

GLASS MANUFACTURE

in the Town of Sand Lake

Collection of articles relating to the manufacture of
glass at the site of Glass Lake

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SAND LAKE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 492
WEST SAND LAKE, NY 12196

(1800s)

The first 19th century New York State glasshouse about which many facts have been gathered is the Rensselaer Glass Factory on Glass Lake and the southeastern turnpike to Bath and Williamstown, 10 or 12 miles from Troy and Albany. Its history, though incomplete and sometimes blurred by contradictory accounts of events, is typical of its period. #2

Traditions differ about the start of the glasshouse. So far we have been unable to substantiate the exciting Pied Piper tale that one of its founders, a Scotsman named William Richmond, returned to his native land for Scotch glass blowers, naturally the best in the world. He donned a kilt, wore a patch over one eye and played the bagpipes as he vagabonded through the Cambria glass district gathering the blowers with glowing accounts of America and eventually smuggled some across the sea.

But no matter how deviously craftsmen were secured or when the factory started, the following advertisement appeared in the fall of 1805 which leaves no doubt that the factory was operating then:

James Kane & Co.

Have opened a store at the Rensselaer Glass Factory near the Sand Lake where they will keep a constant supply of dry goods and groceries. Rensselaer Glass Factory Nov. 4, 1805

James Kane of Albany was one of the four merchandising brothers who established general stores in several communities.

Feb. 28, 1808 the Rensselaer Glass Factory was incorporated for 14 years by nine men including Jeremiah Van Rensselaer, Elkanah Watson, George Pearson and James Kane, members of the Hamilton Manufacturing Society operating the Hamilton or Albany Glass Works. Their agent, superintendent, all artificers and workmen were exempted from jury and militia duty so long as they were in the company's employ. As the works, a crown and cylinder glasshouse, had been erected in a variable

booming. In December 1806 the company joined with the Albany firm in an appeal to Congress for higher duties, a subject on which at the time Congress was hard of hearing and of heart. In the early fall of 1812 the crown house burned down. Immediately the president and board of directors levied upon the stockholders for the purpose of rebuilding it.

Each share was assessed at \$50 of this \$20 was to be paid in 30 days, \$20 in 60 days and \$10 in 90 days. Failure to pay meant forfeiture of the stock. By January 1813 the house had been rebuilt. Rensselaer crown as well as cylinder glass "superior to any made in this state" was once more on the market. If the company did not possess a fire engine before the fire, it did afterward, two of them.

Another calamity was in store for the works. By 1816 its prospects were submerged by a flood of postwar imports. In November the coming auction of the glassworks was advertised by its agent, John Reid, Albany merchant. On Tuesday, Feb. 6, 1816 the cleared land, wood lots, glassworks, sawmill and two houses for the superintendents, 24 dwellings for workmen, the general store and barns were to be put on the block.

On the following Tuesday the personal property was to be sold at the factory including horses, wagons and sleighs, tools for blowers and a complete set of crownhouse, iron bar and iron castings, ^{for a} ~~stone~~ firestone and sand, clay and other materials for making glass --and the two fire engines.

In 1816 the cylinder house burned down, presumably after the crownhouse ^{that} was used for making both types of glass. From then until the spring of 1819 the record is obscure except for continued advertising of cylinder glass. In April, about the nadir ^(peak) of the depression, the New York State Assembly passed an act for the relief of the president and directors who, having kept the house in operation in spite of continuous loss wished to sell their estate and pay their debts. Permission was granted. It is said that at this point Isaac Fox, who ran a general store at Rensselaer Village (the glasshouse community), Nathan Grandall and Abraham Gregory first

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entered the picture. In any event the works was in full blast that fall.

In the fall of 1824 Grandall, Fox & Co. failed for \$14,786 and Richard J. Knowlson of Albany purchased the property at sheriff's sale in March 1825. Fifteen months later since it had not been redeemed, Knowlson took title and promptly advertised it for sale. Again the picture fades. A few scattered advertisements show that window glass was being made at the factory and that it had to compete with many other glasshouses.

Since in the spring of 1830 the Rensselaer Glass Co. was incorporated for 21 years by Richard Knowlson, Daniel M. Gregory and Isaac Fox, it may have been that they were operating the factory during those years. Three years later the State Assembly refused the request of Knowlson and others to reincorporate with an increased capital stock on the grounds that the factory was doing very well on its current basis.

About this time, according to local tradition, blowers from South Jersey arrived at the glassworks which some of them soon rented. There is no doubt that William and John Gabler were there then for they purchased property. In 1835 Stadlers, Rush & Co. paid Knowlson and his wife \$3,500 for the glass works. Perhaps a victim of the 1837 panic, the company failed in 1838. Knowlson and Fox were appointed trustees and at once sold the works to Fox's sons, Albert and Samuel, who operated it until 1863 when it was destroyed by fire.

Quite a number of individual pieces have been located in homes in the vicinity of the Rensselaer Glass Factory or Sand Lake Glass Works as it was called locally. The articles consist mostly of bowls, pitchers, jars and "whimsies" such as glass canes. All are free blown from aquamarine glass and are free from ornamentation. A goblet, said to have been blown by John Gabler, is an exception in two respects--its color, a clear, brilliant deep green and its function, a drinking vessel.

Mr. Goodwin copied this from "Two Hundred Years of American Blown Glass" by Helen and George McKearin in the N.Y. State Library.

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Excuse please the home typewriter --no good.

Some words may have to be interpreted for you but this is authentic. The McKearins knew all about glass.

Dr. Haskell's house is the old Knowlson house. The Doll Museum is the Fox residence. The windmills are supposed to have been originally glass blowers. The ^{glass} ovens were right in back of Dorothea Hughes Hudson's house. A few years ago they could be seen there. I believed the yard has been leveled since then.

The picture you have may be the Fox house.

In the 1847 painting you will recognize some of the houses

The state says no photograph of glassworks exists, so far as they know.

VERTICAL
FILE

Send Lake-Hist
(Glass Works)

(#1)

THE STORY OF THE GLASS LAKE WORKS

On May 12, 1785, a contract was signed between three Dutchmen who began an era of glassmaking in Albany and Rensselaer counties which would last for a period of 65 years. Although the records of these factories are gone and the remaining stories in the "histories" are clouded, there is enough information to draw some conclusions which pertain to the facts known about the twin glass works.

The three Dutchmen who signed the agreement were Jan de Neufville, Leonard Heefke and Ferdinand Walfahert, the manager. With the signing of this document, two glass factories were to be built. The Hamilton Glass Factory was erected in 1787 in Hamilton, and the Glass Lake Glass Works was built in 1788 in Glass Lake, New York.

The Hamilton glass works was located in what is now Guilderland, or what was then Hamilton, named after Alexander Hamilton. The site of the factory ruins is eight miles northwest of Albany in what now is a strawberry field owned by Matthew M. Liedkie. Waterpower was supplied to the factory by the Hungerkill creek and wood was obtained from local forests. The factory site was excavated in 1964 by the Junior Museum in Troy, but little information was gained. The produce of the factory was window glass, demijohns, pocket bottles and snuff bottles. Neufville's factory was started with 24 or 25 glass blowers imported from Germany by Heefke. The factory was run by the

three Dutchmen until 1790 when it was abandoned because of a financial collapse.

In 1792 the works were taken over by McClallen, MacGregor and Company. This company also had financial difficulties and in 1793, it obtained a loan of three thousand pounds for a period of eight years with no interest for the first three years and five percent for the next five. With the loss of McClallen in 1794, the factory came under the management of MacGregor and Company.

In 1797 the factory was incorporated as the Hamilton Manufacturing Society. The Hamilton Society and the Glass Lake factory then jointly submitted a petition to Congress asking for an increase in the duties on imported glass and were promptly denied. The factory continued in operation until 1815 when it closed permanently because of a lack of wood.

The Glass Lake factory was built on the banks of Glass Lake about 15 miles east of Albany in the town of Sand Lake or Glass House Lake, Rensselaer Village, as it was then called. It was thought, when the factory was started, that the sand deposits around the lake would be sufficient for glass making, but it was soon found out that the sand there produced glass that was too dark for window glass and only good for bottles. Therefore, the sand needed was brought in from Hancock, Massachusetts, in horse-drawn wagons. Waterpower for the factory was obtained from the then-undammed Wynantskill creek flowing out of Glass House Lake. This factory was started one year after the Hamilton factory was started in Albany and, therefore, it is possible and probable that the factory was started with German glass blowers brought over from Germany by Heefke for

the Hamilton factory. The three Dutchmen were able to hold on to this factory five years longer than their Hamilton factory, but as their financial difficulties mounted, they had to sell the factory in 1795 to Robert MacGregor and Company, who had taken over their Hamilton factory in 1794. Included in MacGregor's enterprise were Elkanah Watson, Jeremiah Van Rensselaer and Thomas and Samuel Mather. This company didn't last, however, and on April 17, 1795, it was renamed Thomas Mather and Company. A new company was established in 1796 and consisted of Jeremiah Van Rensselaer, John Saunders, Abraham Ten Eyck, Elkanah Watson, Frederick A. DeZeng, K. K. Van Rensselaer, Douw Fonda, Walter Cochran and Samuel Mather. No title has been found for the company and this venture was said to have ended in 1806. This conflicts with the fact that a glass company of Sloansville, Albany County, purchased five thousand acres of land around Glass Lake from Stephen Van Rensselaer in 1800. This enterprise was promoted by James Kane, William Richmond and Major Frothingham. This might mean that the company established in 1796 was concluded in 1800 and sold to the Sloansville trio who added the large acreage to the company. This business could then have been incorporated into the Rensselaer Glass Works with Major Frothingham as the superintendent and Jeremiah Van Rensselaer, Elisha Jenkins, Elkanah Watson, George Pearson, Fred Jenkins, Rensselaer Havens, Francis Bloodgood and William Richmond as members. Each member of the corporation had a share or stock certificate of 1,000 dollars. Many of these members were mentioned previously as they were connected with earlier glass companies at Glass Lake and Hamilton in Albany. The Bostonian, Major Frothingham,

previously mayor of Hudson, New York, upon moving to Glass Lake in approximately 1798, built the houses for superintendents on Cylinder Street. Cylinder Street is now routes 43 and 66 and was named after the type of glass, cylinder glass, manufactured there. The superintendent's home is now owned by the Edmans family.

Another member of the corporation was Francis Bloodgood, the president of the State Bank of Albany, having Elisha Jenkins, Elkanah Watson, and Thomas Mather as directors of the bank.

William Richmond, also a member, was sent to Scotland to recruit Scottish glass blowers, which he did dressed as an itinerant bagpiper. A few of the glass blowers imported were Gottlieb Gatler and his sons, William, John, Thomas and George; also, a Mr. McClellan, a Mr. Bailey and a Mr. Green.

Another hazy bit of information taken from a Federal census of manufacturing for 1810 lists two glass factories in Rensselaer County. There are no names given and this mistake in number could be due to the fact that sometimes there was more than one person taking the census in a county.

In the fall of 1812, the factory was destroyed by fire and was rebuilt by January, 1813. This was done on an improved plan with the financial aid of the Hamilton Glass Works and by assessing each share of stock for fifty dollars. The first twenty dollars was to be paid within thirty days, the second twenty within sixty days and the last ten within ninety days. Failure to pay meant forfeiture of stock. In 1816 the factory again burned and was abandoned until 1819. Hereafter, the company's inventory always included two fire engines.

In 1819 Isaac B. Fox, Nathan R. Crandall and Company rebuilt the house for manufacturing cylinder glass. With the withdrawal of Gregory in 1823, and a sum of debts amounting to \$14,766, the financial failure of the factory forced its sale in March, 1825, to Richard J. Knowlson. Included in the sale were 346 acres of land, a building for producing crown glass with all necessary tools, two houses for superintendents, twenty-four workman's dwelling houses, two large barns and a store. Knowlson continued the business until July, 1835, when it was sold to Stadlers, Ruch and Company. During this period when Knowlson owned the factory, it is said that Knowlson was in on another factory at Glass Lake with a Mr. Schneuiss. This conflicts with other information found, but it could mean that Mr. Schneuiss came into the factory as a partner between 1831 and 1833.

Stadlers, Ruch and Company paid Knowlson \$3,500 for the factory and continued it for four years. Their company was formed with South Jersey glass blowers and was known as the Sand Lake Glass Works, ending the earlier glass works known as the Rensselaer Glass Company.

Albert R. Fox and Samuel H. Fox then bought the business. These brothers were the sons of Isaac B. Fox, of Fox, Crandell and Co., owners from 1819. The factory was run by the Fox brothers continuously until 1853, when the factory burned and was abandoned permanently. When the Fox brothers took over the business in 1839, they had a total employment of sixty men, a capital invested of \$12,000 and a value of articles produced at \$30,000. Eleven years later, the industrial census showed an employment of fifty men and

an investment of \$25,000. During the ownership of the Fox's, many of the houses around the lake were built; among these were the present Doll Museum, Mr. Mark Perry's home and its identical twin next door.

The products of the glass works were always thought to be crown glass, cylinder glass, and off-hand or whimsy pieces of aqua, amber and amethyst glass. Recently, some black slag glass was discovered by Mrs. Edmans and it was dug from under the kitchen of her house. It had been used as fill when the house was built and, since this house was built in 1798, this means that the factory was producing black glass, used in bottle making, previous to this time. Therefore, it is very possible that the Albany historical flasks could have been made there, even after the Hamilton Glass Works was out of business. Bottle molds could have been brought over from the Hamilton works and used there also.

A number of bottles which have been attributed to the Sand Lake works have recently been discovered. These bottles are aqua, blown in a mold, pontiled, have a tooled lip and were found on the property of the glass works. These bottles were made for a Dr. Evans of Schodack, New York. There are two types of bottles, round ones for teething syrup and square ones for camomile pills. Mrs. Sproule has a similar bottle, but it had no embossing and it was also attributed to the Glass Lake Glass Works. These bottles were produced sometime between 1810 and 1840 according to the Corning Glass Company. With the quantity of Evans' bottles found, it is certain that they aren't "offhand" pieces. This also helps to strengthen the idea that bottles were made there. This may

open a new door to the produce of the factory and, therefore, bring to light more specimens of bottles produced at the works.

The glass made at the Glass Lake factory was of the highest quality in the state and it was reported in an early newspaper that the windows in the White House and the Capitol in Washington, D. C., were made at Glass Lake.

Because of the numerous fires that frequented the factory, there is little way possible to verify the assumptions or suppositions gathered about the works, except through old letters and advertisements in many of the old papers from Albany and Troy. These old newspapers are very hard to find. Maybe someone will discover some records stashed away in one of the homes around Glass Lake or Hamilton, but at this time it is very unlikely.

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SL Chronicle:

Glass Works *Sand Lake History - (5)* The Glass Works

In 1805 Stephen Van Rensselaer leased some 5000 acres of land in Sand Lake to a group of Albany county businessmen who were engaged in glass making at Sloansville. These men built furnaces for the manufacture of Crown and Cylinder glass on the shores of Sand Lake (now Crystal Lake).

On February 28, 1806, the State Legislature of New York passed an act to incorporate The Rensselaer Glass Works. The capital stock did not exceed 100 shares at \$1000 each. One of the original incorporators was Major Thomas Frothingham, whose house still stands at Glass Lake.

It was soon discovered, however, that the glass at Sand Lake was too dark and therefore unacceptable for window glass. The works were then moved to the north west corner of Glass Lake, then called Rouses Lake. At this time, Glass Lake village was known as Rensselaer Village. Sand for the works was imported from Massachusetts and, despite the lack of skilled labor available, it continued in business until 1815 when it burned to the ground.

The original company was dissolved in 1819 and was purchased by Isaac Fox and Nathan Crandall, who turned out a large amount of window glass and a number of "off hand" blown specimens, for neighborhood households use until 1830.

From 1830 until 1833, the plant was leased by Stadler Rush and Co. of South Jersey. Four Gabler brothers, Joseph, William, Nelson and John, each took charge of a certain part of the glass works.

In 1833, Albert and Samuel Fox, sons of Isaac, took over the works and ran it successfully until 1853 when fire entirely destroyed the plant. During this period of twenty years, the Fox brothers erected a large frame building called Mechanics Hall, to accommodate those of their workmen who had no permanent homes. Sometime in the late 1850's, Joseph Gabler remodeled the building and turned it into the Glass Lake Hotel.

Some of those "off hand" glass pieces made by the Gabler Brothers in the 1830's are still owned by local collectors.

Times Record (Troy N.Y.)

April 1975

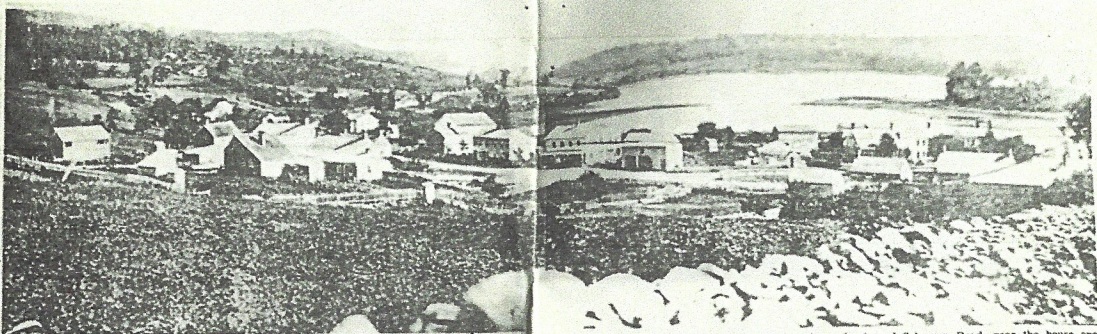
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pulse

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The Sunday Record, April 12, 1981 — B-1



THE WAY THEY WERE—Buildings around the outlet of Glass Lake, many of which are still there today, are shown as they looked in the first half of the 19th Century. The buildings of the Rensselaer Village

Glass Works are located at the right of the picture. Many of the other buildings shown belonged to the glass company as well. The picture

was taken from the top of Schuman Road, near the house once occupied by Richard Knowlson.

Glass works once again seen clearly

By JANE A. BENNETT
Pulse Staff Reporter

The connection between the French and Indian Wars of the 18th Century and the delicate blown glass produced in this area in the 19th Century is not immediately evident to most people, but there is an easily-traceable connection in Judy Rowe's case.

Several years ago Judy, who lives on the shore of Glass Lake, was tracing a possible link between North Petersburg and western Massachusetts during the wars between the Colonies and the French and Indians when she came upon an article about the Underground Railway in Massachusetts.

Jumping ahead about 180 years, she discovered that runaway slaves had been brought into Massachusetts from railway stops in Rensselaer County, specifically in the Town of Sand Lake.

The French and Indian War was put aside for a time while Judy wrestled with the question of how they got over the mountain undetected. She was not long in formulating a theory: The slaves had been taken to Massachusetts in the wagons sent from the local glass house to haul Berkshire sand back for glass making.

Proving her theory correct, however, was another matter. It required more knowledge of the men who ran and worked in the glass house. Who were they? Were they Abolitionists and humanitarians as well as good businessmen and skilled workers?

The Rensselaer Village Glass Works, located near the outlet of what was then called Rensselaer Lake, was incorporated in 1806, although there is some evidence that glass making was conducted there before that time. The area was part of the Town of Berlin until 1812, when the township of Sand Lake was formed.

The factory was established because of a disagreement among the investors of the Hamilton Glass Manufacturing Society of Albany. The Hamilton factory, built in Albany in 1798, was running out of wood, one of the most important factors in glass making.

The Glass Lake area was heavily wooded and had the advantage of water power at the foot of the lake. It was also close to the Hudson River, the main artery of shipping in those days.

Judy found that the partners at Rensselaer Village were mostly prominent Albany businessmen of their time, whose reputations were more than local. Elkanah Watson, for instance, was a correspondent of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson.

Another, David Arnold, was a cousin of Benedict Arnold. His wife, ironically, was a cousin of Alexander Hamilton. Their descendants, Judy found, were associated with the glass works as long as the factory remained at Glass Lake.

"The list of the original owners," she remarked, "reads like 'Who's Who' of that period."

The original lease of 5,000 acres of woodland and shorefront was mapped in 1808 and 1807 by John Randall, an Albany mapmaker. The numbers he put on the lots at that time still crop up in deeds and surveys, Judy has found.

The firm brought in its own carpenters and used wood from its leased land to construct the factory buildings and the workers' houses. At

one time, Judy discovered, Rensselaer Village boasted 34 employees' houses, a boarding house for the unmarried workmen, a store, a blacksmith's forge, two furnaces and all the other various buildings needed for a glass works. In short, a thriving community.

In 1816, the glass works was put up for auction. Its inventory was listed in an advertisement in the Albany Argus. Not everything was sold, so later the owners dissolved the corporation. The property was purchased by Isaac Fox and Nathan Crandell (both of whom had married daughters of David Arnold) and Abraham Gregory. Their first advertisement ran in the Troy Northern Budget in October 1819.

Although the firm was reputed to make superior glass, it failed in 1821, probably due to Gregory's withdrawal. In 1823, Crandell's failing health (he died in 1825) and disabling tariffs.

In the early years of the Rensselaer Village Glass Works, the makers discovered that the local sand, used alone, made too dark a glass to be really desirable. They began "importing" Berkshire sand from Lanesboro, Mass., near Pittsfield. The resulting product was a glass with lightness and purity of color which proved quite popular.

The production of this glass was not held up for long after the Fox and Crandell failure. The business was purchased in 1825 by Richard J. Knowlson, an Albany merchant, who tried, unsuccessfully, to resell it in 1826. In 1830, Knowlson, with Isaac Fox, Daniel Gregory, and Richard Spencer, incorporated the firm again.

In 1831 it was operated by Knowlson and Schmeids and in 1835 by Francis Sadler, Anthony Rush and the Gabler brothers, a New Jersey family famous in the glass business.

In 1838 Richard Knowlson and Isaac Fox regained control of the firm and leased it to Fox's son, Albert R. and Samuel H. Fox. In 1845 Samuel moved to Durhamville in Oneida County and opened an extensive glass factory there. Albert continued at Glass Lake until 1853, when the factory burned.

It had survived earlier fires in 1812 and 1816, but was not able to survive this time. Shortly thereafter Albert Fox was invited to move to Berkshire County in Massachusetts to rebuild the glass house there. He went, taking with him, all his equipment which had come through the fire.

After the 1853 fire the land and the remaining buildings were sold. Many of the worker moved, some to Durhamville and others to Lanesboro, but many are buried in the little Sand Lake cemetery. Judy found it interesting that these families, so closely knit in life, lie together on the hilltop section of the cemetery.

Some residents of Glass Lake have found souvenirs of the 1853 fire in their houses, Judy said. When the flames and heat reached the pots of molten glass, they exploded, throwing globs of glass in all directions. When the excitement of the fire died down, "icicles" of glass were discovered hanging from all the nearby tree branches. Families in the village tied bows on these icicles and used them to decorate Christmas trees for many years thereafter.

Judy became so interested in the study of the Rensselaer Village Glass Works that she decided she should learn something about the glass

making process itself as an aid to her research.

Fire was the greatest enemy of any glass works, she discovered. The buildings were mainly built of wood, and wood and straw were constantly on hand in the manufacture and packing of glass. Most of the glass houses, she found, worked during the winter months so that snow could help keep down the danger of fire. When the local firm was up for auction in 1816, two fire engines were listed in the inventory to be sold.

During the War of 1812, Rensselaer Village was thriving because of an embargo on English goods, but other times competition with imported goods and tariffs proved troublesome to the glass works.

By asking questions, delving into old records and deeds, and exploring the land on the lake shore, Judy Rowe has been able to establish the locations of most of the factory buildings. She has ascertained which of the factory houses, many of the house originally built for the workers have disappeared, but some remain in place.

Continued on page B-3

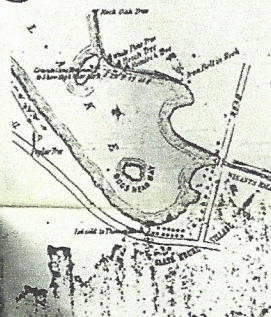
Talk on glass

Judy and Henry Rowe will present their slide show "Rensselaer Village: Yesterday's Heritage" Tuesday at 8 p.m. at the meeting of the Sand Lake Historical Society. The meeting will be held at the Sand Lake Town Hall, located on Routes 9 and 86, one mile east of Averill Park.

The show will deal with the history of the Rensselaer Village Glass Works which was located at the outlet of Glass Lake from 1806 to 1853.

The meeting will be open to the public. Those attending are invited to bring specimens of Glass Lake glass for display and discussion.

The Rowes are also interested in any information about the glass works or earlier glass making at Glass Lake.



GLASS WORKS—The Rensselaer Village Glass Works, which once employed about 100 workmen, is indicated on the old map of the area, above. The row of houses nearest the lake shore is under water today. The level of the lake rose after Henry Burden built the dike at the outlet of the lake.

Considerable research on the old factory, which was never reopened after a fire in 1853, has been done by Judy Rowe of Glass Lake, above right, shown examining a glass darning ball made at the works. The little pitcher at right is one of the many pieces of fine glass made at Glass Lake. The photograph below shows two other products of the glass works, a small medicine bottle and an accidental product, a glass "icicle" formed when the pots of molten glass exploded in the fire of 1853. It is one of many found on the trees surrounding the old glass works. In the picture at lower right are Frederick Guntrum Jr. and Cindy Herman, who have photographed many examples of Glass Lake glass for a photo archive on the factory and its output. (Photos by Tom Killips)

