

AMELUNG GLASS

*Enlightening Notes of a Famed Collector
Are Published Here for the First Time*

In 1964, W. Daniel Quattlebaum, well-known collector of early American glass and at that time 89 years of age, sent to Mrs. Richard B. Smith, of Kensington, Md., a long-time collector of Amelung glass, a manuscript relating informally some of his adventures during his own pursuit of Amelung glass and history. Mrs. Smith was given permission to do what she wished with the manuscript. Mr. Quattlebaum has since passed away, and Mrs. Smith has kindly made his informal but interesting notes available to this publication. They are printed here, because we think they will be of special interest to collectors and students of Amelung glass.

**By W. DANIEL
QUATTLEBAUM**

In 1926, when I began to collect early American glass, Mr. George S. McKearin owned a well-stocked antique shop in New York City. His daughter, Miss Helen McKearin, an experienced student of American glass, was his agent.

As I was then living in nearby East Orange, N. J., I began to visit the shop and to buy early glass from Miss McKearin. Years later Miss McKearin pleasantly "bragged" that I was one of her earliest proteges.

Mrs. Rhea M. Knittle's book *Early American Glass* came on the market in 1927. I bought a copy and read it from cover to cover with eager delight. Her chapter on what was then known of Amelung's works and wares thrilled me.



AMELUNG MANSION from 1927 photo by Mr. Quattlebaum.

So, in a few weeks, the wife and I got off by our auto for Frederick, Md., and the site of Amelung's Glass Manufactory. We had decided to put up at the hotel in Frederick and to "scout" around for several days. On a fine early summer morning we arrived at the old mansion. It was in a dreadfully dilapidated condition. A German-American widow and her teenage son lived in the best preserved part of the old building. My German name gave me favor with the lady. She took pleasure in showing us all through the sadly worn old mansion.

A handsomely paneled ball room took up the greater part of the eastern second floor. There were several cabinet-made benches placed here and there against the wall for the "wall-flowers" (the maids and matrons did not dance). This ballroom looked well kept, and seemed to be as it was when Amelung put on a grand ball for President George Washington when he was in this area in 1791.

I and the teenage son walked a short way down from the old mansion towards the brook to the site of the old glass works. There in a small area of fairly level ground the son had corn under cultivation. I walked over the

plowed ground and picked up some pieces of clear glass. (I took the fragments home and by test under ultra-violet light the greenish colored fluorescence indicated that the fragments were of nonlead glass.)

One day during my visits around the old place, I saw the man who owned the old estate. He wanted to sell it to me for some \$12,000. But I told him that I had about 12,000 reasons for not buying it. He did a little later sell the paneling in the ballroom to an antique dealer.



SIDE VIEW of Amelung mansion as it looked in 1927.

Some years later Mr. Fisher, of Frederick, bought the old estate. He repaired the old mansion and fixed up a part of it for a residence and he and his wife moved into it. Soon after this, when I was on a visit to Frederick, Mr. and Mrs. Fisher invited me to a noon-day dinner in their renovated mansion. I suppose they invited me as a "thank you" for a dozen or so pieces of glass, which I attributed to Amelung – flips, decanters, tumblers, wine glasses, etc. – that I had given to Mr. Fisher. And what a distinguished experience for me – for me, an

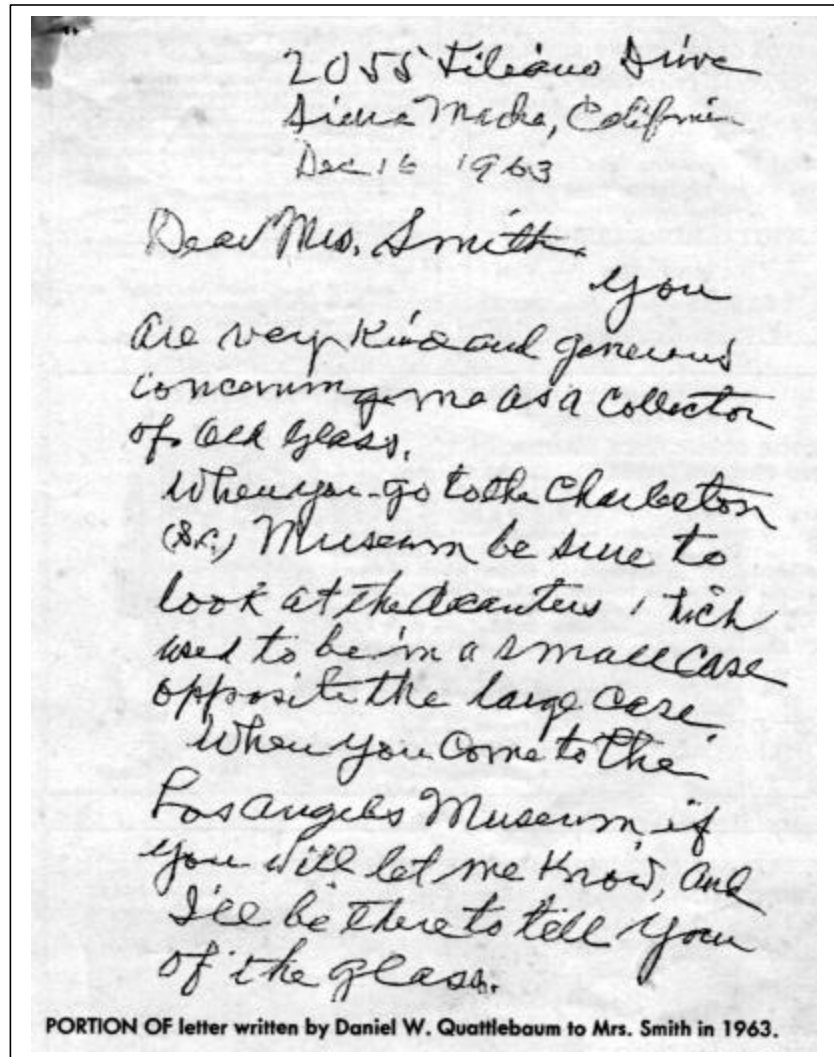
ecstatic enthusiast about Amelung and his glass!

As I strolled about the famous old place, I became reminiscent of how lucky I was: lucky to dine with friends in the mansion which was planned and built by Amelung – his home, where he had lived some five years or more – *and also*, a mansion in which President Washington had very probably dined, danced and slept when he was there in 1791.

On one of my trips to Frederick and the site of the old Amelung Glass Works, I learned that a Dr. Johnson, of Frederick, owned an inherited liquor-case bottle inscribed "J. Johnson 1788." So I called on Dr. Johnson and asked to see his bottle. He kindly showed it to me and let me handle it. He told me that the family tradition was that it was made at the Amelung works. The glass was greenish murky, and the bottle did not have a finished look, particularly on the shoulders and lip. On one side near the top was an engraved design of a circle and just above it an engraved leafy spray extending down on each side to near the bottom of the bottle; at the top of the spray were two "love birds", near the bottom of the circle "1788" and above the, date "B. Johnson". (This bottle is shown in McKearin's Book Plate 40.2.)

Now, oddly enough, in the early 1940's I received a letter from a citizen of Waynesboro, Va., in which was a photo of a case bottle similar to the Johnson case bottle, but having a more finished look, especially about the shoulders and neck. The writer stated that he owned a liquor-case of such bottles.

I wrote to him, congratulated him on his good luck and I asked permission to send the photo and give the good news of this find to a magazine. He replied quickly and asked me to return the photo, refrain from giving his name and



address and not to even give the name of the town in which he lived.

I wrote Mr. McKearin and Mr. Henry du Pont about getting the letter and photo. They wanted me to give them the name and address of the owner of the case of bottles, but I informed them that the owner had asked me not to tell anyone. I haven't heard anything about this B. Johnson Liquor Case since.

The day I visited Dr. Johnson in Frederick he mentioned some local traditions about the old Amelung works. One was that Amelung ground some of the abundant white rock – an *old, old* quartzite – to use as sand in making his glass. He calcined the white rock and then ground it with

large millstones, turned by waterpower, to a fine powder. This grinding made the fusion of the materials in the furnace quicker and better – and without prolonged intense heat.

I make the conjecture that Amelung's First Glass Works was at the site of the "Old Glass Works" near the Monocacy River, and that it was here on the Monocacy River that he arranged for his water-power to grind the calcined quartzite to a powder. There is a record that Amelung "hailed sand" (probably disintegrated quartzite) from Townson, Md.

In the Spring of 1948, I decided to take a trip to Washington, D.C. and Frederick,

Md. I had heard that collectors and dealers were making Miss Russell offers for her "MT" glass bowl.

June 10, 1948, I landed in Washington, D.C., and took a bus for Frederick. There I hired a taxi to take me to Newmarket, and to wait there until I was ready to come back to Frederick. We came to Miss Russell's old-fashioned home. She was at home and invited me in. I said to her: "I've heard that some collectors have made you offers for your 'MT' bowl; may I ask if you have about decided to part with it?"

She replied, "Well, I would rather sell it to you than anybody I know and I might sell it if I can get my price for it. Make me a bid."

So I made a bid.

She then said, "That is a very nice bid but my friends tell me I should get \$100 more than you bid!" She went to a built-in buffet, got the bowl and placed it on the table near me.

I gently tipped the bowl to have a good look at the engraved design and initials. As I did so I noticed a queer little groove on the base of the bowl. When I looked carefully I saw then the glassblower had applied, as a "foot-ring," a strip of glass about the size of a fountain pen, around the base of the bowl. I was surprised and pleased at this unusual feature.

I then gladly said to Miss Russell: "I'll give you your price for the bowl."

At once, Miss Russell said, "Well, I must go to the attic to get a good strong box to pack it in. I don't want it to get broken, for if it does, my heart will be broken."

I paid Miss Russell her price with some cash and the rest with a check, plus \$10 for packing the bowl so carefully. With unutterable gladness and gratitude I took the package to the waiting taxi back to Frederick, then by bus to Washington, and by train to

Columbia, S.C., and then my cousin drove me in his auto the three thousand miles across the continent to my home in Pasadena, Calif. (Early in 1952, I learned that the Smithsonian Institution did not have any Amelung glass. So I gave the "MT" Bowl to the Smithsonian Institution, where it is now.)

My "Adventure" added quality, knowledge and length to my life, but in all of my experiences there was – and still there is – the sad note that John Frederick Amelung failed in his worthy enterprise. His glass manufactory went into bankruptcy in 1794. He lived, lingered for a few years in Baltimore – and probably died with a broken heart.