

Weston holds close ties to the history of glass production in America

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When looking into Lewis County's past, it's impossible to ignore the impact that the glass industry has had on the area.

The glass industry first came to Weston due to the natural gas that could be found in the county, said Scott Meyer, owner of West Virginia American Art Glass.

"Glass started where I'm from, in New Jersey, 20 miles from my hometown. It was all coal and wood fires," Meyer said. "With the discovery of natural gas, factories shifted this way."

Natural gas is important because with glassmaking the furnace runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, said Tom Felt, who works with the Museum of American Glass.

"You had to have a good supply to burn, and a relatively inexpensive one," Felt said.

The first glass factory in the county opened in 1907. There, they made glass tiles. From that time forward, there was constant glass production in Lewis County until 2007.

“In the late 1920s, there was more handblown stem glass here than anywhere else in the world,” Felt said, “which is pretty amazing considering the size of Weston.”

There were a number of companies that made items such as bathroom fixtures, milk bottles, windows and more. There were also several several glassmakers that would hand-blow the glass, “a highly talented skill,” Felt said.

“There were also a lot of companies here in town that made decorated glass. They would buy from one of the companies and would decorate it. They would hand paint it or use decals— decorated tumblers that were popular in the ’60s and ’70s came from this area,” Felt said. “A lot of decorations were done by West Virginia Glass Specialty themselves, which was the largest company here.”

Glass would have kept several hundred residents employed in the area.

“They would have been the major industry in town after the asylum,” Felt said. “The fact glass was the major employer, it really kept Lewis County going for years and years.”

It would be difficult to find someone in the county who wouldn’t have felt the effects of the glass industry.

“It’s almost impossible even today, if you go up to a group, to not meet people who at one time worked for the glass factory or had relatives who worked in the area,” Felt said. “It had a tremendous economic impact on the area, and its loss also had a tremendous impact.”

Glass companies began to die off around the 1980s, Meyer said.

“The loss of American glass factories had a 25 percent impact to our economy,” Meyer said. “There were 5,000 jobs in the glass factories in Lewis County alone, and then none.”

The glass factories left for two major reasons: Outsourcing and pay rates.

“We couldn’t compete with foreign imports any longer, because of the expense of the fuel,” Felt said. “That, and the fact that Americans had decent wages for their labor, in comparison to some other places, like China.”

However, glass continues to bring individuals to the area, including Meyer.

“That’s why I came back to West Virginia, for that. I came from New Jersey where glass started, but I wanted to retire where it retired. That’s why I’m here,” Meyer said. “I come from the big city, and people say, ‘why move to a little town in West Virginia?’, and it was because of the glass history.”

Glassmaking isn’t dead, especially not in Lewis County. Instead, it’s just taken a new form.

“The handmade craft is where I’m at,” Meyer said. “I’m not making standard factory-lined products, I make decorative art in functional form. Almost 25 years, it’s been my career.”

Felt believes this kind of glass work is the future of the craft.

“We’re not going to see big commercial glassmakers come back, but there’s a future,” Felt said. “That’s the future of glass making in America, all handmade, studio art kind of productions.”

Meyer pointed out that no matter what the future may hold, glass will always be important.

“My daughter’s asked, ‘why glass?’” So I told her to write down everything she could think of that involved glass,” Meyer said. “It’s really important. She came up with about 300 things. ... It’s unbelievable.”



The first glass company opened in Weston in 1907, and there was consistent glass production in the area until 2007.

Staff photo by Kirsten Reneau



This Depression-era glass at the Museum of American Glass shows some of the work that would have been done in Lewis County at the various glass companies.



Scott Meyer, a glassblower, came to Weston because of its history with glass.
Staff file photo by Victoria Cann



Much of the historical glass, such as these pieces from the 1920s to the 1940s, can be seen at the Museum of American Glass.
Staff photo by Kirsten Reneau