

Short Histories of McKee, Jeannette, Jenkins, and Kemple Glass

McKee Glass Company began its life as McKee and Brothers Glass Works in Pittsburgh, PA in 1853. In 1888 the factory moved to Jeannette, PA, which was founded by H. Sellers McKee and named for his wife. By 1901, McKee and Brothers Glass Works was acquired by the National Glass Company (which was operating 19 factories at this point), and the name was changed to McKee-Jeanette Glass Company. However, by 1903, McKee had apparently broken away from the combine.

In 1904, McKee-Jeanette Glass Company was awarded a patent for its Pres-cut trademark. Pres-cut glass was a line of glassware that was produced to simulate the highly popular cut glass designs. It was hand pressed glass made to resemble cut glass, but was produced and sold at prices the average working family could afford.

McKee introduced its new line with two patterns that had already been part of the line under National — Aztec and Toltec. This new line quickly gained popularity. Later that same year, McKee added another former National pattern to the Pres-Cut line — Nortec. Fentec, the first McKee-designed pattern, was the next to be added. Two more patterns, Sextec and Bontec, were introduced in 1906. The introduction of new “Tec” patterns slowed down in the years between 1908 and 1912, as the company once again reorganized, becoming the McKee Glass Company in 1908. While new Pres-Cut patterns were added during this time, only Yutec was named using the “Tec” suffix. Between 1913 and 1915, eleven more patterns were added to the line: Bontec, Glentec, Carltec, Doltec, Plytec, Plutec, Quintec, Rotec, Startec, Valtec, and Wiltec.

By 1912, they employed 600 laborers and turned out millions pieces of finished glass yearly, making it one of the largest plants of its kind in the world. The McKee Glass Company produced large quantities of high quality glassware including pressed pattern glass, jadeite (opaque green), white milk glass, black glass and other opaques.

After many years of production, the McKee Glass factory was acquired in 1951 by the Thatcher Glass Company. In 1961, Jeannette Glass Company bought the Thatcher Glass Company. Jeanette made a variety of pressed glass tableware there until it closed in 1983

Jeannette Bottle Works began operation in the late 1880s in Jeannette, Pennsylvania. In 1898 the company became Jeannette Glass Company and produced a vast selection of handmade bottles, jars, and dishware well into the early 1900s.

Improvements made to the factory during in the mid-1920s included converting it to a pressed glass facility. This change allowed the company to later produce the Depression-era kitchen glass and dinnerware for which they are best known.

Jeannette Glass Company produced several patterns during the period from 1928 through 1950s. Among these are Iris & Herringbone, Hex Optic, Cube (also known as Cubist), Floral, Sierra, Doric, Sunflower, Windsor, Doric & Pansy, Swirl, Cherry Blossom, Homespun, and Sunburst.

Colors used in Jeannette's Depression glass vary from the traditional pink, green, and clear to a more uncommon teal blue-green color called ultramarine. Several of their patterns were also made in iridescent marigold specifically Iris & Herringbone.

During the 1950s Jeannette introduced Cameo Glassware which is essentially milk glass. Competing with many other companies, their bowls, compotes and covered dishes looked similar to those made by Westmoreland and Fenton, although Jeanette's milk glass wares were nowhere near as plentiful in terms of the quantities produced in varied patterns.

Jeannette purchased the McKee Glass Division of Thatcher Glass Manufacturing in 1961. In 1970, the company's name changed to Jeannette Corporation. They ceased production and closed the factory in 1983.

In 1901, David Charles Jenkins, Jr. and his sons, who were the founders of the Indiana Tumbler and Goblet Works at Greentown, along with J.D.K. Kennedy and Edward Seeny Kokomo organized The Kokomo Glass Manufacturing Co. and erected and put into operation a flint glass factory. This plant was destroyed by fire in 1905, and was rebuilt in 1906 and resumed operations as the **D.C. Jenkins Glass Company**.

In 1914, Mr. Jenkins started another glass factory in Arcadia, IN. These companies made a line of tableware. They also made lanterns, candy containers, fruit and fish globes, lamp founts, display jars, private mold work and glass novelties. The Jenkins Glass Company issued patterns in pink, green, crystal and iridescent marigold. Marigold was the only iridescent color issued. Both plants were in operation until 1932.

John and Geraldine Kemple were married in 1941. John was an experienced glass artisan, the fifth generation in a family of glass makers and Geraldine owned a gift shop when they met. John began his career in glass as an 11 year old at the Fostoria plant in Moundsville West Virginia. In May 1945 they leased two large buildings in East Palestine Ohio. The Kemples purchased 246 hand press molds from the Mannington Art Glass Company of West Virginia. Additional molds were acquired until they owned more than 1,100. They bought antique molds most of which had originally been used to make pressed glass in imitation of clear cut crystal glass. Between 1950 and 1957, the Kemples bought 300 molds from the McKee Company. The most important of these were the covered animal dishes and the various Prescut Tec patterns: Aztec, Toltec, Sextec, Martec, Bontec, Carltec, Plutec, Plytec, Rotec, Quintec, Valtec, Wiltec and Yutec.

At first Kemple made only white milk glass and a small amount of blue milk glass. The quality of their milk glass was excellent due to the formula which was known only by the Kemple family. Sales of milk glass were very successful during the 1950s. In 1956, the factory burned to the ground. An opportunity to buy the old Gill Glass Works in Kenova, West Virginia came up and they then moved there. In 1960, colored wares were added to the Kemple line. Glass was marked by stickers and occasionally by a K in the mold. In all, Kemple produced about 20 colors including West Virginia Red. They used their molds to make glass reproductions from 1945 to 1970 when John Kemple died.