

# Millersburg Glass Association Newsletter

## Summer 2021 Edition — Volume 2, Number 3

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**Millersburg Glass Association**

PO Box 406

Millersburg, Ohio 44654-0406

[www.millersburgglass.com](http://www.millersburgglass.com)



### **What's in this Summer Issue of the Millersburg Glass Association Newsletter?**

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- ◆ Work Roles and Equipment in an Early 1900s Glass Factory by Chris Sieverdes
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- ◆ Board Meeting Actions: Membership Cards, MGA Dues Increase for 2022, Food at Auction

### **Greetings Millersburg Glass Association members!**

The American Carnival Glass Association held their annual convention in Berlin at the Comfort Suites in early June. I thought they had a great turnout with people coming from all across the country. The Wroda team had a great auction with some great Millersburg glass, some of which brought record prices!

I presented one of the programs during the conference. Of course, it was on Millersburg Glass. I showed items that I had found locally within 20 miles of home. Chris Sieverdes also presented a program on Millersburg and brought the blue Peoples Vase for all to see. The ACGA convention will be returning to Berlin next year.

Our 2021 Annual Gathering will be October 8 & 9, the same weekend as the Holmes County Antique Festival. We are looking forward to a great auction with many rarities from the Ports collection. That is a very busy time in Amish Country, so book your rooms early. We will be at the Comfort In and Suites in Berlin, OH (330-893-7400) again this year. For additional information for lodging, RV hookups, restaurants and entertainment, contact the Holmes County Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Bureau at [www.holmescountychamber.com](http://www.holmescountychamber.com).

We produced a deck of playing cards with pictures of Millersburg Glass as a fundraiser for the Millersburg Glass Association. Over 25 members provided glass items for the pictures to be taken and placed on cards. The resulting card deck is great. It is a great souvenir for only \$10. Be sure to get one for yourself and extras decks for Christmas and birthday gifts to friends!

Hope you are having a great 2021. I wish you well from the Millersburg Glass Association!

Steve Maag, MGA President

## Millersburg's Glowing Glass: What is Vaseline Glass? Part 1 in a 3 Part Series.

By Matt Young, Loudonville, Ohio

When I started collecting glass, it wasn't Millersburg. My passion, when coming through antique malls or perusing the millions of listings on Ebay, was to find Uranium Glass, or as Millersburg collectors call it, Vaseline. I liked the fact that it contained Uranium, the main component that led to the Atomic Era, one of my favorite periods in American history.

At one time, I probably had over 500 pieces of Uranium Glass. Now, I'm down to only the nice pieces that I really enjoy. Plus, I had to fund my newly acquired Millersburg habit. Naturally, when I found out that Millersburg had Vaseline examples, I was gung ho to learn all I could about it. There wasn't anything written on Millersburg's glowing glass at the time, so I set out to write my own piece, which is now available should you so desire a copy. This is only a snippet.



Only 23 out of Millersburg's nearly 80 carnival glass patterns were made in Vaseline. That's just 29% of their entire Carnival line, and very few examples of each were produced at that. It is possible, however, that more examples exist, they just haven't been black lighted yet. It is also possible that some pieces were produced and never made it past the shard pile out back of the

factory. As with many Millersburg pieces, there is only one example known. It is highly likely that one example of a pattern was made in Vaseline, but succumbed to the trials of time and ended up in a trash can, shattered by an unruly toddler.



One of the most common questions I get when combing through antique malls with a blacklight is "what do you use that for?" or "what are you looking for?" My answer is obviously Uranium Glass. It usually doesn't take me long to find a sample to show it off to the inquisitive person, and when I light it up, they usually find it "pretty interesting." We chat about it for a little bit and then they walk off, as I stand there smiling because I just helped create a new collector.

All Vaseline glass is Uranium Glass, but not all Uranium Glass is Vaseline glass. In order to be considered "Vaseline," it has to have the same yellowish tint as its jelly counterpart. The picture here shows the distinct difference between the two.



In fact, when Millersburg produced glass in this color, they didn't do it because it glowed, they probably didn't even know it glowed, and they didn't call it Vaseline. That term wasn't coined until 1938 when Fenton used it in one of their art glass catalogs.



In order to get the glowing effect, glass needs to be colored using Uranium Oxide, also known as Sodium Diurinate with a mix of uranium isotopes 234, 235, and almost entirely of 238, which is non fissile and can't sustain a nuclear reaction. No, I don't know what that means, but someone might enjoy that fact. It doesn't take much to make glass glow like the sun. Generally, the brightest glowing pieces only contain between 2% and 25% uranium by weight. For anyone thinking I'm crazy for having this stuff in my house, the EPA has since deemed "radioactive antiques" including glassware safe to be around.

Yes, the glass is giving off rays, but they are known as beta rays, meaning they couldn't make it through a paper towel. The alpha rays are the ones you need to watch out for. To put this in perspective, if you have quartz countertops in your home, they give off more radioactivity than Uranium Glass. And yes, I do have unprocessed uranium ore to accompany my collection. Uranium in glass dates back to 79 AD, but reached its height in what was known as the depression glass era.

Uranium, at that time, was cheap. It was a waste byproduct, and when glassmakers realized that they could efficiently

color glass with it, they used it A LOT. Depression glass was a way for cash strapped families to have a nice set of dinnerware. In fact, there were theatres that would give away a piece of glass as an incentive for coming to their shows.

If the whole family went week after week, in just a short time, you could have collected an entire set of glass like the one in the picture. Certain soaps and detergents would include a piece of depression glass in their boxes in an effort to keep people buying their products. This glass was cheap, machine made by the millions, and not very high in quality.

Shortly after the depression era, a demand for higher quality pieces arose, and we get what was known as elegant glass, as shown by the wine glass in the picture. This glass was handmade, a lot of times it was etched, and was higher in quality. In 1943, however, the use of Uranium as a glass colorant ceased when the government regulated the use of Uranium. There was a little mission going on known as the Manhattan Project, which was the development of the Nuclear bomb in WWII.



Now, if you have a piece of Uranium Glass, it doesn't mean it was produced prior to 1943. The government deregulated Uranium again in 1958. However, during that 15-year stretch, glass makers simply weren't going to not produce green glass, so they found even cheaper, more efficient ways of achieving the same color. This is why you can have a piece of the same color that doesn't glow under a black-light, as in the picture shown.



NOTE: Now that you have a basic understanding of what Uranium Glass is, in the next two issues of the MGA Newsletter, we will take a closer look at the pieces Millersburg produced in Vaseline. I hope to see you all at the MGA Gathering and Wroda Auction this October. There you will be able to see many of these unique pieces in person and hear a more in-depth presentation on Millersburg's Glowing Glass.



## Work Roles and Equipment in an Early 1900s Glass Factory

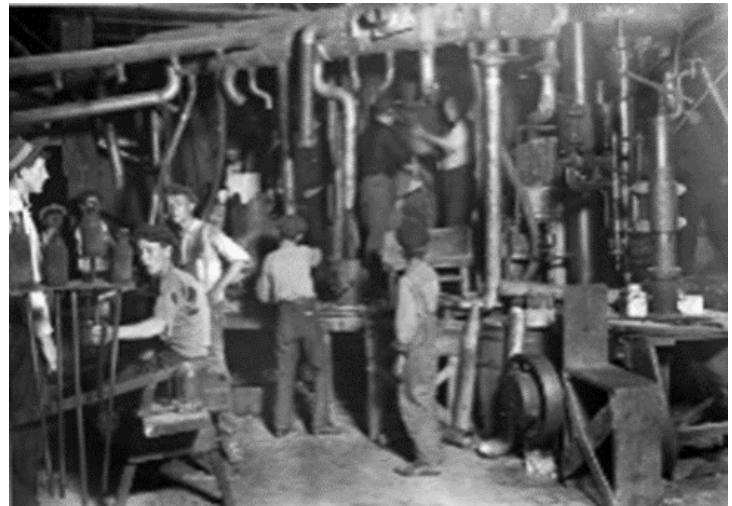
By Chris Sieverdes

### Work Roles in a Glass Factory Using Moulds

- ◆ Gatherer – Takes a gob of molten glass from the furnace and carries it to the presser.
- ◆ Presser – Stands next to side-lever press on wheels and forces molten glass into the mould.
- ◆ Plunger – Operates the tool used to press molten glass into a mould. Plunger is also the name of the tool. It holds back the walls of the glass and specially prepared plungers stamp the interior design into the carnival glass.
- ◆ Turning-Out Boy – Removes the baked glass item from the mould and places it on a board.
- ◆ Crack-off Boy – Removes the finished piece of hot glassware from the end of the gaffer's iron (or blow iron) by cracking it off.
- ◆ Gaffer – Glass blower who blows molten glass into a mould.
- ◆ Mould Boy – Opens and closes the mould.
- ◆ Carrying-In Boy – Moves the glass to the lehr for cooling.
- ◆ Warming-In Boy – When further re-heating and finishing work is required to refine the glass item, he places it into the glory hole.
- ◆ Finisher – Receives the re-heated glass item and shapes or re-shapes the glass into its final form. The finisher also may rub out seams caused by the sections of the mould.

Equipment in the Glass Factory

- ◆ The Tank – The main furnace in the glass factory.
- ◆ The Punty – Tool consisting of a long iron bar or rod used to hold soft glass so it can be shaped while warm. It has a movable clamp to hold a bowl from the bottom rim.
- ◆ Lehr – An oven that has a wide conveyer belt that runs through it with controlled temperature gradients from high to low throughout the traveled space. The glass is slowly cooled after it is removed from the mould. Typical temperatures range on a continuum from a high of 850-900 degrees and under while traveling through the lehr.
- ◆ Snap Tool – Used to hold the glass for re-heating.
- ◆ Glory Hole – The opening in the side of a glass furnace. It is the hole providing access to the furnace used to re-heat a glass item in between steps in the process.



Seated is Mould Boy, Gaffer standing at Mould Boy's right shoulder. Next is Gatherer. Far right is worker with the Snap Tool to clamp the glass.

Process

- ◆ Annealing – Process of slowly cooling glass to relieve internal stresses after it was formed. The glass is then slowly cooled at a predetermined rate until its temperature is below the strain point. It is a heat treatment process that changes the physical and sometimes also the chemical properties of a material to increase ductility and reduce the hardness to make it more workable to be shaped. It is a time and temperature relationship. Typically, the lower the temperature, the longer the soak time. Most small glass objects have had their strain relieved within 30 minutes at about 950 degrees.

**In Memoria: A Tribute to Margaret Ports of Wooster, Ohio by Lola Johnson**

Margaret Ports, a Charter member of The Millersburg Glass Association, passed away March 11, 2021. Margaret was a quiet lady who loved Millersburg Glass. She enjoyed attending auctions and renewing friendships. She always came prepared with a list of glass items to bid on after doing her investigative due diligence. She always had a smile on her face and willingly greeted friends, acquaintances and others. She experienced true joy in Millersburg Glass and was an excellent yet careful collector.

I missed seeing her at the American Carnival Glass Auction held in Berlin this spring. She will be sadly missed. She was a dear and steady friend. By Lola Johnson.



**MGA Board of Directors Action Items at Board Meeting on July 6, 2021.**

- ◆ As a result of rising postal costs with more on the way, the Board of Directors decided that Millersburg Glass Association Dues for year 2022 will be \$20.00. We are mailing by US Mail a significant number of MGA seasonal Newsletters in addition to the emailed digital copies.
- ◆ We also decided to re-institute the distribution of MGA membership cards with each member's personal membership number.
- ◆ We anticipate that food will be provided to our members at no cost to them on October 8-9, 2021
- ◆ Wroda Auction will occur in two installments on Friday evening and Saturday morning. The preliminary plan is that crystal will be prominent at the Friday evening auction and carnival glass will be prominent at the Saturday auction. The Ports collection has some real size and quality to it. Come and enjoy! Margaret was a discerning collector of Millersburg Glass.

Thank you! Chris Sieverdes, MGA Secretary and Newsletter Editor