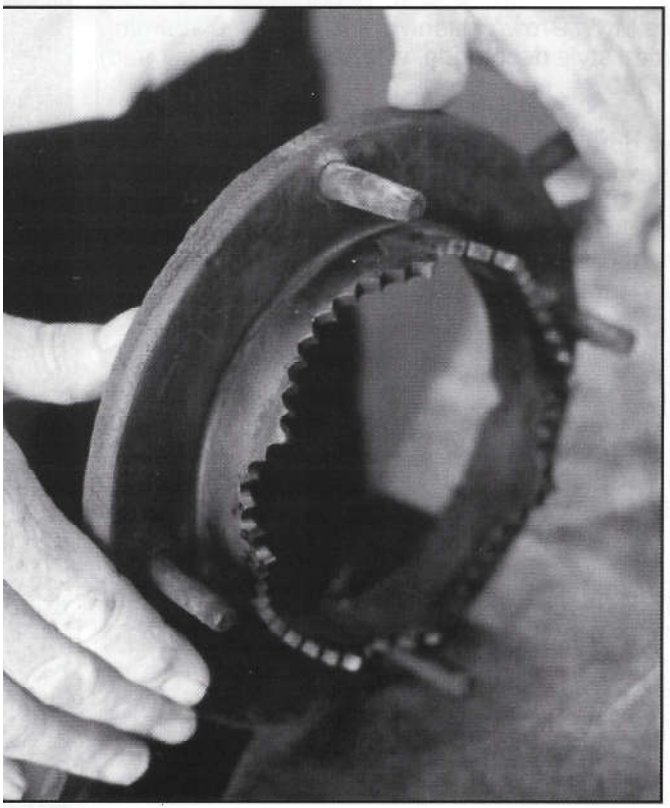
Christmas in January!

Dr. James S. Measell

Thump! Thump! Bud Ward wielded his rubber mallet, and I hoped that a few more hard taps would open the stubborn mould. It was a big, four-section press mould, and the plunger weighed about 80 pounds. I was anxious to see the interior.

Bud and I had been working for about six hours this cold January day. We were in an old warehouse, looking at hundreds of glassmaking moulds. Most were laid out in rows so we could get to them easily and kneel beside each in turn. The storage area was not heated, but the work kept us active and moving about, so we really didn't notice the chill.

Our job was twofold. Bud, who retired from his position as foreman of the Hot Metal department at Fenton several years ago, evaluated condition and workability on a 1 (best) to 5 scale. I did the best I could to identify the kind of article and the pattern of each mould. We called out our conclusions to Dave Richardson, who, perched nearby on a small stool, quickly wrote down each entry.



Mould sleeve ring; note the finely scalloped edge.

After the first few moulds, we fell into a routine. If the object of our attention was a press mould, either Bud or I would remove the plunger and set it aside. If the mould opened readily, we would train our flashlights on the interior and soon complete our work.

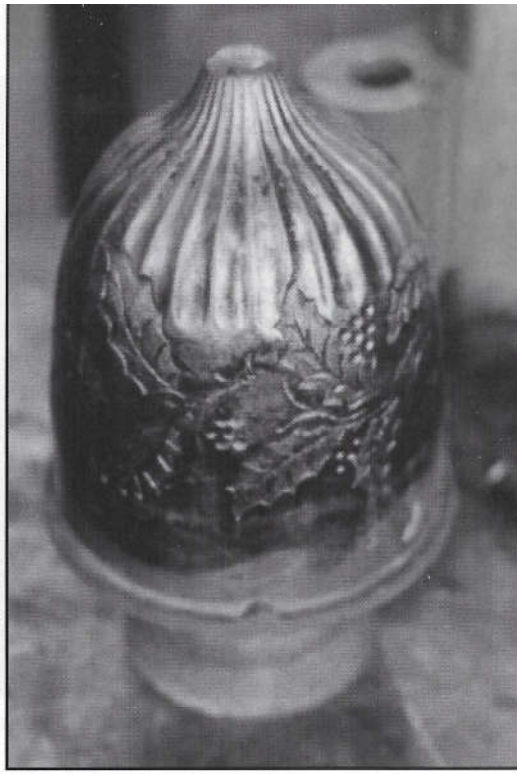
I was learning a lot about moulds from Bud. He explained why moulds are made in varying numbers of sections (two parts for blown vases; three or four parts for an intricate pressed pattern spooner), and he taught me about keys, pins, bottom plates and sleeve rings. By the end of the day, I was even looking for those tell-tale fire cracks which can render a shiny, new-looking mould almost useless for making good glass.

Because motifs are in "reverse" on a mould, I had been apprehensive about my ability to identify patterns, but I found the task much easier than I thought it would be, especially for the press moulds. Objects made from the plain blow moulds were sometimes hard to visualize, but Bud often commented on how the same mould could be used for either a jug (pitcher) or a vase. Dave's list was getting longer and longer as Bud and I worked steadily.

Some moulds, stiff from time and lack of use, resisted our efforts to open them. Putting aside our flashlights, Bud and I would use our two pairs of gloved hands to rotate or otherwise move the mould so that he could prepare to deliver a few well-aimed blows on the lugs with that rubber mallet to force open the reluctant hinges.

Thump! Thump! This one wasn't going to be easy!

Earlier in the day, we had made some interesting finds. Some moulds carried the names or cities of the independent mould shops which had made them, and most



Plunger; note the interesting pattern.

were marked "AFGWU" to denote the work of members of the American Flint Glass Workers Union. A mould for a 4½" round sauce dish had the original pattern name, c. 1905, right on the mould. Many other moulds had numbers and/or terms such as "cover," "cream" or "vase." I tried to fix the locations of these moulds in my memory so that I could look at them later and make some notes.

Thump! Thump! THUMP! Finally, the big mould was open just far enough to see inside. As our flashlights played on the interior, I caught glimpses of leaves and berries. Just as they were beginning to take shape in my mind, Bud Ward spoke. "It's a big footed

What does this mould make??!!

piece," he said, "and look at the nice scallops on this ring." I also glanced at the plunger and saw the holly leaves and berries I had overlooked moments earlier.

"It can't be!" I thought. I urged Bud to hit the lugs a few more times to open the mould even further. Thump! Thump! Thump! I held the flashlight steady. I'm sure my jaw dropped and I gulped a few times before I spoke. "Holy smokes," I exclaimed, "It's the Christmas compote!"

My tone brought Dave over to us. "The Christmas compote," he said, "Isn't that a rare piece of carnival glass?" My answer was quick: "It sure is, and nobody knows for sure who made it."

For years, carnival glass collectors have wondered about the origins of the Christmas compote. Many attributed it to Harry Northwood, but, in the absence of the distinctive Northwood mark, others felt that it might be a Millersburg piece or even one made by some obscure or unknown manufacturer.

As the late Bill Heacock's research on the Dugan and Diamond firms progressed in the 1980s, he felt that the Christmas compote could be a Dugan article, although he included it with items photographed for a book on Northwood glass (see *Harry Northwood: The Wheeling Years,* p. 116).

When I completed the Dugan-Diamond book in 1992-93, I reiterated Bill's thoughts, but held out the hope that shards from Indiana, Pa., or some other evidence would be discovered to put the mystery to

Detail from top of foot; note the holly leaves.

rest (see *Dugan-Diamond: The Story of Indiana, Pa. Glass*, p. 132). Little did I realize that the evidence would be right there before me on a cold day in January!

The discovery of this original mould removes all doubt. The Christmas compote was a product of the Dugan Glass Company. The mould has the characteristic Dugan mark (D-in-diamond) stamped into its outside. This mark was introduced in late 1906, and Dugan's iridescent glass production began about two years later in 1908. The original Christmas compote is known only in marigold and purple Carnival glass, but examples of either color are very rare indeed. Prices have been in four figures for some time, and recent issues of Tom and Sharon Mordini's annual *Carnival Glass Auction Prices* list sales in the $3000-4000 range, although only a few examples change hands in any given year.

In late June 1997, Dave Richardson arranged for mould samples of the Christmas compote to be made at the Fenton Art Glass Company. Fourteen mulberry blue (13 iridized and one not), three teal (all iridized) and one topaz opalescent iridescent

Dugan D-in-diamond mark. Proof positive!

The original Christmas compote plunger and mould along with one of the compotes made recently by Fenton for Dave Richardson.

Christmas compotes were produced. Dave took most of them to the International Carnival Glass Association meeting in Dayton, Ohio, in early August (they were priced at $500 each; all now have new homes!). The topaz opalescent iridescent Christmas compote now occupies a special niche at the Glass Press offices in Marietta.

All of these mould sample Christmas compotes were marked on the underside of the foot with the initials "GP" (for Glass Press) and the cursive single letter "F" in an oval with which Fenton marks all glassware it makes using moulds which are not owned by the company.

When I first handled a marigold Christmas compote about 1990, I remember thinking how great it would look in other Carnival colors. *(Editor's Note: See the inside back cover.)*

I'll not soon forget my Christmas in January, when I peered through dust and rust to see a remarkable bit of American glass history. An intriguing mystery is now solved: Dugan made the Christmas compote. As a bonus, today's collectors will see an old mould used once more to create beautiful glass. ◊

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