

EARLY  
AMERICAN  
GLASS



A PICTURE BOOK  
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM  
OF ART

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## EARLY AMERICAN GLASS

THE early glasshouses of America depended largely for their operations on trained craftsmen from abroad—artisans who brought with them the traditions and technical practices of their homelands. From these diverse influences, often mingling or fusing with one another and always modified by the particular conditions in the New World, emerged a distinctly American expression in glass.

Little is definitely known of the output of the numerous colonial glasshouses which usually, from the founding of Jamestown on, flourished briefly and failed. Most were established to meet the increasing need for practical ware, particularly bottles and window glass, and to avoid the delay, expense, and uncertainty of shipments from abroad. For two centuries, probably starting with the efforts of Caspar Wistar near Allowaystown in 1739, Southern New Jersey has been a site of the industry. The basic character of a large category in American glass is attributed to the influence of the early glasshouses of that region (figs. 1-6). Full-bodied, sturdy forms in this Southern New Jersey style are often embellished with trailed threads of glass, superimposed patterns of waves or loops, and crimping (figs. 1, 2, 5, 6). However, almost all the safely identified examples displaying these features are of the nineteenth century, when successive generations of glassblowers had developed the style from its somewhat obscure origins and had carried it beyond the confines of the state into New York and New England.

Most of this glass represents the individual efforts of craftsmen designing for their private wants rather than a commercial product. The metal was often the same as served for ordinary bottles and for window panes and shows the same variety and un-

certainty of hue, resulting from economical methods of production. Variants of the parent style characteristic of regions in New York State, for example, clearly proclaim their relation to window glass manufacture in a limpid aquamarine fabric (fig. 5). The quest for a flawlessly transparent and colorless crystal glass, which attracted the efforts of so many European glassmen, was an expensive pursuit long discouraged by conditions in America. But, to a degree, it is just in their decorative, if fortuitous, colors that these robust native shapes achieve a distinct charm. Occasionally the forms themselves reveal a sophistication that quite belies any humble associations, as in an exceptional pair of candlesticks (fig. 4).

The fabulous "Baron" Stiegel has lent his name to another important category of glass types, partly because purely documentary evidence concerning his glasshouses in Pennsylvania (1763-1774) is so abundant. However, few, if any, actual pieces can be claimed beyond cavil for those factories, nor can many of the articles listed in his lengthy advertisements be identified in surviving examples. Nothing which the term "Stiegel type" implies is more distinctive than the effective use of expanded mold patterns, often in rich blue or amethyst, as well as clear glass. Salts, bowls, flasks, and creamers in this style are enriched with subtly graduated designs formed by the expansion of patterns impressed on the original small gathering of metal, a type of decoration which is always organic with the shape (figs. 7, 8). These were commercial articles, and their shape, color, and decoration follow relatively fixed standards. The material itself, a rich lead glass, is refined beyond that of the off-hand types. It is assumed, quite plausibly, that foreign-born artisans working at the Stiegel and other factories in competition with the import trade duplicated foreign styles, since much of the work attributed to these sources is indistinguishable from the output of English glasshouses at Bristol and elsewhere. Occasional variants of these borrowed styles appear with a distinctly native character. Lidded bowls with spiral-twist finials and paneled vases are of this type (figs. 8B, C). The daisy-in-a-diamond flask, although fashioned of a different kind of glass, is

another design apparently of local invention and popularly called "Stiegel type" (fig. 8A).

Mugs, flip glasses, and canisters of a light soda-lime glass, naively decorated in colored enamels or lightly engraved with floral motives, whimsically stylized zigzag borders, and cross-hatched reserves bear a direct relation to similar commodity glass from southern Germany and other European districts (fig. 9). These may often be the work of the enamellers, glass cutters, and flowerers listed in Stiegel's account books. But the term "Stiegel," like "Southern New Jersey," is more convenient than specific. Quite apart from the matter of foreign analogues, the nature of the output of other factories, such as those operating in New York City during the eighteenth century, remains highly problematical. The types already described were, in any case, used extensively in America and it is likely that a large part was made here as well.

Following the Revolution craftsmen from various eastern districts moved westward to the Pittsburgh and Ohio regions, carrying the older traditions to the frontier. The most typical of their work shows a reliance on expanded mold patterns, reminiscent of Stiegel types but used here with a new feeling and with distinctive fabrics. Ribbed patterns, swirled to a spiral or twice impressed in counter directions, were favored decorations (figs. 10, 11). This regional variation of an older style is apparent, as well, in the shapes and colors of these pieces. Flasks, bottles, and bowls in rich ambers and light greens are typical of such Midwestern design. The Museum owns a rare flask in brilliant blue glass (fig. 11C).

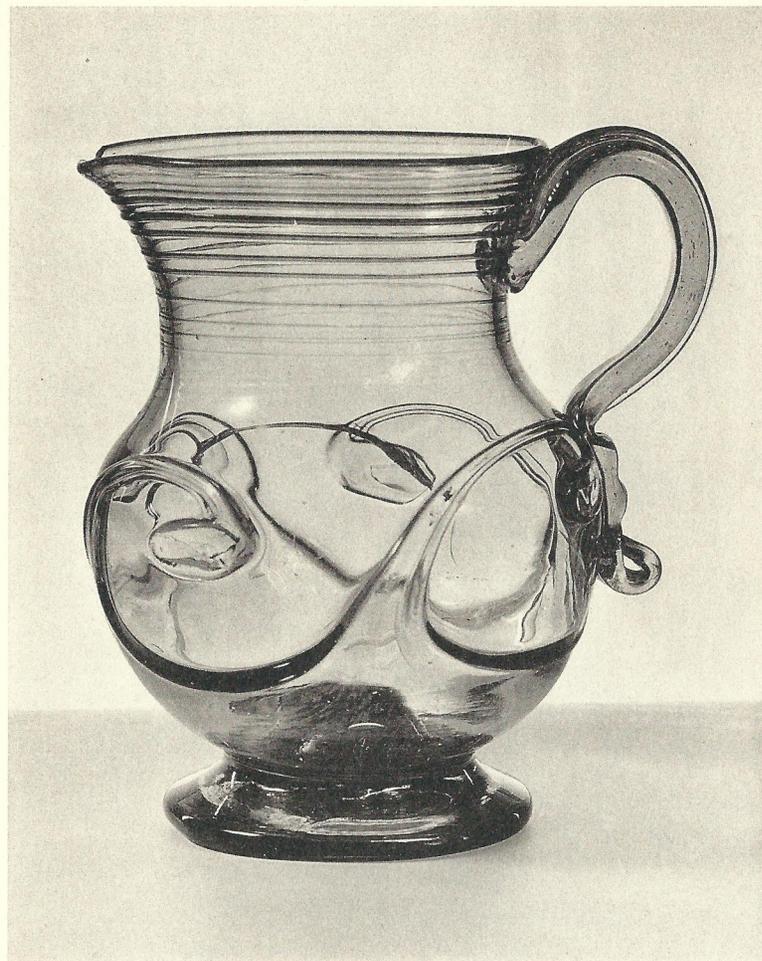
A remarkable, if brief, episode in American glassmaking was the enterprise of the German immigrant John Frederick Amelung at the New Bremen Glass Manufactory in Maryland. Two presentation goblets, one fashioned for the city of Bremen, Germany, and the other for Governor Thomas Mifflin of Pennsylvania, dated 1788 and 1791 respectively, reveal the unusually fine engraving practiced at New Bremen. The coats of arms and the inscriptions are adapted to the transparent medium by skillful

variations in the depth of cutting and precision in the indication of detail, in contrast to the roughly ground motives on types previously described (figs. 12, 13). As might be expected from a community moved virtually in mass from Germany, the design of these two pieces follows a style most familiar in the goblets of German glass. After the collapse of Amelung's venture, about 1795, his craftsmen continued their work in other glasshouses. The deft engraving on a vase probably made in the Baltimore-Philadelphia area in the early nineteenth century suggests the prevailing influence of their skill. Both the form and its decoration are here naturalized to an American idiom (fig. 14).

During the first half of the last century various glasshouses revived an ancient technique in using full-size, hinged molds in several sections, thus producing inexpensive substitutes for the more costly cut glass. The method could hardly reproduce the sharply faceted patterns of the original models, and local versions of these designs assumed a wholly American character (figs. 15-17).

The invention of a practical glass-pressing machine about 1827 introduced the first radical change in the industry since the blow-pipe was adopted in pre-Christian days. In America pressed glass is inevitably associated with the factory at Sandwich, Massachusetts, which operated from 1825-1888, although much interesting patterned ware was also mechanically produced at numerous other glasshouses in this country as well as abroad (fig. 18). In the purity and radiance of its controlled colors this glass often compares favorably with the best of the ages, despite the fact that it was a relatively inexpensive commodity. An unusual presentation goblet and a flask in the style of the Venetian "vetro di Trina," both blown at Sandwich by Nicholas Lutz (figs. 20, 19B), indicate that the tradition of the individual glassblower successfully survived the introduction of mechanical methods.

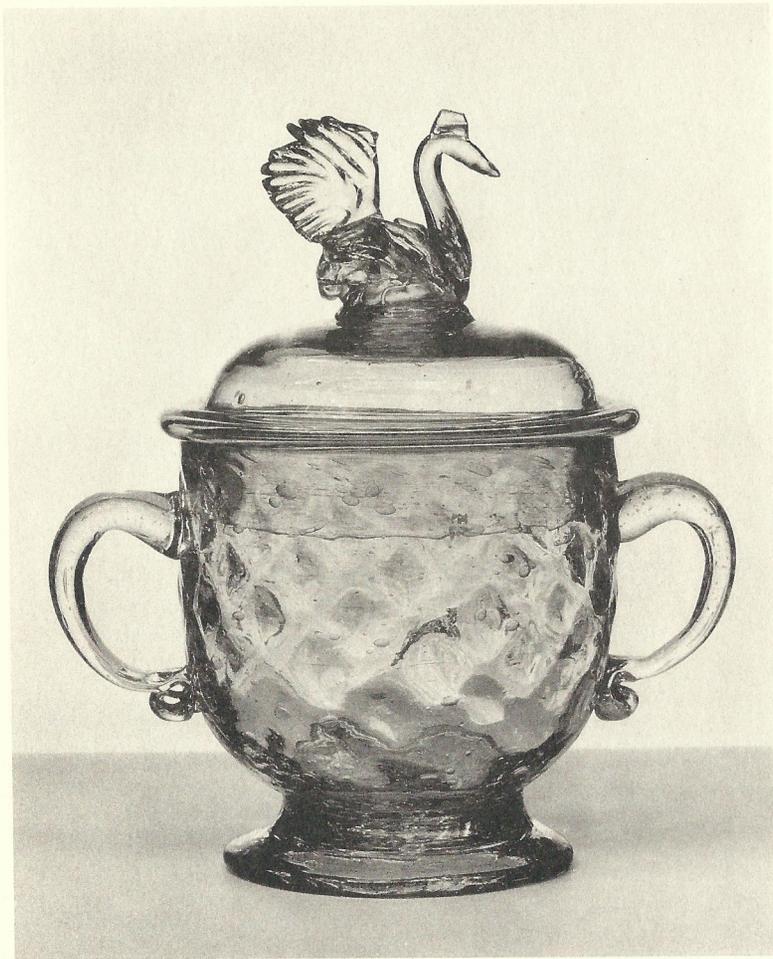
MARSHALL DAVIDSON.



1. Green with applied red threads about the neck. Southern New Jersey type, first half of the XIX century. Height 7¼ in.



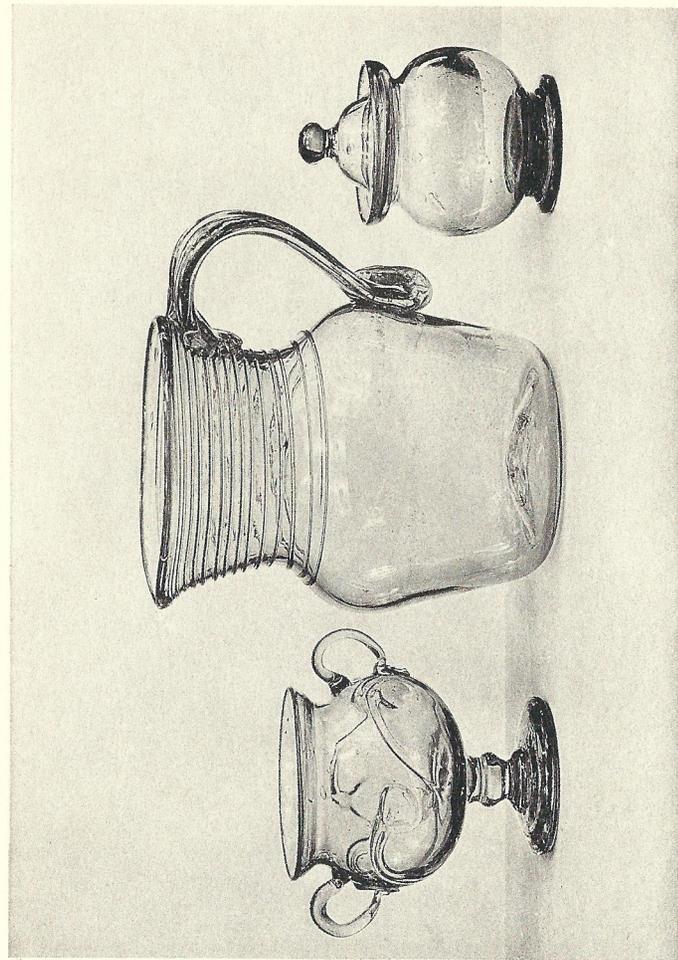
2. A and C. Green, first half of the XIX century. B. Pale green with red swirls, middle of the XIX century. Southern New Jersey type. A. Height  $6\frac{1}{2}$  in. C. Diameter  $9\frac{3}{8}$  in.



3. Pale green. Body blown in a pattern mold. Southern New Jersey type, late XVIII-early XIX century. Height  $6\frac{1}{2}$  in.



4. Blue-green. Southern New Jersey type, about 1800. Height  $9\frac{1}{8}$  in.



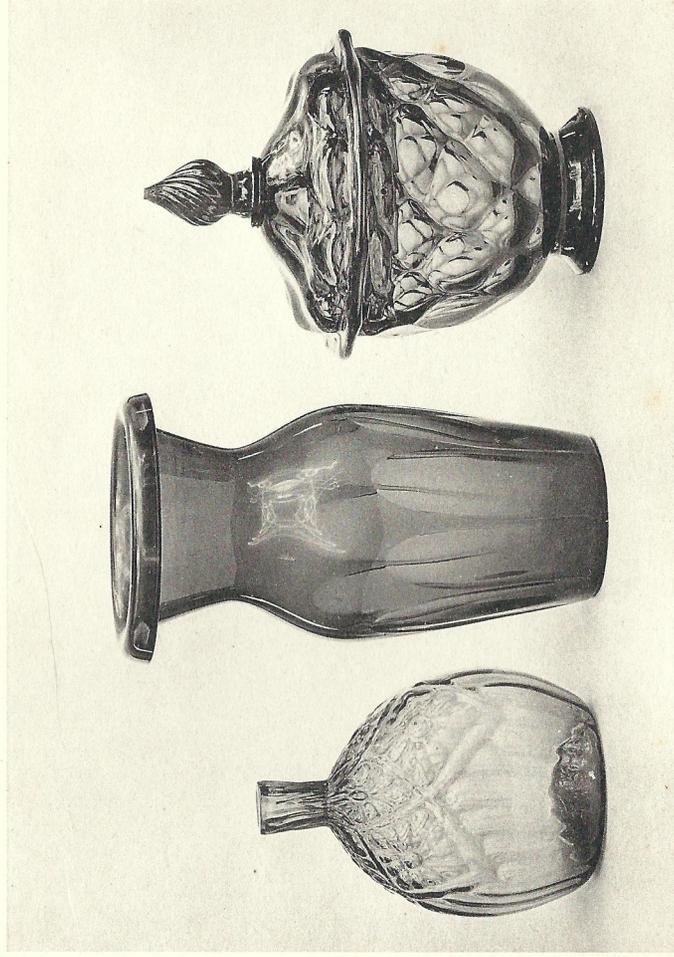
5. Aquamarine. New York State, first half of the XIX century. A. Height 6 in.



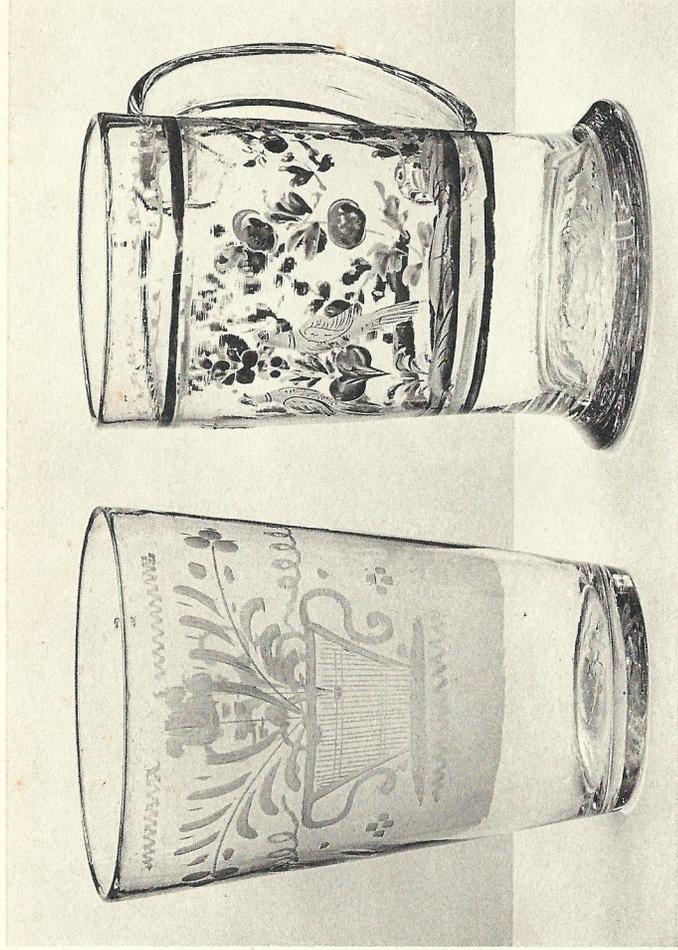
6. Blue. Southern New Jersey type, early XIX century.  
Height  $7\frac{1}{2}$  in.



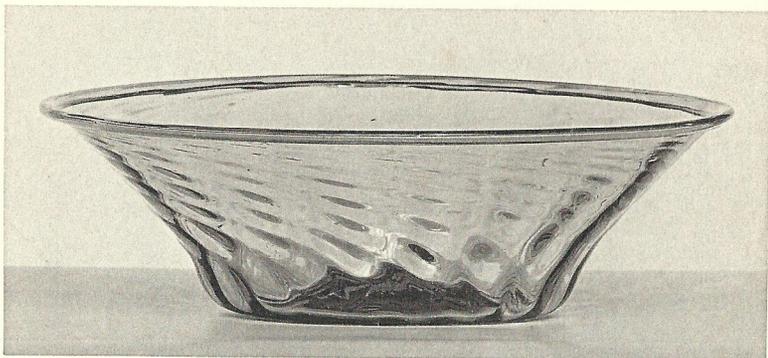
7. A. Cobalt blue. B. Amethyst. C. Emerald green. Blown in pattern molds. Stiegel types,  
late XVIII-early XIX century. A. Height 3 in.



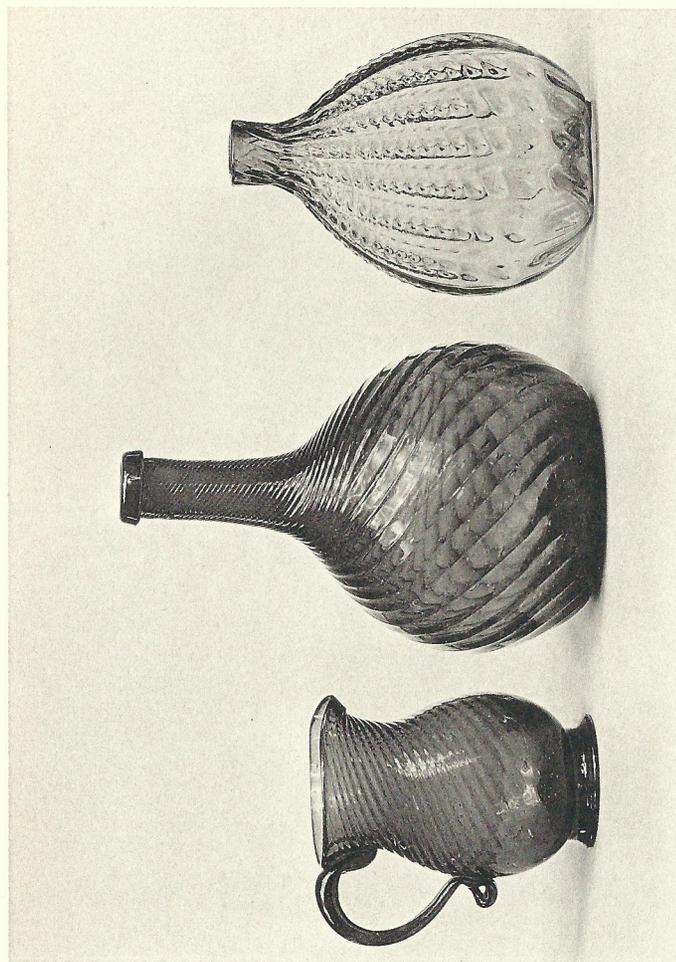
8. A and B. Amethyst. C. Cobalt blue. Blown in pattern molds. Stiegel types, late XVIII-early XIX century. A. Height  $4\frac{3}{4}$  in.



9. A. Clear glass. B. Polychrome enamel on clear glass. Stiegel types, late XVIII century. A. Height  $6\frac{5}{8}$  in.



10. A. Aquamarine. B. Amber. Blown in pattern molds. Eastern Ohio, early XIX century. A. Diameter  $9\frac{1}{8}$  in. B. Height  $3\frac{3}{4}$  in.



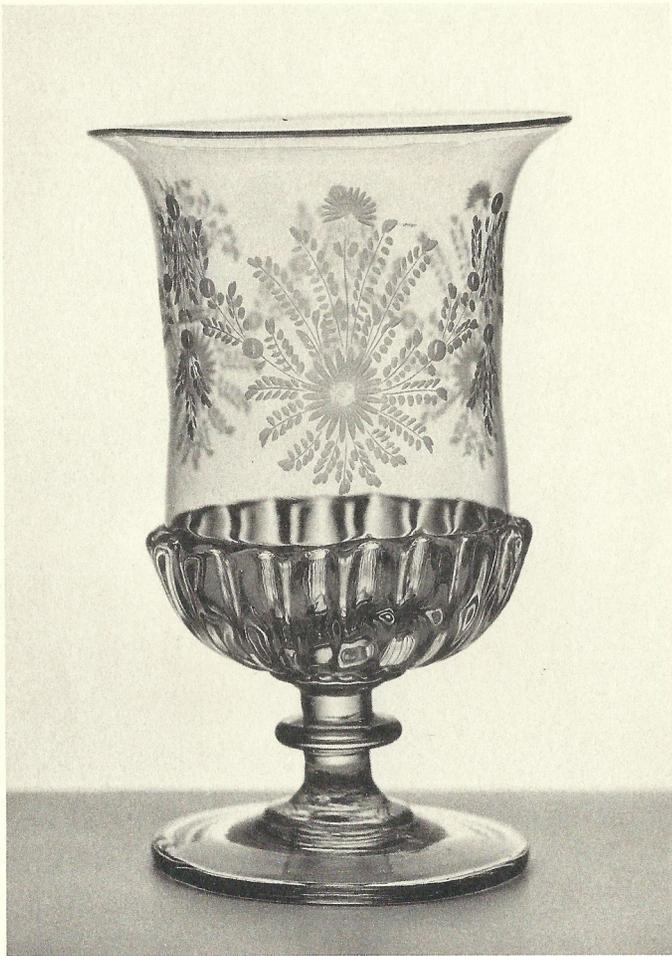
11. A. Yellow-green. B. Amber. C. Blue. Blown in pattern molds. Eastern Ohio, early XIX century. A. Height  $4\frac{3}{4}$  in.



12. Clear glass, engraved with the arms of the city of Bremen, Germany, and the date 1788. New Bremen Glass Manufactory, Maryland. Height  $11\frac{1}{4}$  in.



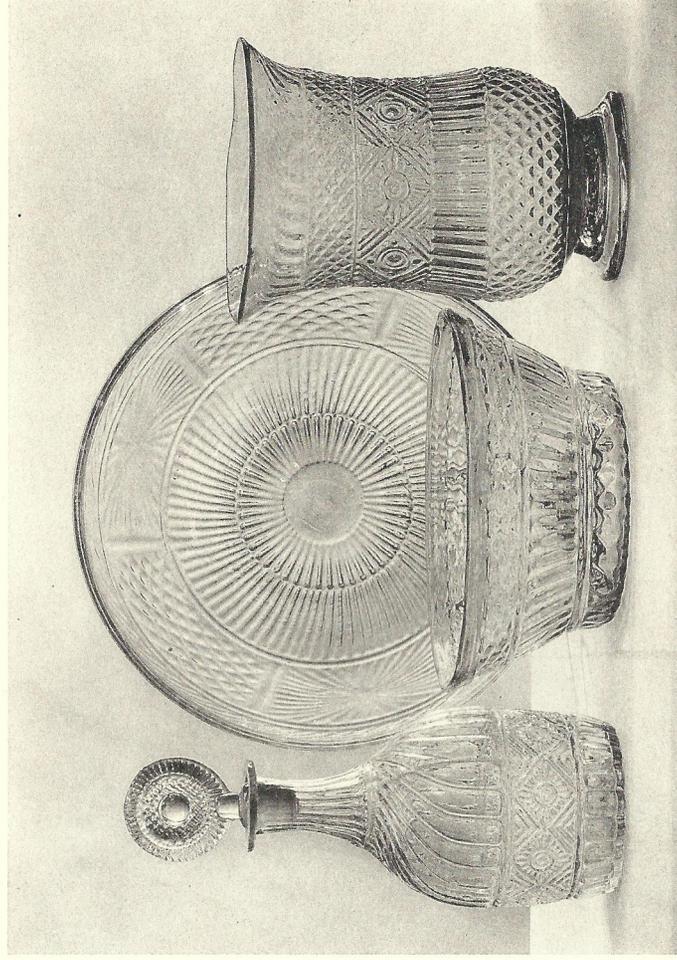
13. Clear glass, engraved with the arms of the state of Pennsylvania and the date 1791. New Bremen Glass Manufactory, Maryland. Base restored. Height 10 in.



14. Clear glass. Probably Baltimore-Philadelphia area, early XIX century. Height 8 in.



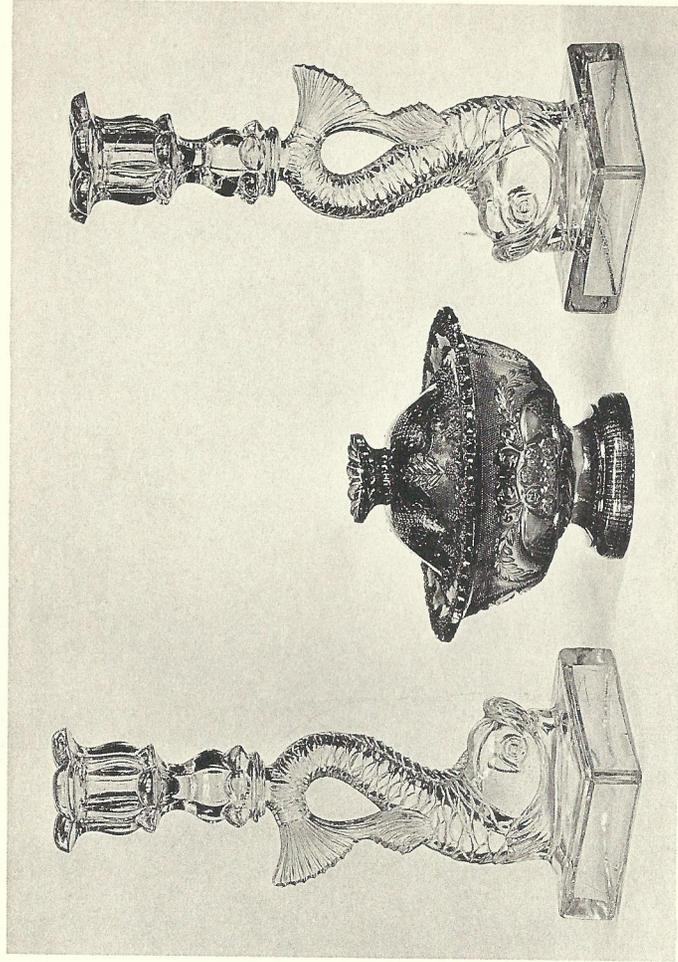
15. Amethyst. Body blown in a full-size, hinged mold; lid blown in a pattern mold. Western (?) Ohio, 1810-1825. Height 7½ in.



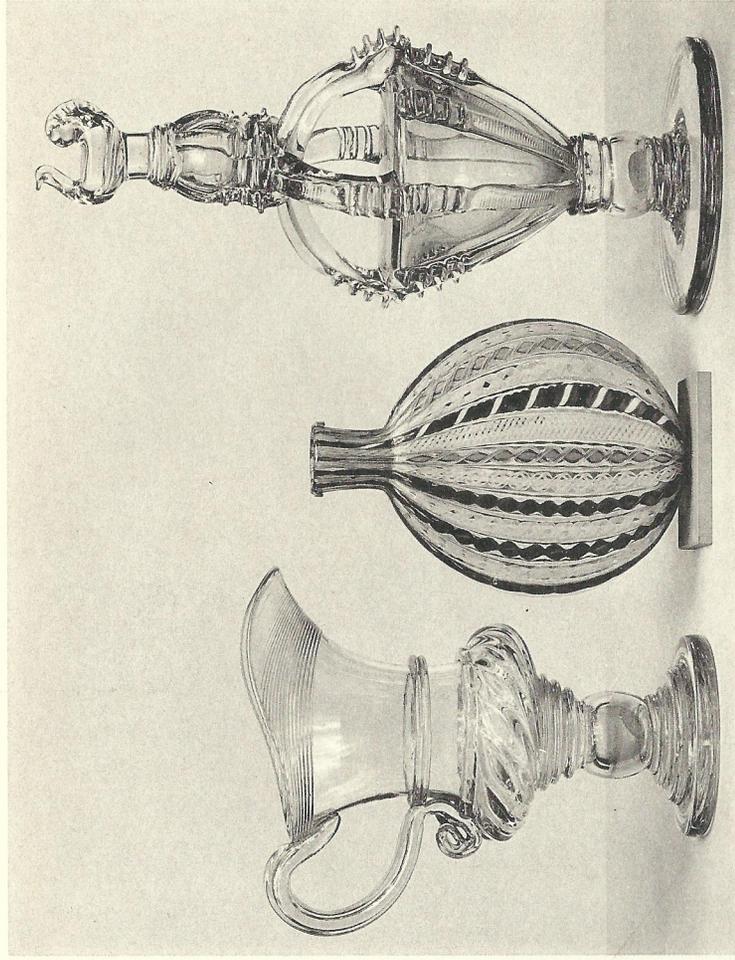
16. A-c. Clear glass. D. Pale green. Blown in full-size, hinged molds. American, 1810-1850.  
A. Height  $9\frac{1}{4}$  in.



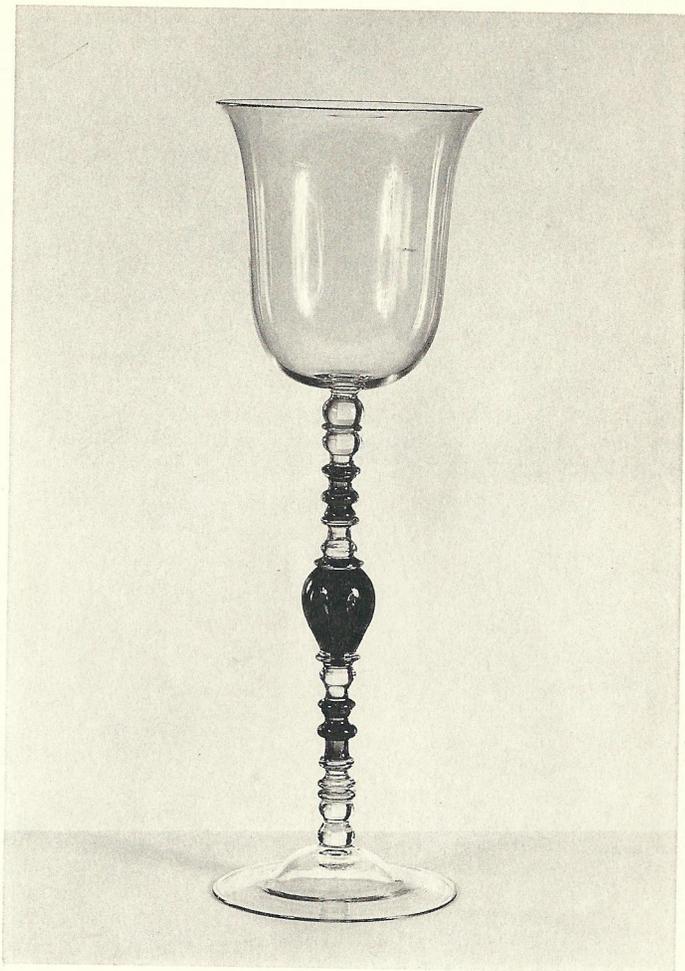
17. A. Cobalt blue and clear glass. B. Amethyst. C. Clear glass. Blown in full-size, hinged molds. American, 1810-1850. A. Height  $5\frac{1}{4}$  in.



18. A and c. Greenish yellow, 1840-1850. B. Mottled blue, 1830-1840. Machine-pressed. Sandwich, Massachusetts. A. Height  $10\frac{3}{8}$  in.



19. A and c. Clear glass. B. Multicolored threads in clear glass. Blown. New England, XIX century (A, about 1829; C, about 1833). A. Height  $7\frac{5}{8}$  in.



20. Clear glass with ruby and amber knops. Blown. Sandwich, Massachusetts, XIX century. Height  $14\frac{1}{4}$  in.

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