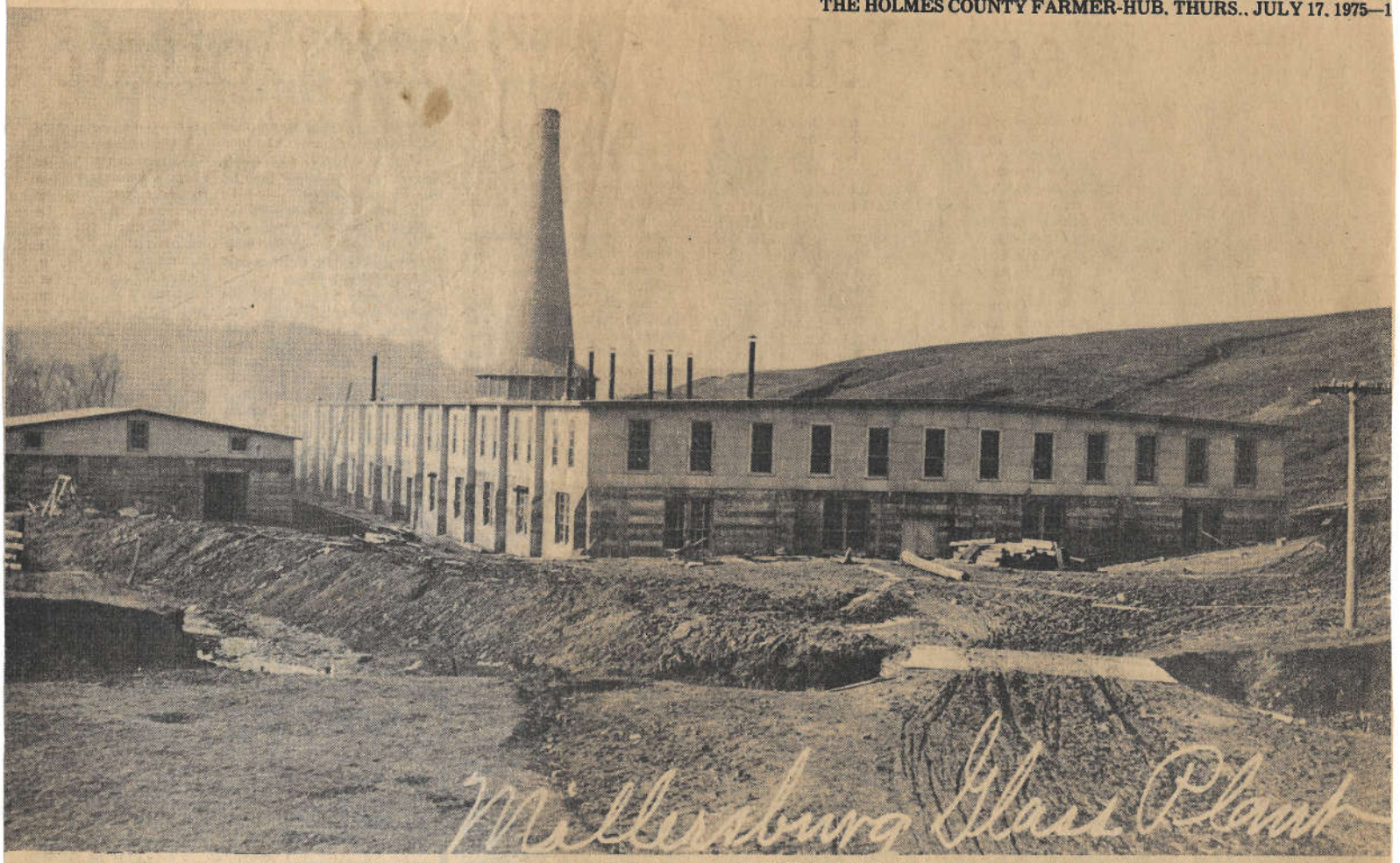
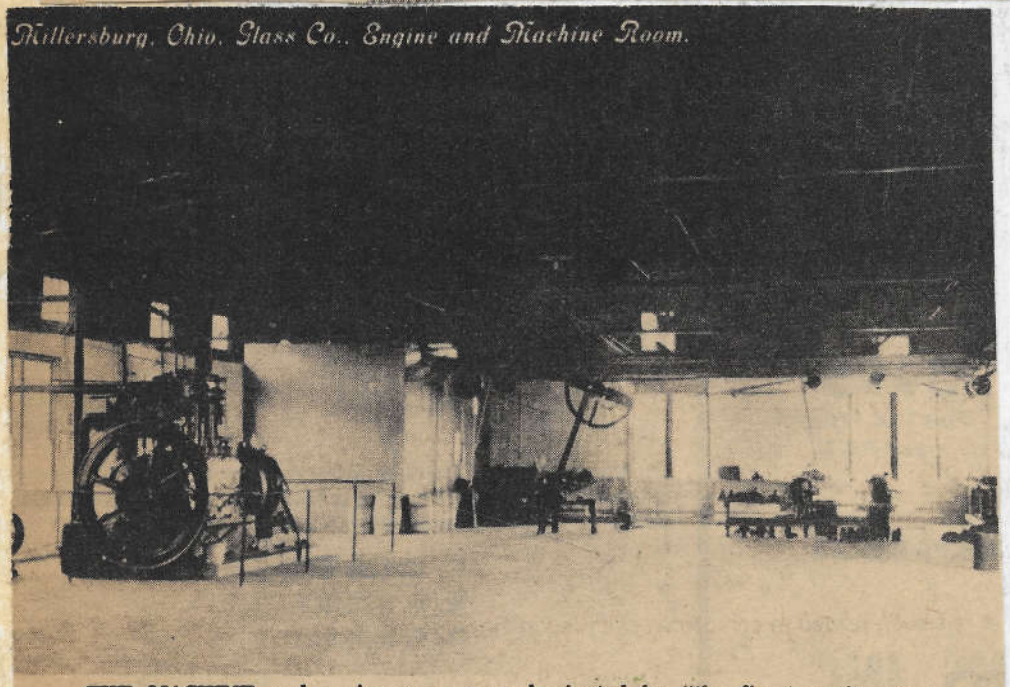


THE MOST modern and advanced equipment of the day was installed at the $125,000 Millersburg Glass Plant in 1909. Two years later, the bankrupt plant, inventory and equipment was sold at public auction for $14,203. The main plant was 300 by 100 by 28 feet without a center support. The steel framework for the building was purchased at Chicago World's Fair. Finished with concrete, the iron and steel construction was virtually fireproof. The smaller 300 by 50 building was divided into a shipping room, a copper shop and combination engine-machinery room, blacksmiths shop and pattern shop.

DESPITE THOROUGH research, the two women photographer in the packing room were never identified by George Irving of Millersburg, who has undertaken a costly study of the plant. Oat straw from Iowa, known for its softness, was used for packing material.



THE MACHINE and engine room was dominated by "the finest engine ever manufactured" by Fairbanks Morse Co. The firm reportedly made it especially for the glassworks, and was later listed among the creditors. Molds were destroyed along with some life savings, leaving a taste of resentment against the firm which produced some of America's most collectible glass ware.

Not much official data is available in local records concerning the Millersburg Glass plant, where some of today's most collectable glassware was manufactured from May 20, 1909 to Nov. 11, 1911.

Probably the most complete history of the factory has been compiled in note form by George D. Irving of Millersburg, an insurance agent who has spent a lot of time and thousands of dollars researching its operation.

Bits and pieces of folklore and legend probably have crept into the tales about the plant and the glassware that once was traded, bartered, given away as prizes at carnivals, peddled and sometimes broken to fill cisterns or used in target practice. It now claims top prices at antique shops and sales and is treasured by collectors for its irridescence touted as "pulsating with life" in early advertisements.

According to residents who lived through Millersburg's "glass era," J. W. Fenton of Marietta founded the glass company while he was simultaneously the president of Fenton Art Glass Co. in Williamstown, W. Va., and he devoted all his time to the local plant.

Millersburg residents are credited with raising $120,000 in 1909 to start the glassworks under a program of President William H. Taft to encourage new industry. The company was officially incorporated on May 10, 1909, with a capital stock of $125,000 which was divided into equal shares of $100, of which Fenton and H. W. Stanley were the largest single stockholders.

Word pictures paint Fenton as a flamboyant man who is said to have been chauffered around town in a limousine and was not adverse to some human frailities. A reliable spokesman said Fenton often lit his cigars with a $5 bill when the act could be appreciated by a public audience. It is also rumored that he sometimes threw gold coins or dust into the molten glass, offering a unique sheen to the finished product.

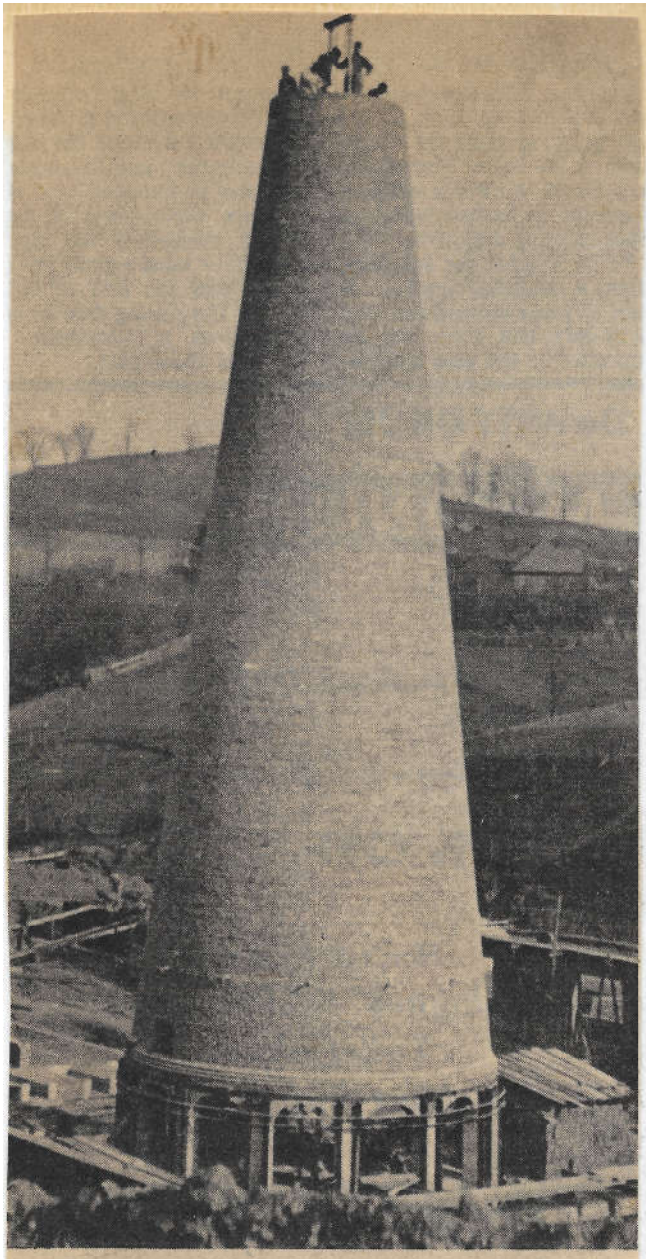
Aside from his avid interest in glassware, which is evidenced in the design of some patterns said to have been molded by his brother Robert, Fenton is said to have been a sportsman. He also dabbled in gas wells, searching to supply the plant with fuel, it is said, drilling close to 20 while the factory was in operation.

Excavation for the Millersburg Glass Plant began Sept. 18, 1908 under the direction of two Sterret brothers, who are said to have weighed 300 pounds apiece.

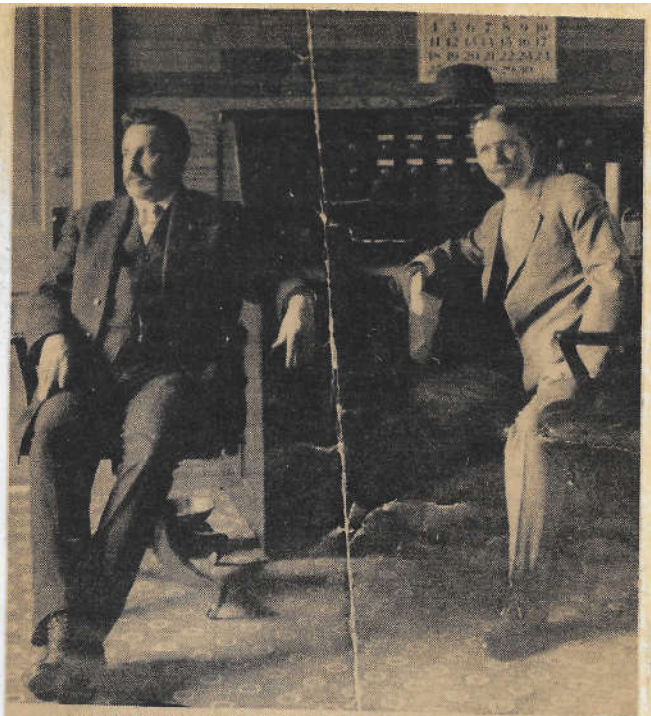
A former Millersburg councilman, Howard Farra, recalls a tale about the hefty Sterrets.

He said "the boys" got into a fight during the construction of the plant, and during the scuffle, one of them fell on Frank Farra who was working as a water tender on the job. Farra's leg was broken in the fall.

Farra said mason helpers made 12 cents an hour when the chimney was constructed and 45 cents an hour when it was torn down.



A 14-POT furnace installed in the glass plant required a 27-foot smoke stack, which was constructed by laborers who later were hired to dismantle it. Laborers included were Frank Farra (left), Mint Spahr and Herbert Tressel. The furnace was located in the larger of two buildings at the site.



PRESIDENT AND GENERAL Manager of Millersburg Glass Co., J. W. Fenton (left) is reported to have enjoyed "the good life" while the firm went bankrupt. His sales manager, H. R. Weber, posed with him under a calendar which is dated 1909 from the Burger Iron Co. of Akron. S. B. Fair of Millersburg purchased the firm in 1911 at public auction and formed the Radium Glass Co., of which Fenton became vice president and manager.

Almost immediately after the first glass Ohio Star and Hobstar and Feather patterns — were produced at the new plant, Fenton installed bigger and better equipment and initiated two 12-hour shifts to meet the demand. Workers are said to have been paid $1.50 per shift.

Orders allegedly came from Germany, France and England as Radiumware gained international popularity and fame for its opalescence and metalic sheen. But local rumor that a piece of the glassware came into the possession of King Edward VII is largely discredited by historians.

Locally, the glass was regarded with little esteem, and became known as "carnival glass" because of its popularity as prizes at fairs and carnivals. Alva (Peck Fortune of Millersburg recalls when the carnies moved on to the next stop, they often left partially filled barrels of the dishes behind to save freight costs. When the plant folded, some of the dishes toted home by the employees as partial payment against wages due, found their way to attics and barns for storage or lowly use as pet dishes. Some were broken up in slingshot practice, it is recalled by some who were boys at the time.

Peddlers bartered for the glass dishes years after the plant closed, trading goods and produce for "that old dish," or paying an embarrasingly low sum for dishes now selling for outrageously high prices.

According to dealers and auctioneers in the area who deal with the dishes on a regular basis, some of the dishes now claim higher regard by residents who want a physical reminder of local history than collectors across the nation.

The well-known "Courthouse" dish, for example, claims a going rate of $200-$250 on the collector's market, while the dish can raise up to $350 at a local home auction.

The dish was designed by Fenton to pay tribute to his success in Millersburg. It was produced as a souvenir dish, and some sources say it was given to the employes who donated their time to lay a gas line into the plant from one of Fenton's new wells, lessening the cost of production. Other sources said the dish was one given away at Christmastime one year by Millersburg merchants during the factory's flourishing years.

Other styles of the dishes are said to be claiming thousands of dollars apiece on the collectors market.

During the height of production, the glass plant turned out more than 50 patterns to which names were attached such as "zig-zag," "feathered serpent," "pipe and tobacco," "Cleveland memorial," "honey comb" and even "trout and fly," presumably so named after Fenton caught a trout while behind the plant fishing in Killbuck Creek. All the names now have special meaning to the avid carnival glass collector.

The iridized glass was produced in hues of green, blue, marigold and amethyst as well as crystal. It was molded into water, table, ice cream and berry sets, punch bowls and glasses, toothpick holders and other novelty items.

Only one piece of blown carnival glass was traced from the plant. Fortune said he knew of a piece which was blown during lunch hour by a plant laborer, who later gave it to his girlfriend.

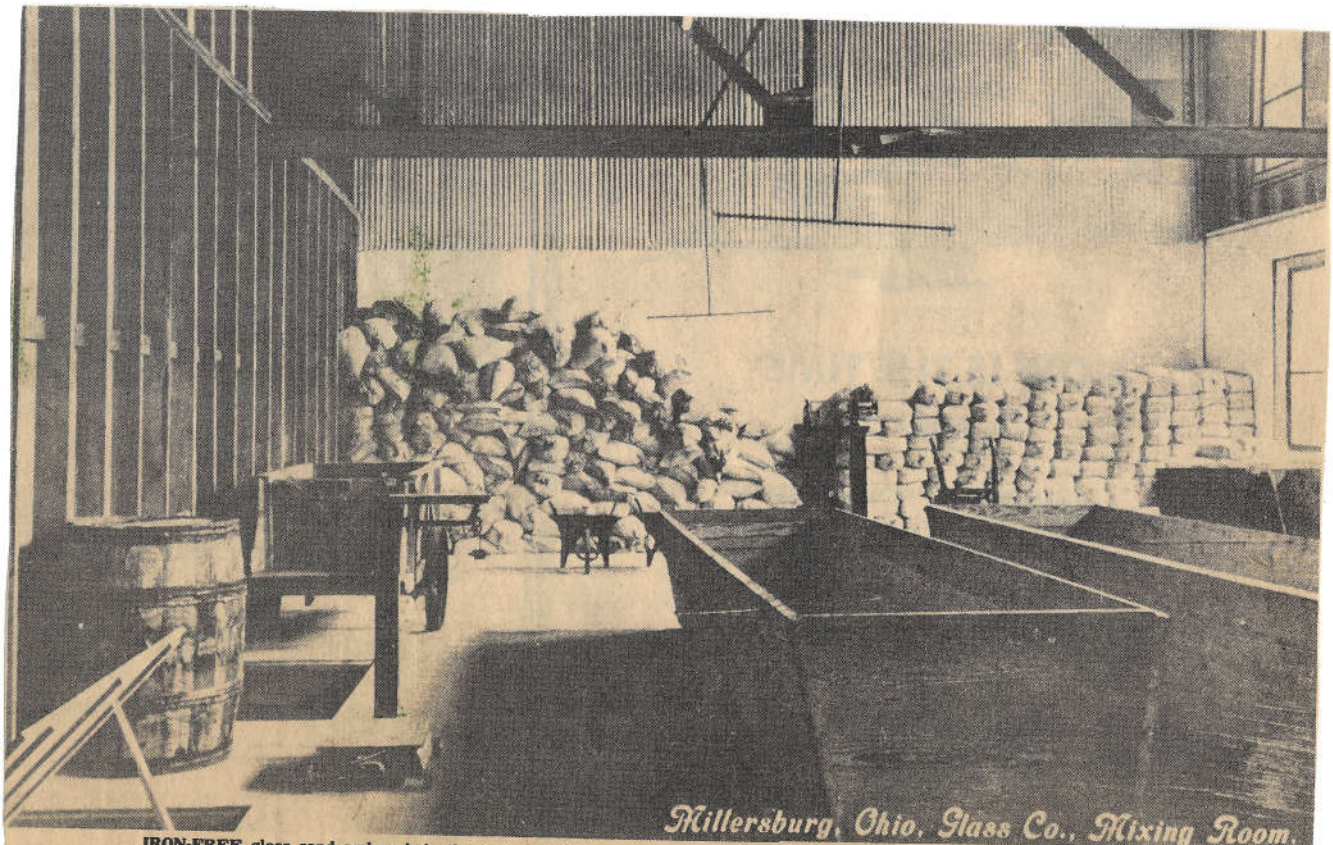
Bankruptcy closed the plant. Former employes theorized it was caused by the mismanagement of funds and selling the glassware below the cost of production.

It was also intimated that some "personality conflicts" also caused strife between Fenton and the community while the plant was operating.

The first lawsuit for money owed was filed by the moldmaker, Stephen Hipkins. That was quickly followed by the machinery construction firm, Fairbanks-Morse, which was credited with the installation of a 80-horsepower gas engine which was said to have been designed especially for the plant as the finest engine the firm ever produced.

Twenty-six other suits quickly followed, including one by the county treasurer for real estate taxes.

The plant, equipment and inventory was sold for $14,203 on



Millersburg, Ohio, Glass Co., Mixing Room.

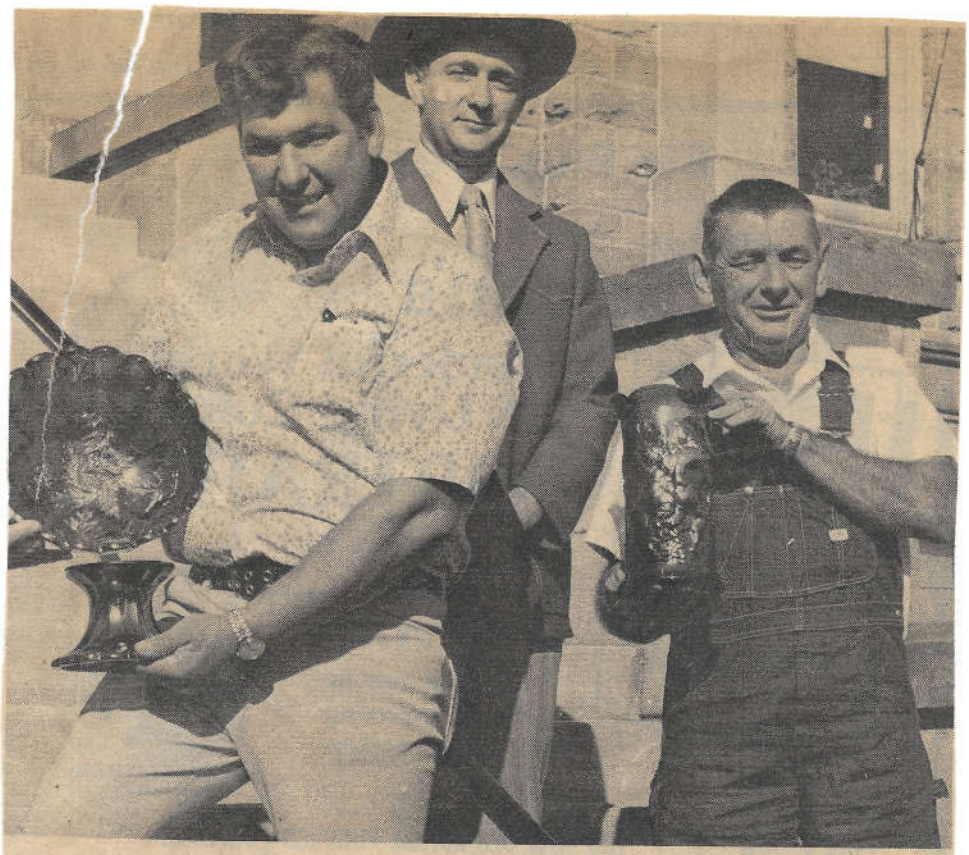
IRON-FREE glass sand and rock in the area, which insured a clear-crystal glass product, was the drawing card for J. W. Fenton to locate a glassworks in Millersburg. In the mixing room, he stocked feld spar from Massachusetts, soda ash from Barberton, flour spar from Kentucky, lime from Tiffin, nitrate of soda from South America and sand from Michigan.

ANTIQUE FESTIVAL visitors on October 8 included two buses of carnival glass collectors, the majority of them being members of the International Carnival Glass Association. Above is a part of the group who assembled on the east courthouse steps Sunday morning while many others were circulating enjoying the window exhibits. An estimated 23 to 25 states were represented in those attending.

Sept. 23, 1911 to Samuel B. Fair, who with two other men owned the 50-acre site on which the plant was constructed. Fair formed the Radium Glass Co., with Fenton as vice president and manager. It operated from November, 1911 until the end of May, 1912.

The plant was then idle during the 1913 depression year until Oct. 11, 1913, when Fair sold out to the Jefferson Glass Co. of Steubenville which produced electric and gas light fixtures and lenses for autos and trains.

The lack of natural gas as fuel is said to have forced the final closure of the building as a glass plant on Aug. 21, 1916.



THERE WERE some rare pieces of Millersburg glass circulating around Millersburg during the Antique Festival in October, in addition to the ones on display in the local window displays.

Among these pieces were an amethyst Thistle punchbowl now owned by Henry Taylor of Beloit, Wisc., said to be one of the most spectacular pieces known in carnival glass. Purchased at a reported $4,800 it is said to be the single highest priced rarity in carnival in the November issue of The Carnival Glass News & Views of Joe Olson. This is one of two known Thistle punchbowls, No punch cups have been repoted found for it as yet.

On the right Charles Thrawley of near New Castle, Ind., holds an amethyst People's vase with flange top. The third known of these, it was purchased from a home in Millersburg by John Woody, Derby, Kans., pictured in center, a nationally known carnival auction manager. This vase previously has brought $2,500 and is reported to have gone over $4,000 this time.

By O. Joe Olson:
The picture above will unquestionable is destined to become one of the famous historical photos of the hobby. It was taken by Marilyn Scherer, reporter and editor of the Farmer-Hub newspaper, on the steps of the Holmes County courthouse at Millersburg, Ohio, on Friday Oct. 6, 1972.
A group of collectors who had journeyed to nearby Canton, Ohio, for a Woody auction of carnival belonging to Ray Wishard, drove to Millersburg for a visit.
While the crowd watched, three carnival personages posed for the special picture, two holding pieces of top prized carnival. Foreground, left, is Henry Taylor, Beloit, Wis., with the amethyst Big Thistle punchbowl and base for which he had just paid Marshall Shafer, dealer, the sum of $4,800.
To Taylor's left is Charles Thrawley, Rushland, Ind., clad in customary overalls, displaying the second known amethyst People's vase with a flange top. Thrawley had sold his famous collection three years earlier, in august 1969, which had included a blue People's vase.
Auctioneer John Woody, Douglas, Kas., wearing a pleased expression, stood behind Taylor, Woody managed to buy the amethyst vase through Florence Martin, Millersburg dealer, for $4,400.