

## A Town Made of Glass

Tales and truths  
from a forgotten  
industry

BY ANN HAUPRICH AND  
AUDREY BOPP HAUPRICH

There isn't much to look at now on the wooded slopes of the Kayaderosseras Mountain Range, above Lake Desolation in northern Saratoga County. What nature hasn't eroded or covered with brush has been largely carted away by collectors. Only those with a keen awareness of local history and a vivid imagination can walk amidst the ruins of the once bustling village of Mount Pleasant and reconstruct—at least in words—the place known

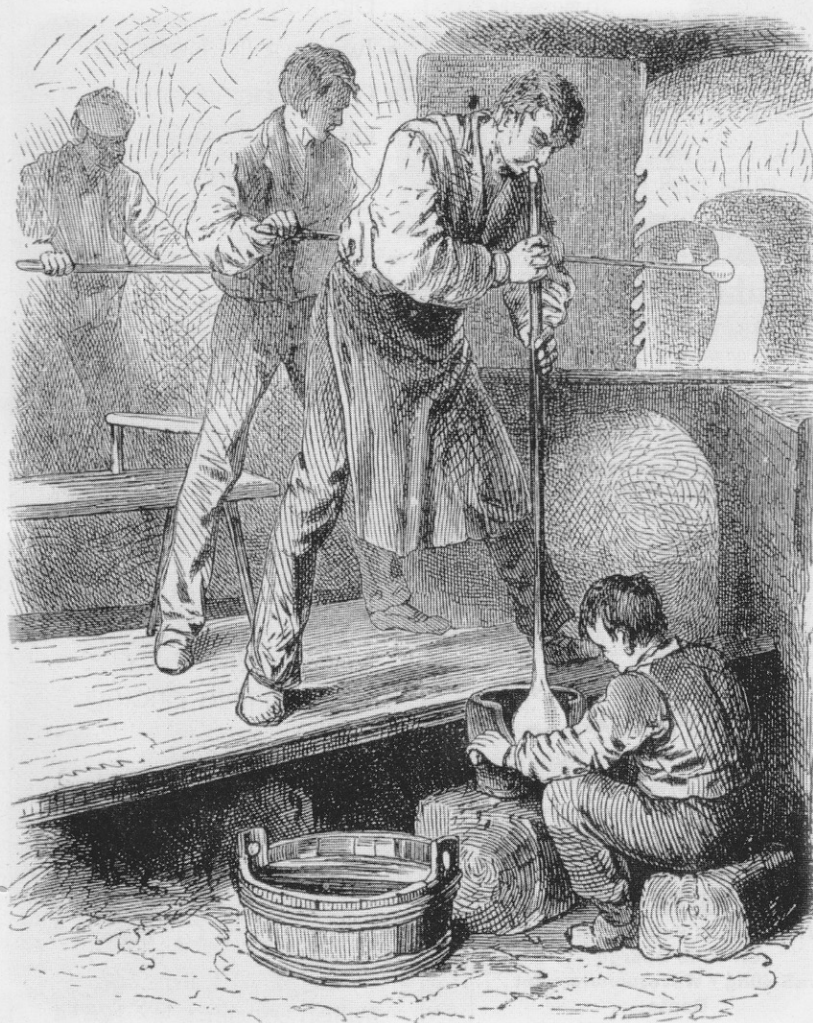
as Glass Factory Mountain.

The history of Glass Factory Mountain dates back to the 1840s, when Oscar Granger, proprietor of the Mount Vernon glassworks near Oneida, traveled to Saratoga County to find a suitable location on which to build a new factory. His company made bottles for Saratoga Springs mineral water, as well as for inks, medicine, milk, snuff, wine and bitters. Since substantial quantities of wood and sand were needed to produce glass, the fourteen hundred acres Granger found high atop Mount Pleasant were deemed to be ideal, especially since they were much closer to the springs themselves.

Before long, the remote site became a flourishing community of about two hundred people, many of them French-Canadians who arrived to cut timber for construction and firewood for the glass furnaces. Expert glassblowers came from as far away as England and Ireland. During its heyday, which lasted until about 1870, Mount Pleasant's craftsmen were producing well over a million mouth-blown bottles annually, in a settlement that also boasted a sawmill, gristmill, blacksmith shop, church, schoolhouse, store, post office, barns, stables and hotel. There was even a plank road built from three million board feet of lumber that allowed for relatively easy travel up and down the mountain.

Yet, by the turn of the century, the picturesque village had been reduced to a ghost town. Sadly, there are no historic markers to draw attention to its significance. Indeed, the only signs of life besides birds and woodland creatures are the occasional hikers, hunters, loggers and amateur archeologists who come searching for clues to everyday life at Glass Factory Mountain.

Oscar Granger's first step in transforming the wilderness began with moving his existing manufacturing operation more than a hundred miles. Tools, molds and workmen came from Oneida to Lake Desolation via the Erie Canal and steam railroad; horse carts hauled cargo and people up



GLASSBLOWERS IN A NINETEENTH-CENTURY FACTORY.

the mountain. Between 1844 and 1846, Granger built a village, improved transportation from the mountain and constructed glassmaking facilities. A water-powered mill sawed wood for twenty workers' houses, substantial dwellings for Granger's family and a hotel for unmarried men known as Temperance House. A church and schoolhouse were also erected, and a teacher from the Albany Normal School was hired. When all was ready, the Mount Vernon Glass Works officially closed its doors, and the new plant, called the Saratoga Mountain Glass Works, opened for business.

The road leading up the mountain was primitive at best and caused Granger many problems. Hardpan or bedrock was covered by several inches of sand on the steep slope; even under ideal circumstances horse-drawn wagons had a difficult time. Granger decided it would be cheaper to draw the small quantity of sand required up to the settlement than to transport the wood down to the sand pits. He built a plank road in 1846 from the new factory to the outskirts of Saratoga, a distance of about twelve miles. Granger installed four tollgates to cover his road-construction costs; tolls were three cents at each gate.

The plank road was initially used to haul two wagonloads of bottles each day to Saratoga Springs. Bottles were packed in either oats or meadow grass and placed in sturdy wooden crates. This approach was still less than ideal: as the cargo bounced down the road there was considerable breakage, which forced the creation of an alternate route down the mountain.

Granger's answer was the dugway: Loaded wagons were brought by teams to a launching platform at the top of a long right-angled cut carved in the face of the mountain. From here the carts were slid downhill—the rate of descent checked by ropes and a windlass—into Middle Grove. There the wagons were hitched up to horses and the rest of the trip made in the conventional way.

The focal point of life atop the mountain was the furnace, which resembled, according to noted glass authority Helen McKearin "a conical beehive of between fifty to seventy-five feet in cir-

## Great Adirondack Rarity

—A Henry D. Swann Settle



There are only six known examples, one of which is in the Adirondack Museum. Pine with ash splint panels, the seat removable, the construction is very typical of Swann's work and also of the Arts and Crafts period. At the seat rail and at the back are keyed through-tens. The surface has an original Burnt Sienna paint subtly contrasted with pale yellow painted panels at the back. In original condition.

See Craig Gilborn's *Adirondack Furniture* p. 274 for an example, p. 304, 305 for a picture of Swann and a settle on his shop's front porch, p. 326 for biography of Swann.

63 1/2" wide,  
52" tall,  
seat 21  
1/2" deep.

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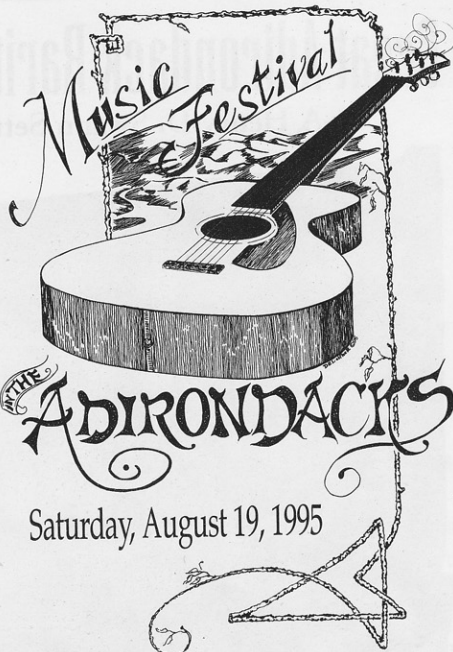


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## YESTERYEARS

cumference," with the top part of the cone ending in a chimney. An article in the March 1930 issue of *The Antiquarian* by McKearin featured interviews with Antoinette Carr, the daughter of Oscar Granger, and Morris Holmes, son of one of the original glassworkers at Mount Pleasant. From them McKearin learned the furnace held six clay pots, each measuring two-and-a-half feet in height and diameter.

In order to have the glass at the proper temperature for shaping the bottles, the furnace temperature was brought to 2,400 degrees Fahrenheit, and then allowed to cool to 1,800 degrees, the standard temperature for glassmaking. Because of the extreme heat, bottles were produced only from the first of October until the last of April. Blowing hours were from four a.m. to two p.m. Monday through Saturday. The factory operation closed down on Sundays, but even then the furnaces were kept stoked.

During the summer months clay pots were made. Local clay wasn't suitable; Granger originally imported clay from Germany, but later had it brought in from Missouri. Intense heat caused the pots to soften, and the corrosive action of the molten glass eventually destroyed them. Replenishing the supply of clay pots was vital.

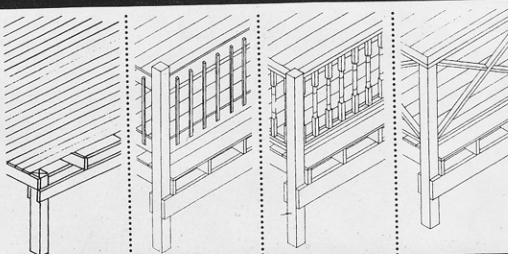
The process of manufacturing the glass was painstaking and complex. Pay was on a piecework basis, providing incentive for the men to work as quickly as possible. "The fire in the furnace was continuous during the glassblowing months . . . Only when an old pot had to be replaced, about every four weeks, was any portion of the fire extinguished, and then only for the time being at the point where the new pot was to go. Workers working in six-hour towers [shifts] fed to this Moloch ten cords of wood every twenty-four hours. Wood dryers working in twelve-hour towers were responsible for the wood supply. They saw that the wood was properly dried in the wood oven or kiln, and split into three-foot lengths," McKearin wrote. According to a glassblower's wife, the work was so physically demanding

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that a master craftsman required five meals a day.

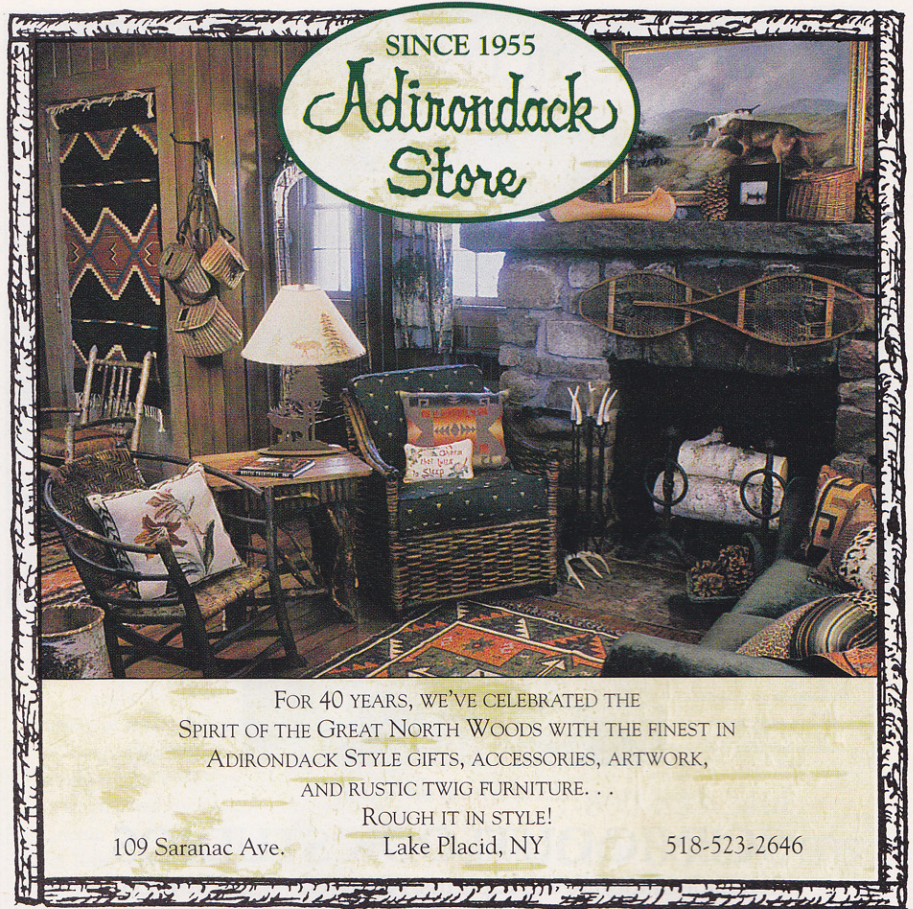
A batch of glass contained about twelve measures of sand, five of soda, three of lime and ten of ashes. Ashes gave the glass a dark olive color—the more ashes, the darker the glass. If light green was required, burned and powdered sandstone was used in place of ashes. Before the batch could be put in the pots for cooking, ingredients were heated in a material oven to extract as many of the impurities as possible.

A crew of five or six men and boys worked at each glory hole, which housed a ceramic vat filled with molten glass. Two glassblowers were positioned at each pot. Each of them inserted a four- or five-foot-long metal blowpipe into the mixture and extracted a gather of cherry-red molten glass. A glassblower's apprentice acted as gatherer, collecting the glass and handing the pipe and contents to the blower.

The glassblower then rotated the rod on a metal slab called a marver, which helped shape and cool the bottle. Then he puffed into the pipe to create a bubble inside the gobbet. Sometimes this hollow ball would have to be enlarged and the gathering, rotating and blowing repeated. When the ball was the appropriate size, the glass-coated end of the pipe was inserted into a two-sided, hinged metal mold.

Bottles for sparkling mineral water had to be made of especially thick glass to prevent explosions caused by the pressure of carbonation. Many of the molds for mineral-water bottles were custom designed for a particular spring; engravings in the form created raised lettering on the bottle's exterior.

After the bottle had been removed from the mold, a pontil rod with molten glass on its end was attached to the base of the bottle. (A later invention to expedite the job was a basketlike device on a rod called a snap case.) With the base firmly secured by pontil rod or snap case, a shearer deftly removed the blowpipe. He finished the bottle by reinserting the neck into the furnace to reheat it and added more glass if necessary. Then he extended the neck and applied a small



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lip with a special tool. (You can recognize these handmade bottles today by the seams that end at the shoulders; sometimes a drip edge is found at the base of the lip.)

Despite the fact that the walls of the furnace were three feet thick, workers were in an extremely hot environment. The building had exterior wooden walls divided into eight-foot sections, each containing two tiers of hinged doors, so the sides of the building could be opened to allow heat to escape. In addition to the main furnace, there were tempering ovens or lehrs, where carrying boys left finished bottles to be gradually cooled for three days. To prevent heat loss, iron sheets were placed in front of those doors each night and then removed in the early-morning hours. (Glass that is allowed to cool too rapidly will break, and Mount Pleasant workers were not paid for broken or imperfect bottles.)

A handwritten volume of the 1850 agricultural census in the Saratoga County Clerk's office reveals the startling figure of 7,200,000 bottles, with a market value of \$18,000 produced by Granger's business. Of the forty-five workers in the factory, only five were listed as being glassblowers; the rest were auxiliary staff. If these five blowers working sixty to seventy-two hours per week for thirty weeks were producing at top speed, they would have been receiving a blowpipe from a gathering boy, blowing a glass bubble, inserting it into a mold, puffing down the pipe until the bubble filled the mold, removing an unfinished bottle from the mold, with a helper attaching a pontil rod or snap case to its base, breaking off the blowpipe and passing it to the shearer at the minimum rate of one every nine seconds continuously for ten to twelve hours a day. Four perfect bottles would have sold for a penny—an incredibly low price even by 1850 standards.

Superhuman production speed aside, one pleasant aspect of a glassblower's work was the right to use the fag end of the pot at the close of the day to create personal offhand pieces, such as sugar bowls, cream pitchers, vases, toothpick



## YESTERYEARS

holders, candlesticks, hats, rolling pins and even glass canes. These whimsies are highly valued by collectors and are specimens of the finest-quality work that these craftsmen could produce.

Granger moved his company one more time, to be closer still to the spring-water company that held a twenty-five-year contract for his bottles. Ironically, the most tangible evidence that a settlement ever existed on Mount Pleasant can be found on a heavily traveled strip in Saratoga formerly known as Congressville. Just outside the Adirondack Hotel on Congress Avenue is a small historical plaque stating: "CONGRESSVILLE. Numbers 1 to 15 were built in the 1840's as glassblowers' homes for the Glass Factory Mountain near Lake Desolation. When the factory moved to the corner of Congress Ave. and Empire Ave. in 1871, the houses were brought to their present location by means of horses and skids." ♦

*Ann Hauprich is a free-lance writer who lives in Middle Grove, New York. Audrey Bopp Hauprich, a retired school-teacher, lives in Ballston Spa.*

### Pieces of the Past:

#### Finding Glass Factory Mountain

Head out on a bright summer day; the area is popular with hunters in the fall. Cover your legs and arms to protect yourself from heavy brush, mosquitoes and deer ticks. Don't forget a trowel, work gloves and paper towels or bags for wrapping your finds.

To get to Glass Factory Mountain, head southeast from Batchellerville, into the Town of Edinburg and along Fox Hill Road about ten to fifteen miles. The overgrown entrance to the old village will be on your right. An alternative route is to travel along Middle Grove Road, off Route 9N in Greenfield, to Lake Desolation Road, and follow it north for approximately eight to ten miles, until you reach Fox Hill Road. Expect to drive about three miles after the blacktop ends; the road is rough. The entrance to the settlement will be on your left.

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