

A brief history of the Philadelphia Glass Works (Later Called Kensington Glass Works)

This is another fine article by Kevin A. Sives. Mr. Sives has allowed HMPF to add this informative article to our website.

The following are dates and facts related to Dr. Thomas W. Dyott and the Glass Works at Kensington, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. For anyone interested in early American glass and American Historical Flasks, this is valuable information.

Establishing a Glass Works

- 1771 Oct. Robert Towars (skinner) & Stephen Leacock (watchmaker) leased land in Kensington to build a Glass Works.
- 1772 Nov. Isaac Gray and John Elliott, Sr., two merchants, along with John Elliott, Jr. (brush maker), and Samuel Elliott (tanner) bought out Towars & Leacock.
- 1773 Jan. An advertisement appeared stating that the glass works was complete.
- 1774 Workmen obtained from Steigel's defunct Manheim Glass Works.
- 1775 Feb. Advertising for sale: decanters, case bottles, bitters bottles, pocket bottles, wine, cider, and all kinds of table ware.
- 1777 Apr. Glass works closed, Philadelphia occupied by British.
- 1780 May. Isaac Gray & Thomas Leiper bought out former owners.
- 1783 Glassworks back in operation, but soon closed.
- 1784 No glass works in operation through 1790.
- 1789 Sept. Philip Stimel possibly rented the works, and began glass production, but for only a very short time.
- 1798 Apr. Christopher Trippel & Co rented glass works from Leiper, and began glass production.
- 1799 Jan. Company opened a store in Philadelphia to sell wares.
- 1800 Mar. Joseph Roberts, Jr., James Rowland (iron merchant), and James Butland (merchant), purchase glass works from Leiper.
- 1802 Jan. Roberts bought out by other two partners.
- 1812 Feb. Glass works operated until this date, when the Kensington Glass Works held an auction to sell off coal and inventory of glass.
- 1815 Sept. James Rowland bought out James Butland, but glass works still not producing a product.
- 1816 Hewson, Connell, & Company announced they were about to build a new glass works 'on the lot adjoining the old glass works in Kensington'.

- 1821 In one of Dr. Dyott's advertisements, he referred to the 'Kensington Glass Factories', which suggests that the 'new' Kensington works had expanded to encompass the location of the 'old' Kensington works.
- 1832 James Rowland died, and James Rowland, Jr. inherited the glass works.
- 1833 Jul. Thomas W. Dyott purchased the Kensington works from James Rowland, Jr. for \$ 12,000, and incorporated it as Dyottville.

A Brief Chronology of Thomas Dyott

- Born 1777 in Britain (or perhaps Scotland).
- Claimed to be the grandson of Dr. Robertson, of Edinburgh, although no data exists about Dr. Robertson.
- Coming from Britain about 1804, where he learned boot blacking, he set up a shop in Philadelphia. Presumably, he had some medicine formulas with him also.
- By 1805, he had set up a medical practice, and was selling some medicines as well as boot blacking.
- By late 1806, he had a Patent Medicine Warehouse operating in Philadelphia.
- By 1809, he had American made bottles blown in his mold, which was embossed, "Dr. Robertson's/Family Medicine/Prepared/only by/T.W. Dyott".
- Same year, moved to a new and larger facility at 116 North 2nd Street.
- Also in the same year, his expansion intensified, and he had in place 14 agents in 12 towns and cities in 7 states. This number continued to grow, with 41 agents in 36 towns in 12 states by 1810. By 1814, in New York state alone, he had agents in 14 towns.
- In 1810 or so, Dyott added the letters 'M.D.' after his name.
- On September 3, 1811, he moved to 137 2nd Street, and soon expanded to 139 as well. This address, known forever onward to Dyott collectors, as the North East Corner of 2nd and Race Streets.
- During this period, he continued to have a medical practice as well as selling his medicines (see newspaper).
- During and after the War of 1812, business boomed, and Dyott expanded southward. His brother, John, moved to Charleston, South Carolina, and opened another large warehouse there.
- During these war years, the 'old' Kensington Glass Works, operated by James Butland and James Rowland since about 1800, closed. Originally built about 1771 by Towars & Leacock. At this point, Dyott was without a supplier for his glass bottles.
- About this time, Dyott gained an interest in the Olive Glass Works in Glassboro, New Jersey.

- Not being a total business man, Dyott got married in 1815, and had a son named John, who was born in October, 1816.
- In 1816, Hewson, Connell, and Company opened a glass works near the site of the old Kensington Glass Works.
- In 1817, Dyott was still associated with Olive Glass Works, but he was also an agent for the Gloucester Glass Works in Clementon, New Jersey and the Union Works at Port Elizabeth, New Jersey.
- About 1821, Dyott became affiliated with the 'new' Kensington Glass Works, which he called 'Kensington Glass Factories'. This is the beginning of the period when the famous Kensington flasks were produced.
- By 1833, when Dyott purchased the Kensington Glass Works from James Rowland, Jr., it had 5 furnaces in operation, had about 400 employees, of which 130 were apprentices. At this point, Dyott called his works, Dyottville.
- Dyottville became a work commune, with everyone participating in morning prayers, calisthenics, and formal education. Also, a formal apprenticeship developed, with small children becoming indoctrinated in the glass production process.
- Dyott started his own bank, the Manual Labor Bank, and issued own script which was redeemable at the Dyottville store.
- With a general collapse in the economy, by November 1837, Dyott pleaded insolvency.
- Convicted of fraudulent banking practices, Dyott was sent to jail in 1839, and served 1 1/2 years before being pardoned by Governor Porter.
- From his release until his death at the age of 83 in January, 1861, Dyott worked in relatives drug stores.
- Dyottville did not die with Dyott's bankruptcy. After remaining idle from 1838 until about 1842, when the fires were re-lit.
- About 1848 or so, Dyottville went wild with flask production, with the many variation of the Washington/Taylor flask.
- Also a large part of their production during these years was soda or beer bottles, with an enormous quantity of 'squat' sodas being produced.
- From then until 1923, Dyottville continued to be operated as a glass house by various individuals and companies.

Dyott most famous contribution to bottle and flask collecting is the wonderful variety of flasks that were produced at Kensington under his close supervision. There are a total of five distinct subjects depicted on Kensington flasks. These five subjects are: George Washington, General LaFayette, Benjamin Franklin, the ship 'Franklin', and a picture of a cornucopia filled with fruit and vegetables.

GEORGE WASHINGTON

The first series of flasks depicted the picture of Washington on the front, and an Eagle on the reverse. There are four flasks in this series, all pints, and are numbered GI-14, GI-15, GI-16, and GI-16a.

GI-14 pictures Washington - Eagle (with the inscriptions "ADAMS AND JEFFERSON JULY 4 A.D. 1776" and "KENSINGTON GLASS WORKS PHILADELPHIA"). GI-15 Washington - Eagle (No inscription). GI-16 Washington - Eagle (No inscription, no E PLURIBUS UNUM). And GI-16a Washington - Eagle (same as 16, but no TWD - perhaps the mold was sold and used by another glass house). There is only one known example of GI-16a.

GENERAL LAFAYETTE

The next series of flasks, of which there are two variations, are both pints. The picture General LaFayette on the obverse, and an Eagle on the reverse. The first flask, GI-90, carries the full inscriptions "E PLURIBUS UNUM", "REPUBLICAN GRATITUDE", and "KENSINGTON GLASS WORKS PHILADELPHIA".

GI-91 lacks the three inscriptions, but is identical otherwise.

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

This series of flasks, of which there are four, depict likenesses of Benjamin Franklin. GI-94 and GI-95 are pint sized, whereas GI-96 and GI-97 are quart sized. GI-94 and GI-95 both depict Franklin on the obverse and Dr. Dyott on the reverse. On the edge of GI-94 is the inscription "WHERE LIBERTY DWELLS THERE IS MY COUNTRY" and "KENSINGTON GLASS WORKS PHILADELPHIA". GI-95 is identical, with the omission of the inscriptions.

The two quart sized flasks, GI-96 and GI-97, differ considerably from each other. GI-96 depicts Franklin and Dyott, but has the inscription "ERIPUIT COELO FULMEN. SCEPTRUMQUE TYRANNIS" and "KENSINGTON GLASS WORKS PHILADELPHIA". Translation -- 'He snatches from the sky the thunderbolt, and the scepter from tyrants'. Of course, we don't know if this quote was meant for Franklin or Dyott.

GI-97, on the other hand, shows Franklin on both the obverse and reverse. In addition, there is no inscription.

SHIP "FRANKLIN"

The next grouping of flasks depict the ship Franklin. GII-42, a pint flask, shows an Eagle on the obverse, and the ship 'Franklin' on the reverse. GIV-34 shows various implements of the Masonic order as well as some agricultural implement on the obverse, depicts the ship 'Franklin' on the reverse, and carries the inscriptions "FREE TRADE AND SAILORS RIGHTS" and "KENSINGTON GLASS WORKS PHILADELPHIA".

GIV-35 is identical to GIV-34, with the replacement of the inscriptions with vertical ribs. GIV-36 is also identical to GIV-34, lacks the inscriptions, but instead has horizontal ribs instead of vertical.

CORNUCOPIA

Cornucopias are represented on three flasks made by Kensington, and all are half pint. GII-43 has an eagle on the obverse and an upward facing cornucopia on the reverse. This flask has the inscriptions "E PLURIBUS UNUM", "ONE OF MANY", and "KENSINGTON GLASS WORKS PHILADELPHIA".

GII-44 is similar to the above, but has vertical ribs instead of an inscription. GII-45 is very similar to GII-44, lacking the inscriptions, and lacking many of the other details as well (e.g. rays around the eagle, beads around the oval panel, etc.)

MISCELLANEOUS

The final three flasks are of Kensington manufacture, and represent variations on other flasks described above. GII-40, for example, is a pint sized flask with an eagle on both the obverse and reverse. GII-41, another pint flask, has the Eagle on the obverse, but has a large tree in foliage on the reverse.

The last flask, GIV-37, utilizes the agricultural and Masonic emblems seen on the ship Franklin flasks for the obverse, and the ever present Eagle on the reverse.

SUMMARY

When Dyott came to the United States, he came with only a few shillings in his pocket. Becoming an example of a true Horatio Alger character, Dyott rose to become a very wealthy man. Only to lose it all in bankruptcy.

Dyott made his fortune by first selling Dr. Robertson medicines. As business grew, and he had a warehouse, he added a full line of other products, such as wine, porters, and mineral waters. He then added an entire range of "Family" medicines.

The bottles for these products were first produced by the 'old' Kensington glass works, and then later Olive and Union glass works. Soon, however, Dyott began using so many bottles and flasks, he decided to get a glass house of his own. He became heavily involved with the 'new' Kensington Glass Works, and began having designed flasks of his own creation.

On a number of levels, Thomas Dyott and his Kensington Glass Works are very interesting. His story is wonderful to illustrate how someone could rise from poverty to becoming a world famous millionaire. Continuing the story, it can illustrate how a doctor and glass house manager can quickly become bankrupt by getting involved in financial matters for which he was not equipped.

Dyott was, at the beginning anyway, a quack and a huckster. He created and sold cures for cancer, rheumatism, and gout. And this made him become very rich.

He was ahead of his time in creating a work commune concept. If he were doing it today, we'd probably say he was mimicking the Japanese style of manufacturing.

But no matter what your opinion of Dyott and his glass works, he left us newspaper advertisements and glass house script to collect. He left us squat soda and porter bottles with dozens of embossings. And finally he left us historical and pictorial flasks in colors from aquamarine to cobalt blue to emerald green.

Unembossed bottles of the type produced by and for Dyott:

- olives • capers • mustard • nursing • demijohns • carboys • wine
- cordials • porters • mineral • black glass • cologne

Other manufacturer's products sold by Dyott:

- Turlington's Balsam of Life • Dalby's Carminativ • Bears Oil
- True Daffys Elixir

Bottles made for Dyott (but probably not at Kensington):

- Aquamarine, blown, 5 oz., embossed "DR. ROBERTSON'S" on the left end, "FAMILY/MEDICINES" on one side, "PREPARED" on other end, and "ONLY BY/T.W.DYOTT" on the other end.

Flasks made for Dyott at Kensington:

- GI-14 Washington - Eagle (c. 1826)
- GI-15 Washington - Eagle
- GI-16 Washington - Eagle (c. 1824)
- GI-16a Washington - Eagle (c. 1831)
- GI-90 LaFayette - Eagle (c. 1826)
- GI-91 LaFayette - Eagle (c. 1824)
- GI-94 Franklin - Dyott (c. 1826)
- GI-95 Franklin - Dyott (c. 1824)
- GI-96 Franklin - Dyott (c. 1826 - 1828)
- GI-97 Franklin - Franklin (c. 1824 - 1825)
- GII-40 Eagle - Eagle
- GII-41 Eagle - Tree (c. 1822 - 1824)
- GII-42 Eagle - ship 'Franklin' (c. 1822)
- GII-43 Eagle - Cornucopia (c. 1826 - 1828)
- GII-44 Eagle - Cornucopia (c. 1824)
- GII-45 Eagle - Cornucopia (c. 1824 - 1825)
- GIV-34 Agricultural & Masonic - ship 'Franklin' (c. 1826 - 1828)
- GIV-35 Agricultural & Masonic - ship 'Franklin' (c. 1826)
- GIV-36 Agricultural & Masonic - ship 'Franklin' (c. 1825)
- GIV-37 Agricultural & Masonic - Eagle (c. 1822)

Flasks attributed to Dyottville (after Dyott's 'retirement'):

- GI-37 Washington - Taylor
- GI-38 Washington - Taylor
- GI-39 Washington - Taylor
- GI-39a Washington - Taylor
- GI-40 Washington - Taylor
- GI-40a Washington - Taylor
- GI-40b Washington - Taylor
- GI-40c Washington - Taylor
- GI-41 Washington - Taylor
- GI-42 Washington - Taylor
- GI-43 Washington - Taylor
- GI-44 Washington - Taylor
- GI-45 Washington - Taylor
- GI-46 Washington - Taylor
- GI-47 Washington - Taylor
- GI-48 Washington - Taylor
- GI-49 Washington - Taylor
- GI-50 Washington - Taylor
- GI-51 Washington - Taylor
- GI-52 Washington - Taylor

- GI-53 Washington - Taylor
- GI-54 Washington - Taylor
- GI-55 Washington - Taylor
- GI-55a Washington - Taylor
- GI-55b Washington - Taylor
- GI-55c Washington - Taylor
- GI-56 Washington - Taylor
- GI-57 Washington - Taylor
- GI-58 Washington - Taylor
- GI-59 Washington - Taylor
- GII-38 Eagle - 'Dyottville'
- GII-39 Eagle - plain
- GXIII-41 Sheaf of grain/'Sheets & Duffy' (calabash)
- GXIII-42 Sheaf of grain/star (calabash)
- GXIII-44 Sheaf of grain/star (calabash)
- GXIII-45 Sheaf of grain/star (calabash)
- GXIII-46 Sheaf of grain/tree (calabash)
- GXV-22 'Sheets & Duffy'/plain

Bottles made at Dyottville (after Dyott's 'retirement'):

- Sodas, sodas, and more sodas
- Scent and colognes
- Wine bottles