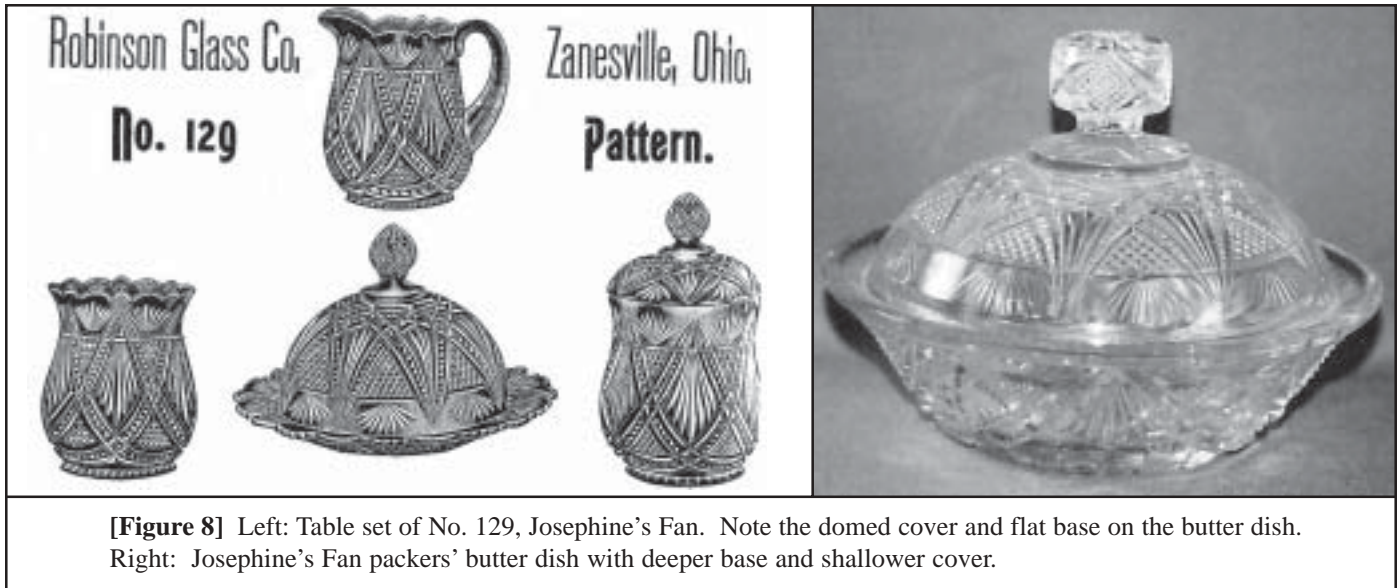
tumblers (Figure 12). The company had joined a consortium composed of 20 individual factories specializing in jelly tumblers and common tumblers that had formed in Pittsburgh in January 1896. Commenting on the jelly tumbler situation, *Commoner & Glassworker*, February 15, 1896, opined, "...the market seems to be too crowded and there is no demand at the increased prices." The news item named the Crystal Glass Company, Bridgeport, Ohio, as the only factory manufacturing jelly tumblers and plain tumblers that had not joined the combine.

Another trade paper, *Glass and Pottery World*, June 1896, reported the RGC tumbler output otherwise: "The Robinson Glass Company have their factory in complete operation again and are devoting their attention just now largely to jelly glasses preparatory to the large demand this summer from the large fruit crop. The prospects were never better for fruit, and prices and conditions for jelly tumblers and fruit jars are such that it is desirable for dealers to lay in stock early if they expect to be supplied with favorable terms."

Although the RGC continued to add new forms to the Josephine's Fan line during 1896, the company's January 1897 exhibit in Pittsburgh featured "...new blown stemware, sherries, champagnes, julips [sic], cocktails, hot whiskeys, wines, cordials, and...tumblers engraved and etched" (*CGL*, January 13, 1897).

While the 1897 show spotlighted these blown forms, the RGC had previously advertised them in *CGL*, October 1894

[Figure 7] *Glass and Pottery World*, April 1896 ad, showing the No. 123 Weston pattern.



[Figure 8] Left: Table set of No. 129, Josephine's Fan. Note the domed cover and flat base on the butter dish. Right: Josephine's Fan packers' butter dish with deeper base and shallower cover.

(Figure 13). The same advertisement urged buyers to “Write for prices and catalogue.” One wag with a need to elucidate wrote, “Among new things promised for the near future are lines of hot whiskeys and cocktails—at least glasses to hold those beverages preliminary to their being absorbed into the human system” (*CGL*, October 3, 1894).

The End Nears

In February 1897, the RGC suffered a strike, idling the factory for nearly eight months. The union men objected to the new blowing machines for stemware that could be operated by one man instead of two, a move by the RGC to curb production costs. The new machinery

further threatened the livelihood of the highly skilled glass blowers (*CGL*, April 28, 1897).

The issue of wages as well as the installation of new blowing machinery may have contributed to the strike action. The July 28, 1897, *CGL* observed that Edwin Robinson had attended a wage conference between the National Association of Manufacturers of Pressed and Blown Glassware (an organization of managers) and the American Flint Glass Workers Union (AFGWU).

Although records at the Toledo, Ohio, headquarters of the AFGWU do not name the RGC workers as belonging to an affiliated local, they may have been members of AFGWU Local 95 or AFGWU Local 119, both already

organized in Zanesville before the RGC started up.

How the strike was finally resolved was not reported, but the factory had resumed operation by October 30. *Crockery and Glass Journal (CGJ)* January 27, 1898, commented: “The men returned to work—all that were needed—with the understanding that a man, not a boy, would operate the machinery.”

(With the advent of greater mechanization in glass factories, labor leaders urged cooperation and flexibility, so that all concerned with the glass industry might benefit. Dennis Hayes, a Zanesville native, became president of the Glass Bottle Blowers of the United States and Canada union beginning in 1896. He served until his death 21 years later. John A. Voll, also born in Zanesville, succeeded Hayes as president, serving until his death in 1924 [Barrett, 1997]. These men were concerned with many humanitarian as well as industry-wide issues, including child labor in the glass factories, exposure to harmful chemicals, loss of jobs due to the automatic bottle blowing machine, and managing the summer stop.)

In addition to the labor troubles that plagued the RGC, Harry Northwood, founder of the Northwood Glass Company, sued the RGC in 1897, alleging infringement on mechanical patent No. 369,296 that he had obtained in 1887. Harry had improved a device to crimp the rims of glassware in the mold. The crimping device, mechanical patent No. 327, 406, had originally been patented in 1885 by Harry's father, John Northwood I, residing in Briarly Hill, Stafford, England. He had assigned this



[Figure 9] Left: Ad showing forms of the Romola pattern made in 1895-96. Right: Romola high standard covered compote.



[Figure 10] The No. 43 four-bottle caster set in a glass holder with a metal handle.

patent to his son while Harry lived in Bridgewater, Pennsylvania (Figure 14).

During May 1897, *CGJ* divulged that Edwin Robinson was busily gathering information to defend the company in the patent infringement suit. Minnie Watson Kamm stated she did not know how the suit was resolved, but that "...others at once began to crimp their rims in the mold adding greatly to the attractiveness of pressed pieces (Kamm-Wood, 1961).

The RGC minority stockholders hired receiver E. E. Bagley to represent them in 1899, alleging that the RGC management threatened bankruptcy "to dispose of goods and stock at needless sacrifice" (*CGJ*, March 30, 1899). A week later the court dismissed the receiver because the stockholder's allegation could not be confirmed.

With the original officers still in charge, the RGC board of directors voted to start up again following the summer stop (*CGJ*, June, 15, 1899). However, during the summer of 1899 Edwin Robinson already had voted in favor of becoming part of a tableware combine. "Edwin Robinson of Zanesville, O., was a looker-on at the combiners meeting in Pittsburgh last week, and favors a pooling of interests," reported *CGL*, July 20, 1899.

The National Glass Company (NGC), a tableware combine or trust, was formed in November 1899. Following an appraisal, the deeds of joining factories were turned in to the attorneys in charge of NGC legal transactions. In all, 19 formerly independent firms joined the second largest tableware combine. The NGC absorbed the RGC on November 1, 1899, as Factory No. 16, and changed the name to the Robinson Glass Works. (The NGC numbered its member factories, while the U. S. Glass Company assigned letters to its factories.)

Probably little, if any, glassware was produced at this factory after the merger. The NGC announced that the Robinson Glass Works would not operate in 1900, and began moving equipment and molds to other factories now under its control.

Equipment was moved to National's Royal Glass Works (Factory No. 18), Marietta, Ohio, along with at least ten Puritan, Radiant Daisy pattern molds. Molds for the Romola pattern went to the Model Flint Glass Works (Factory No. 11), Albany, Indiana, in 1901. Teal (1997) reported that the RGC had produced at least 76 different forms in this pattern.

The NGC also shipped molds for the No. 129, Josephine's Fan pattern to its new factory in Cambridge, Ohio, built in 1901-02, to be continued there as Cambridge's No. 2504 Ware in 1903. This pattern was also produced at the Ohio Flint Glass Works (Factory No. 14), Lancaster, Ohio, in 1902.

The McKee & Bros. Glass Works (Factory No. 12), Jeanette, Pennsylvania, received molds for No. 125, Zanesville and continued the line in 1902. The Ohio Flint Glass Works made No. 123, Weston as well as No. 129, Josephine's Fan in 1902.

Addison Thompson, secretary of the NGC, traveled to Zanesville in 1902 to investigate reopening the RGW. The factory building had remained in satisfactory condition, and could have been supplied with adequate fuel and raw materials; transportation links continued to be excellent. Thompson never did reopen the factory, and in 1904, the roof caved in. (The NGC itself foundered and fell into receivership in 1907, and was completely defunct by 1910-11.)

Plans to revive the old RGC factory surfaced once more during the summer of 1906. The August 4, 1906, *CGL*



[Figure 11] Above Left: No. 125, Zanesville clear/frost cruet with five-merous yellow flowers. Above Right: No. 125, Zanesville clear/frost spooner with enameled five-merous blue flowers. Bottom Right: No. 125, Zanesville frosted tumbler with enameled floral spray and clear condiment tray in background.

Remember

The Time is Near at Hand When the "New Woman" Will Make Us Put Up Fruit

Write to the **Robinson Glass Co.**

Zanesville...Ohio
For Quotations

Gentle Men

Now Is the Time to Buy Jelly Glasses

[Figure 12] Summer 1896 ad urging purchase of jelly tumblers (*Glass and Pottery World*, June 1896).

disclosed: "According to a local exchange, there is some prospect that the old Robinson flint glass works will once more become one of Zanesville's producing manufactories. The matter of starting a factory for the manufacture of lamp chimneys to be operated by the AFGWU has been discussed, and a committee has been appointed to look into the matter..." Before further action could be taken, the factory burned to the ground that same year.

The Robinsons Move On

Following the 1899 merger, John Robinson became an employee of the NGC in 1900, working for the combine at several locations. He first accepted the manager's job at the West Virginia Glass Works (Factory No. 19), Martin's Ferry, Ohio. He left that position and worked as the superintendent of the Crystal Glass Works (Factory No. 4), Bridgeport, Ohio, in 1901-02.

By 1903, he had moved to Rochester, Pennsylvania, where he managed the glassware manufacturing department of the H. C. Fry Glass Company for about 12 years. (This company made a variety of fine glass including cut glass, oven and kitchen ware, and Fry Foval.)

When John was about 60 years of age, he and his wife moved in with Mrs. Anstis Gordon, 409 Adams Street, Rochester. In early January 1915, he suffered a stroke and died on January 27 at age 70. Funeral services, attended by many co-workers, were held in the home of Mrs. Gordon. Later he was interred in Bellaire, Ohio.

Other men named John Robinson appear in glass literature of the same time period. As far as is known, John Robinson of the RGC never used a middle initial, but at least two others with the same first and last name did.

After the RGC closed its doors, Edwin Robinson also worked for the NGC, becoming the superintendent of the Fairmont Glass Works (Factory No. 1), Fairmont, West Virginia. The *CGJ* (May 31, 1900) placed him in Mannington, West Virginia in May 1900 where a glass factory reportedly was planned, but probably never built.

In June 1900, Edwin represented the Fairmont Glass Works at the NGC's superintendent's meeting on June 6 in Pittsburgh. He was still residing in Fairmont, West Virginia, in 1915. At this time he may have been employed by the

The Robinson Glass Co.,
Zanesville, Ohio.

AGENTS:

Docter & Co., 58 Barclay St., New York.
Gen. E. Reinhardt, 619 Arch St., Phila., Pa.
Chas. J. Gill, Western.
R. E. Miller, Southern.

WRITE FOR PRICES AND CATALOGUE

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[Figure 13] Assorted barware made from 1894 to closing (CGL, various issues).

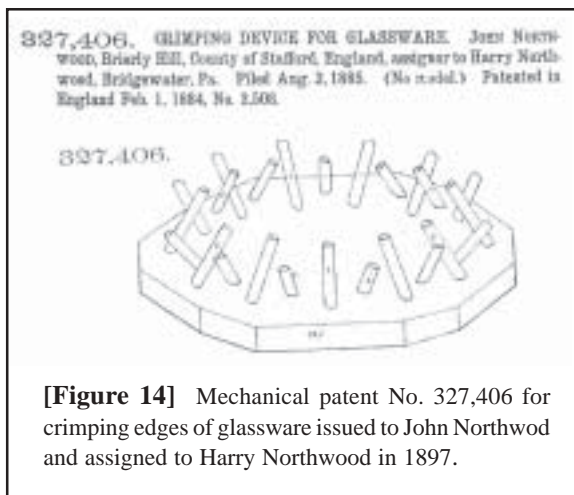
Cumberland Glass Works or the Monongah Glass Company, both located in Fairmont.

The RGC history, a work in progress, waits until further research can fill in the gaps. When a copy of the RGC catalog circa 1894-95 surfaces, it will aid immeasurably in attributing wares to this factory.

Acknowledgments

Contributions to the RGC history made by the following individuals and organizations are acknowledged with gratitude: American Flint Glass Workers Union Headquarters, Toledo, Ohio; Gail Bardhan, Reference Librarian, the Juliette K. and Leonard S. Rakow Research Library, Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, N.Y.; Tim Deane, Albany, Ind.; Genealogy Department Staff, Muskingum Library System, Zanesville, Ohio; Elaine Henderson, PatternGlass.com, Albuquerque, N.M.; Interloan Staff, Madison (Wis.) Public Library; John and Paula Landers, Stoughton, Wis.; James S. Measell, Fenton Art Glass Company, Williamstown, W.V.; a Private Collector; Research Center, B. F. Jones Memorial Library, Aliquippa, Pa.; Nancy Spitzer, Patents Librarian, Kurt F. Wendt Library, Madison, Wis.; and Ron Teal, Sr., Albany, Ind.

About the Author: Marg Iwen began collecting Early American Pattern Glass (EAPG) after bidding successfully on an unknown glass plate at a country auction in 1969. Today she collects a Mc-Kee tableware pattern, but has bought and sold EAPG novelties, and historical glass through her home-based Bear Tooth Antiques for the past 14 years. Her research interest is glass factories of the 19th and early 20th centuries. She has written over a dozen articles on various factories and their wares. She lives in Madison, Wisconsin, with her husband, Frank, and Schnauzer, Data Base.



[Figure 14] Mechanical patent No. 327,406 for crimping edges of glassware issued to John Northwood and assigned to Harry Northwood in 1897.

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