

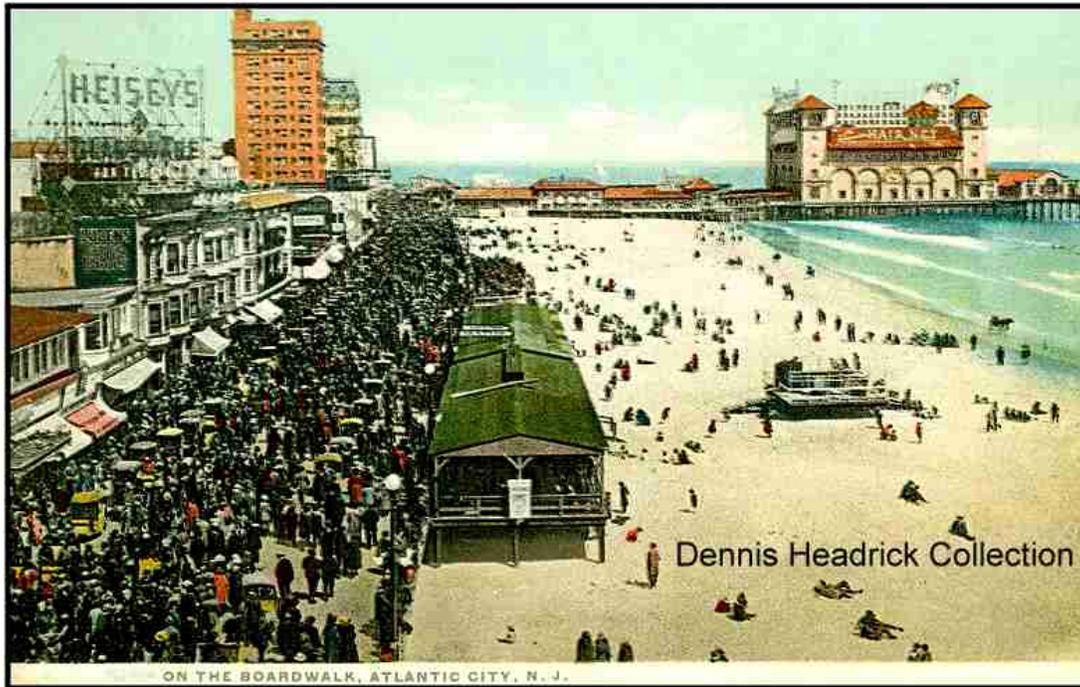


Glass Factories



On Postcards

By Portland's Rain of Glass Members Carole Bess White and Dennis Headrick



1920s view showing Heisey's neon sign high above the Atlantic City Boardwalk near the Steeplechase Pier.

From the late 19th century to the first half of the 20th century there were more than 500 glass factories in the United States. Most of them made utility and industrial glass only, such as laboratory vessels, bottles, window glass, light fixtures, etc., but several produced an amazingly diverse and creative amount of glass for the table, kitchen and vanity.

Here is a chart showing the approximate eras of American glass manufacturing:

1827 First American pressed tumbler produced by the Boston & Sandwich Co., Boston	1850-1920 Early American Pattern Glass Era (Called Lacy or EAPG)	1879-1930 Louis Comfort Tiffany Glass Era (Art Glass production c1900-1930)	1882-1915 American Brilliant Cut Glass Era
1885-1900 Victorian Art Glass Era (Amberina, Burmese, Cranberry, etc.)	1885-1910 Opalescent Glass & Custard Glass Era	1900-1930 Art Glass Era (Art Nouveau Style—Tiffany, Steuben, etc.)	1908-1920 Carnival Glass Era (Only factory overstock was later used as carnival prizes)

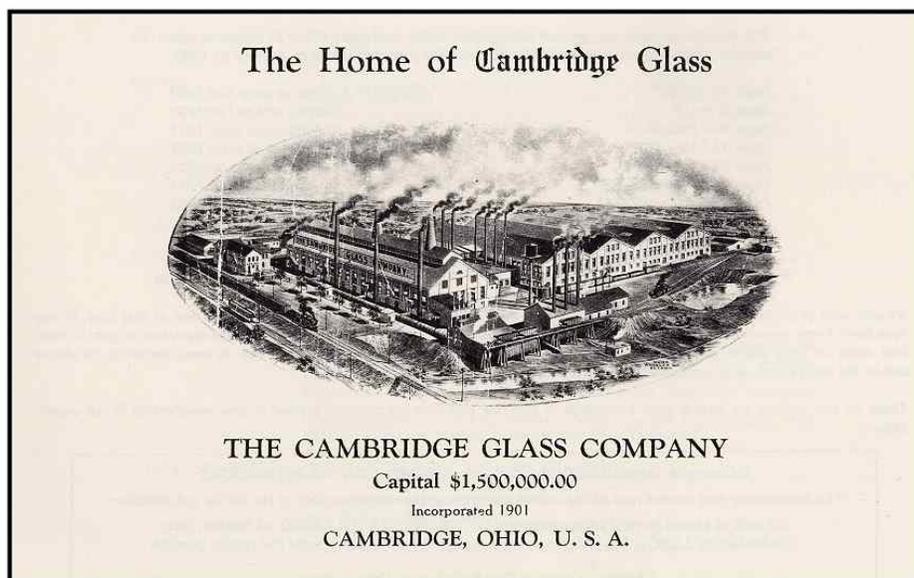
1916-1930 Stretch Glass Era	1922-1944 Depression Glass Era (Mainly machine-made, colored glassware)	1925-1955 Elegant Glass Era (Mainly handmade colored & crystal glassware)
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ELEGANT GLASS is the better quality glassware made in America from 1925 to 1955. It was hand pressed, hand molded or hand blown, and after the shaping was done, it was returned to a smaller kiln called the “glory hole” for fire polishing to a high gloss. Because it required more skill and labor, Elegant Glass was more expensive during its time, and it was usually sold at better quality stores and not given away. Today it is generally more expensive than Depression Glass. Elegant Glass was made in clear as well as many shades of green, pink, blue, yellow and amber.

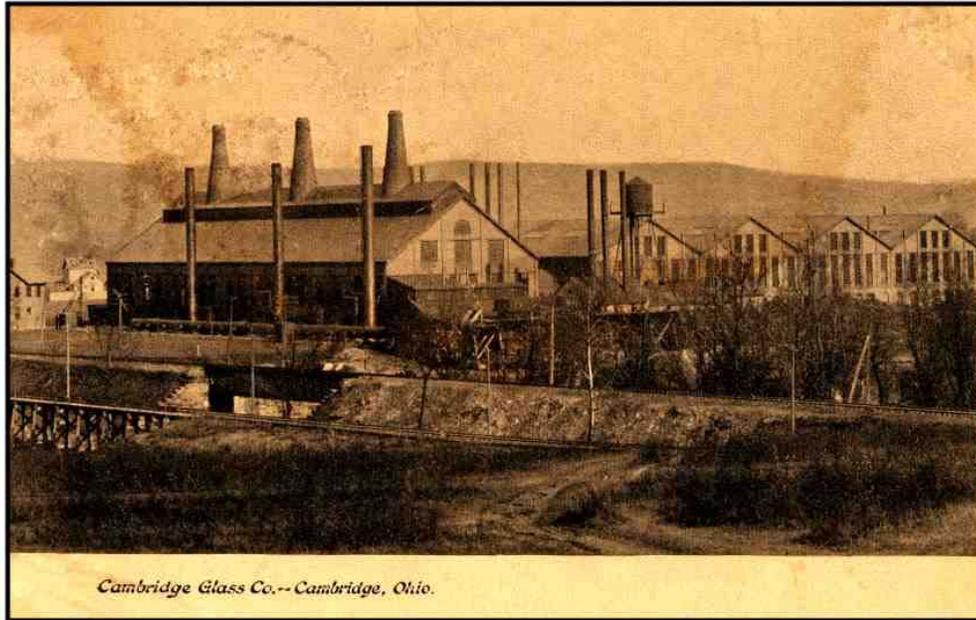
DEPRESSION GLASS is the colorful, machine-made glassware that was manufactured in America from about 1929-1941. Made by machine to emulate the more expensive Elegant Glass, it was originally very inexpensive; a complete set of dishes with eight place settings could be bought for \$1.98 or \$2.98. It was also given away in cereal boxes and soap boxes, and at “Dish Nights” at the movies, where a piece of glass was given with each ticket purchased. In addition to clear, Depression Glass was made in many shades of green, pink, blue, yellow and amber.

I started collecting Depression Glass before I was born—literally!! My grandparents had stashed boxes of glassware from the 1920s and 1930s in their attic, and when my husband and I were first married in 1966 and trying to get established, Grandpa gave me the boxes. Of course at the time we didn’t know the attic glass was soon to become collectible—we were just grateful to have it to use. In 1971, my Mom and I found out about Depression Glass, and I realized what a treasure trove I had, including a bowl I used for cat food. That came up off the floor PDQ, and I became a diehard Depression Glass collector.

In about 1996 I started collecting Elegant Glass. I now have 23 sets of dishes and have stopped collecting sets because what army am I planning to feed with all those dishes? Nowadays I collect accessories such as glass smoking, vanity and kitchenware items as well as glass factory postcards. The American Elegant Glass factories that glass collectors call “The Big Three” were Cambridge, Fostoria and Heisey. These three were the most prominent, most respected, advertised the most, and generally set the standard for other factories.



Founded by the National Glass Company, a large combine of glass factories, the Cambridge Glass Company was built in 1901 and produced its first glass in 1902. When the National Glass Company collapsed, Cambridge remained in business. In the beginning, they used molds from their sister National companies, but by 1906 they were producing pieces from their own original designs.



Cambridge's 1903 catalog offered some pieces in colors, including turquoise, green, amber, blue and opál (the early name for white glass, which was more delicate and translucent than later milk glass such as that produced in the 1950s and on by other factories). Color gained importance as time went by, and nearly every catalog featured several lines available in various colors. However, during WWII the minerals needed to make colored glass were needed for the War, so many colors were discontinued and most of them never came back.



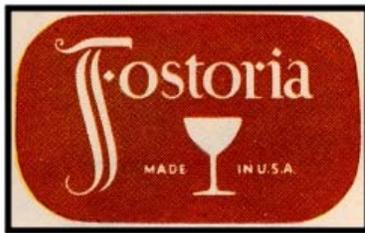
A big fashion fad from the 1920s on was acid-etched glass. A design was stamped on to a tissue in wax; the wax was applied to the piece of glass, and then the piece was treated with acid, usually hydrofluoric. The acid etched the pattern into the glass on the unwaxed areas. Both clear and colored pieces were acid-etched, and frequently the etchings were encrusted with gold as shown in the bowl with Wildflower etching below.



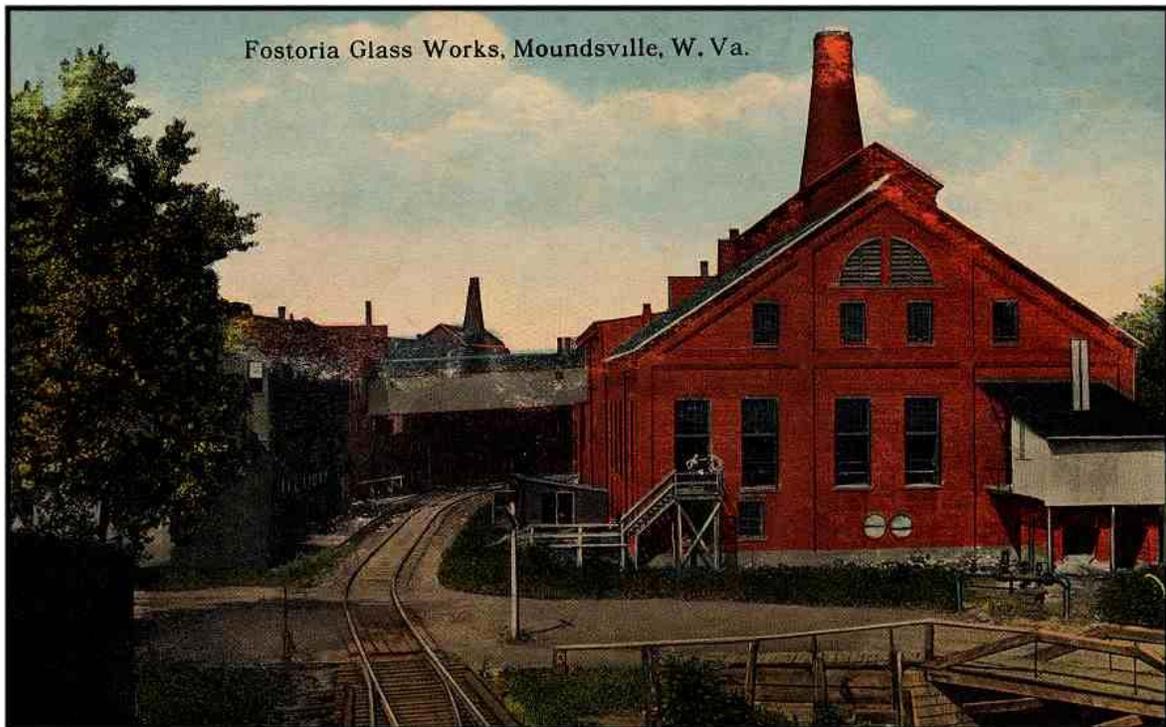
Cambridge made sets of glass luncheon or dinner dishes including several sizes of plates and bowls, as well as pieces such as cream and sugar sets, salt and pepper sets, stemware and vases, all matching. Cambridge also made a lot of accessory pieces such as glass perfume bottles, powder jars, and covered candy jars that may or may not match the table dishes. Some Cambridge pieces have a C in a triangle molded into the glass (see below), but most had a similar paper label that washed off.



The Cambridge Glass Factory closed in 1958. The remaining stock was sold at rock-bottom prices by the boxful off the loading dock, and factory workers saved some of it for themselves and their families.



The Fostoria Glass Company was founded in 1887 in Fostoria, Ohio. They made clear pressed glass and oil-burning lamps from the simplest to the fanciest, including painted “Gone With the Wind” lamps. The fuel supply ran out in Fostoria, so the plant was moved to Moundsville, West Virginia in 1891.



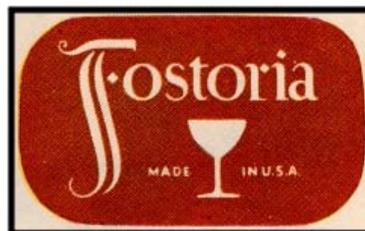
Fostoria gradually changed their focus to glassware for home use, and as their chemistry and techniques became more sophisticated, their products became more beautiful.

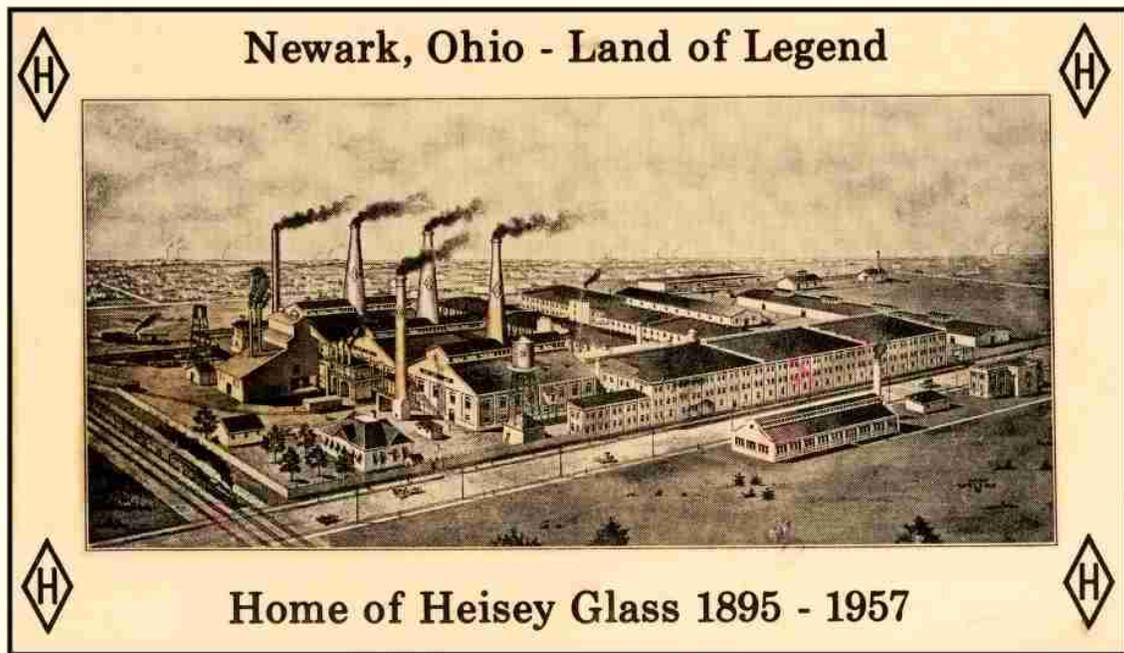
Before 1924, there were lots of Early American Pressed Glass (E.A.P.G.) tableware sets made by many glass companies that would have included any or all of these pieces: a cream and sugar, salt and pepper and a spooner (a goblet-type vessel for storing extra spoons at the table). Other popular E.A.P.G. pieces made were celery vases, comports (sometimes called compotes, but to glass collectors a comport is what one served their compote in!), pitchers, tumblers, pickle dishes, vases, candy dishes and many other accessory pieces. The tableware pieces were meant to complement one's china set.

Fostoria decided to add colored glass to their line in 1924, and in 1925 they started a revolution in the glass industry when they introduced complete dinnerware sets in colored glass. Colors included canary (yellow), green, amber, blue, ebony (black) and rose (pink). These sets included a different vessel for every type of drink from the smallest cordial to the largest iced tea tumbler, usually 10 or a dozen sizes; several sizes of plates from a 5" or 6" bread plate up to a 10" dinner plate; cups and saucers; and serving pieces and accessories galore. If one wished, a table could be set using nothing but glass up to and including a nice console (centerpiece) bowl and matching candlestick holders. A complete service for 6 including serving pieces quickly added up to more than 100 or even 150 pieces. Fostoria offered many different acid-etched patterns, and today Versailles and June etchings are probably the most popular with collectors.

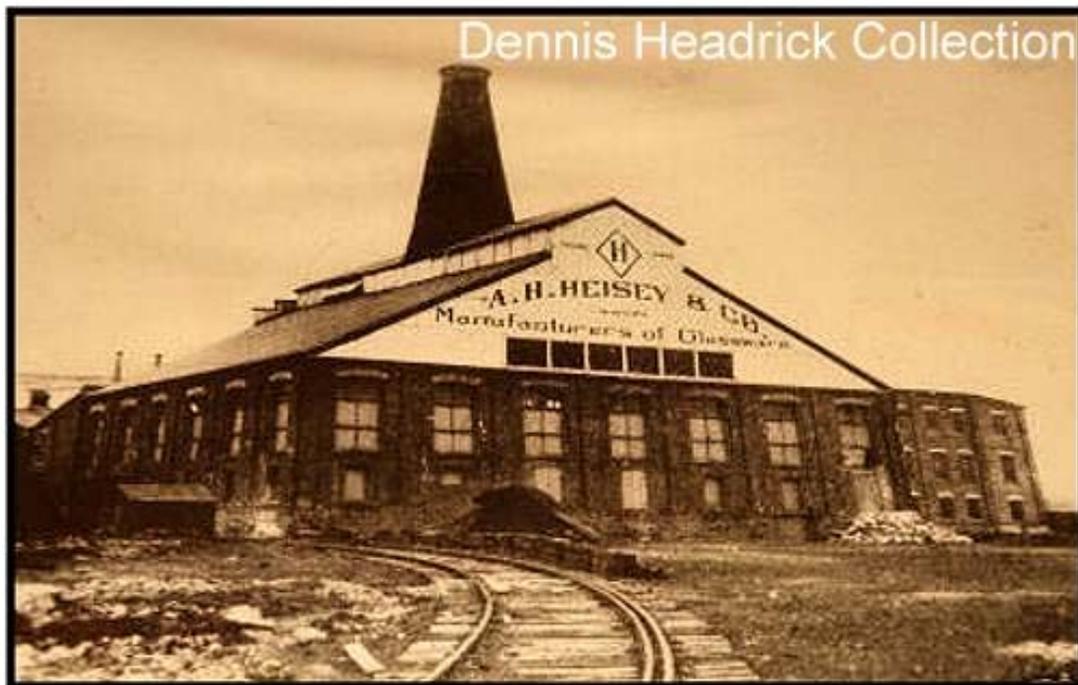
Fostoria supported this new line by advertising heavily in consumer publications, mainly "ladies' magazines" such as Good Housekeeping. Because they advertised the most, Fostoria was a bit jealously referred to as the "tony" company by other glass manufacturers. Fostoria's ran more ads, they were colorful and showed wonderful table settings using Fostoria's products, and they set the standard for the industry.

As fashions changed, so did Fostoria. In the 1930s their colors became darker and richer: cobalt blue, forest green, ruby red, etc. During World War II, the minerals needed to make colored glass were diverted to war materiel, so Fostoria continued to make clear glass. Ironically, for a colored glass company their most popular pattern was "American," which was primarily produced in clear glass! American was introduced in 1915 and continued until the factory was sold to Lancaster Colony in 1983. Lancaster contracted with other glass factories to produce some of the American pieces, and new pieces are still available today. Fostoria's glass was marked with a paper label.



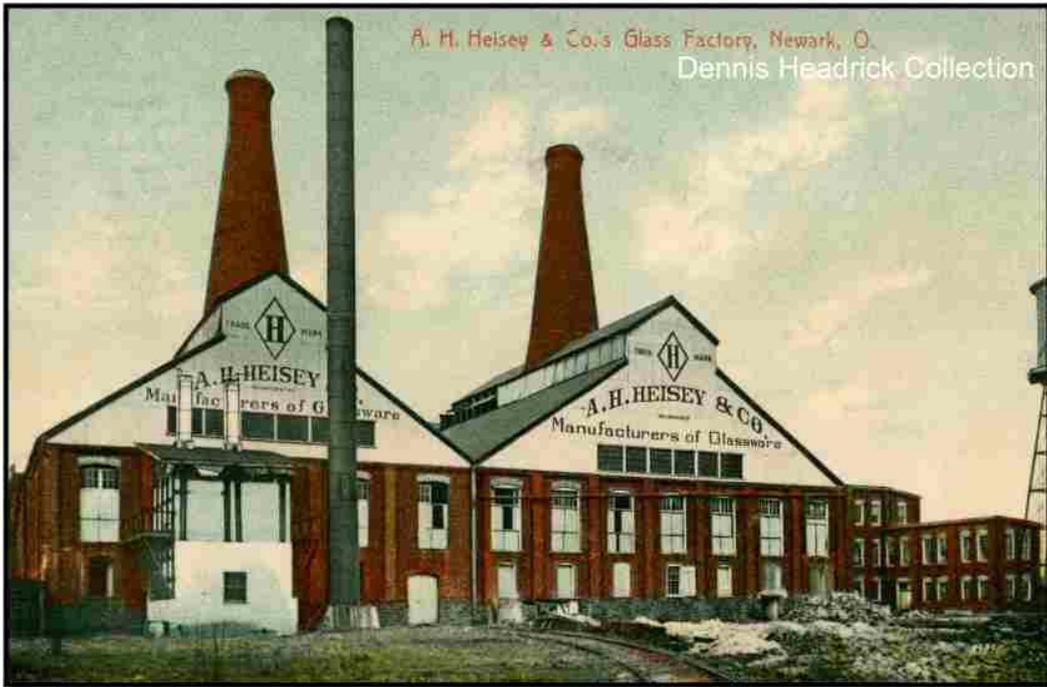


Augustus Heisey founded the A.H. Heisey Glass Company in Newark, Ohio, in 1895. He was quite a character and in the early days personally inspected the day's production. If the quality did not meet with his approval, he would take his walking stick and sweep the whole lot off the table. Think of the many, probably quite acceptable, pieces that bit the dust!

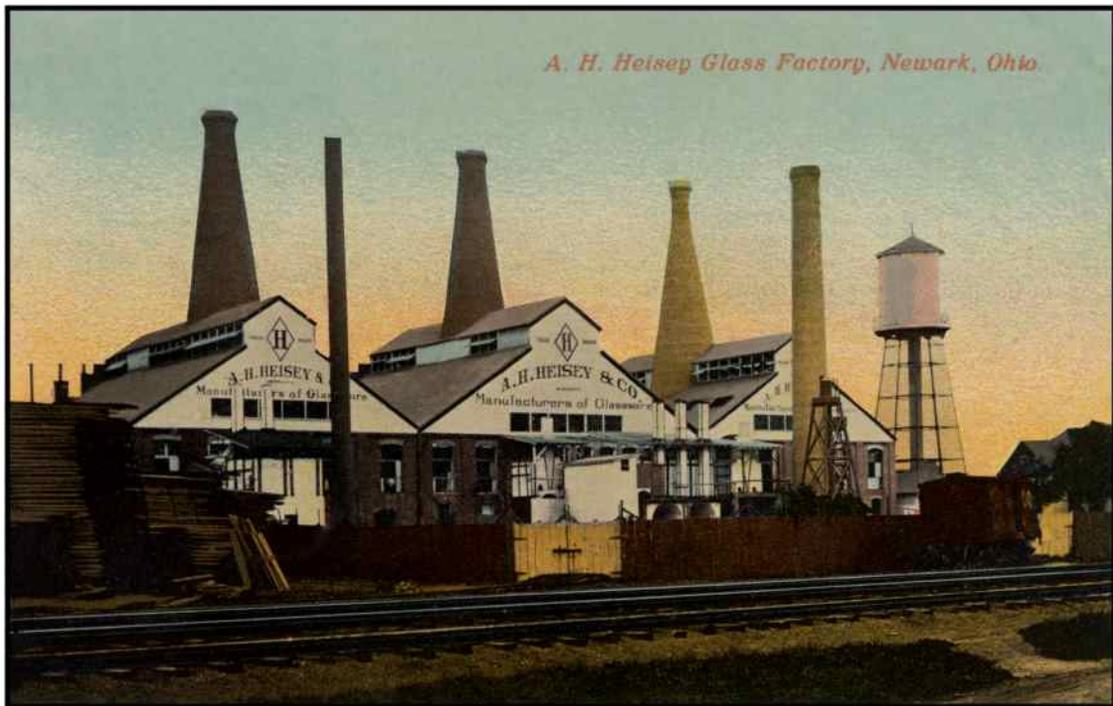


The original Heisey factory had only one smokestack. As the factory grew, a second smokestack was added, and then a third.

Heisey's production followed along the same lines as Fostoria's—first tableware sets and accessories, followed by glass dinnerware sets in similar colors. However, even though all glass was made in the same colors at their respective factories, the colors are easily differentiated. If one compares a green Cambridge plate to a green Fostoria and a green Heisey, it's very easy to tell them apart.

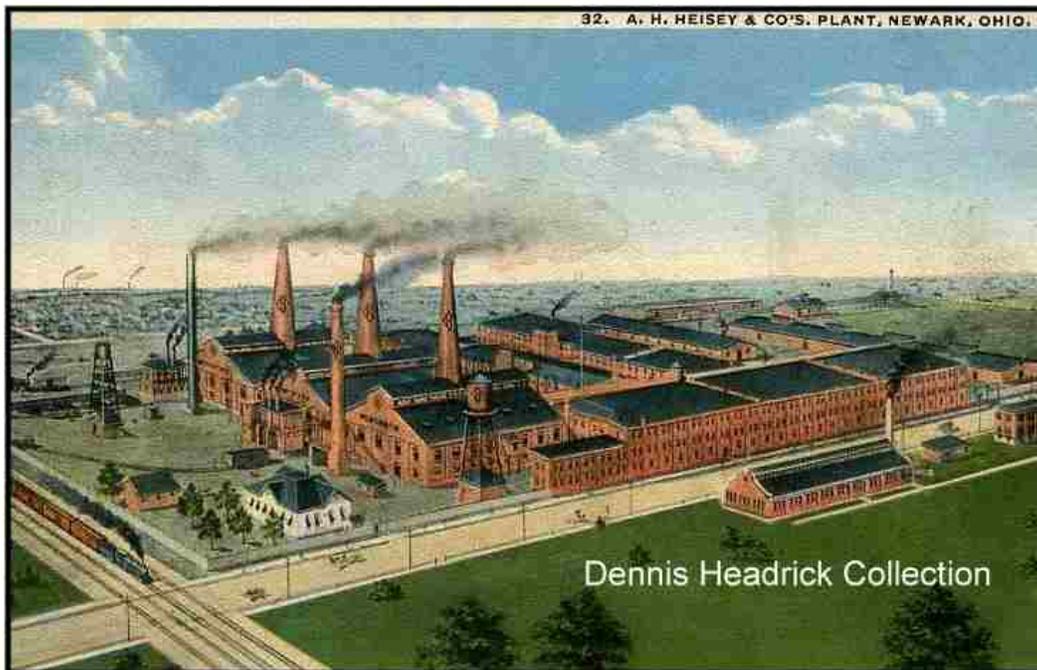


Heisey Factory with two smokestacks.



Heisey Factory with three smokestacks.

Heisey collectors consider Heisey's quality to be superior to other companies. They claim the glass is purer and more brilliant, and the pieces are better finished with fire polishing and ground feet. Many Heisey pieces are marked with an H in a vertical diamond molded into the glass, so many collectors prefer to collect this company because they don't have to study shapes, sizes and colors—they just have to look for the mark. But they miss out on all of the blown pieces that are never marked.



Many more buildings were added to the complex over the years.

Like Fostoria, Heisey's most prolific and popular line was made in clear glass: Crystolite. Introduced in 1938, Crystolite production continued until the factory closed and was sold to Imperial Glass Company in 1958, and they continued to produce pieces under the name of "Heisey by Imperial" until Imperial closed in 1984.

Nearly 20 Crystolite items were made through 1961, and several patterns and animals were made up until closing. One Heisey pattern, Old Williamsburg, that had origins as early as 1899 was credited with keeping Imperial alive in its later years and was made until they closed.



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Editor's Note: Carole White has been a member of the Webfooters Post Card Club for several years and she collects post cards and memorabilia from the Portland area with a focus on hotels and restaurants. She is a noted lecturer and author and she has had several books published. She recently retired from The Oregonian after working there over 40 years.

Dennis Headrick is a collector of glass and he is a noted lecturer and authority on Heisey glass.

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