

Union Glass Works/Union Glass Co., Kensington

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Located in the Kensington section of Philadelphia, the Union Glass Works opened in 1826 and remained in production until ca. 1880. This appears to be another case where the Union Glass Co. operated the Union Glass Works. The plant made wine, porter, and mineral water bottles – almost certainly occasional flasks – and probably/possibly fruit jars. The identification of the factory with the three logos that have been suggested for it range in quality from almost certain to speculative. This should not be confused with the Union Glass Co. of New London, Connecticut – another producer of marked soda bottles.

History

Union Glass Works (Co.), Kensington, Philadelphia (1826-ca. 1880)

William Emmet, William Granville, William Bennett, William Swindell, Joseph Capewell, James Venables, and Richard Synar formed the Union Glass Co. (also called the Union Flint Glass Co.) in 1826. The plant, located on Queen St. in the Kensington area of Philadelphia, actually began production early the following year. The factory primarily produced tableware, although an ad from the *American & Commercial Advertiser* of April 12, 1827, also included “Pint and Half Pint Flasks” along with “Special Jars, Tinctures, &c.” (Figure 1). On May 18, 1828, Swindell and Granville withdrew from the partnership to be replaced by Charles B. Austin. William Emmett died at the age of 62 on December 18, 1832 (McKearin & Wilson 1978:88-89; *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser* 4/19/1828; 12/20/1832).¹

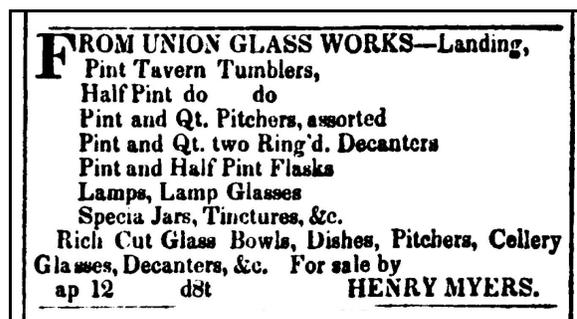


Figure 1 – 1827 ad (*American Commercial Advertiser* 4-12-1827)

¹ Interestingly, Austin signed the document as the “Agent of the Union Glass Works Company” – using both Works and Company in the name.

An interesting 1831 account of the Union Cut and Plain Flint Glass Works by Mease & Porter (1831:74) also places that factory on Queen St. Since the story places the founding of the firm at 1826 and the plant making the same kind of tableware, this longer name was almost certainly same as the Union Glass Works. A woodcut of the factory is the same one published elsewhere of the Union Glass Works (Figure 2).

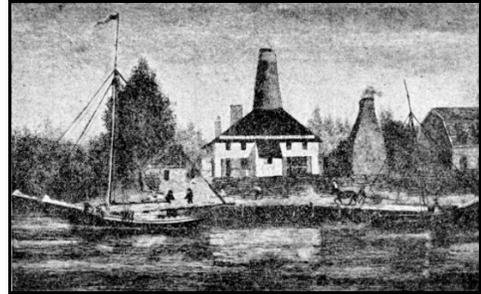


Figure 2 – Union Glass Works (Mease & Porter 1830:74)

The *American & Commercial Advertiser* informed the public on March 19, 1835: “In consequence of the death of Mr. Venable, one of the firm, the Union Glass Co. will sell on Tuesday, the 31st inst. at 10:00 to close that concern, the entire stock of Glass, consisting of 300 PACKAGES GLASSWARE . . . and a full assortment of Apothecaries Ware.” What happened next is unclear. It seems likely that the remaining trio of owners may have pooled their resources to forestall the auction, keeping the firm in business.

After the death of Joseph Capewell, Charles Austin and William Bennett posted a notice in the *Public Ledger* that they had entered into “a new partnership to for carrying on the old business under the same title Union Glass Works Company” on October 2, 1840. Only Bennett remained of the original owners. However, on October 10, the *American & Commercial Advertiser* published another termination notice:

Flint Glassware by auction . . . Monday morning, 19th instant, at 9½ o’clock—400 packages, with a large stock open Ware, on shelves This stock belonging to the old Union Glass Co., will positively be sold without limitation, to wind up that concern, as also to close up the estate of one of the late partners, dec. [deceased]

McKearin & Wilson (1971:89) added that “Austin died in 1840 [and] the management passed to William Bennett, who was handicapped by strife within the firm and litigation with Austin’s widow. The firm was dissolved in 1844. The works was shut down.” The Union Glass Works made the scarce Columbia flask “UNION CO” on one side and “KENSINGTON” on the

other. The flasks were chartered in 1841.² The firm dissolved in 1844, and the plant closed (McKearin & Wilson 1978:88-89).

In 1847, the firm of Hartell & Lancaster (William Hartell and John or Joseph Lancaster) reopened the plant to make bottles. On August 23 of that year, the new partners published a “Notice to Druggists, Bottlers, and Perfumers” that “the old established Union Glass Works, Queen Street, Kensington” was now making “Carboys, Wine, Porter and Mineral Water Bottles; Druggists’ Ware, of every description; Colognes and Fancy Bottles of all colors, both transparent and opaque, and equal to any ever produced in the world.” Thomas R. Hartell joined the firm ca. 1850 (McKearin & Wilson 1978:89).

A notice in the *Daily Pennsylvanian* of March 27, 1856, placed the Union Glass Works up for “Absolute Sale.” However, the plant was again placed for sale in the May 7, 1857, edition of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* as one of six estate sales – almost certainly upon the death of Lancaster that year. The firm was back in business by September 11, when the *Public Ledger* announced that the workers were on strike. William apparently also left around that time, and Thomas teamed up with John Letchworth to form Hartell & Letchworth in 1858. The plant remained in production until ca. 1880 (McKearin & Wilson 1978:89). Although McKearin & Wilson cited a couple of brief mentions of Hartell & Letchworth during the 1870s, it seems strange that neither they nor we have discovered any significant information about the Union Glass Co. during that period.

Toulouse (1969:311) called the plant the Union Glass Co. and noted that the plant opened by 1826 and was owned by Hartell & Lancaster after 1848. The factory was still in operation in 1874. Creswick (1987a:210) also claimed that the firm was “Co.” rather than “Works” and that the company was in business from 1845 to 1876, but she noted that Hartell & Letchworth owned the business after 1858. Even though most contemporary references to the firm use the term “works,” there were contemporary accounts that listed it as “company” (e.g., Jocelyn, Darling & Co. 1831:110) and – as noted above – the firm was officially the Union Glass Works Co. by the 1830s. This was another case where the glass factory – the Union Glass Works – was run by an operating firm – the Union Glass Co. or the Union Glass Works Co.

² McKearin & Wilson (1978:89) actually said “chartered in 1941,” but the “9” was almost certainly a typographic error.

Containers and Marks

Although the logos used by this firm have created some controversy in the past, one of them was almost certainly used by the company; another was very likely a Union Glass Co. mark; and the final one fits this firm better than any other choice we can find.

The Union Glass Co. of New London, Connecticut was another manufacturer of marked soda bottles – with the logo “UNION GLASS COMPANY.” However, the two glass houses were unrelated in any way – except the name, a popular one during the 19th century. We have discussed the New London firm in the Other O file.

U.G.Co. (prob. 1860s-1870s)

These initials are found at the reverse heel of jars embossed “MASON’S / PATENT / NOV. 30TH / 1858” and wax-sealer fruit jars (Figure 3). The jars are old in appearance, many having a “whittled” look with numerous small bubbles in the glass (Figures 4 & 5). These are commonly offered on eBay. If prices in the Red Book 11 are any indication, these jars are very common (except for the octagonal variation and one other in a green color) (Leybourne 2014:292).



Figure 4 – Whittled (eBay)

he lacked documentation for either claim. Roller (1983:246, 363) refused to speculate on either a manufacturer or a date.



Figure 3 – U.G.Co. (eBay)

Toulouse (1969:310-311) stated that “several glass companies *might* have used the initials U.G.Co., but none has been proven by any documentation.” He suggested that the Union Glass Co. of Philadelphia or the Union Glass Co. of Cleveland, New York, were possibilities, but noted that



Figure 5 – Tiny bubbles (eBay)

Creswick (1987:210) also showed four variations of wax sealers with the U.G.Co. mark, three on the heel, one on the base. One jar had two round and four flat panels. She ascribed the mark to the Union Glass Co., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and dated the jars 1845-1876, almost certainly following Toulouse (Figure 6). The wax sealers may have been made earlier than the Mason jars, or they could have been produced concurrently.

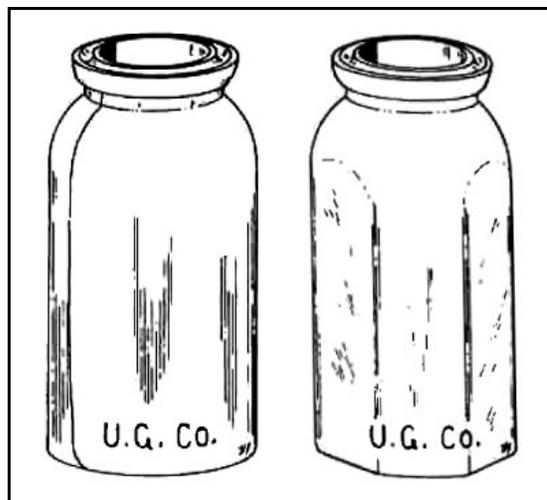


Figure 6 – Wax sealers (Creswick 1987:210)

We have made an exhaustive search for companies with UGCo initials. Although we found several firms that fit the letters, none of them made jars. Most made tableware; others manufactured window glass. Although Toulouse noted (correctly – 1969:311) that some factories that made window glass also made containers, we could also add that some plant that made tableware also made containers – but neither of those were the norm. If we added all of those, the list would then go up to a dozen or more contenders. Although Toulouse suggested the Union Glass Co. of Cleveland, New York (1852-1877) as a possible alternative, the plant made window glass and is thus an unlikely choice.

Regardless of the other possibilities, McKearin and Wilson demonstrated that the plant at Kensington, Philadelphia, was open during the correct period to have produced crude Mason jars – like the ones with the UGCO mark – and that the factory made hollow ware during at least part of its life. Although the identification is not fully satisfactory, the Kensington plant seems the most likely producer given the current evidence.

A North American Glass auction suggested that glass researcher Lou Ebert had attributed the “U.G.Co.” mark to the Upland Glass Co., Upland, Indiana. There is no doubt that Upland made fruit jars, but the factory was only in business from October 1882 to November 1884 – just over two years. With as many jars as seem to have survived, this short period of production makes Upland unlikely. However, the identification cannot be entirely ignored. The factory was in business during the correct period to have made the crude jars.

UNION C^o and KENSINGTON (1841-1844)

McKearin & Wilson (1978:89; 553) noted that the flasks bearing “UNION C^o” beneath an eagle and shield on one side and “KENSINGTON” under a bust of Liberty on the other were “chartered” in 1841 (Figure 7) and speculated that the Union Glass Works of Kensington made them. The authors could find no “Kensington Union Co.” nor any additional glass house with the Union name at Kensington. Assuming this date was correct, the flasks would have been made during the 1841-1844 period when William Bennett was the only surviving owner but was beset by litigations from the widow of Charles Austin, a former partner. Although the company concentrated on tableware prior to 1856, it certainly also made flasks – at least periodically.

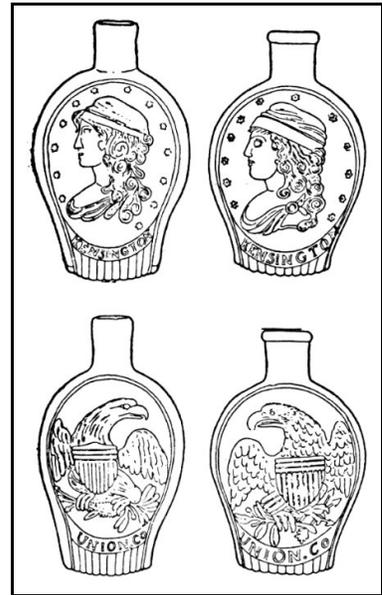


Figure 7 – Union Co. (McKearin & Wilson 1978:553)

UNION GLASS WORKS / PHIL^A (1847-ca. 1880)

The American Glass Auction offered a blob-top soda bottle embossed “UNION GLASS WORKS / PHIL^A” on one side. Roller (1998) also noted a “green iron-pontilled soda, embossed UNION GLASS WORKS PHILAD / BROWN / STOUT, rev: P. CONWAY & HUNTERS” that he dated ca. 1860.

Von Mechow (2019) listed and/or illustrated 171 examples. These may be classified in several ways, and there are almost certainly additional minute or possibly major variations.

1. Size (in relation to other embossing): small – probably added onto existing molds; large – same or similar size as other embossing
2. Position: back shoulder; either heel (or just above a mug-bottom); back body; vertical panel
3. Shape: arch; arch with Philadelphia abbreviation horizontal; one horizontal line; two horizontal lines; vertical in panel

4. Philadelphia Abbreviation: none; PHILA; PHIL^A (with or without a dot under the “A”); PHILAD; PHILAD^A (may have dot under “A”)



Figure 8 – Union (American Bottle Auction)

We classified the following ten variations. We have made no attempt to show all variations – only the best photographs we have found:

1. UNION GLASS WORKS (arch) / PHIL^A (horizontal) – reverse body [improved pontil; soda; tapered finish] [on some examples the “A” has a dot under it] [also true blob] [many of these are small letters, probably added to an existing mold] [also on porter bottle with double tapered (two-part) finish] (Figure 8)

2. UNION GLASS WORKS (horizontal) – heel [improved pontil; pony; rounded taper finish] [also some with tapered finish – not rounded] [also above mug bottom] (Figure 9)

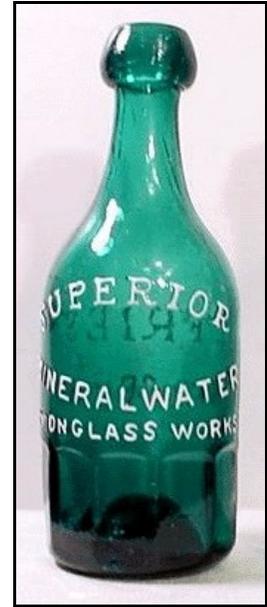


Figure 9 – Union (Barry Thuerer)

3. UNION GLASS WORKS (arch) / PHILAD (horizontal) – reverse body [improved pontil; pony; rounded taper finish] (Figure 10)



Figure 10 – Union (American Bottle Auction)

4. UNION GLASS WORKS / PHILA (both horizontal) – front heel/lower body below bottler name OR reverse heel below line drawing of plant [improved pontil; pony; rounded taper finish] (Figure 11)

5. UNION GLASS WORKS PHILAD. (arch) – reverse shoulder [improved pontil; soda; tapered finish] [also porter with double tapered finish]



Figure 11 – Union (Pole Top Discoveries)

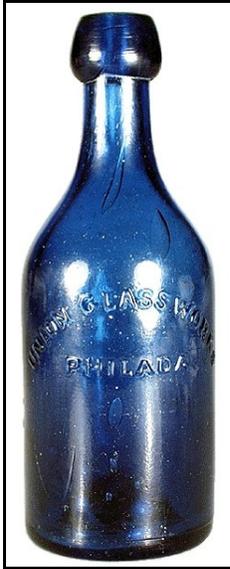


Figure 12 – Union (American Bottle Auction)

6. UNION GLASS WORKS (arch) / PHILAD^A (horizontal) – reverse body [OR PHILADA] [improved pontil; porter; double tapered finish] [may have dot under “A”] (Figure 12)

7. UNION GLASS WORKS PHILA (horizontal) – front heel [improved pontil; porter; true blob]

8. UNION GLASS WORKS (vertical on one of six panels) [improved pontil; soda; tapered (not rounded) finish] (Figure 13)

9. UNION GLASS WORKS PHILA (vertical on one of six panels) [improved pontil; soda; tapered (not rounded) finish]

10. UNION GLASS WORKS (arch) / PHIL^A – reverse body [improved pontil; porter; double taper] (Figure 14)

Most of these variations seem to have been caused by the placement of other embossing on the bottle or at the whim of the engraver. Almost all the soda/pony bottles had both tapered finishes (ca. 1845-ca. 1852) and rounded-tapered finishes (post-1852). Thus, all variations must be dated for the full duration of the firm – 1847-ca. 1880 – although soda bottles with tapered finishes were made earlier. Von Mechow only dated the bottles 1847-1857 – under the ownership of Hartell & Lancaster, but the Union Glass Works name probably extended through the operation of Hartell & Letchworth (1857-ca. 1880) as well.

Discussion and Conclusions

Each of the three marks we have associated with the Union Glass Works of Philadelphia deserves its own discussion.



Figure 13 – Union (American Bottle Auction)



Figure 14 – Union (American Bottle Auction)

U.G.Co.

The “U.G.Co.” logo on the reverse heels of Mason jars is the weakest identification of the three. Like Toulouse, we can find no documentation to support a production of Mason jars by the Union Glass Co. (or Works) of Philadelphia. But, we find no evidence to suggest any other glass house, either.

It is interesting that Mason’s early manufacturing efforts seem tied to the word “Union.” Between 1870 and ca. 1875, the Mason Mfg. Co. (and its successor) produced jars embossed “MASON (slight arch) / UNION (slight inverted arch)” with an American Shield in between. Mason’s next firm was called the Standard Union Mfg. Co. Although neither of those fits in with the “U.G.Co.” logo, they do connect Mason, the jars, and the term “Union.”

However, these jars *could* have been made for John L. Mason during the 1860s or for the Consolidated Fruit Jar Co., sometime after 1871. Mason never manufactured his own jars, and researchers have never completely isolated which glass houses produced jars for him. In 1871, control of the extended patents passed to Consolidated – and that firm also farmed out the manufacture of the actual jars. Again, there is no consensus as to the identity of *all* producers of the jars, although many have been recognized. The Union Glass Co. may well have fit into the unrecognized category – and could have made the jars with the “U.G.Co.” mark for Consolidated prior to Consolidated’s adoption of the GFJCo monogram on April 3, 1878. In 1879, Mason’s patent extension expired, and the production of Mason jars became general.

As noted above, jars with the “U.G.Co.” logo were often crudely made with “whittle” marks (i.e., an uneven surface known to have been caused by “cold” molds) and numerous tiny bubbles in the glass. For more on the Mason firms, see *Keystone Mason Jars, Part I and II* and *Consolidated Fruit Jar Co.* The jars were probably made during the 1860s and/or 1870s. Although the approximate dates are probably valid, identification of the Union Glass Co. as the producer of these jars should be approached with caution. As noted above, the Upland Glass Co. (1882-1884) must also be considered – although its short period of operation makes it less likely.

UNION C^o and KENSINGTON (1841-1844)

Although McKearin & Wilson (1978) suggested the Union Glass Co. of Kensington (Philadelphia) as the possible maker of the flasks with “UNION C^o” on one side and “KENSINGTON” on the other, we feel that the mark deserves stronger recognition than that. With no other glass house as a suggested second possibility, we would rate the identification of the Union Glass Co. at Kensington as highly likely, maybe even almost certain. The flasks were almost certainly produced during the 1841-1844 period.

UNION GLASS WORKS

This is the easy one. Since the soda and porter bottles were embossed with both the glass works name and Philadelphia, there is no doubt whatsoever the the Union Glass Works was the manufacturer.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix A – Other Union Factories

Aside from the Union Glass Works Co. at Kensington, there were at least 15 other factories with “Union” in their names. In the vast majority of cases, the names were not connected with the use of glass blowers’ union activities. Although a few were earlier or later, most of these firms began during the 1850-1890 period, the aftermath of the Civil War. It is not surprising that all were located in the East or Midwest – all Union states during the war.

The following list of 17 factories was mostly derived from the work of J. Stanley Brothers, published on the Corning Museum of Glass website (Corning 2002). We have updated many of entries for length of time in business (mostly from newspaper articles) and added three factories to the list.

Union Glass Works

Bellaire, Ohio (1880-1892)
Bridgeton, New Jersey (?-1820)
Cleveland, New York (1866-1898)
Martin's Ferry, Ohio (1896-1897)
New Castle, Pennsylvania (1863-1886)
Olean, New York (1885)
Somerville, Massachusetts (1873-1877).

Union Glass Co.

Barnesville, Ohio (1882-1883)
Columbus, Ohio (1892)
Deal's Shore, Maryland (1880)
Jersey City, New Jersey (1899)
New London, Connecticut (1856-1872)
Wheeling, West Virginia (1851-1926)

Other Union Plants

Union Flint Glass Works (1927-1937)
Union Glass Factory, Port Elizabeth, New Jersey (1818-1826)
Union Glass Manufactory, St. Louis, Missouri (1943)
Union Window Glass Co. (1891)

Total – 17 [Corning Museum of Glass]

Source

Brothers, J. Stanley

2002 "Collection of papers about American glass companies whose names begin with 'U.'" Corning Museum of Glass.

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