

Dyottville Glass Works

Bill Lockhart, Pete Schulz, Beau Schriever, Bill Lindsey, and Carol Serr

The early history of the Dyottville Glass Works has been the subject of numerous accounts in the collectors' literature (Barber 1900; Van Rensselaer 1921; 1969; Knittle 1927; McKearin and McKearin 1941; Toulouse 1971).¹ All of these accounts were based on the early research of Scharf and Westcott (1884:2298-2300), and all of them begin with the assumption that the original factory was that founded by Robert Towars and James Leacock in 1771. This assumption has been challenged by McKearin (1970) and McKearin and Wilson (1978:38-41, 79-88), whose research on the early Philadelphia factories has been by far the most thorough and authoritative. McKearin was also unusually diligent in citing her sources and openly weighing the rationales for her conclusions. Even so, the picture is complicated by the fact that Dr. Dyott was associated in various ways with multiple glass factories before – despite his grandiloquent claims – he ever operated one, and, by the end of his glass making career, he was operating five factories while seldom distinguishing amongst them. This is a tangled web indeed, but McKearin provided the clearest path through the maze.

T.W. Dyott

Born in England in 1777, Thomas W. Dyott apparently began his working life as an apprentice to an English pharmacist. He came to Philadelphia ca. 1805, making and selling boot black (shoe polish). Dyott eventually adopted the soubrette of “Doctor,” although he did not attend medical school. He claimed that his grandfather was a Dr. Roberson and compounded remedies using that name. From these somewhat humble beginnings, Dyott build a large commercial sales force and set up his own practice where he gave free advice but recommended his own products. His business spread until he was selling medical concoctions at least as far south as South Carolina and west to St. Louis. He partnered with John G. O’Brien in 1815 to form O’Brien and Dyott and became concerned about finding enough bottles and vials to support his business. Thus, Dyott was soon involved in the glass trade (McKearin 1970:13-23).

¹ Toulouse (1971:171) misspelled the factory name as “Dyottsville,” even illustrating a mark with that error. He gave the name correctly elsewhere in the same volume (pp. 502-506).

Histories

Kensington Glass Works, Philadelphia (1816-1833)

The Kensington Glass Works was built in 1816, the second factory to be constructed in the Kensington district of Philadelphia, and evidently the second with the same name. The original factory, founded by Robert Towars and James Leacock in 1771 had by then been abandoned for several years, possibly earlier called the Philadelphia Glass Works (McKearin and Wilson (1978:38-41). The new factory was built by Hewson, Connell & Co. “on the lot adjoining the Old Glass Works in Kensington,” which may have by that time have been converted to steel production. By 1819, the firm’s name had changed to Hewson & Connell, and, in October of that year, they (along with the Olive Glass Works and the Gloucester Glass Works, both in New Jersey) advertised that Dr. T.W. Dyott was their sole agent. In 1821, they advertised as the “Kensington Glass Factories,” presumably meaning that two plants were in operation. This may indicate that they had leased the old Kensington factory and refitted it for glass production² (McKearin and Wilson 1978:40, 79-80).

In 1813, Dyott had complained that apothecary vials and bottles were not consistently available due to the War of 1812, and imported bottles were extravagantly high in price. Dyott likely entered the glass business because of the high price and shortage. Despite his absence from the firm name, it seems that Dr. Dyott, the first of America’s patent medicine kings, invested in the factory in 1818 or 1819. A later account noted that “he has been the owner or proprietor” since 1818, while, in 1819, he advertised for cullet for the factory (Griffenhagen & Bogard 1999:25; “Jefferson” in Dyott 1833:69, footnote; McKearin and Wilson 1978:80). He evidently had the controlling, if not sole, interest by 1821, while Hewson was noted merely as the superintendent of the works.

² In 1824 Dyott published an ad for the wares of the “Philadelphia and Kensington Glass Factories” (McKearin 1970:36). It is possible that the second factory was the “Old Glass Works at Kensington,” resurrected. One might take the name itself as an indication, were there any evidence that the older factory, called the Philadelphia Glass works by McKearin and Wilson (1971:38-41), was actually so-called during its operating life. Absent any clear indication of that, it seems just as likely that the 1824 “Philadelphia” plant was newly constructed – although we have found no historic record of such a construction project.

Although the moralizing constraints imposed by Dyott a few years later led to the factory being popularly known as “Temperanceville,”³ we know from the diary of one of his workers, Samuel Huffsey, that the work week was seven days. In 1827, Huffsey and Solomon Stanger met with Dyott, demanding that the men should have Sunday as a day of rest. Dyott refused, not surprisingly given the difficulties involved in cooling and reheating the furnace. Huffsey, Stanger and several other glassblowers left for a factory at Millville, New Jersey, which was amenable to the change (Pepper 118-119).

By 1828, there were three factories and four a year later, while the firm built a fifth factory in 1833 (McKearin 1978:47, 53). In 1831, these factories formed the most extensive bottle works in the country, melting 4 tons of glass per day and producing 120 tons of product per year (Stebbins 1867:399-400). The plants manufactured such wares as vials, bottles, demijohns and window glass (Figure 1). The firms first advertised figural flasks in 1822, although they had undoubtedly been made earlier by this and other factories (McKearin 1978:35-37).

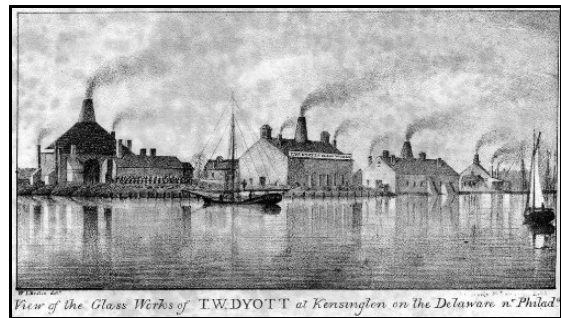


Figure 1 – Kensington Glass Works (Library Co. of Philadelphia)

Dyottville Glass Works, Philadelphia (1833-ca. 1900)

In 1833, with his glass enterprises enjoying great success, Dyott decided to incorporate them as part of a planned community which he named Dyottville. The plant made vials, bottles, and window glass. Because of Dyott’s demands that his workers limit their drinking, the plant became known as “Temperanceville” – as noted above (Kinttle 1927:149; McKearin & McKearin 1941:585; Toulouse 1971:504). Dyott stated at that time that “the articles now manufactured in the United States are superior in quality, workmanship, and regularity of sizes to any that can be imported from England, and that they cost less than one-third of the pre-war prices” (Griffenhagen & Bogard 1999:26).

³ Van Rensselaer (1926:141) noted the “Temperanceville Works” as the common name for the Lewis Stanger factory founded at Harmony, New Jersey, in 1834.

Dyott opened the Manual Labor Bank on February 2, 1836, and even issued bank notes, at least one of which had a drawing of a glass furnace and Dyott's picture on the right (Figure 2).

However, the firm ran into trouble in November 1837, when a rumor caused a run on the bank. By the fall of 1838, Dyott declared bankruptcy. On

June 1, 1839, he went to trial for charges related to the bank failure and was convicted. The plant was closed until a trusteeship was set up for Dyott's estate on May 11, 1841.

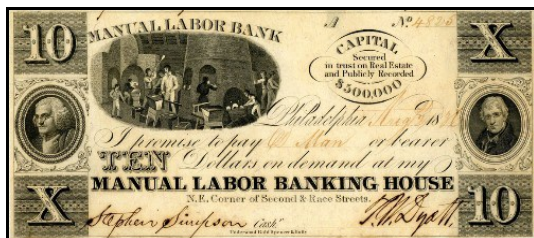


Figure 2 – Banknote from the Manual Labor Banking House (Paul Joseph Goodwin)

In 1842, Henry Seybert acquired one (or perhaps two) of the old Dyott factories, which had lain dormant for several years, and made mineral water bottles. He presumably used the term Dyottville Glass Works for his operation, but we have found no direct evidence of this. The name was certainly used by his successors. In 1844, Seybert sold out to Benners, Smith & Campbell. Henry B. Benners was perhaps the youngest of the partners, having worked in the Seybert operation “when a boy” (Scharf and Westcott 1884:2299). In 1852, the firm was dissolved and succeeded by H.B. & J.M. Benners, Henry being joined by his brother, James. For the next decade or more, various brothers joined or left the partnership until Henry Benners became the sole proprietor.

In 1875 or 1876, the factory was employing 90 workers (including 24 blowers and three pot makers) and producing wares to the extent of \$105,000 per year for a blast of six months. Two furnaces were present, but “owing to dull times” only one was in operation. Anthracite coal was used for melting and pine wood for annealing. The product was green glass hollow ware, Benners stated that “I manufacture bottles, nothing smaller than six ounce capacity, mostly carboys, demijohns, wine bottles, porter and ale bottles and mineral water bottles” (Grier 1877:714).

Business evidently improved in 1880, sales being greater than for several previous years. The factory was noted as having a large trade with the Pacific Coast, shipping to San Francisco where it “undersells makers there after paying freights, commission, etc.” (*Brick, Pottery and Glass Journal* 1880). In 1881, the plant made “green glass-ware” at a single furnace with six pots (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania 1882:59).

Benners died in October of 1892 (*Commoner and Glassworker* 1907). E.A. Barber, writing near the end of the century, reported that “from 1870 to 1889 Mr. Benners was sole proprietor, and latterly the business has been carried on by his estate, under the superintendence of Albert H. Parke, whose connection with the establishment has extended over a period of more than forty years” (Barber 1900:39). The last contemporary listings we have found in the trade literature are from 1897. They note fire being put in the furnace in January, while the factory was listed as having eight pots in June (*National Glass Budget* 1897a; 1897b).

Previous writers (Toulouse 1971:502; McKearin and Wilson 1971:88; McKearin 1978:102) reported that the Dyottville Glass Works operated until 1923, evidently on the strength of listings for the estate in city directories. Van Rensselaer (1926:163) noted that the factory was leased by Benners et al. in 1842 [*sic*], “and it has been in operation ever since.” However, Charles Evers, a long-time blower at the Burgin factory elsewhere in the city, reported in 1909 that the Dyottville factory, along with several others, had gone out of business “during the last fifteen years.” The factory was not listed in the 1900 or 1904 glass directories nor in any of the Thomas Guides that began in 1905. Nor was it included in a comprehensive list of Pennsylvania glass factories published by Fettke in 1918 (1918:Plate CVIII).

Furthermore, what we assume is an authoritative dis-confirmation comes from Albert Parke, the last superintendent, who reported that in 1900 the factory was demolished “when the city of Philadelphia opened a street through the plant” (Parke 1919). It is not certain that the glass works was still operating at the time, but a trade note from March 1901 reported that “There are quite a number of glass workers of the defunct Dyottville who have accepted positions at Cramps’s shipyard rather than leave good old Shad Town” (*Commoner and Glassworker* 1901). Thus, it is clear that the plant was finally closed sometime between 1897 and 1900.

Containers and Marks

The Kensington and Dyottville plants were known for making the embossed flasks that were popular in the early 19th century, although they also made other types of containers (Knittle 1927:148-149). McKearin (1970:73) repeatedly noted that all the plants connected with Dyott made virtually every style of bottle used at the time. However, she stated that most of the bottles

made by Dyott were not marked with either the name of the factory or Dyott. McKearin (1970:95-98) specifically dated several bottles. Barber (1900:39) cited Albert H. Parke, connected with the factory from the 1860s to 1900, that “most of the fancy bottle moulds at the Dyottville Works were made by Stacy Wilson, and later by George H. Myers.”

KENSINGTON GLASS WORKS PHILADELPHIA (ca. 1826-1828 and 1842-1846)



Figure 3 – Kensington Glass Works on sides (McKearin & Wilson 1978:527, 599)

According to Toulouse (1971:502), the Kensington Glass Works used this mark from ca. 1816 to 1833, the entire span of the business. Van Rensselear (1921:9) and Freeman (1964:65) both described a flask embossed with “Kensington Glass Works Philadelphia” on one side.⁴ McKearin (1970:95-98) illustrated six flasks embossed with KENSINGTON GLASS WORKS



Figure 4 – Kensington Glass Works (American Glass Auctions & eBay)

PHILADELPHIA on the side strap. Two of these were also embossed T.W.D. (Figures 3 & 4). The bases had blow-pipe pontil scars (Figure 5).

In addition, von Mechow (2015) listed three porter bottles embossed “KENSINGTON” or “KENSINGTON / GLASS WORKS” on the front body (Figure 6). Each bottle had a pontil scar (improved or open). He suggested that the bottles were made between 1842 and 1846, when Henry Seybert, a wealthy chemist, rented one of the closed Dyottsville plants and called it the Kensington Glass Works.



Figure 5 – Blowpipe pontil scar (Norman C. Heckler)



Figure 6 – Kensington stout bottle (von Mechow 2015)

⁴ The embossing was almost certainly in all capitals.

DYOTTVILLE GLASS WORKS (ca. 1833-ca. 1880)

According to Toulouse (1971:171), “The name ‘Dyottville’ appears on many historical flasks, and is one of several marks used by various owners of the glass factory that was also known as the Philadelphia Glass Works and the Kensington Glass Works.” Toulouse (1971:502) dated the DYOTTVILLE mark as being used from 1833 to 1923, the entire time he inferred that the Dyottville Glass Works was in business. The business, of course, closed much earlier than the date of Toulouse’s understanding, and the mark was not used anywhere near as long.

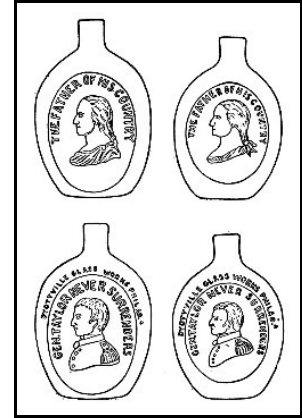


Figure 7 – Dyottville Glass Works on flask (McKearin & Wilson 1978:533)

McKearin & Wilson (1978:532-534, 566) listed four examples of the mark on various flasks (Figure 7). All were marked “DYOTTVILLE GLASS WORKS PHILAD.^A.” Four examples were also in Freeman (1964:69, 93, 136), and three were listed in Van Rensselear (1921:5, 18). These listings, of course, refer to the same bottles. McKearin (1970:110-111) illustrated two flasks embossed DYOTTVILLE GLASS WORKS PHILAD.^A. She dated one, “probably second quarter of the 19th century” and the other “probably first produced in 1847.”

A large number of blob-top soda bottles and porter bottles were marked “DYOTTVILLE GLASS WORKS” in an arch with “PHILAD.^A” (horizontal) below on either the body or shoulder, occasionally on Rickett’s molds on the base (Figure 8 & 9). According to McKearin (1970:116-118), these were made between



Figure 9 – Improved pontil scar (American Glass Auctions)

1844 and 1860. However, von Mechow (2015) listed 115 examples, usually with improved pontil scars on the bases. He dated the bottles ca. 1850-1858. Von Mechow’s distribution map shows that these were predominantly used in eastern Pennsylvania and the immediate surrounding states, with outliers in New Hampshire and South Carolina. Ring (1980:456) listed the DYOTTVILLE GLASSWORKS PHILA 5 0 mark on a Tilton’s Dandelion Bitters bottle. She stated that the brand was advertised from 1876 to 1885.



Figure 8 – Dyottville Glass Works (American Glass Auctions)

McKearin (1970:120) noted that some wine bottles were embossed DYOTTVILLE GLASS WORKS PHILAD.^A in a Rickett's type mold on the base. The bases were made both with and without mamelons (Figures 10 & 11). These were made between 1844 and 1880. Although McKearin identified these as wine containers, they were probably cylinder whiskey bottles. These have been reported and photographed on various online venues. Examples we have found were made in three-piece molds. Some of these had improved pontil scars, while others had dots or small mamelons.

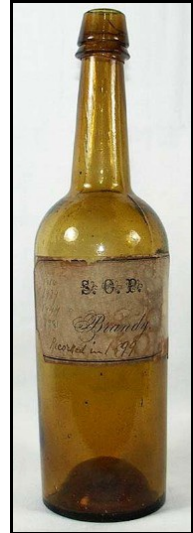


Figure 10 – Cylinder whiskey bottle (Peachridge Glass)



Figure 11 – Whiskey bases (eBay)

Von Mechow (2006:10-14) studied various porter bottles embossed DYOTTVILLE GLASS WORKS (arch) / PHILAD.^A and determined that minor variances in mold lines, plate molds, and other characteristics denoted different molds. He created a table of molds, that generally survived two to three years, and formed them into a chronology. Several molds, of course, were used concurrently.

TWD (1822-1828)

Knittle (1927:442) identified the TWD mark as belonging to Thomas W. Dyott but made no attempt to date its use. Toulouse (1971:502) dated the mark from ca. 1821 to 1836. McKearin and Wilson (1978:546, 566, 600) showed four examples of the logo on flasks (Figure 12). Freeman (1964:65, 70-71, 79, 82, 85, 92) listed a total of nine flasks with the TWD logo, and Van Rensselear (1921:11-12, 15, 18-19, 106) listed eight. Many of the listings refer to the same bottles (Figure 13). McKearin (1970:96-98) illustrated four flasks embossed with T.W.D. and dated them between 1822 and 1828. Two of the flasks were also embossed KENSINGTON GLASS WORKS PHILADELPHIA on the side strap. There are numerous machine-made imitations of these flasks (Figure 14).

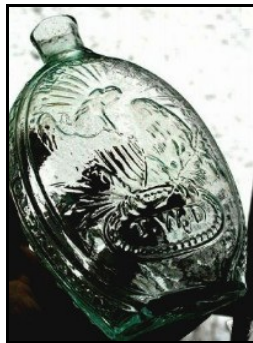


Figure 13 – TWD logo (eBay)



Figure 12 – TWD logo (McKearin 1970:96-97)

T.W. DYOTT (1809-1830s)

Although these bottles were probably not produced at Dyott's own factories, he had at least two types of medicine containers made with his embossed name. The best known of these was a square (cross-section) bottle



Figure 15 – TW Dyott medicine bottle (Historical American Glass 2015)

with a flared finish that was embossed “D^R ROBERTSON’S” on one side; “FAMILY / MEDICINE” on the next “PREPARED” on the following side; and “ONLY BY / T W DYOTT” on the final one. A later version was rectangular with the same embossing (Figure 15). Dyott advertised the Robertson medicine in 1807, although how long the bottle was made is unknown (Griffenhagen & Bogard 1999:77; Historical American Glass 2015). According to Fike (1987:161), Dyott “had his own mold” by 1809, and the bottles with his name should probably date from that point.



Figure 14 – TWD Imitation (eBay)

A contributor on Antique Bottles.net discussed and illustrated a “tiny vial” embossed “T W DYOTT” on its side (Figure 16). He noted that this was a very early Dyott container, likely used between ca. 1810 and the 1820s (Antique Bottles.net 2012).



Figure 16 – TW Dyott vial (Antique Bottles.net)

T.W. DYOTT, M.D. (1824-1828)

Van Rensselear (1921:9) and Freeman (1964:80) both noted two flasks that were embossed on the back “T.W. Dyott, M.D.”⁵ McKearin (1970:96) illustrated both flasks, also embossed KENSINGTON GLASS WORKS PHILADELPHIA on the side strap and well as noting another flask that did not include the Kensington designation (Figure 17). She dated the T.W. DYOTT, M.D. marks between 1824 and 1828.

⁵ The actual mark was embossed in all capitals.

Discussion and Conclusions

As with many of the older glass houses, the sources are contradictory. In this case, the most recent source (McKearin & Wilson) seems less coherent than the older ones. It is particularly notable that the earliest sources (Knittle and Van Rensselear) are in close agreement on this company. Of major importance, however, Dyott became involved with the Kensington Glass Works no later than 1821 (probably by 1818 or 1819) and had full ownership of a Kensington Glass Works and a Philadelphia Glass Works in 1833.



Figure 17 – TW Dyott M.D.
(McKearin & Wilson
1978:547)

McKearin’s book devoted exclusively to Dr. Dyott provided the best dating device for the marks. McKearin actually dated specific bottles, but, by combining her date ranges for each bottle with a specific mark, we can surmise a range during which the mark was used. The dates given above (in parentheses by the marks) reflect the McKearin date ranges for each logo.

Sources

Antique Bottles.net

2012 “One of a Kind Embossed T.W. Dyott Very Tiny Vial.” Antique Bottles.net.

<http://www.antique-bottles.net/forum/One-of-a-kind-embossed-T-W-Dyott-very-tiny-vial-m517612.aspx>

Barber, Edwin Atlee

1900 *American Glassware, Old and New*. David McKay Co., Philadelphia.

Brick, Pottery and Glass Journal

1880 “Trade Notes.” *Brick, Pottery and Glass Journal* 7(8):84.

Commoner and Glassworker

1901 “A Good Philadelphia Report.” *Commoner and Glassworker* 22(24):17.

1907 "Old Memories Revived." *Commoner and Glassworker* 26(2):3.

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

1882 *Annual Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Part II: Industrial Statistics, Vol. IX, 1880-81*. Lane S. Hart, State Printer and Binder, Harrisburg.

Dyott, T. W.

1833 *An Exposition of the System of Moral and Mental Labor, Established at the Glass Factory of Dyottville*. Private printing, Philadelphia.

[Evers, Charles]

1909 "Going Backward." *Commoner and Glassworker* 27(13):5.

Fettke, Charles R.

1918 "Glass Manufacture and the Glass Sand Industry of Pennsylvania." *Topographic Survey of Pennsylvania*, Report 12.

Fike, Richard E.

1987 *The Bottle Book: A Comprehensive Guide to Historic, Embossed Medicine Bottles*. Peregrine Smith Books, Salt Lake City.

Freeman, Larry

1964 *Grand Old American Bottles*. Century House, Watkins Glen, NY.

Grier, W. Hayes

1877 "Manufactures – Glass Works." *Annual Report of the Pennsylvania Secretary of Internal Affairs*, Part 3, Vol. 4: 706-714.

Griffinshagen, George and Mary Bogard

1999 *History of Drug Containers and Their Labels*. American Institute of the History of Pharmacy, Madison, Wisconsin.

Historical American Glass

2015 “Early American Medicine Bottles: Very rare 1808- 1820 T W Dyott Dr. Robertsons Family Medicine bottle.”

<http://historical-american-glass.com/early-american-medicine-bottles.html>

Knittle, Rhea Mansfield

1927 *Early American Glass*. Appleton-Century, New York.

Library Co. of Philadelphia

n.d. View of the Glass works of T. W. Dyott at Kensington on the Delaware nr Philada., Lithograph by Kennedy & Lucas after William L. Breton, 1831.

McKearin, Helen

1970 *Bottles, Flasks and Dr. Dyott*. Crown Publishers, New York.

McKearin, Helen and George McKearin

1941 *American Glass*. Crown Publishers, New York.

McKearin, Helen and Kenneth M. Wilson

1978 *American Bottles & Flasks and Their Ancestry*. Crown Publishers, New York.

Parke, Albert H.

1919 “Oldest Plant in the U.S. is Older Than We Thought.” *Glassworker* 37(16):13.

Pepper, Adelline

1971 *The Glass Gaffers of New Jersey*. Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York.

Ring, Carlyn

1980 *For Bitters Only*. Nimrod Press, Boston.

Scharf, J. Thomas and Thompson Westcott

1884 *History of Philadelphia: 1609-1884*. Vol. 3. L.H. Everts & Co., Philadelphia.

Stebbins, L.

1867 *Eighty Years' Progress of the United States*. L. Stebbins, Hartford.

Toulouse, Julian Harrison

1971 *Bottle Maker and Their Marks*. Thomas Nelson Sons, New York.

Van Rensselaer, Stephen

1921 *Check List of Early American Bottles and Flasks*. Cracker Barrel Press, Southhampton, New York.

1969 *Early American Bottles and Flasks*. Rev. Ed. [original, 1926] J. Edmund Edwards, Stratford, Connecticut.

von Meechow

2006 "Dyottville Porter Bottles: Alas Only One Color." *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector* 23(1):10-16.

2015 "Soda & Beer Bottles of North America: Bottle Attributes - Beer & Soda Bottle Manufacturers." <http://www.sodasandbeers.com/SABBottleManufBeerSoda.htm>

First published 3/29/2015; last updated 11/9/2025

