

gardening

UNDER GLASS

Spring in the heart of winter

AECOM archaeologists recovered this free-blown bell-shaped glass artifact during excavations along I-95 in the Kensington-Fishtown section of Philadelphia. Its shape and size indicate two possible uses. Holding the opening downward gives it the form of a bell-glass, also called a garden bell or cloche. In the opposite position, it could be the shade of a lighting device, which



Free-blown bell-glass, mid-nineteenth century, 8 inches high, 7-inch circumference. Photograph by Thomas J. Kutys, 2015. (Top)

Modern bell-glass. Private collection, photograph by Thomas Kutys, 2015. (Left)

would have been fitted with a metal armature and suspended by chains. Although the proportions of the glass are appropriate for a shade and the shape of the knob is correct for a metal fitting, it is likely the artifact was actually used as a bell-glass because it shows considerable wear along the flared rim. Also, it is made of unrefined aquamarine window or bottle glass. Most lamp shades of this period, including those found in the same feature, are colorless lead glass. Such shades were being blown at Union Glass Works, located directly across the street from where this artifact was found.

Gardeners use bell-glasses as incubators in the early spring and fall to force seed germination and plant cuttings, thus extending the growing season (cover). The dome-shaped glass traps heat and moisture, while protecting delicate seedlings from harsh winds, unpredictable frosts, deer, and other pests. Varying in size, bell-glasses can be as large as 2 feet in diameter

or small enough to fit within the rim of a single pot. Archaeological evidence documents the use of English bell-glasses in colonial Virginia, and they were among the earliest products made in American glass factories. Records from Henry William Stiegel's glasshouse in Manheim, Pennsylvania, indicate that they were being made in 1767.¹ John Elliott, owner of the Philadelphia Glass Works in Kensington, advertised them along with other glassware in the *Pennsylvania Packet* on February 27, 1775.²

Philadelphian Bernard McMahon, Thomas Jefferson's horticulture confidant and the curator of Lewis and Clark's plant specimens, provided instruction for their use in his *American Gardener's Calendar*. In this popular text, reprinted often between 1806 and 1857, McMahon advises, for example, that "Cauliflowers under hand or bell-glasses must also have air every mild day, by raising the glasses two or three inches on the warmest side; in sharp weather keep them close; in severe frost lay some litter round, and straw or mats over each glass."³

This garden bell, which dates from about 1830–1850, is of particular significance because it is part of the larger story of itinerant glassworkers and the difficulty inherent in trying to identify the origin of glass artifacts. It was recovered with an amazing array of glass, ceramics, and other artifacts on property where three fishermen, the Faunce brothers, lived side by side. Christian R. Faunce (1810–1902), the brother living at 609 Richmond (formerly Queen) Street, married Margaret Huffsey in 1833.⁴ In 1815, Margaret's brother, Samuel Huffsey, was a glassblower apprenticed to a well-established family of glassblowers, the Stangers, in Port Elizabeth, New Jersey. According to details in his journal, between 1823 and 1841, Samuel relocated seven times, moving repeatedly between Kensington and South Jersey, and even venturing west to Pittsburgh. His accounts confirm that he and his fellow glassblowers regularly worked on both sides of the Delaware River—whether at glass factories or seasonal odd jobs.⁵ The pale aquamarine color of the bell-glass is often attributed to South Jersey, but flasks of the exact same color were made at Dyottville Glass Works in Philadelphia. The exchange of objects, ideas, knowledge, and skill between the glassblowers in Kensington and South Jersey demonstrates that the "South Jersey tradition" was regional, not limited to factories east of the Delaware River. - Mary C. Mills

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