



*The Story
Of
St Clair Glass*

By Jane Ann Rice

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Offering Private Collections for Photographs:

Mary Ellen Walsh, Ed St Clair,
Bob and Maude St Clair and Marie Hirsch

Consultant - Joe St Clair

~ON THE COVER~

Jody St Clair, Marie Hirsch, Johnny, Ed
and Pop St Clair at the plant in 1942.
Missing is Bob St Clair who was in service.



DEDICATION

To Mom and Pop St Clair . . lovingly called so by their children and grandchildren and all who knew them. Their love of glass was so firmly implanted in the hearts of their children that each new creation is a silent tribute to them. To Mom and Pop this effort is humbly and gratefully dedicated.

The little village of Elwood, located in central Indiana, was officially incorporated in 1872 with 400 people. Growth came slow and fifteen years later the population was still under one thousand persons.

But the year 1887 brought fantastic changes to the sleepy town. That was the year natural gas was discovered in the area and Elwood suddenly awakened to find itself part of the "gas boom". Natural gas was available in large quantities and there seemed to be an endless supply. In fact, in yard after yard and at every street corner, the lights were just left burning because it was too much trouble to shut them off and after all, the supply was "inexhaustible".

With the gas came many industries seeking this ideal location and free fuel. Between 1877 and 1887 the population of Elwood increased 105 per cent. In the next three years, the population jumped another 300 per cent. By 1893, the count was 9,031, and the 1899 census showed the population at 15,289.

Because of its geological history, Elwood was the perfect spot for glass companies. There were abundant quantities of sand suitable for making glass and the easily secured and regulated fuel. At one time there were five major glass factories in Elwood - the George A. MacBeth Pearl Top and Pearl Glass Works, W. R. McCloy Chimney Works, Rodefer Window Glass Factory, The Diamond Plate Glass Company (Pittsburgh) and the Nivision and Weiskopf Bottle factory. In 1890 George MacBeth erected his first building in Elwood and a special train brought 365 glass workers from Pittsburgh to work at the plant.

At that time glass blowing was all done by manpower and it could not be done by unskilled labor. At first, the plant made only chimneys and lantern globes. It was for a time the only plant in the world which manufactured oil-tempered lamp chimneys and since oil was still the standard source of light throughout the world, the products of MacBeth were shipped to every part of the globe.

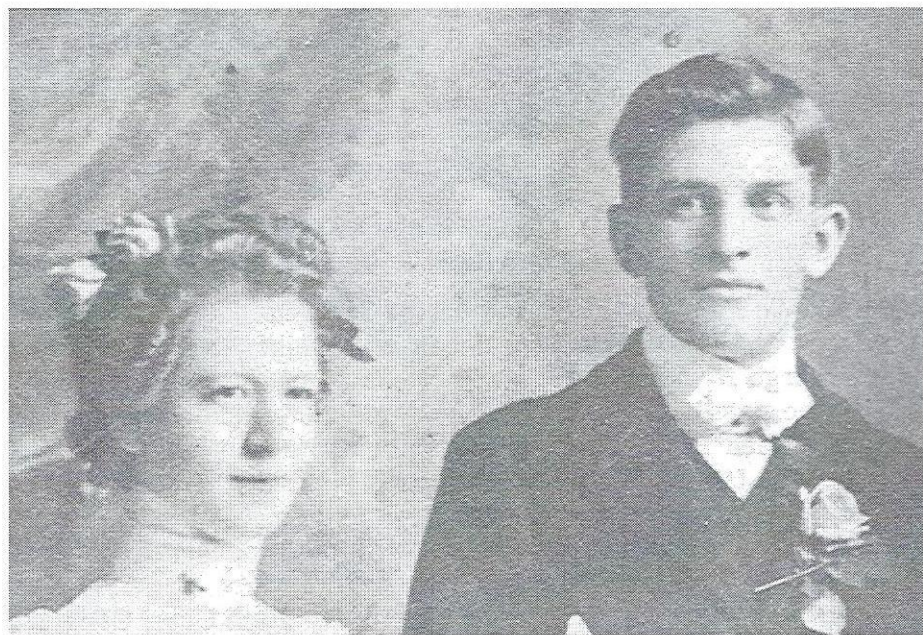
Discovery of natural gas and the location of MacBeth Glass Company in Elwood, are significant events far exceeding mere paragraphs in the history books. Because of these two events, and the ultimate failure of both, the St Clair Glass Works was born.

It was in 1890 that John and Rosalie St Clair came to Elwood. They had immigrated to the United States in 1885 from Alsace-Lorraine, France with their two children, John and Rosa. The family first settled at Crystal City, Missouri, where many of their countrymen had already found employment in the glass houses there. Many of the skilled glass artisans of the United States at that time called France their native land. In fact, it was at Poitiers that the first fabrication of glass took place in the second century.

Hearing of the MacBeth Plant in Elwood, John St Clair moved his family to the mushrooming town and he went to work as a lamp chimney worker. Young John, like his father, also found employment there. In 1903 he married Ellen Carroll, an English girl, and set up housekeeping at 408 North Fifth Street, a house given to them by John's father.

They were a handsome couple, this dashing Frenchman and his fair and smiling English girl. Their large family, which numbered eleven, consisted of five boys-John, Paul, Joseph, Edward and Robert and six daughters-Marie, Rosella, Dorothy, Ellen, Margaret and Jane Ann. Little Ellen died during an influenza epidemic when she was less than two years old. The home on Fifth Street was a noisy and happy one as the family enjoyed life to its fullest.

Things looked well for the St Clairs. The factory was at full production



Wedding portrait of John St Clair and Ellen Carroll

and John was eventually promoted to the job of blow-room foreman. He had learned well the fundamentals of glass working and the talent was already there. All of the men who worked under John had one common opinion-he was the hardest worker of them all and never assigned a task he would not do himself.

In most glass houses of that era men were encouraged to practice, invent, improve and create after their regular working hours. This was true at the MacBeth-Evans plant and John would return to the plant night after night to perfect the art which was part of his native country's culture.

When the St Clair boys were old enough they went back to the plant with their father to watch and help. It was in this way that the techniques of glass work also became part of them, as it had their father and his father. Early in life they got the feel of the pipe, the long rod which held the molten glass while it is being worked.

The main items of these off-duty productive hours were the glass paperweights that were so popular in grandma's day. It was not an easy task, this working the intricate flowery designs into the solid glass weights, but on each one, they perfected their technique. Thus did the St Clair boys learn. Joe, the third son learned easily to "stick" handles, a job he practiced many hours, before it became his special talent. Most of the doorstops and weights made in these practice sessions were given away and they may still be spotted occasionally in estate auctions although most are the proud possessions of descendants of their original receivers.

Elwood's gas boom had begun to fade in 1903 and it went almost as unexpectedly as it had come. Pumping stations had been put in earlier to pump the precious fuel to Fort Wayne, Chicago, and Indianapolis and as a result the pressure was lowered and water began to creep into the wells. The factories which had leased the large acreages and constructed their own pipe lines found the pressure steadily dropping and began to supplant their gas with coal. As the moisture continued to creep into the wells and pipes the supply on cold mornings became undependable, the water freezing in the pipes and stopping the flow of gas, since the pressure was even too low to keep the lines clear.

Then suddenly, in 1938, the world seemingly collapsed for the St Clair family. Elwood's "golden era of opportunity" was ended. As the gas failed, so did the particular advantages of the area for industry disappear and the MacBeth-Evans plant closed its doors. Corning Glass did purchase the facility but no further production was ever carried on from the Elwood plant. It was finally completely dismantled in 1936.

Things looked bleak for the St Clairs. It was not remotely possible for them to know that the closing of MacBeth would be the richest blessing they would ever receive.

full of heated asbestos were used for annealing, and each days production was moved from one position to another until in a week or ten days the annealing was completed.

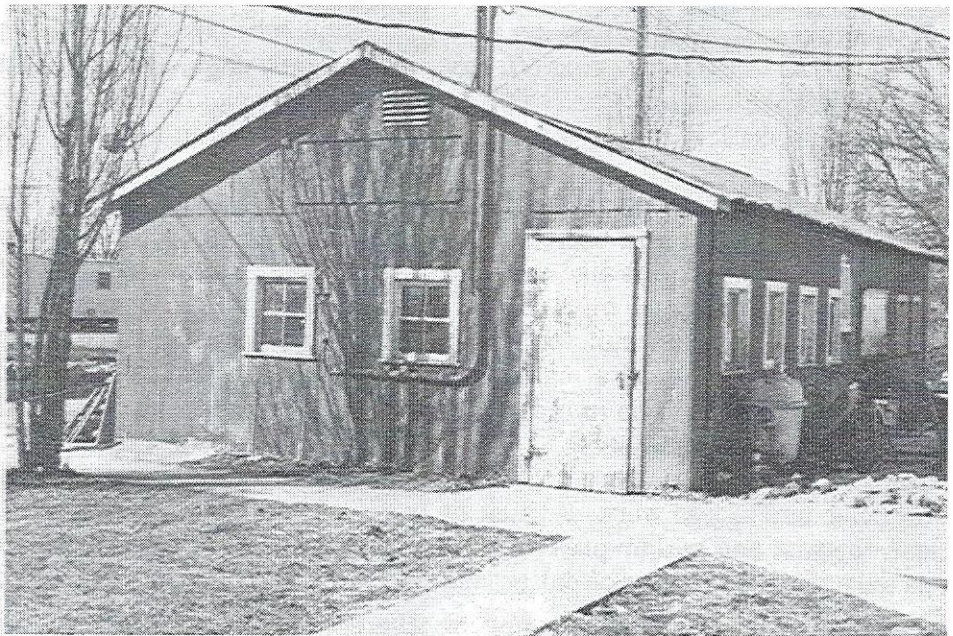
Importing was curtailed during the war years and the demand for St Clair Glass grew. Bob was the first to enter the service, followed by Ed and Johnny. Pop and Joe kept the shop alive, with the help of Mom and her sister Marie. Many of the items made during this period were not considered production pieces, and as such have greatly increased in value over the years.

In 1945 the St Clairs were again united and began full production once more.

With the increased demand for St Clair Glass came the necessity to add a display room, office and gift shop. Johnny's wife, Faye, helped Mom with the packing and shipping and many other duties, Marie, eldest of the St Clair girls, was the bookkeeper and Dorothy introduced the line to the Fort Wayne area.

New products were added to the line and the reputation of the St Clair glass began to spread.

The main lines then were small paperweights, ashtrays, penholders, bookends and small doorstops. The St Clair lamps are probably the most valued of all their many items and the major part of these lamps were



The St Clair manufacturing facility



The St Clair Gift Shop

manufactured between 1945 and 1958, ranging from small vanity lamps to floor lamps. The St Clair lamps were sold in the most exclusive shops and were considered even at that time the most valuable and collected of all the St Clair items.

It was this tremendous upswing in demand that brought the slowdown of Pop. He had begun tapering off, just working half days, as his health began to fail. Although not actively working at his bench, he kept an ever watchful and critical eye on his men and until his death in 1958, he was still "the boss".

In 1956 new electric annealing ovens were installed. Prior to this, the finished glass pieces had been dropped into the barrells of heated rock wool. The old process was also responsible for marring the ware if not put in at precisely the right moment.

Joe St Clair assumed full command of the plant upon Pop's death in 1958 and continued the spiraling business with the help of Ed and Bob and Johnny's wife, Faye, who managed the gift shop, doing the packing and shipping, since Mom's death in 1951.

In 1959, a new era began for St Clair Glass. Joe began experimenting with color and mould work. It must be remembered that Joe was not a glass chemist and had no previous experience with this type of work. It was only after long hours of patient learning and trial and error involved in making colored glass that new St Clair products made their appearance.

The first two items pressed by the St Clairs were the Greentown "dog" and "witch" toothpick or match holders in Nile green. The exciting part of this experimental period was the different shades of color obtained with one grain, more or less, of any one element. The greens varied with each melt, some bluish gray, some dark and some the exact shade Joe was searching for. These two patterns were the only items made in Nile green and it was not made again. For collectors, the year was 1960.

Using the dog and witch moulds again Joe's next experiment was with caramel slag. Color again varied with each melt. These two moulds were never used again by the St Clairs.

Joe was still held captive by the long forgotten formulas of the past. He was fascinated by the delicate beauty of pink slag and decided to revive its popularity. But even in 1961 the price of twenty ounces of gold made for an expensive experiment. The first trial batch was just what he had hoped for although he also learned that the gold fired away in the melt, or mix, and the more desirable pink fired away to color more resembling opalescent. The panelled grape lemonade glass, wine and the one inch slipper were made from this first effort. The lemonade glass mould was never used again.

In 1962 this same formula was tried again using the inverted fan and feather tumbler and the cactus tumbler moulds. Both patterns were very limited in number and there were color variations. Other moulds used were the panelled grape wine and Holly Band toothpick holder.

The last attempt by Joe St Clair to make pink slag was in 1969. The only mould used on this run was the Inverted fan and feather toothpick holder. The same color variations occurred.

A fire in June of 1964 resulting from a glass tank bursting, spewing molten glass over the floor, brought near disaster to the St Clairs. But a larger, better equipped plant was constructed and production resumed four months later.

Making decorative glass is considered one of the most difficult and complicated processes. It is an art that is not only rare but until recently had almost completely faded from the American scene. The late Jean Southerland Melvin's extensive work on the subject of contemporary glass paper weight makers is certainly recommended to those who are interested in this art. Among the better known glass artisans reviewed in this book besides the St Clair family are John and Gertrude Gentile of Star City, West Virginia, Joe Zimmerman and Gene Baxley of Corydon, Indiana, and the late John Degenhart, a great artisan, whose wife Elizabeth is grande matriarch of the glass industry. They were long time friends of Mom and Pop and the St Clair family.

Glass is the most interesting of an artisans raw materials. At the hands of a skilled craftsman, glass can be given almost any chosen size or shape

while it is in its elastic stage. There are as many "receipes" for making glass as there are for making a cake but certain basic ingredients are necessary. Every glass company has its own formula, suitable to their own specific needs. Joe St Clair always mixed the batch himself using only the finest ingredients available. Starting with pure white Illinois sand mixed with precise amounts of soda ash, feldspar, lime, and other basic ingredients this dry mixture is churned in a mixer, shoveled into the furnace and cooked for sixteen hours at a temperature of 2700 degrees. The fire is reduced to 2100 degrees and then to working temperature which is 1900 degrees. From this mix, or batch as it is called, comes one ton of molten glass ready to be worked.

Fire and temperature control are the most important factors in the manufacture of glass. The fire must be kept within critical boundaries, regulated steadily and evenly. In the melting furnace, the glass, or metal, must be protected. Of importance is the quality of the glass and its color which can be affected by any impurity.

Crystal is a Greek word meaning "clear ice". It comes out of the furnace red hot. In its molten stage, glass is tough and elastic.

The fundamental method of St Clair is a process of building, not blowing, as is often thought. The glasswork is never duplicated because the workmen never repeat the same pattern exactly. In this world of modern technology, which finds us surrounded by exact duplications made by machines, it is no small thing to reflect that each St Clair piece is original and each is unique.

In 1967 Joe St Clair turned his talents in another direction. Collector's interest in carnival glass was increasing and since it had not been manufactured for many years, Joe began his experiments.

His first attempt at making carnival met with instant success. Not wanting to confuse collectors he used the Indian Chieftain mould because it was not originally made in that color. The white carnival and marigold carnival started a revival of this type of decorative glassware that is still going strong today.

Between 1969 and 1970 several new moulds were obtained and cobalt carnival and custard glass made its debut, as well as amber, ice blue carnival and cobalt custard.

The pictures in color show the extent of Joe St Clair's experimenting, patience, knowledge and love of the art. Between the years of 1960 and 1970 the pressed ware was still considered a "sideline". The main production items of the St Clair plant was still the hand crafted ware but two or three months a year was allotted to making the pressed pieces. For this reason, the serious collector of carnival glass, pink slag, caramel slag, custard glass, etc., have added the St Clair reproductions to their collections.

In February of 1971 Joe St Clair announced his retirement. The factory, moulds and all equipment were sold to Robert Courtney of Elkhart, Indiana, with Richard Gregg as president. The new company has just completed construction of a new building to be used in making the hand made ware and the hand shop and press shop can work simultaneously the year round, significantly increasing production.

One might assume that since the sale of the plant and equipment, the St Clair saga had ended. Happily, this is not true.

Bob, youngest of the St Clair brothers, and his wife, Maude, have added to their already established antique and gift shop in Elwood a new factory building, which houses a small day tank, batch room and one electric annealing oven. For the time being production will be limited to collectors' weights, such as the owl, leprechaun and animal weights which are very popular with collectors. Bob also plans to make other items the St Clairs discontinued many years ago.

Working with Bob at his new plant will be Ed St Clair, Paul St Clair (retired from General Motors) and Maude's son, Jack Hutcheson and Joe Rice.

The addition of the factory, as well as the section in the gift shop which displays the items made in the earlier years of the St Clair's, marks a new beginning, as well as a continuation of, the family name in the world of art glass.



The new factory of Bob St Clair

Bob's new facility also makes it possible for Ed St Clair to continue his own line of special weights. The presidential weights are much in demand by the more advanced collector and Ed hopes to complete the presidential series in two sizes and three base colors, red, cobalt and the red, white and blue base. Ed also makes the five petal lily or star and the morning glory magnum sized weight.

To date, Ed has completed just a few of the presidential sulphides which were, for the most part, experimental. Ed, and his wife Lois pour their own sulphides, and fire them in their own home work-shop kiln. These weights will be signed both on the inside and on the pontil end of the finished weight.

Ed's weights are now on display at the Bergstrom Paperweight Museum at Neenah, Wisconsin, the Henry Ford Museum at Dearborn, Michigan and the Bennington Museum at Bennington, Vermont. Among Ed's treasured mementos are personal letters of appreciation from Mrs. Richard Nixon and one from Susan Nixon Eisenhower.



Work crew of the House of Glass includes Ed St Clair (seated) and, left to right Jack Hutchison, Bob and Paul St Clair.

FIG. 1



FIG. 2



FIG. 3

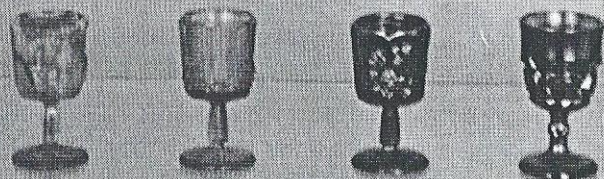


FIG. 4

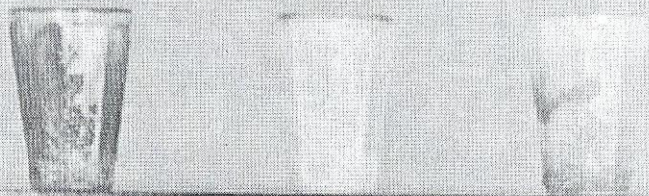


FIG. 5



FIG. 6



FIG. 7



FIG. 8

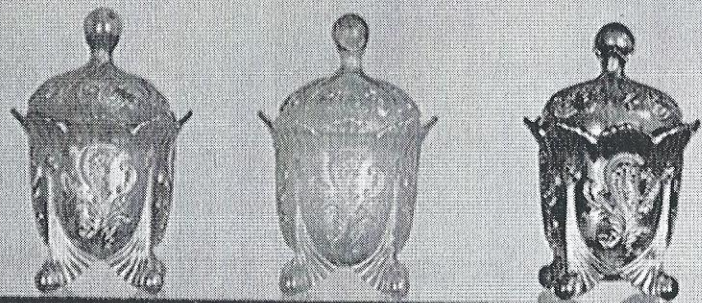


FIG. 9



FIG. 10



FIG. 11

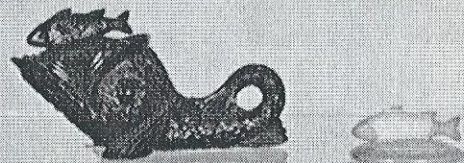


FIG. 12



FIG. 19



FIG. 20



FIG. 21



FIG. 22



FIG. 23



FIG. 24

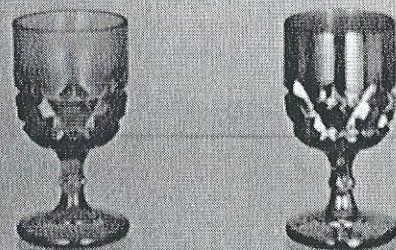


FIG. 13



FIG. 14



FIG. 15



FIG. 16

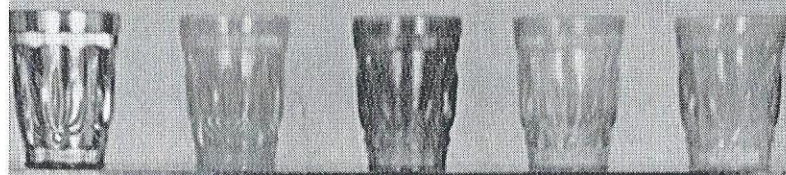


FIG. 17

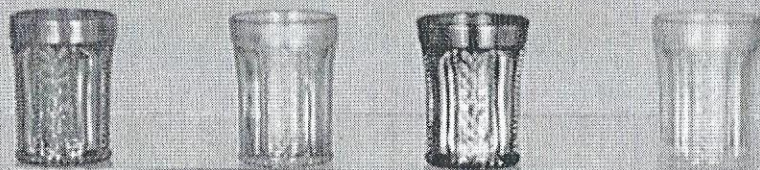


FIG. 18





FIG. 31

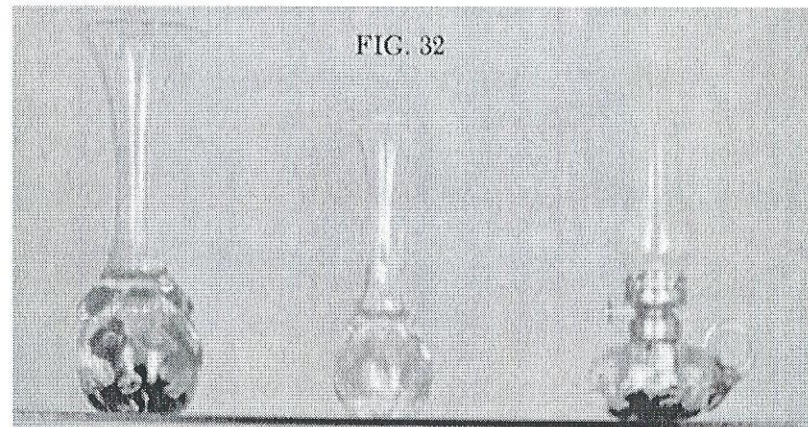


FIG. 32

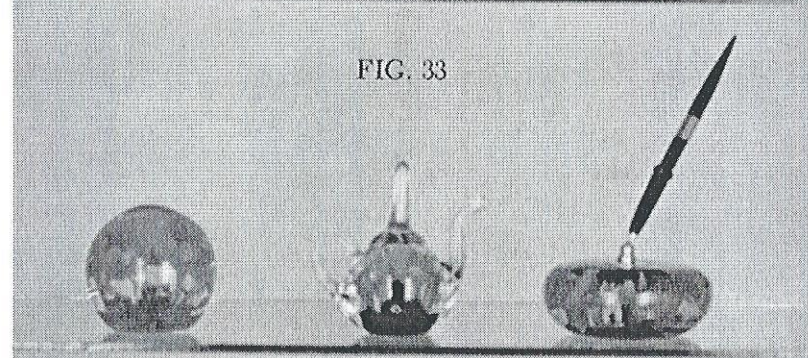


FIG. 33

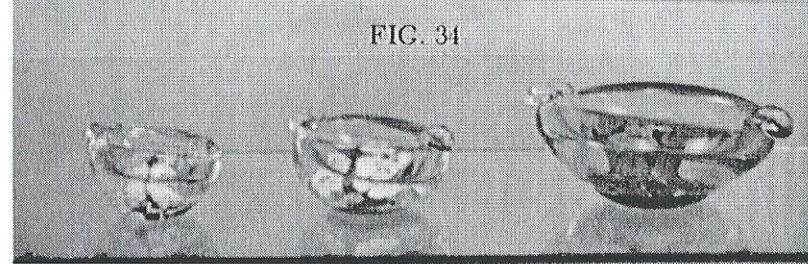


FIG. 34

FIG. 25



FIG. 26

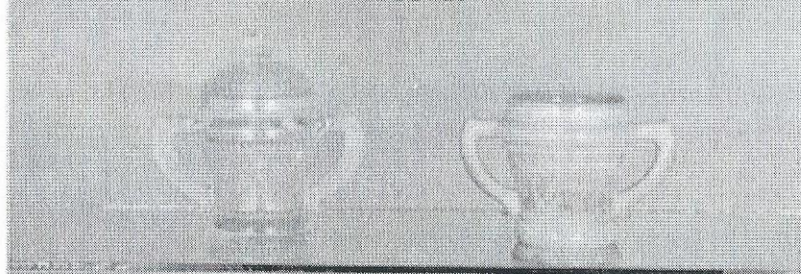


FIG. 27



FIG. 28

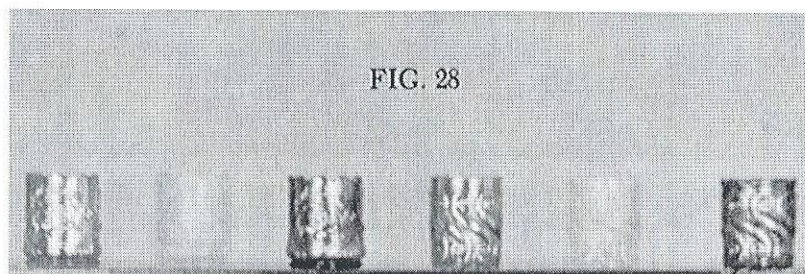


FIG. 29

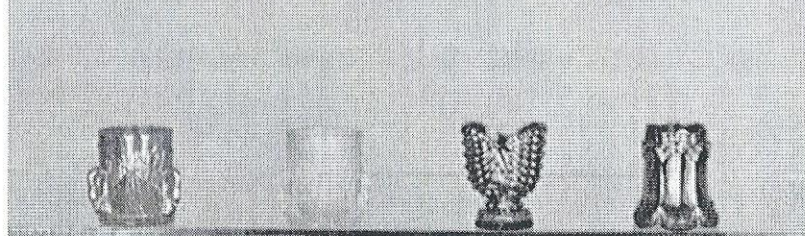


FIG. 30

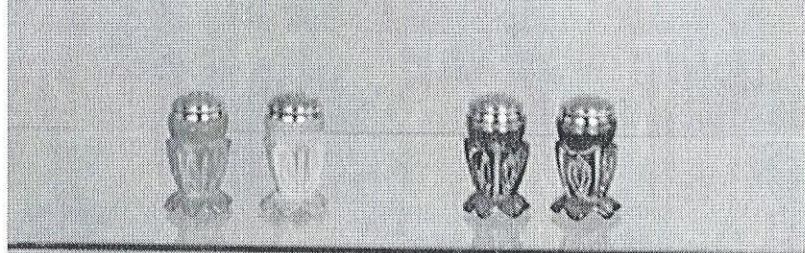


FIG. 35

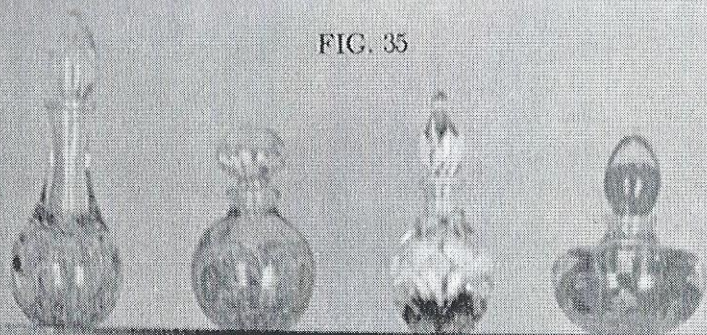


FIG. 36

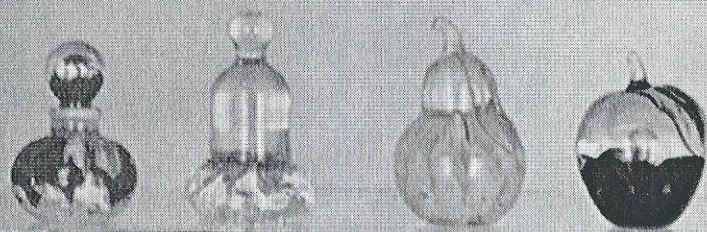


FIG. 37

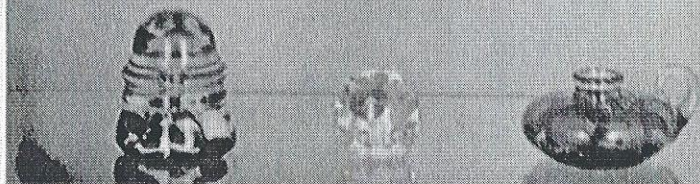


FIG. 38

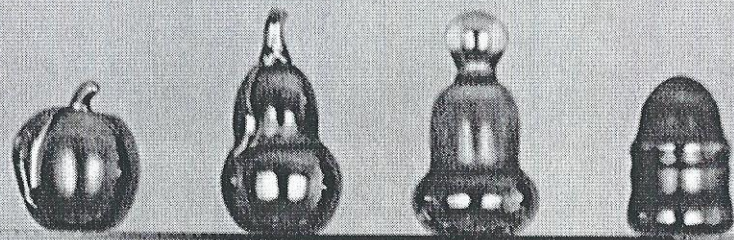


FIG. 39



FIG. 40



FIG. 41

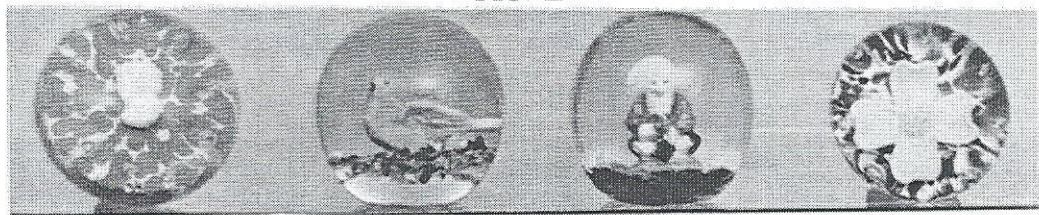


FIG. 42

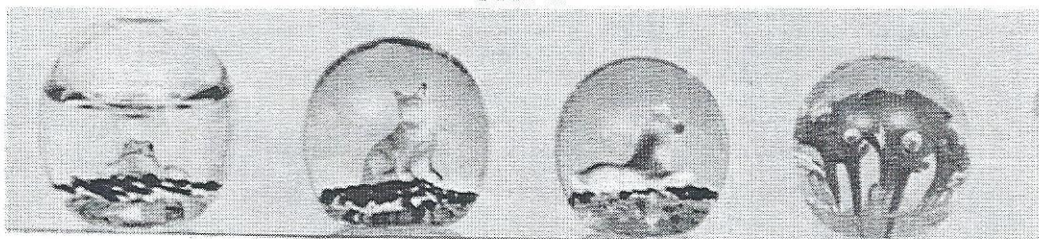


FIG. 43

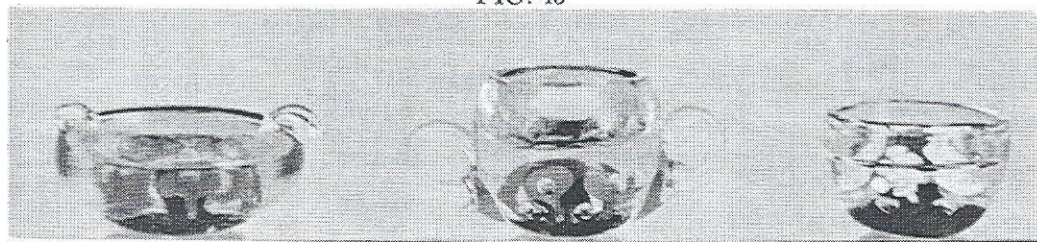


FIG. 44

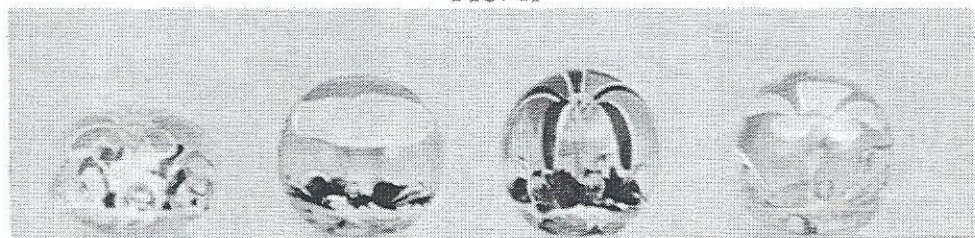


FIG. 45

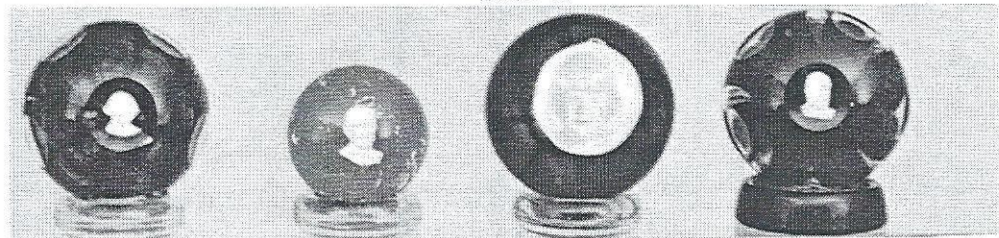
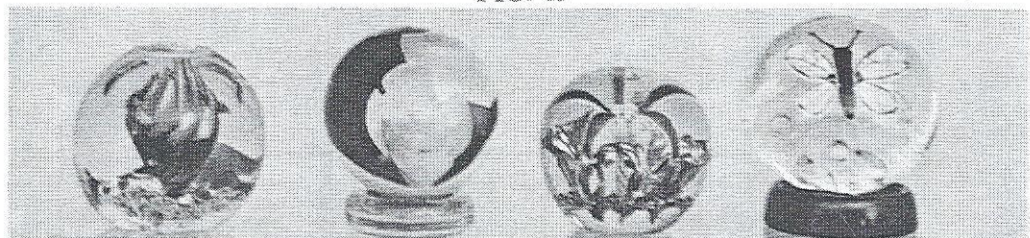


FIG. 46





A recent photograph of the St Clairs showing, left to right, Paul, Ed, Joseph, Joseph Rice - the third generation representative - and Bob St Clair.

The entire glass industry was saddened by Joe St Clair's announcement to retire, saying that an artist of his calibre should never hang up his tools as he had too much to give to the world of art.

Joe's lifelong ambition to make 500 of his rose paperweights will perhaps now be realized. Since the death of his father in 1958, Joe has not had the time to devote to the most complicated of all paperweights, the Rose. Production demands left no time for this dream as he spent each working day at his bench, shaping, and finishing each glass item sold through his shop. Watching Joe work was always a special treat as he handled each weight as if it were a delicate flower. His favorite creation was the teapot jewelry holder, and he always tried to make each one better than the last.

Joe has the opportunity now to realize his dream. His Rose paperweights are the most sought after of all and for the first time will be signed with his own identifying die, stamped on the pontil end of the weight.

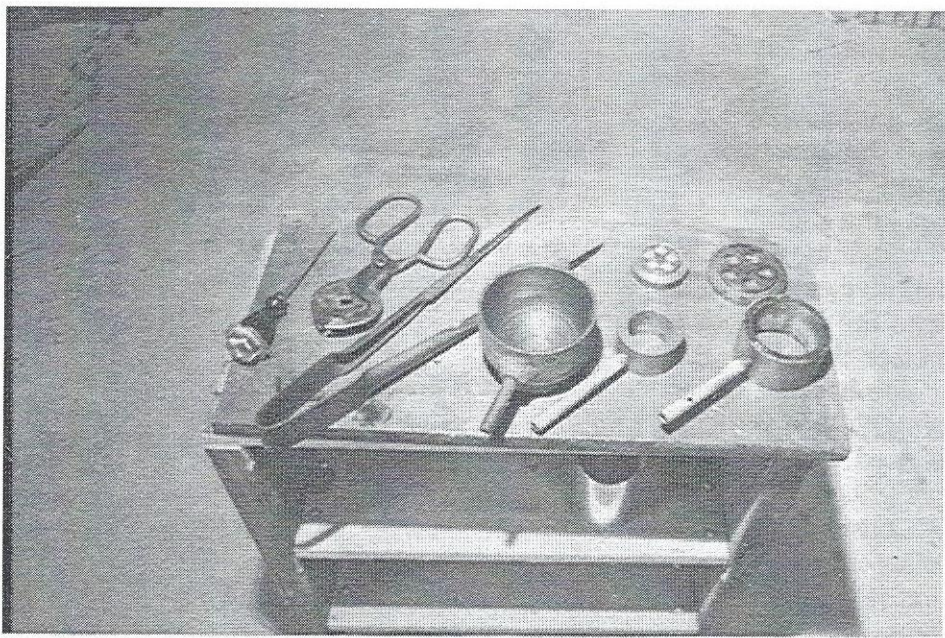
Considered by his friends and colleagues in the glass industry as a master craftsman, Joe is loved and respected by his employees and held in the highest esteem by all those who have had the pleasure of knowing him.

And so, another new chapter begins in the old St Clair tradition of quality, integrity, and the close personal relationship with their customers the family has enjoyed over the years.



Joseph Alan Rice, at twenty, is the youngest known glass paperweight maker. Although still considered an apprentice (it takes years to completely master the art) Joe has the distinct advantage of having been tutored by Joe and Ed St Clair. The only third generation son to be interested in this craft, his uncles recognized his natural talent and eagerly taught him the many complicated and well kept family secrets of their trade. Joe has the intense personal pride of his workmanship all true glass artisans must possess, along with his inherited appreciation of the art itself.

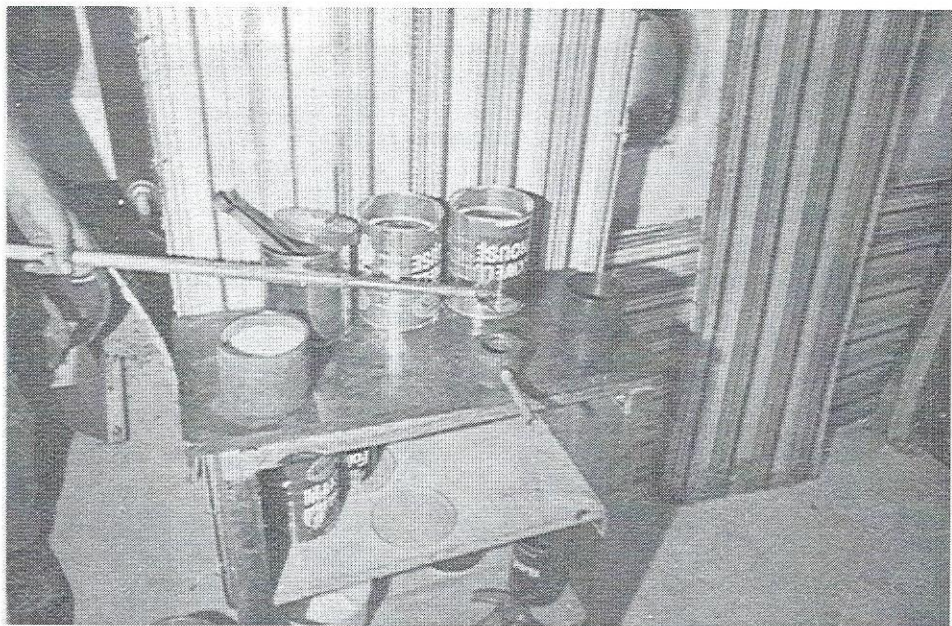
In the following photographs young Joe Rice takes you through the steps of creating a St Clair item.



The tools most commonly used by the St Clairs.



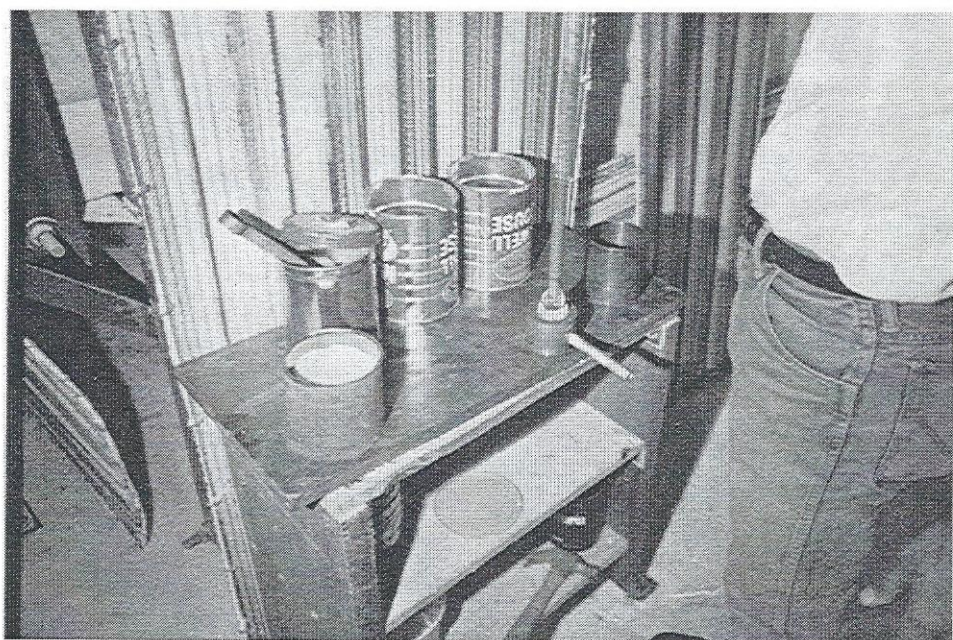
First making sure the preheated pipe is free from any foreign material, the first "gather" is taken from the furnace.



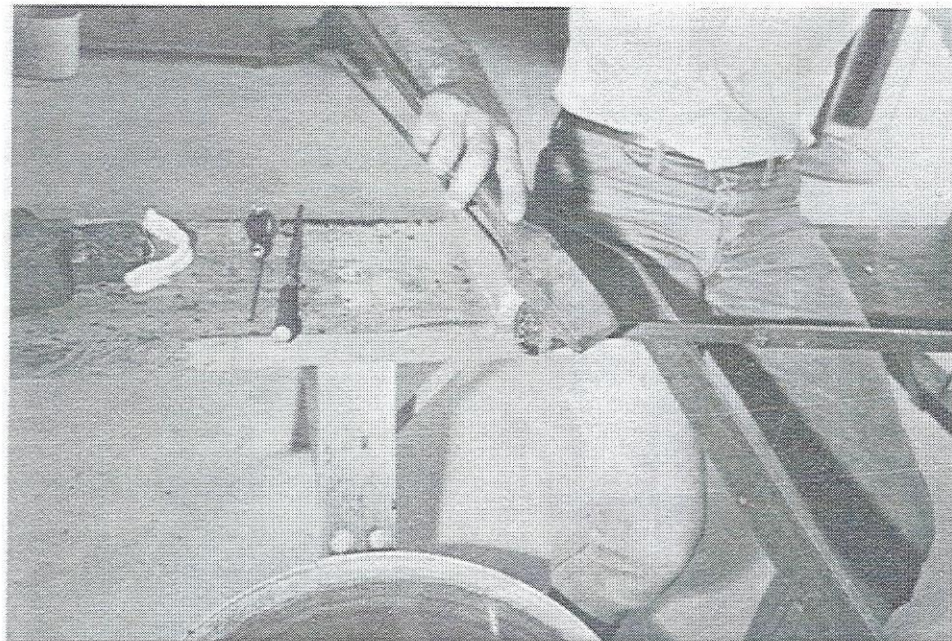
This "bit", as it is called, is then gently touched to the colored glass chips which adhere firmly to the molten glass. It is immediately returned to the furnace to reheat.



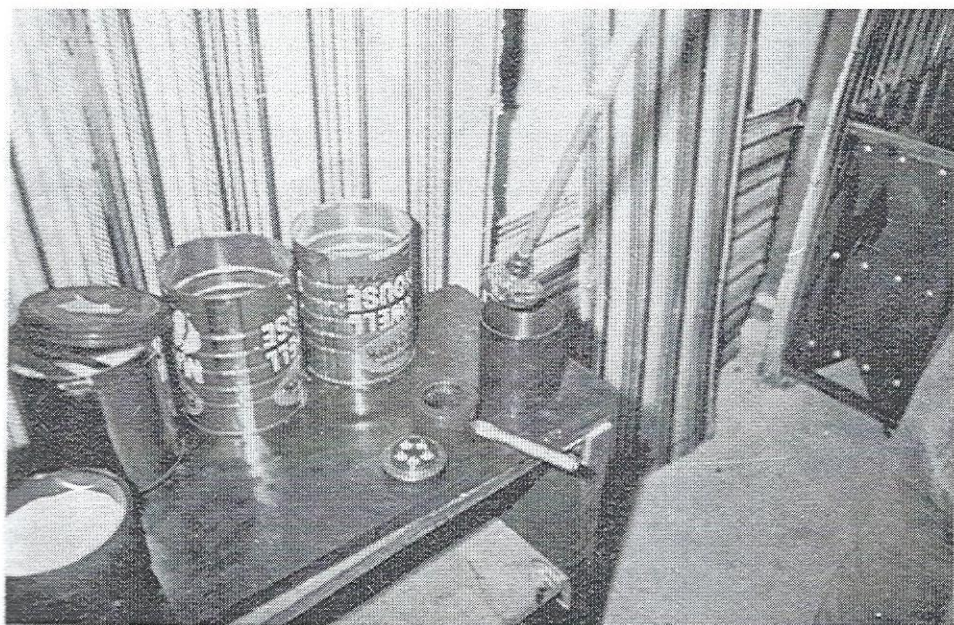
This is picked up by the worker, the ring removed and the structure begins to take shape. It is again returned to the furnace and brought to a uniform temperature.



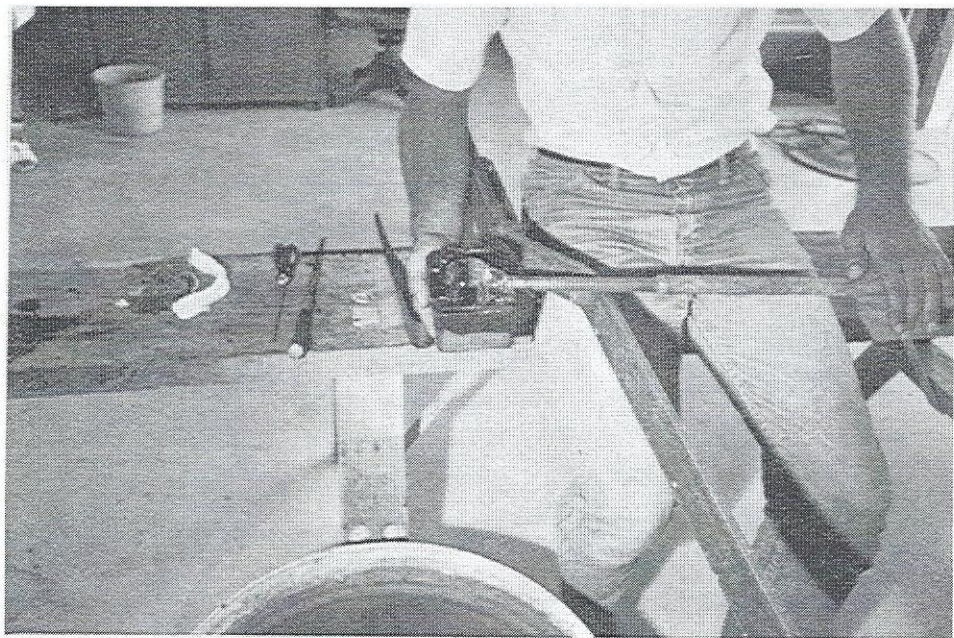
The second gather is prepared by a helper and poured into a prearranged iron die containing glass chips and a retaining ring.



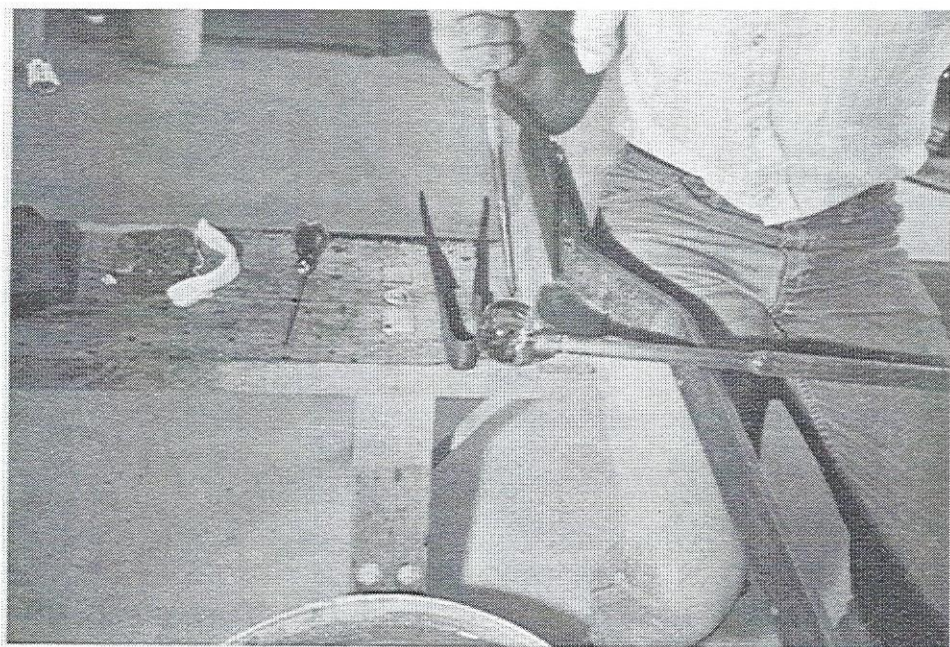
Using the chimney tool, the initial shaping begins.



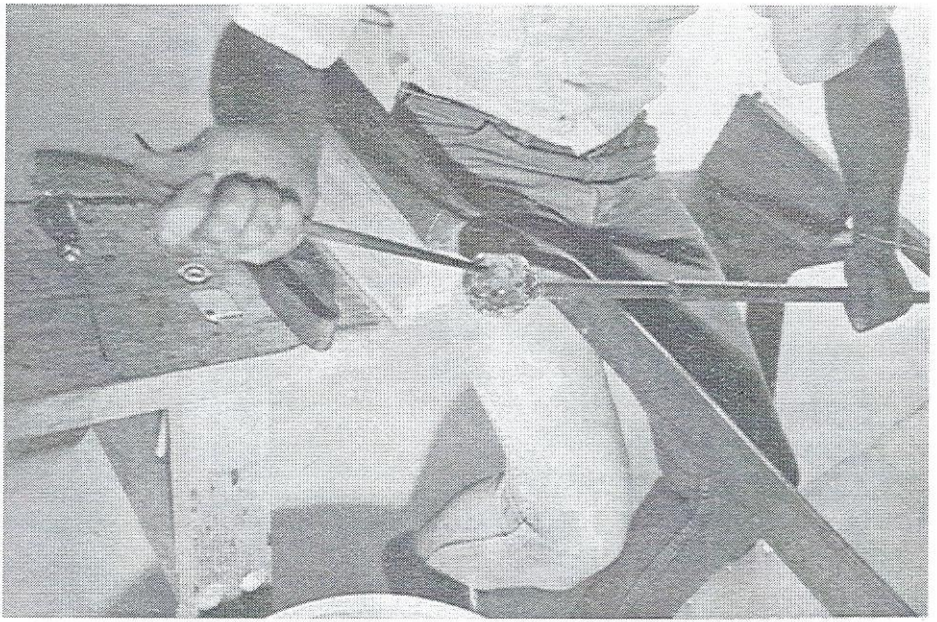
Another gather is taken from the furnace and poured into the larger cup, covering the colored glass chips which will form the flowers.



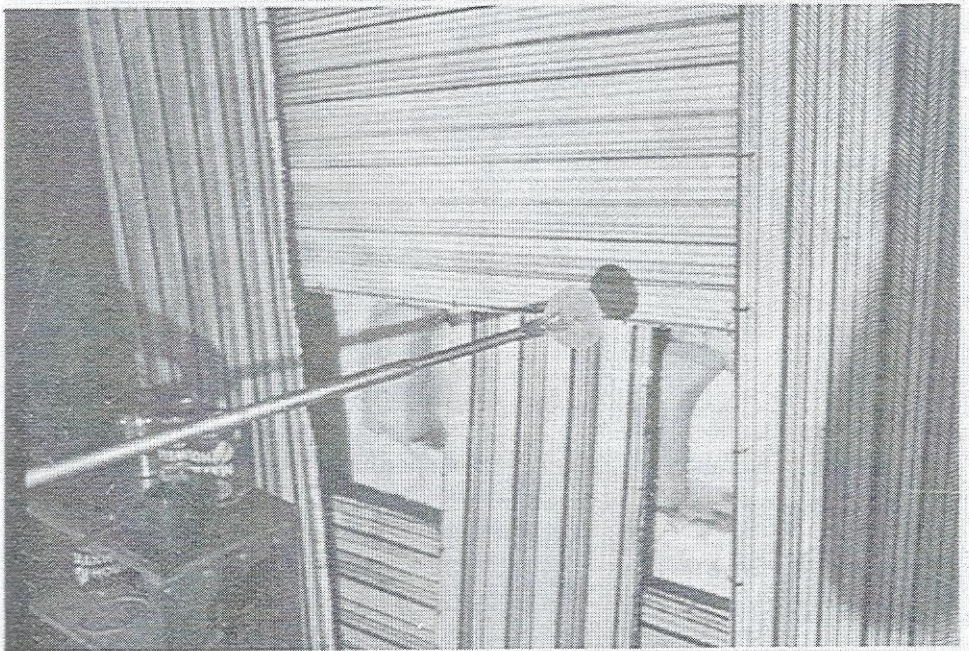
Additional blocking insures these layers complete fusion.



Using a punch-like tool, the first air traps are inserted at the base of the weight. The St Clair weights usually contain five.



This same tool is used to pre-form the flower. An ice pick is also sometimes used, being pushed to the base of the weight, bringing with it the color and forming the stamen of the flower.



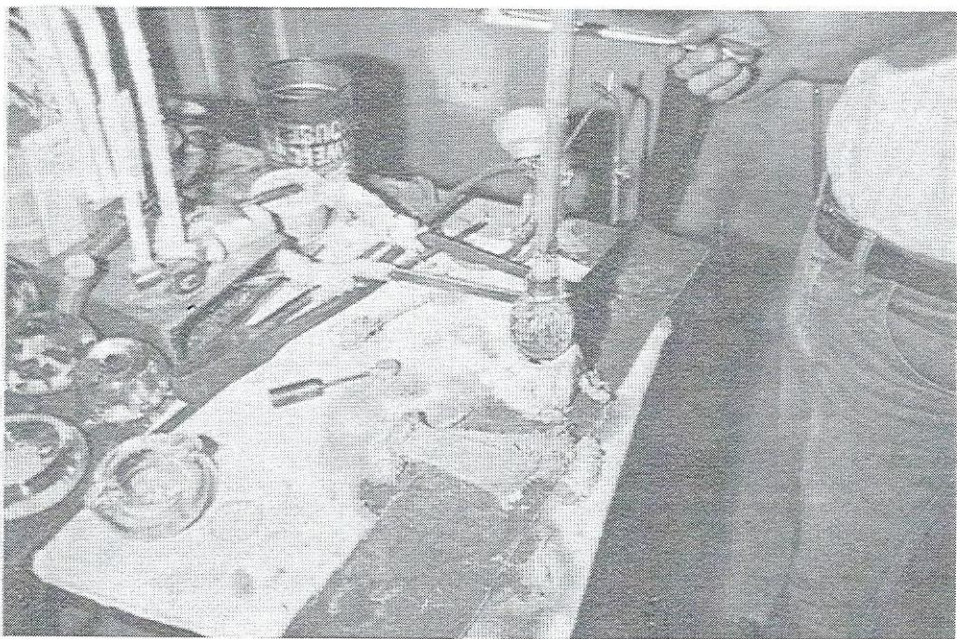
The final gather covers the entire structure and the final blocking begins.



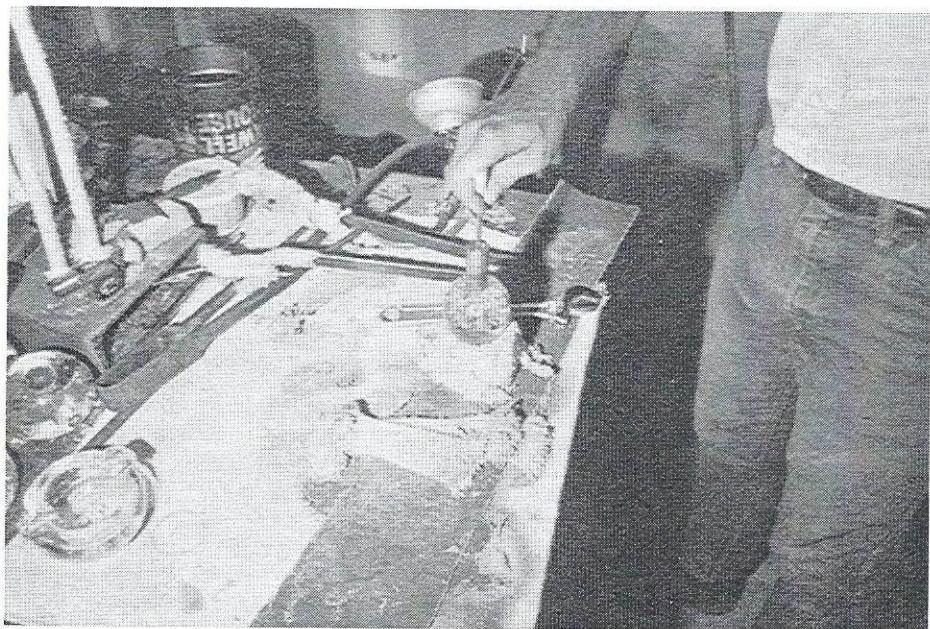
The initial cut-off is performed followed by another blocking and the final cut-off completing the process.



The workman allows the finished weight to cool slightly.



Then he takes it to the asbestos covered ring where it is gently but firmly tapped to release it from the pipe.



The St Clair stamp is applied and the weight is then taken to the electric annealing oven to slowly cool at properly controlled temperatures. This cooling period lasts approximately 30 hours.

A Directory To The Color Plates

FIG. 1 - Dog and Witch in Nile green

FIG. 2 - Witch and dog in caramel and amber

FIG. 3 - Panelled grape wine glasses in blue marble, ice blue carnival, cobalt carnival and a cobalt carnival hob-star wine glass

FIG. 4 - Panelled grape lemonade glasses in pink slag

FIG. 5 - Two cactus and two inverted fan and feather glasses in pink slag

FIG. 6 - Inverted fan and feather toothpick holders in pink slag, showing color variations.

FIG. 7 - Panelled grape sauce dish in transparent olive, cobalt carnival, ice blue carnival and panelled grape sauce dish in transparent olive (mould used one time only)

FIG. 8 - Inverted fan and feather covered sugars in marigold carnival, ice blue carnival and cobalt carnival

FIG. 9 - Panelled grape sauce dish mould was used to make these small plates. On the far left is cobalt and one the far right is ice blue carnival. The nappy in the center was made in clear and white carnival only.

FIG. 10 - Robin on nest in cobalt custard (not shown is robin on nest in cobalt carnival), reclining colt in cobalt carnival and reclining colt in cobalt custard

FIG. 11 - Dolphin in cobalt only and dolphin lid in caramel slag only

FIG. 12 - Swan salt dip in caramel slag, one inch slipper in caramel slag, same slipper mould in cobalt carnival and salt dip in cobalt carnival. The slipper in pink slag is not shown

FIG. 13 - Chieftain toothpick holders in cobalt carnival, custard, carnival, white carnival, caramel slag, ice blue carnival and decorated custard

FIG. 14 - Inverted fan and feather toothpick holders in custard, ice blue carnival, white carnival, cobalt carnival, pink slag and red

FIG. 15 - Kingfisher toothpick holders in red amber, custard, cobalt with white spray, white carnival and cobalt carnival

FIG. 16 - Cactus pattern tumblers in cobalt carnival, coral, charcoal, caramel slag and aqua

FIG. 17 - Holly band tumblers in red carnival, ice blue carnival, cobalt carnival and white carnival (Not shown is caramel amber)

FIG. 18 - Fleur de Lis tumbler made in caramel slag (one run only) and inverted fan and feather tumblers in cobalt carnival and red carnival

FIG. 19 - Holly band toothpick holders in marigold, orchid, white carnival, ice blue carnival and transparent olive. (Cobalt not shown)

FIG. 20 - Holly band toothpick holders in solid caramel slag, caramel slag with light holly band amber and custard

FIG. 21 - Cactus toothpick holders in cobalt carnival, white carnival, caramel slag and red carnival

FIG. 22 - Goblets in cobalt carnival, showing Rose-In-The-Snow, Fruit and Wildflower

FIG. 23 - Thistle goblets in cobalt with white carnival spray, marigold carnival and cobalt carnival (Ice blue carnival not shown)

FIG. 24 - Hob-Star goblets in ice blue carnival and aquamarine carnival (Cobalt carnival not shown)

FIG. 25 - Holly band caramel slag pitcher, holly band ice blue pitcher, holly band ice blue mug in carnival and holly band red carnival mug. The pitcher was made from the same holly band mug mold, but an extra ring was added and the lip was shaped by hand. This mug was also made in caramel slag and transparent olive

FIG. 26 - Holly band sugar bowl in white carnival and amber taffy. (No lids were made)

FIG. 27 - Panelled grape cream and sugar set in cobalt carnival and custard

FIG. 28 - Wreathed cherry toothpick holders in marigold carnival, white carnival and cobalt carnival. Repeat S toothpick holders in marigold carnival, white carnival and cobalt carnival

FIG. 29 - Swan toothpick holders in marigold carnival and white carnival. (Cobalt not shown) Argonaut shell toothpick holder, made only in cobalt, and the chrysanthemum sprig toothpick holder, made only in cobalt

FIG. 30 - Cactus salt and pepper sets in caramel slag (showing color variations) and cobalt carnival

FIG. 31 - A St Clair table lamp using original Greentown color chips

FIG. 32 - Large vase, small vase and kerosene lamp

FIG. 33 - Regular paperweight, teapot jewelry holder and large penholder

FIG. 34 - Small, medium and large ashtrays

FIG. 35 - Tall cologne bottle, early ribbon perfume bottle, regular cologne bottle and flat perfume bottle

FIG. 36 - Small perfume bottle, bell with flowers, green pear and dark green apple

FIG. 37 - Multi-colored insulator, small paperweight and large flat candleholder

FIG. 38 - Carnival apple, carnival pear, carnival bell and carnival insulator

FIG. 39 - Small bookend, doorknob, covered powder dish and pitcher

FIG. 40 - Regular size production weight and small weight

FIG. 41 - Weights by Bob St Clair at the House of Glass showing cameo on pink and white base, blue bird on multi base, leprechaun and pink dogwood on green and white base

FIG. 42 - More weights by Bob St Clair - ivy bowl with ceramic frog, boxer, reclining colt and regular production weight

FIG. 43 - Other production items by Bob St Clair at the House of Glass include large ashtray, two-handled sugar bowl (matching pitcher not shown) and pin tray

FIG. 44 - Weights by Ed St Clair - lilly, morning glory, star and lilly

FIG. 45 - Special weights made by Ed St Clair include faceted George Washington sulphide on green base, small size Grant sulphide on red base, silk screen photo weight and faceted Taft sulphide on cobalt. All of these weights are serially numbered 1 through 300

FIG. 46 - A faceted rose weight and yellow on green and white open rose weight by Joe St Clair; lilly weight with ribbon and painted glass butterfly over yellow flowers by Joe Rice