

The Granite Glass Companies

Bill Lockhart, Beau Schriever, Bill Lindsey, and Carol Serr

Although they were unrelated, two different glass factories, both located at Stoddard, New Hampshire, had very similar names and made similar products. The Granite Glass Co. was the earlier of the two, existing from 1849 to 1862. The New Granite Glass Works followed from ca. 1860 to 1871. Both made flasks that were the only products to bear their names. The link between the two was George Foster, who worked as a glass blower for the first firm and was the dominant force – with his brothers – in the ownership of the second one.

Histories

Granite Glass Co., Mill Village (Stoddard), New Hampshire (1846-1862)

On September 1, 1846, Calvin Curtice, Israel F. Towne, Gilman Scripture and John M. Whiton, Jr. – none of whom seem to have had any glass making experience – formed Calvin Curtice & Co., a copartnership. The new firm bought the molds from the Keene New Hampshire Marlboro Street glass works that Joseph Foster had brought with him – although they removed any markings related to Keene.¹ Located at Mill Village (Stoddard), New Hampshire, the plant made a large variety of products, including flasks, medicinal bottles, inkwells (bottles), wine and porter bottles, and demijohns. George Foster – Joseph’s son, later to found the New Granite Glass Works and other glass houses – worked for the firm and recorded some of the happenings in his diary. The factory was badly damaged by a fire on November 15, 1847, but the firm rebuilt the plant by early 1848 (Historical American Glass 2015).

Israel Towne died on August 2, 1848, and the firm reorganized as Scripture, Whiton, & Curtice. Scripture left the partnership to work for the George Underhill Edge Tool Co. at Nasua in 1854, forcing another reorganization that resulted in the firm of Whiton & Curtice, who now

¹ Joseph Foster and his sons founded a dynasty of glass factories and sales agencies – as described in the Foster-Forbes section. Foster blew glass at Keene and kept the molds when the factory ceased operations. For more on Keene, see the section on Keene.

called the factory the Granite Glass Works (see below for a discussion about the name and the timing). The firm was in financial trouble by the beginning of 1856, and Sheriff Joshua Wyman placed the assets of the company at auction on November 26. The bulk of the goods were bought by George L. Curtis (unrelated to Calvin Curtice), a former distributing agent for the company. Curtis took on B.F. Messer as a partner, operating the plant as Messer & Curtis (Historical American Glass 2015; McKearin & Wilson 1978:147-148).

The partnership dissolved in 1857, but Curtis remained in business until 1860, when he left the area, dissolving the company. The buildings were likely destroyed by fire in 1864 (Field 1975:30; McKearin & Wilson 1978:147-148; Van Rensselaer 1969:73; Yankee Bottle Club 1990:34).

Containers and Marks

The Granite Glass Co. made blackglass bottles (ranging from golden or reddish amber to olive amber to pure olive glass (Lindsey 2015). The main products made by the company were containers for wholesale liquor dealers, especially half-pint, pint, and quart flasks embossed with an eagle on each side, and patent medicine bottles. However, the plant also made “Stoddard Lily Pad Pitchers, inkwells, jars, hats and various ‘off-blown’ pieces” (Field 1975:30).

As noted above, George W. Foster, the son of Joseph Foster, who had operated the first glass factory in the Stoddard area, worked as a glass blower for the Granite Glass Works and kept a diary. He recorded in 1854 his high numbers for a single day’s blowing as 532 quart wine bottles, 250 quart brandies, or 138 one-gallon demijohns, respectively. A later document (1856) noted also noted 532 quart wine bottles blown in one day, almost certainly by a single blower (McKearin & Wilson 1978:147-148). See Lindsey (2015) for more about hand production. For a factory to be successful, each blower had to have a large output.

GRANITE GLASS CO (1846-1862)

It is clear that the Granite Glass Co. did not mark the vast majority of its products, although van Rensselaer (1921:5), McKearin & McKearin (1941:510-511), Freeman (1964:87, 136), and Field (1975:46, 54) all recorded flasks embossed with the Granite Glass Co. name and

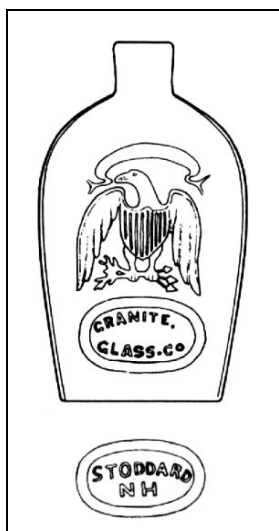


Figure 1 – Granite flask (McKearin & Wilson (1978:575))

location. McKearin & Wilson (1978:148-149, 575) best described, discussed, and illustrated the flasks. Two of the flasks had an embossed picture of an eagle with a pennant in its mouth above a circular labeling area embossed “GRANITE. (slight arch) / GLASS. CO” (slight inverted arch)” on the front and a similar eagle and oval embossed



Figure 2 – Granite flask (North American Glass)

“STODDARD (slight arch) / N.H. (horizontal)” on the reverse (Figures 1-3).

McKearin & Wilson (1978:148-149, 673-675) described and illustrated another flask embossed “GRANITE / GLASS / CO (all horizontal)” on the front and “STODDARD / NH (both horizontal)” on the reverse. Another example was the same but with “C.O” instead of “CO” in the name (Figure 4).



Figure 3 – Granite base (North American Glass)

One flask had a wetted-off or cracked-off finish that was then fire polished (Figures 5 & 6); the other was finished with a double ring (Figure 7). One not illustrated by

McKearin & Wilson had a single ring finish (Figure 8). McKearin & Wilson dated all of the flasks 1846-1850, although they did not explain why the cutoff date was so early.

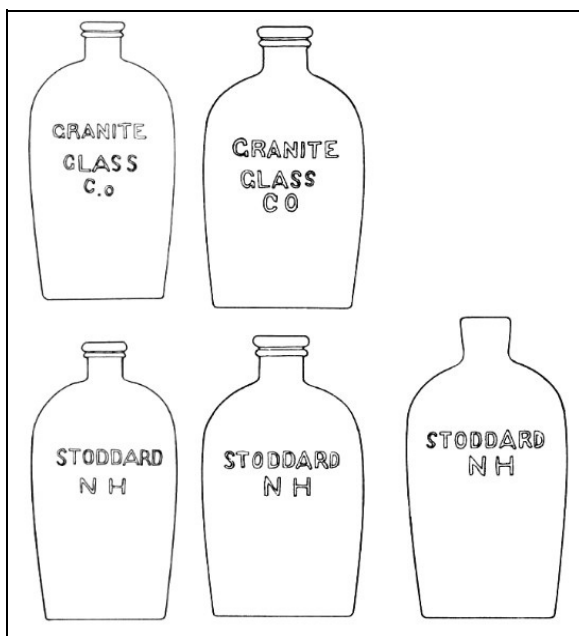


Figure 4 – Granite flask 2 (McKearin & Wilson (1978:673, 675))

What's in a Name?



Figure 5 – Granite Flask, finish 1 (Norman Heckler)

One aspect of the Granite Glass Co. flasks remains vexing. Historical American Glass (2015) illustrated several of the historical documents, dating from a report of the initial copartnership in 1847 to a court report from 1856. None of these used the name Granite Glass Works or Granite Glass Co. When

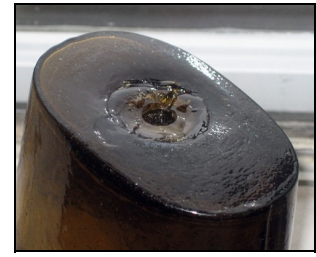


Figure 6 – Granite flask base (Norman Heckler)

Historical American

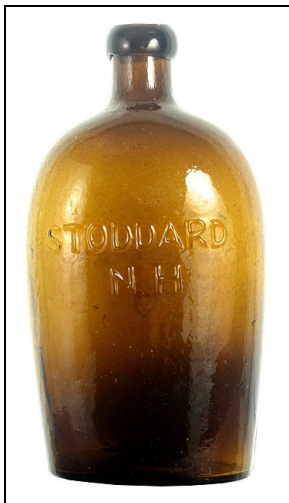


Figure 8 – Granite flask 2, finish 3 (Glass Discoveries)

Glass noted the term in 1854, it used “Works” rather than “Co.” McKearin & Wilson (1978:148-149) used the heading “Granite Glass Works” but alternated between “Works” and “Co.” in the text. Assuming that Historical American Glass was correct that “Granite Glass Works” was not used prior to 1854, it is likely that



Figure 7 – Granite flask 2, finish 2 (Jeff & Holly Noordsey)

“Granite Glass Co.” also fell into usage at that point.

Although Historical American Glass makes a good case for the name Granite Glass Works not being used until 1854, two sources refute that argument. Peachridge Glass (2012) presented updated information on Stoddard glass firms in 2012 that included the following statement:

The Granite Glass Company was founded in 1846 by partners Gilman Scripture, John Whiton and Calvin Curtice. The 1850 New Hampshire manufacturing census reported that this firm had eight furnaces, 38 employees and produced 500,000 bottles that year.

Although the details are unclear, this seems to be saying that the firm was called the Granite Glass Company in 1850. Second, an 1897 history (Gould 1897) noted:

March 1853. Henry Whitman was digging sand in the employment of the Granite Glass Company. He incautiously dug under a bank when it suddenly caved in upon him crushing him under its weight and killing him instantly, aged 17.

Although this second item only placed the name in use a year earlier, it is enough to question the veracity of the 1854 claim.

The actual use of the name, however, does not make intuitive sense. In similar cases, an operating firm (e.g., the Granite Glass Co.) managed a factory (e.g., the Granite Glass Works). Since the managing firms were named in the histories until 1857 (e.g., Calvin Curtice & Co., Scripture, Whiton & Co., etc.), The only time the name Granite Glass Co. makes sense is from 1857 to 1862; however, all of the flasks reported were embossed with “Co.”

New Granite Glass Works, Mill Village (Stoddard), New Hampshire (ca. 1860-1871)

Located at Mill Village, New Hampshire, the New Granite Glass Works was open from ca. 1860 to 1871 but bore no relationship to the earlier company, other than the name and the institutional knowledge reposing in the brain of George Foster. The sons of Joseph Foster (George, Charles, Wallace, and Joseph) built the plant, but George was distinctly the leader. Although the timing of the opening is unclear, the plant was certainly operational on May 20, 1861, the initial payroll entry. The factory made a large variety of bottles and fruit jars as well as willow-covered demijohns (Field:26, 34-36; McKearin & McKearin 1941:611; McKearin & Wilson 1978:174-175).

Although the sources are unclear about the timing, the brothers sold the business to Charles B. Barrett sometime between 1864 and 1868. A liquor and tobacco salesman, Barrett made bottles to sell his products. The plant burned to the ground in 1871, and Barrett chose not to rebuild (Field:26, 34-36; McKearin & McKearin 1941:611; McKearin & Wilson 1978:174-175).

Containers and Marks

Like its predecessor, the New Granite Glass Works did not identify the vast majority of its products, although it is noted for three flasks (in pint and half-pint sizes) embossed with its name and location. The plant was noted for golden-amber bottles (Knittle 1927:367). Van Rensselear (1969:73-74) mentioned that the factory made one-quart and three-quart bottles as well as demijohns, covered with rattan or willow weaving, done by the youngest Foster brother, Joseph E. After the Fosters left, Barrett also advertised 15-gallon demijohns, flasks, and containers for wine, soda, mineral water, ale, ink, blacking, bay water, cologne, hair oil, and patent medicines. The plant made bottles in black and amber colors and often used a cornucopia design on the sides (Field 1975:34-36).

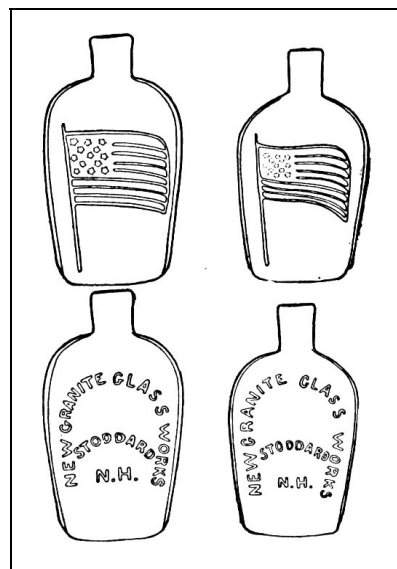


Figure 9 – New Granite flask
(McKearin & Wilson (1978:635))

NEW GRANITE GLASS WORKS (ca. 1860-1871)

McKearin & Wilson (1978:173, 634-635) discussed and illustrated one pint and two half-pint flasks embossed with flags on the front and “NEW GRANITE GLASS WORKS (horseshoe-shaped arch) / STODDARD (slight arch) / N.H. (horizontal)” on the reverse (Figures 9 & 10). The flags appeared in two configurations, one with 9 stripes and 13 stars; the other with 13 stripes and 16 stars. The 9-stripe variation was also made in pint size. Van Rensslear (1921:13) and the McKearins (1941:500) also noted the flasks.

New Granite Glass Co., Zanesville, Ohio

Even though Van Rensselaer (1969:219), Knittle (1927:376), and McKearin and McKearin (1941:594) all mentioned a New Granite Glass Co. at Zanesville, Ohio, and agreed that it opened in 1816, they disagreed on other details, like what it made (window glass or bottles and flasks) and when it closed (1823 or 1852).

However, according to Bill Barrett (personal correspondence 7/8/2008), a researcher who had been combing Zanesville newspapers and archival resources for decades, the factory *never existed!* Barrett found *no* historical evidence of any kind that there was ever such a plant. This fiction undoubtedly began with Van Rensselaer (1921) and was built upon by the later researchers.



Figure 10 – New Granite flask (Norman Heckler)

Discussion and Conclusions

It is certain that neither of these glass houses chose to mark the majority of its products with any kind of logo. The exception in both cases were a very few flasks. Again, in both cases, the plants embossed the name of the company and the location on the flasks – although the designs of the flasks of each firm were quite different. There is, however, one dangling connection.

A Curious Case of Timing

None of the past researcher seem to have noticed (or at least pursued) the unusual timing between the two Granite plants. The Granite Glass Co. (the earlier firm) closed in 1860. The New Granite Glass Works opened ca. 1860, yet none of the authors suggest any connection between the two. Of course, the earlier researchers believed (incorrectly) that the New Granite Glass Works opened in 1865. All of the researchers agreed that the Foster brothers built a new factory in the center of town – *not* at the location of the old plant, and most agree that the old Granite Glass Co. factory burned in 1864.

What is not recorded is whether George Foster worked for Curtis at the Granite Glass Co. until it closed, although McKearin & Wilson (1978:148) did note that Foster was still blowing glass for the sheriff until the auction in 1857. If Foster remained in Mill Village until the older firm closed, the timing almost certainly means that he and his brothers opened the New Granite Glass Works in the figurative ashes of the old firm. Even if Foster had moved on, he could certainly have heard about the closure and decided that the time was ripe to strike out in business. A curious mind also cannot help wondering if the New Granite Glass Co. was able to acquire some of the molds and tools from the earlier plant. Unfortunately, current resources do not tell this story.

Acknowledgments

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