

Shards of Glory 3: Phoenix Glass

By Jeff Mihalik

(This article was originally written in 2014 but was never published.)

While digging in Monaca (one of our local Ohio River towns) my digging partner, Rick Ronczka, and I kept finding use layers which contained very colorful and unusual glass shards. We surmised that these shards may have been associated with the Phoenix Glass Works, but back in the day, we didn't save them for research or study. However, as potential Phoenix glass shards kept rising from the privy depths, I started to save them.

Let me start by providing some background history of this business and the community in which it was (and still is) located. The Phoenix Glass Co. was incorporated in 1880 under the supervision of Andrew Howard, president of the Phoenix Glass Co. It was located in the town of Phillipsburg, Pa., which is now called Monaca.

Phillipsburg itself has a very colorful history. Originally known as Water Cure, it became known as New Philadelphia (which later became Phillipsburg) when, in 1832, Count De Leon and his followers settled here after breaking away from the Harmony Society, which was located upriver in Economy, Pa. I read that this breakaway may have something to do with the Harmony Society espousing

celibacy, among other issues. These German immigrants were mostly adherents of Pietism and lived communally. They were also skilled in many crafts and brought a zeal for work and labor to this area.

Move forward about fifty years and we now see a growing population and growing industry along the towns of the Ohio River. Having access to local raw materials and good transportation routes to markets, Phillipsburg was an ideal location for constructing a glass manufacturing facility.

Dig Site 1: We have been scoping out this particular home for many years. It shows up on both our 1861 and 1876 maps and there lies our interest. The owner, as we found out, had mental health issues. He would not really talk to us let alone discuss digging in his backyard. Then, recently, I noticed that a condemned notice was attached to the front door and the windows were boarded up. Apparently, there was a fire that totaled this structure.

We were very familiar with all the neighbors and wanted to get a dig in before the home was torn down. A couple weeks later we probed the lot and found two probable privy sites. The first privy was an 1890 to 1910 privy, filled with unembossed whiskey flasks (over 70) and a few common medicines.



THIS PAGE: Photos of the dig site and unearthed objects.





Privy 2, which was up close to the home just off the back porch, picked up where the first privy ended. As we dug down, going from 1890 to circa 1880, I found a layer of glass shards in a pile on one side of the privy. I immediately recognized these shards as probable Phoenix Glass due to their unusual colors, unknown forms, and colored cullet mixed in.

Unlike years earlier when we dug similar shards, I knew to put these aside and keep for further investigation and study. Digging to the bottom, we found the only whole pontil bottle we have ever found in Monaca. It was a nice Nerve and Bone Liniment. Nothing special, but a cool keeper from our home area.

Dig Site 2: Directly across the street was another home which, although it did not show up on our maps, had double chimneys and had that old look to it. The owner of this home was losing it to foreclosure and did not care what we wanted to do. We found another two likely privy spots. This time, one was near the alley next to a garage, and the other was along the property line in front of the garage.

We dug the one next to the garage along the alley first. This privy contained a lot of newer trash in the first couple of feet and it was hard to determine if it had been dug previously. However, as we dug further, we started to find whole bottles dating to around 1890. Nothing special, but at least blown in the mold.

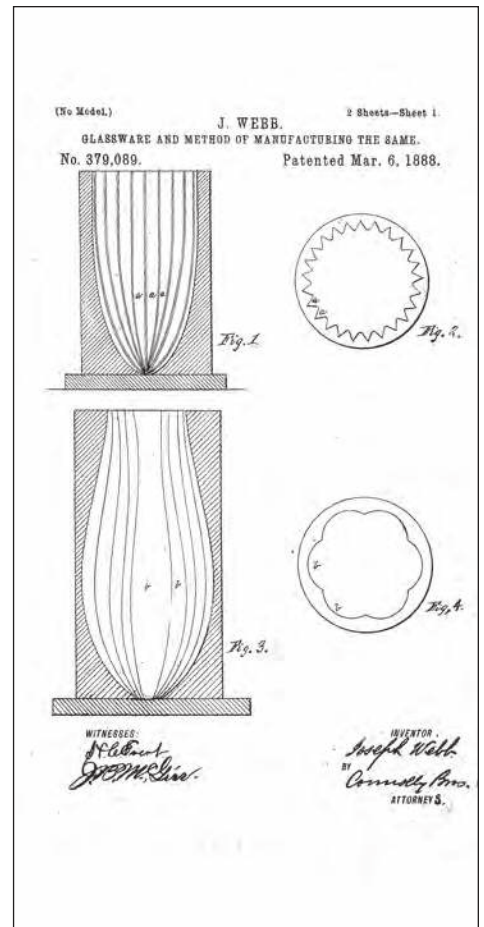
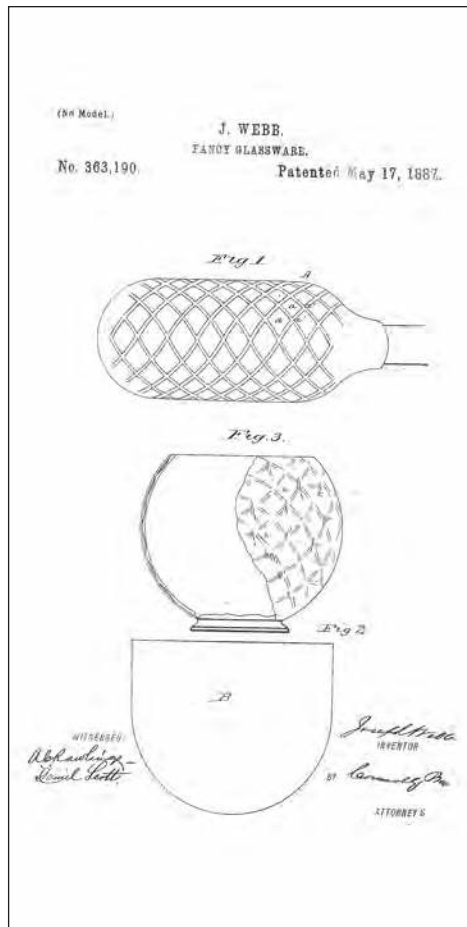
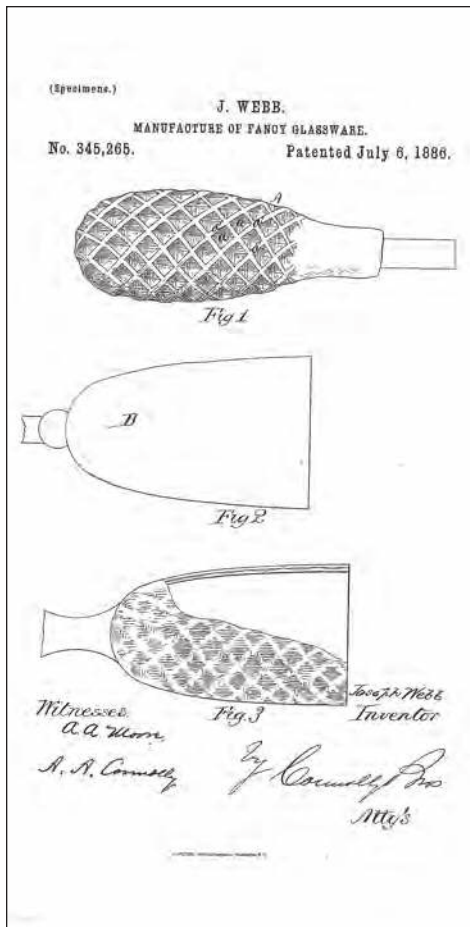
At about the five foot level I uncovered another grouping of Phoenix glass shards. Once again, the color, type and cullet all indicated that this was locally produced, at least this is what I surmised.

I dug the second privy by myself in 90-degree heat. I didn't have our shade umbrella so I rigged up a tarp and secured



THIS PAGE: Images from the dig site and objects on display at home.

FOLLOWING PAGE: Three Joseph Webb patents for glassware and some of the many shards of Phoenix glass recovered.





THIS PAGE: Another look at some of the many shards found during the digs.

it over the pit by tying it down to filled trash cans in order to have some shade. Hey, this actually worked.

The soil in this area is very rocky and sandy river material, as this part of town is not far from the Ohio River. It was difficult to determine if the probe was hitting a glass object or some flat shale rock, but I dug on. When I got to the five foot level, I found another clump of glass shards all piled together (are you seeing a pattern here?). These shards appeared to be of Phoenix glass origin but some of the others were hard to say.

At about the seven foot level I hit the privy trash layer (bottles in night soil). The glass here was all broken and was of the 1870 era (very typical of privies in this area, usually always dipped). Again, not much in the way of whole good bottles for these two privies, except another 60 or more clear whiskey flasks, but I kept the shards from Phoenix glass.

Dig Site 3: This site was right next to Dig Site 2. The owner had been very curious with all the other digging we had been doing and allowed us onto this lot. Once again I found two privy sites. One was closer to the home and the other was next to the garage but away from the alley.

We dug the one closer to the home first. When we hit a trash use layer, the whole and broken bottles indicated another 1890s-era privy. This pit once again had a grouping of glass shards and cullet that pointed towards a Phoenix Glass origin. I have not mentioned this yet, but all of the privies dug so far had been wood-liners.

Pit 2 at this site turned out to be a brick-liner. It was about 4 foot wide and 5 foot long. As we dug into this pit, we started to find some 1880s era bottles. Several embossed local drugstore bottles and medicines were found, as well as some local Hutches. This pit ended up being over 7 feet deep.

Near the bottom of this pit I again started to find a pocket of glass shards of Phoenix

origin. I also found several glass canes. Two were clear with a frosty strip and one was a deep emerald green color. Many other colorful shards were also recovered.

By now I had several buckets of shards. Some were highly unusual forms that I could not even decipher what they may have been used for. Maybe they were end-of-the-day whimsies or test forms that a glassblower was experimenting with. I even thought that maybe the glassblowers would bring home broken or seconds examples instead of leaving them in the glass shop. What I do know is that these shards represented what was being either owned and tossed, blown and tossed, or just tossed into privies during the period of 1880 to 1900.

Now started my research. The Phoenix Glass Co. began operations in a newly constructed plant on Aug. 5, 1880 in Phillipsburg (now Monaca), Pa. Phoenix was founded by Andrew Howard and originally made flint chimneys and shades. Phoenix remained in continual operation until 1970 and is in fact still operating today under the name Anchor Hocking.

From my research, it appears that the time period of 1883-94 is of greatest interest to glass collectors. This was the period of Phoenix's art glass production. Phoenix Glass Co.'s great success in art glass is due mainly to one man, Joseph Webb Jr., the son of an English glassmaker, Joseph Webb Sr.

Joseph Webb Jr. was an active glassmaker at Coalbourn Hill near Stourbridge in England prior to his immigrating to the U.S. and becoming plant superintendent for Phoenix (from 1883-93, he was a metal maker, glass formulator, or plant superintendent).

His knowledge of glass was so extensive that some of the glass made at this time by Phoenix could not be made by any other company in the U.S. He was responsible for many innovations in glass manufacturing and glass formula-

tion. However, very little documentation remains of the glass he produced.

The most recent book on Phoenix Art Glass, by Leland Marple, started with the process of elimination in order to identify Phoenix Glass items. Phoenix Glass identification is also made more difficult due to the fact Phoenix did not issue catalogues for its glass, which was sold primarily through its own showrooms in Pittsburgh and New York.

Phoenix manufactured a broad line of products including tableware, pitcher sets, cruets, fairy lamps, rose bowls, vases and novelty products. Their Mother of Pearl glass included almost every type of Mother of Pearl, including rainbow, diamond, dot oval, zig zag, moiré, swirl glass and ribbed panel optic.

Their standard optics included spot, oval spot, opal spot, diamond, lattice, opal lattice, opal lattice reversed, opal diamond, Phoenix drape, swirl honeycomb, and window optic patterns. They also manufactured ribbed panel optic and Venetian thread.

As to the glass itself, Phoenix made peach blow, also known as mandarin. Phoenix was producing peach glass before Mt. Washington. Phoenix's (i.e. Joseph Webb's) patent for MOP (Patent # 345,265) was submitted prior to that of Mt. Washington; unfortunately Mt. Washington's patent was granted first, which later caused Phoenix legal problems. Joseph Webb produced other Patents on MOP glass while at Phoenix, at least two that we have found: one in 1887 (Patent # 363,190) and a second in 1888 (Patent #379,089).

Phoenix made acid-etched cameo glass and cased glass. Below is a summary table prepared from trade journals, which recorded a multitude of colors and effects made by Phoenix. This table ignores those items used in lighting wares. The table was compiled by Leland Marple in his book, *Phoenix Art Glass*.

Year, Color, and Effect:

1883 "Crackled glass in blue, green, amber, canary, lemon, citron."

1884 "Caarnelian, Amberine, Gopazine, Asurine, spotted blue, crystal, canary, pink; rose, blue, and ruby, amber, gold, Coralene.

1885 "Mottled wine, opal, mottled amber, blue, white rose. Colored cut glass with color on exterior, threaded colored glass wound spirally around a different colored body. Ivory, Aurina, ruby cased cameo with figures cut on the exterior, amethyst, flint opalescent, canary, citron and rose in coralene mold pattern. Topaz and rose, Venetian Art (color combination), Etruscan, threaded ware (patented), peach (combination of colors identified as Mandarin), blue and marine opalescent."

1886 "Ivory with applied crystal ornamentation in relief and crystal twisted feet. Rose du Barry (in diamond pattern, full tableware line), Bronze (bronze shading to steel grey), Chinese Mandarin (body of pale yellow with smoke-colored tops). Tinted Ivory, fairy lamp bases and shades in striped pink and blue. Blue, ruby, canary and flint shades in Coraline mold pattern. Verde Pearl, carved ivory glass, Rose du Barry with satin finish and diamond pattern, satin finished ivory satin cased inside with colors and with crystal edges. Gold and silver enameling on vases, pitchers, water sets, tankards with enameling in Japanese and other oriental designs. Peach (new line) with decoration, opalescent spot in all colors, opalescent diamond in all colors, etched enamel cameo glass."

1887 "Heliotrope, Harlequin, Pearl, ivory, pleated Snowstorm, etched, cut crystal, ivory and gold fairy lamps; Bridal Pearl; Verde de Satin Onde (green zig-zag airtrap); gold clouded crystal."

1888 "Impasto Cameo in four colors."

It is also interesting to note that Phoenix Glass Works was out of the art glass pro-



One last look.

duction within a year after Joseph Webb's leaving Phoenix Glass.

On the 1861 map the home on Dig Site 1 was listed as being lived in by the Meriman family. Later research showed that during the 1890s in Phillipsburg, four out of the five Merrymans (notice spelling) living in town were glass blowers! So the shards found at this location can with almost certainly be attributed as Phoenix Glass. Although ownership of the other dig sites were not shown on my maps, it doesn't take much to surmise that most (if not all) of the colorful or etched or air trapped or cut or MOP glass shards being found in the privies were coming from Phoenix Glass workers. I counted at least ninety glasshouse workers on the 1892 Phillipsburg directory. All the dug privies are within a few blocks of the glasshouse and were likely occupied by glasshouse workers.

Take a look at the pictures of the items found and see if you can correlate to the Year, Color, and Effect table above.

I strongly urge anyone with further interest to read Leland Marple's book, *Phoenix Art Glass*.

Editor's note: Also, *R.S. Prussia: The Formative Years* by Leland and Carol Marple is available on the internet. The Marples have been collectors, researchers and writers of porcelain wares marked R. S. Prussia for many years. They have produced four books on the topic.