

Last Links to the Past: 20th Century South Jersey Glass
Volume 1 – Clevenger Brothers

By Thomas C. Haunton

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Reviewed by Jeffrey S. Evans

With this volume Tom Haunton has produced a long overdue and much needed chronicle of one of America's last great families of glass makers. His 438-page comprehensive history is not only a definitive account of the wares manufactured by the Clevenger family from circa 1930 to 1999, but also represents an indispensable component within the historical narrative of American glass production and collecting.

Supported by more than 800 photographs and illustrations, Haunton documents the free-blown, mold-blown and pressed glass produced at the firm's small shop in Clayton, NJ. His 30 years of researching and living the Clevenger story is evidenced through family and employee biographies, explorations of glass formulas and manufacturing processes, and specific product identification details.

Arguably the most valuable component of the volume is the 60 pages of original catalogues and trade advertisements associated with the Clevenger Brothers. Examples range from a small catalogue titled *The Renaissance of South Jersey Blown Glass* that was published by the Clayton (NJ) Antique Co. around 1934, to the firm's own circa 1990 advertisement for 6" and 12" diameter gazing balls. While many of the objects illustrated within these ephemeral offerings are well known, familiar reproductions, others have caused much confusion among scholars, collectors and dealers for many years. Foremost among the latter are the lily-pad decorated pitchers, vases and bowls that have fooled many, including Henry Francis du Pont who purchased an example from respected Ohio dealer Neil C. Gest in 1949.

The lily-pad decorated wares were first illustrated in a 1939 trade catalogue of *Authentic Reproductions of Early American Glass*, published by the Ritter-Carlton Co., 527 Fifth Ave., New York, NY. Interestingly, the identity of the Clevenger Brothers as manufacturers of the illustrated articles is not revealed; however, it is noted that "production is limited to the personal efforts of two elderly men who possess secrets of color that will pass with them."

As a further expansion of Clevenger's output, Haunton dedicates more than 130 pages to individual images accompanied by descriptions and notes of examples published in the aforementioned catalogues, production items not included in catalogues, and a variety of off-hand and whimsy articles. Additional pages are filled with samples of the firm's line of commemorative glass wares. This is complemented by a listing of the more than 1,000 different commemorative bottles produced from 1969 to 1999, including the production quantities of most examples.

In addition, Haunton includes many enlightening tidbits of information throughout his writings that greatly enhance our understanding of the early period of American glass collecting. Some of the most interesting are interactions between early distributors of Clevenger products and pioneering authors George S. McKearin and Ruth Webb Lee.

I congratulate Tom Haunton on the quality, magnitude and breadth of information that he has successfully included in this self-produced and self-published volume. His inclusion of more than 600 endnotes provides valuable sources and additional information to further our comprehension of the subject. The author's 24 years of work on, and passion for, the Clevenger family and their products is clearly evident throughout this narrative. The book does have several shortcomings that are attributable to the necessity of self production. Its overall organization could have benefited from a more structured layout, and the inclusion of an index would have greatly enhanced its usability, especially for those looking for quick information.

Tom Haunton's many years of interaction with the Clevenger family and a large number of those involved with the firm allows him to provide readers with an inside look into the everyday lives of those associated with the history of this important chapter of glass production in the United States. Through his closeness to the subject he is able to provide a personal connection that researchers who rely solely on archeological or documentary evidence cannot afford. In this age of pseudo "reality" TV and "tell-all" books, Haunton's exposition faithfully illustrates the real life of glassworkers and their industry in South Jersey during the 20th century.

While the retail cost of this volume is a bit intimidating, another effect of self publication, in consideration of the large amount of previously unavailable information included, it is certainly worth the price and should be a part of any serious glass library. Two thumbs up Tom!