

Glassmaking in Elmer at the Turn Of The Century

GLASS FACTORIES OF ELMER, NEW JERSEY

The small town of Elmer, New Jersey, was the birthplace of a large number of glass insulators. Several glass manufacturers operated there, primarily in the early 1900's. There were at least two factory locations, referred to as the "upper" and "lower" works. Both of the factories were the host to various firms. The production of fruit jars, battery jars, insulators, and other materials took place at both factories at various times in their existence.

THE "UPPER" WORKS and NOVELTY GLASS COMPANY

The "upper" works, called such due to its location in that section of the town of Elmer, New Jersey, was situated on property located partly in the township of Pittsgrove and partly in the borough of Elmer. It was bounded on the lower end by the Elmer-Malaga road. It was also placed next to the West Jersey & Seashore Railroad. The two parcels of property on which the factory was located consisted of five and one half acres. The site is presently occupied by a large community recreation park. (Figure 1.)

The property was purchased by the G.M. Bassett Glass Company in May 1896. A glass factory was constructed, and glass was produced for period of time. The property was sold on August 19, 1899, to the Gilchrist Jar Company. Fruit jars and battery jars were produced at the factory under this firm's name until a suit was brought against the company. The property was placed in receivership and was sold on December 3, 1901, to the Novelty Glass Manufacturing Company. Insulators were the main item produced at the factory by that firm. The company operated until late 1903 when a patent infringement suit, brought by the Brookfield Glass Company, forced its closing. The following excerpts taken from issues of the *Elmer Times* give an interesting description of the activities at the factory. One item that should be pointed out to save the reader any possible confusion is that the December 3, 1901, date mentioned above is the date that the property was actually purchased by the Novelty Glass Manufacturing Company.

Apparently, as will be determined by reading the following newspaper accounts, the company operated the works for several months prior to the actual purchase of the land.

1901

January 18 - Gilchrist Jar Company receivers sale of glassworks. Auction notice. By Virture--Jan 14 '01 to be offered Feb 13 '01 stock etc. at 10 a.m. Main factory buildings and connecting wings about 180 x 90 feet wide. Machine shop and box shop combined about 27x 65 feet. Ware shed 100 x 50 feet. Hay house 24 x 48 feet. Storehouse 30 x 48 feet. Office 16 x 24 feet. All buildings erected since 1896. Main factory contains one 40 ton tank furnace now containing about 30 ton of glass. Two large lehrs.

February 15 - THE GILCHRIST FACTORY SALE The big glass house sale in Elmer, Wednesday, kept auctioneer J.G. Brooks crying from 10 o'clock until dark. The biggest buyer was the Novelty Glass Manufacturing Company, which will operate the Gilchrist plant at once.

February 22 - Daniel Parker, manager of the Novelty Glass Works, has been in Elmer every day this week getting ready to start the fire at the Gilchrist Jar Works. Workmen began overhauling the furnace Monday preparatory to placing fire under it the last of this week. About 65 hands will be employed.

March 8 - One shop at the Novelty Glass Works began making glass Thursday. It is expected to have a full force at work on day and night by Monday.

April 5 - Heavy shipments of glassware have been sent from Elmer this week. About 50 tons were shipped to Chicago and today a shipment goes to Missoula, Montana.

April 12 - The Novelty Glass Company has been laying a railway track from the main factory building to the large ware shed, at the upper glassworks. They expect to add an overhead track in the ware shed to facilitate loading cars with ware. The factory is running very smoothly and turning out a large quantity of pressed glass, chiefly insulators.

1902

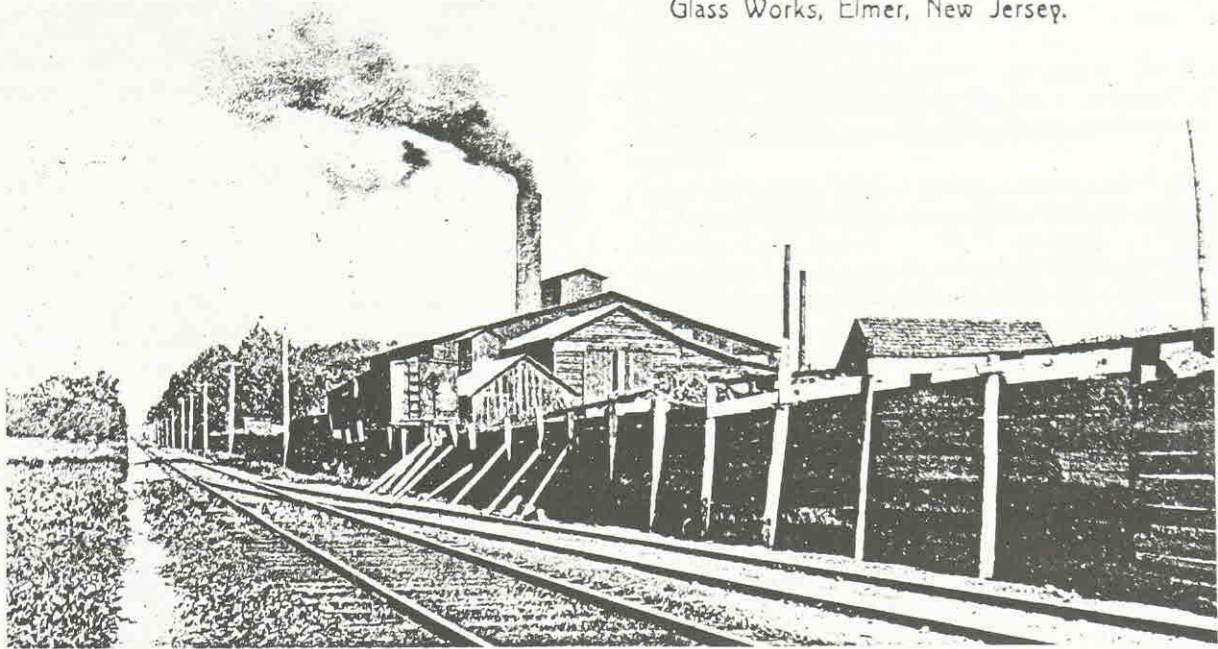
February 14 - The Novelty Glass Works is now manufacturing battery jars in addition to their insulator business.

February 28 - The fires at the Novelty Glass Works have been blocked on account of a shortage in fuel.

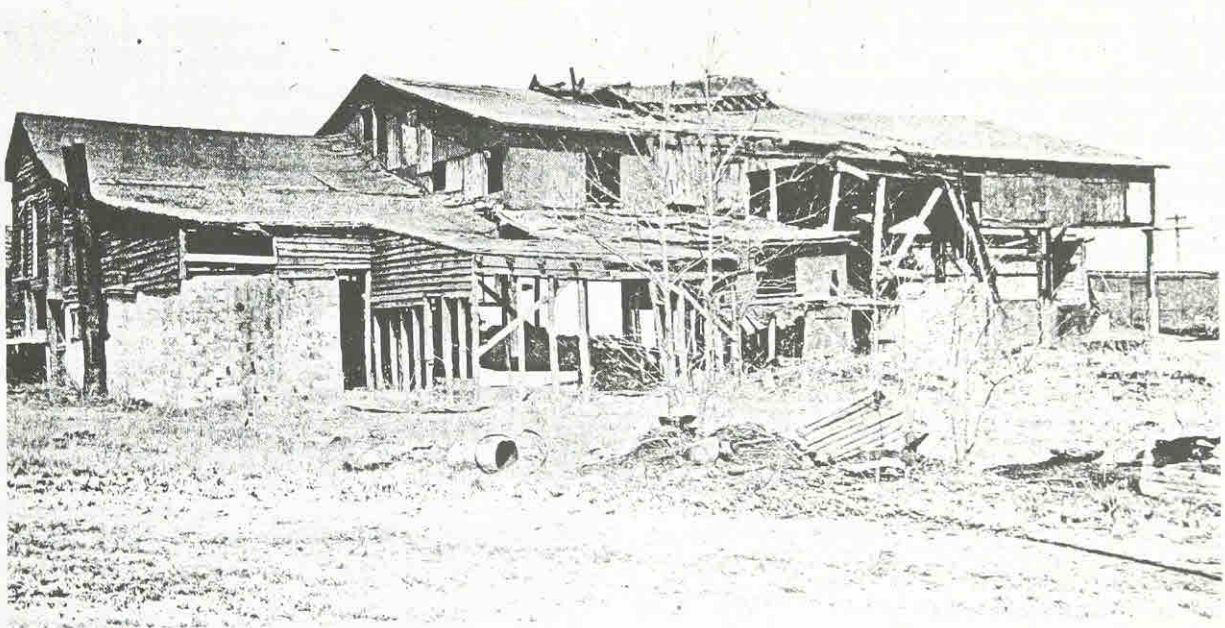
July 4 - The Novelty Glass Company will operate their works all summer it is said.

September 5 - The Novelty Glass Works closed down Saturday night for repairs and erection of a new furnace. The works have made a long run on the old furnace which lasted through the regular glass working season and also through July and August. This industry has been successful since locating in Elmer and has furnished steady employment at good wages to a large number of workmen.

Glass Works, Elmer, New Jersey.



(Figure 1.) (Above) The "Upper Works" in Elmer, New Jersey. "This building housed a glass factory in Elmer, on the site of the present Elmer Community Park." (Below) "Photo was taken after building was in a state of deterioration." (Courtesy of the Elmer Times, August 15, 1968, Souvenir Edition, page 34)



October 5 - The Novelty Glass Company started up again this week after a shutdown to build a new furnace.

December 5 - The Novelty Glass Works is having a serious time to get coal enough to keep their furnaces going.

1903

February 13 - C.W. Shoemaker, of Bridgeton, who returned last Saturday from a visit to California, was in Elmer Tuesday morning on business with the Novelty Glass Company, of which he is Treasurer.

March 20 - The Novelty Glass Company recently started their large continuous tank, giving employment to a number of extra hands.

June 26 - Owing to a difficulty over the foreman at the Novelty Glass Works, the workmen went out on strike Monday morning. The matter was satisfactorily adjusted and the work went on as usual on Wednesday.

September 25 - The West Jersey & South Shore Railroad have made a settlement with Frederick MacFarland, of Elmer, who was injured by the falling of a freight car door at the Novelty Glass Works a few weeks since. The settlement was made with J.C. Edmunds, Esq. attorney for MacFarland.

October 2 - The new machines at the Novelty Glass Works are turning out a big lot of insulators. About \$1,500 in cash is paid out every two weeks for wages.

November 13 - The big furnace at the Novelty Glass Works was closed down Saturday for repairs. The furnace was run all summer and has done a good job.

December 11

GLASS WORKS CLOSED

The Novelty Glass Works of Elmer was closed on Wednesday at the suit of the Cumberland Trust Company of Bridgeton, trustee for the bondholders. The primary cause of the troubles of the company will be of interest to the public. About three years ago the works were purchased of the Receiver of the Gilchrist Jar Company, and have been operated almost continuously winter and summer since in the manufacture of insulators. A large force has been employed, good wages paid promptly in cash, and it has been one of the best industries Elmer has ever had.

Shortly after the company started with special machines for the manufacture of insulators, the Brookfield Company, of Brooklyn which had long enjoyed a practical monopoly of the insulator business, entered suit against the Novelty Company, charging that the machines used by the latter were an infringement on the Brookfield patents. Since then the litigation between the two companies has been continuous and thousands of dollars have been spent in the courts in the fight which was finally decided against the Novelty Company. The Cumberland Trust Company, as trustee then took immediate steps to make themselves safe and the chances are that the Novelty Company will be wiped out of existence before the battle is over as it would be out of the question for the company with its present capital and assets to meet the claims brought against it including the big judgement of the Brookfields for infringement.

The Novelty plant is a good one and we doubt not will find a purchaser who will operate it when sold. So far as we know there will be no local losses in Elmer as the Novelty Company has always been very prompt to pay and stood high in town.

It is said on good authority that the Novelty Company believed that their machines did not infringe on the Brookfield patent, but the courts have decided otherwise, and since the decree of the court the Novelty installed non-infringing machines which they have since operated on a royalty.

December 18 - The employees of Novelty Glass Works are all to be paid in full this week.

December 18 - The employees of the Novelty Glass Company were disappointed last Saturday when they were informed that the officers of the Company were not permitted to pay them off owing to the proceedings against the company. The money was in bank ready to pay them and the officers at the company were also chagrined that they were not permitted to pay off the men as they intended to do. The company has always been prompt with their payments for labor. The claim for wages is a preferred claim and except for the inconvenience caused by the delay just in the Holiday season, it is not believed they will lose any portion of the amount.

The December 25, 1903 issue of the *Elmer Times* had the following advertisement:

Master's Sale

By virtue of a writ of fieri facias, to me directed, issued out of the Court of Chancery of New Jersey, in a cause wherein The Cumberland Trust Company of Bridgeton, Trustee, is complainant, and Novelty Glass Manufacturing Company, is defendant, I will expose to sale at public vendue on

Monday, December 28, 1903,

at the hour of one o'clock in the afternoon of said day, on the premises of the said Novelty Glass Manufacturing Company, in the Village of Elmer, Salem County, New Jersey, all the following described property, to wit:

About 550,000 Glass Insulators of various types and sizes, mostly packed and ready for shipment, about 65,000 Glass Knobs, 6 Cords Oak Wood, 15 Tons Lime, 20 Tons Sand, 5 Tons Soda, 125 Tons Soft Coal, 8 Tons Packing Hay, about 200 tons cullet, about 100 Empty Barrels, Office Furniture and Fixtures, including Sa e, Desks, Chairs and Typewriter, also Books of Account and all accounts thereon and moneys due and to grow due on said accounts and each and every of them.

ALEXANDER R. FITHIAN, Master,
107 East Commerce Street,
Walter H. Bacon, Solicitor, Bridgeton, N. J.
Room No. 2 Pioneer Building,
Bridgeton, N. J.

1904

January 1 - The sale of glass at the Novelty Glass Works last Monday amounted to a good many thousands of dollars. The books were sold subject to the result of litigation in which they are involved.

January 29 - The Novelty Glass plant was sold at public sale Saturday to R. Morris Davis, President of the Elmer Glass Works for \$2,500.

September 23 **WON SUIT**

Daniel Parker and Thomas Duffield were given a decision by Judge Lenning in the United States court last Saturday sustaining the validity of the patents on the Duffield Insulator making machines against the Brookfield Company who sued them charging infringement on their patents.

The fight against the Brookfields has been a long one. Soon after the Novelty Glass Company began the manufacture of insulators in Elmer the Brookfields brought suit for infringement and the Novelty Company ceased using the machines complained of and installed the Duffield machine. The Brookfields obtained an injunction but when it was served the old machines and had been laid aside. They then instituted an entirely separate suit against Parker and Duffield whose machines have for some time been used by the Elmer Glass Works. They have now however won out and it is hoped will not be annoyed further by the Brookfields in the use of the valuable patents. The original suit against the Novelty Company has dragged along for three years although the Novelty Company has gone out of business.

December 2 - The plant known as the Novelty Glass Works will be put in operation about next Monday by the same company that has been

