

A MASTERPIECE OF THE NEW ENGLAND GLASS COMPANY AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

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A monumental presentation vase, beautifully cut and engraved, from the New England Glass Company in East Cambridge, Massachusetts, has recently been added to the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Fig. 1). The vase was exhibited at the Fourth Exhibition of the National Early American Glass Club in the City Hall at Gloucester, Massachusetts, August 6–10, 1935.¹ Since its exhibition, the vase had disappeared for almost fifty years and was known only through published descriptions of it.² One side of the vase bears an engraved view of the New England Glass Works (Fig. 2), and the other, the inscription "From / Henry Whitney / to / Thomas Leighton / East Cambridge [*sic*] / August · 1843 / A token of grateful remembrance."

The shape of the vase is allied to the classical urn form popular during the prevailing Empire style, which flourished in America for about thirty years from 1815 until 1845. Although it derives from Renaissance and ultimately classical prototypes, the vase relates more closely to porcelain and silver forms than to glass of the period. The broad cut panels around the base of the bowl suggest the heavy gadrooning or melon-reeding found on silver vases and tea wares. Its faceted stem with central knob and turned-over rim evoke earlier Anglo-Irish glass of the late eighteenth century.

The engraved view illustrates the New Eng-

land Glass Company factory complex as seen from the east across the Charles River. The young New England Glass Company, which was founded in 1818, moved into the existing glassmaking facilities of the defunct Boston Porcelain and Glass Company, at Craigie's Point or Lechmere Point in East Cambridge. The view depicts the two glass furnaces and one red lead furnace which were in operation during the first half of the nineteenth century. These were prosperous years for the New England Glass Company. By 1845 it was one of the largest industries in Cambridge, employing nearly 250 workers and having a net worth of \$334,000.³ With seventy years of continuous operation, the New England Glass Company is credited with being the longest successful enterprise of any nineteenth-century American glass factory.

1. Lura Woodside Watkins, *The Development of American Glassmaking: An Account of the Fourth Exhibition of the National Early American Glass Club*, Boston, Massachusetts: National Early American Glass Club, 1935, p. 15, pl. 1, vi.

2. Millard F. Rogers, Jr., *The New England Glass Company 1818–1888*, Exhibition Catalogue, Toledo, Ohio: Toledo Museum of Art, 1963, pp. 16–17; Rogers, "New England Glass Company Marks," *Antiques* 89, May 1966, p. 724; Frank T. Innes, "An Historical Treasure," *The Glass Club Bulletin*, 126, September 1979, p. 11.

3. *Survey of Architectural History of Cambridge*, Report One, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cambridge Historical Commission, 1965, p. 14.



FIG. 1. Presentation vase with engraved view of the New England Glass Works and the inscription "From / Henry Whitney / to / Thomas Leighton / East Cambridge [sic] / August · 1843 / A token of grateful remembrance." H. 33 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. William H. Hornsaday, Robert C. Goelet Gifts (1980.69), New York, New York.

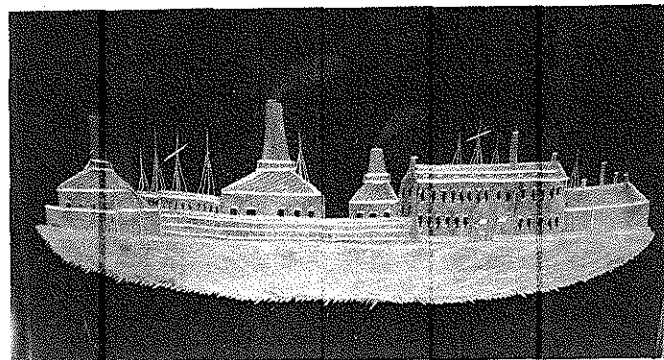


FIG. 2. Detail of Fig. 1.



FIG. 3. Detail of stock certificate no. 845 for the New England Glass Company, dated April 29, 1851. Collection of Lura Woodside Watkins; photograph courtesy of the Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.

The source for this view is an engraved illustration of the factory, delineated by Boston engraver Benjamin F. Nutting (1801–1887), which appears as the heading of a New England Glass Company stock certificate (Fig. 3), numbered 845 and dated April 29, 1851. The view reproduced on glass is surprisingly faithful to the original, and even includes such details as the smoke billowing from the chimneys and the masts from ships on the other side of Craigie's Point. However, the glass engraver has somewhat distorted the relative scale of the various buildings. The engraved view of the New England Glass Company is noteworthy in that it documents how the factory looked prior to 1850 when its character was dramatically changed by the construction of a 230-foot-high chimney,

claimed at the time to be the tallest chimney in the United States.⁴

The attempt to engrave a factory scene on glassware was an ambitious undertaking for an American glass engraver. Aside from mold-blown, patterned flasks, the only other example of a glasshouse view depicted on nineteenth-century American glassware is that on the lacy pressed glass "Industry" bowl.⁵ The similarity of the

4. A detailed contemporary description of the construction of the tall chimney and its appearance on completion is found in *The Cambridge Chronicle*, vol. v, no. 15, April 15, 1850, and no. 35, August 1850.

5. The only other known views of glasshouses on American glass are those which appear on mold-blown figured flasks and

view on the "Industry" bowl and that on the New England Glass Company stock certificate suggests that the moldmaker for this piece also used the Nutting engraving as a model. The bowl, which illustrates the Whig party emblems of the Presidential political campaign of William Henry Harrison, probably dates about 1840.

Although the original print source for the view is undated, evidence strongly suggests it was initially drawn and engraved for the stock certificate in 1838, five years earlier than its appearance on the engraved glass. A photocopy of a stock certificate, identical to the one dated 1851, is at The Corning Museum of Glass (the current whereabouts of the original is unknown).⁶ That certificate, numbered 357, transferred sixteen shares of New England Glass Company stock to John Hancock, Jr., on April 1, 1839. The shares for both the 1839 and the 1851 certificates were worth \$500 each. These shares were first issued, and consequently the factory view delineated, in 1838, when the New England Glass Company applied to the Senate and House of Representatives of the General Court of Massachusetts for authorization to increase the capital stock, "by adding thereto one hundred thousand dollars, to be divided into shares of five hundred dollars each," and which was approved by the Governor on April 6 of that year.⁷ The same scene, simplified and cropped, appears on printed billheads from the glass company.⁸ It was eminently appropriate that this view—so closely associated with the commercial aspects of the firm, appearing on its official documents, which were, in turn, all signed by Henry Whitney while he was agent for the factory—should be chosen by Whitney to embellish this glass presentation vase.

The inscription on the opposite side of the vase pays tribute to Thomas Leighton from Henry Whitney, and is signed and dated East Cambridge, August 1843. Previous published accounts of this vase have consistently cited the occasion of Thomas Leighton's retirement from the factory as the occasion for its presentation.⁹ Documentary records contradict those earlier assumptions

by demonstrating that Thomas Leighton did not retire from the New England Glass Company in 1843, but, in fact, continued to play an active role in the company until his death on September 21, 1849.¹⁰ Instead, this monumental vase marks the retirement of Henry Whitney.

Henry Whitney, came to the New England Glass Company in 1825 and succeeded Deming Jarves as agent, or general manager, for the company.¹¹ In that position, Whitney represented the factory at their Boston office at 97 State Street, and his name appeared on published documents

bottles, of which nine depicting glasshouses are known (Mck. GI-101, GI-102, GI-103, GI-104, GI-105, GI-107, GI-115, GXIII-57, GXIII-62).

6. Photocopy of New England Glass Company stock certificate no. 357, April 1, 1839, document 9:2, The Corning Museum of Glass Library. I am grateful to Susan Maycock of the Cambridge Historical Commission for bringing this and other significant findings related to the New England Glass Company to my attention.

7. *Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts passed by the General Court in the years 1837 and 1838*, vol. 14, Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1839, chap. LXXVII, p. 363.

8. New England Glass Company bill, dated September 22, 1852, Warsaw Collection, Division of Extractive Industry, Smithsonian Institution.

9. Rogers, 1963, pp. 16-17; Rogers, 1966, p. 724; Innes, p. 11.

10. *The John Ford Cambridge Directory and Almanac*, published in 1848 and 1849, lists Thomas Leighton as glassmaker, N. Winter St. (Cambridge City Directories were first published in 1848). The probate of Leighton's will, discharged on November 20, 1849, cites his occupation as glassmaker; the accounts filed by William Leighton, his son and executor, included \$200 in salary payments in arrears by the New England Glass Company at the time of Thomas Leighton's death. Middlesex County Probate, Wills, vol. 190, pp. 19-20, Middlesex County Courthouse, East Cambridge, Massachusetts.

11. Watkins, *Cambridge Glass 1818 to 1888, The Story of the New England Glass Company*, Boston, Massachusetts: Marshall Jones Company, 1930, pp. 173-174. This was a pioneer work on the history of the New England Glass Company. The responsibilities of the Agent for the Company were published in *Act of Incorporation and By-laws of the New England Glass Company*, Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1828, pp. 7-8. In brief, he was responsible for all contracts regarding "labor, stock, and materials and for the disposition and sale of the articles to be manufactured . . . and take the general management of the men and manufactory."

of the firm during his tenure. Through newspaper advertisements in particular, one can pinpoint to almost within a week the date on which Henry Whitney resigned from his position as agent for the glassworks. The New England Glass Company ran weekly Saturday notices in the *Boston Daily Advertiser*. Henry Whitney's name as agent for the factory appears for the last time at the end of the notice on August 26, 1843. Because the next consecutive advertisement for the glassworks, dated September 2, 1843, bears the name of Joseph N. Howe, Jr., Henry Whitney's successor, it would appear that Whitney retired from his work at the New England Glass Company at the end of August 1843.¹² At that time he commissioned from the glassworks this masterful glass vase to give to his long-standing colleague Thomas Leighton as "a token of grateful remembrance" of their years together at the glassworks.

It is interesting to note that the date on the vase, August 1843, coincides with a notice in the *Boston Daily Advertiser* announcing that the New England Glass Company was "about introducing a kind of engraving on glass that is entirely new."¹³ Following that announcement, the factory advertised in addition to their wares described as "plain, moulded and cut flint glassware, in all its varieties," the new category of "engraving on glass."¹⁴ The meaning of this new kind of engraving is not yet clear. One might speculate that the factory introduced a new pattern or a new glass engraver, or possibly that the glass company made a preliminary foray into Bohemian-style glass engraving. This vase reveals no outstanding features which distinguish its engraving from earlier methods of engraving. However, before its appearance, glass blown at New England was primarily ornamented with cut decoration. Unlike Pittsburgh production, engraving was seldom used in New England prior to this period, and when it was employed, it was relegated to initials, ciphers, and dates. Only after this period does one find glass with significant engraved decoration in New England. The glass engraver responsible for this engraved view remains unidentified, although

the only glass engravers known to have been working at the New England Glass Company at this time are Joseph Burdakin and Samuel Fillebrown. Members of Leighton's family¹⁵ may also have been engraving on glass.

Thomas Leighton, the recipient of this tribute, was an important figure in the developing years of the New England Glass Company. Born the son of a glassmaker at Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, in 1786, Leighton became factory superintendent and glass scientist with the Caledonian (later Midlothian) Glassworks in Edinburgh, Scotland, before coming to America in 1826.¹⁶ His family joined him in Cambridge the following year.¹⁷ Leighton fathered a dynasty of glassworkers, bearing seven sons who worked for the New England Glass Company. The position of master gaffer and superintendent that Leighton had held at the New England Glass Works from his arrival in 1826 until his death in 1849 was the highest

12. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, August 26–September 2, 1843. After Henry Whitney's retirement from the factory, he moved to Racine, Wisconsin, where he engaged in a mercantile and manufacturing business. In 1852 Whitney moved to La Crosse, Wisconsin, and died there on June 27, 1859. Frederick Clifton Pierce, *The Descendants of John Whitney, who Came from London, England, to Watertown, Massachusetts in 1635*, published by the author, 1895, p. 295.

13. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, August 31, 1843.

14. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, August 26, September 2, 1843.

15. Watkins, 1930, p. 14.

16. Information about Leighton's life is drawn from Lura Woodside Watkins, *Cambridge Glass*, Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1930, and *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, New York: James T. White and Company, 1937, vol. 26, p. 476. Thomas Leighton requested naturalization for himself and his children, December 28, 1832. Middlesex County Records: Aliens Recorded 1809–37; Admitted Citizens 1, 1–152 (courtesy Cambridge Historical Commission).

17. Leighton's sons, Thomas Jr., William, James, and John, arrived in New York on May 21, 1827, on board the ship *Milton* from Liverpool. In the passenger arrivals list, James and John Leighton were listed as glasscutters; Thomas and William Leighton were listed as glassmakers. Passenger List of Vessels' Arrivals in New York, 1820 to 1892, New York Public Library (courtesy The Stradlings).

rank within the factory. Deming Jarves, one of the founders of the New England Glass Company before he later founded a rival glassworks, the Boston and Sandwich Glass Company, wrote the following about Thomas Leighton and his sons in *Reminiscences of Glass-Making*, first published in 1854: "Besides possessing the best practical knowledge, they had also artistic taste, which enabled them to give elegant finish to their workmanship, and to introduce new and more beautiful patterns into it."¹⁸

After the death of Thomas Leighton, the vase was passed from generation to generation in his family as a great family treasure: presumably, first to his son William Leighton, (1808–1891), then to his eldest son, William Leighton, Jr. (1833–1911), who passed it on to his daughter Mary Leighton. Mary Leighton apparently never married and left no legacy, and the history of the vase since her ownership until 1979 is unknown.

The 1843 presentation vase was the first of four superb glass presentation pieces, all of which were made to honor Thomas Leighton. These glasses set the tone for the stylistic changes that occurred during the mid-nineteenth century. Most closely related in form to the vase presented to Leighton by Whitney is a purple vase mounted on a square marble plinth in the collection of the Henry Ford Museum (Fig. 4). The turned-over rim of this attenuated urn shape is embellished with cut decoration. Thomas Leighton's name is carved into the marble base, the incised lines showing traces of original gilding. The form itself might be dated stylistically as early as the 1830s, but the lettering on the inscribed marble plinth is identical to that on a marble base supporting a solar lamp at The Corning Museum of Glass, featuring a rose and white overlay glass stem with floral enamel painting in the Bohemian manner.¹⁹ The exact date of the lamp must be placed somewhere between 1843, when its solar-type burner was patented, and 1849, when Leighton died.

A third Leighton presentation glass, also at the Henry Ford Museum, is a red, white, and color-



FIG. 4. Vase, amethyst glass, marble plinth inscribed "Thomas Leighton." H. 27.0 cm (73.37.1). Collections of Greenfield Village and the Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.

FIG. 5. Newel post, cased and cut, red, white, and colorless glass. Brass mount inscribed "To Thomas Leighton In appreciation from his associates at the New England Glass Co." H. 18.4 cm (52.47.5). Collections of Greenfield Village and the Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.

FIG. 6. Detail of brass mount on Fig. 5.

18. Deming Jarves, *Reminiscences of Glass-Making*, 2nd and enlarged editions, New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1865, p. 95.

19. *The Glass Club Bulletin*, no. 127, June 1979, cover, p. 2. Jane Shadel Spillman kindly shared with me notes and photographs from her files on another solar lamp, cased and cut with gilt decoration, mounted on a marble and brass base identical to the Leighton lamp. The brass mounts are stamped NEG Co and engraved with the name of New England Glass Company engraver Joseph Burdakin.

less cased glass newel post with Bohemian-style cut decoration (Fig. 5).²⁰ The glass is mounted on a turned brass base bearing the inscription (Fig. 6) encircling the base: "To Thomas Leighton—In appreciation from his associates at the New England Glass Co."

The question remains: when and on what occasion were these other three Leighton presentation objects made? Each exemplifies the finest workmanship on glass executed at the New England Glass Company, with a conscious attention to ornamentation. Stylistically, the lamp and newel post reflect the growing enthusiasm in the 1840s for "richly colored and decorated glass, which is so much admired under the name of Bohemian glass."²¹ Paul Hollister has admirably demonstrated that Bohemian infiltration of the American market with cased or plated colored glass and the American production of Bohemian-style glass began not in 1853 with the New York Crystal Palace Exhibition, nor in 1851 with the Great London Exhibition—as has frequently been suggested—but, in fact, began in the late 1840s.²² Hollister suggests that the first documentary evidence of Bohemian-style glass production in America was in 1847 in the committee report for the Fifth Exhibition of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association held at Faneuil and Quincy Halls, Boston, from September 15 through October 2 of that year, which says that "the colored and Plated Cut Glass, presented by the New England Glass Company, is superior to any heretofore manufactured in this Country."²³

The lamp and newel post must have been made before Leighton's death in 1849 and therefore provide artifactual evidence in support of Hollister's argument. If the New England Glass Company was producing exhibition-quality colored glasses, cased and cut in the Bohemian manner in 1847, they were undoubtedly experimenting with its production perhaps as early as 1845 or 1846. It seems reasonable to assume, in light of this evidence, that the Bohemian-style lamp and newel post, as well as the purple vase, may have been made in 1846, a date which would mark not only Thomas Leighton's sixtieth birthday, but, more importantly, his twentieth anniversary with the New England Glass Company.

The 1843 Leighton vase and the three additional Leighton presentation glasses help to document the development of New England cut and engraved glass of the 1840s. They are among the very few glasses associated with such an important figure in American glassmaking history.

20. I am grateful to Christina Nelson at the Henry Ford Museum for bringing this to my attention.

21. *Gleason's Pictorial*, July 1852.

22. Paul Hollister, "Travels in Style: Bohemian—American," *The Glass Club Bulletin*, no. 137, Spring/Summer 1982, pp. 14–16.

23. The Fifth Exhibition of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association, at Faneuil and Quincy Halls, in the City of Boston, September 1847, Boston: Dutton and Wentworth, 1848, pp. 71–73.