

# A Priceless Treasure Lost to Time THE MALLORTOWN GLASSWORKS

By Lorraine Payette

When you drive west out Highway No. 2 from Mallorytown, heading toward Quabbin Road, you'll find a modest marker by the north side of the road. Nothing remarkable to look at, the boulder carries a plaque notifying all passers by that "Near this site the first glass works was known to have been established in Canada."



Brian Phillips of Rockport, historian, has done extensive work into determining the history of the Mallortown Glassworks. He is well known throughout the area for the highly detailed commemorative signs he has designed and which have been installed in several communities, including one at the Community Centre in Mallortown. Far more detailed than the plaque, it gives a good idea of the history of this amazing venture.

Amasa Whitney Mallory (grandson of UEL Nathaniel Mallory, formerly of Vermont), decided to start Canada's first glass factory in 1839. There were other companies in the general area, but due to more primitive means of transportation, distances seemed far greater in the 1800s than they are now. Redford, New York, was 167 Kilometers away (103 miles), a very long distance to travel or ship such fragile items. They and another factory at Redwood were both manufacturers of sheet or window glass.

Mallory, however, decided to not manufacture window glass, preferring instead to make household and decorative items. All were hand blown from glass made from locally available materials. Simpler pieces such as "torpedo bottles" were also made for everyday use. Basic containers, that were used to store soda water were kept on their sides in racks. The belief was that if the corks were kept moist, they wouldn't shrink and cause the bottle to lose pressure.

Unfortunately, Mallortown in 1839 was not an ideal location for a glass factory. While local sand and limestone were of good quality, poor transportation made the project more difficult, and the factory was established in a structure which today would be considered virtually impossible to work in.

"It was a tough time to start a glass factory in this area," said Phillips. "Out in the wilderness with poor transportation, no railways to bring in coal, no railways to move your product to market, no railways to bring in the soda or lime or even the Potsdam sandstone that they used. Trying to set up something like that was a very tough job."

Twenty-year-old Amasa Mallory was not going to be stopped. He had log buildings assembled; three main furnaces installed, and thus started his glass factory.

Reproductions of Mallortown Glass by Jamie Sherman

Glass fork manufactured at Mallortown Glassworks (submitted by Brian Phillips)

(top right) Unveiling of the Mallorytown Glassworks commemorative sign on June 10, 2012

(bottom right) The plaque at the side of Highway 2

"They were actually wood firing their glass furnaces, which are stupendously difficult, plus they were working out of log cabins," said Phillips. "You can imagine trying to run a glass factory with 2,000° temperatures of glass and do this in a log structure. The temperatures inside for the working conditions were just horrendous, of course, so it was extremely difficult."

To make the items, Mallory needed to bring in an expert gaffer or glassblower.

"Matt Johnson was a fascinating individual and highly talented," said Phillips. "He came originally from Ireland and landed in Boston in 1831, then worked his way through the States northward until he got to Redwood, just across the border here and only seven miles from Alexandria Bay. His unreliability closed the factory in the end."

"He was the gaffer at Redwood, and probably unreliable there, too. He went looking for a job over here and Mallory was trying to start his glass factory, which was perfect. So he worked in Mallorytown for probably 11 months – we don't know exactly how long the glass factory actually existed, but it was about one year and certainly no more than two."

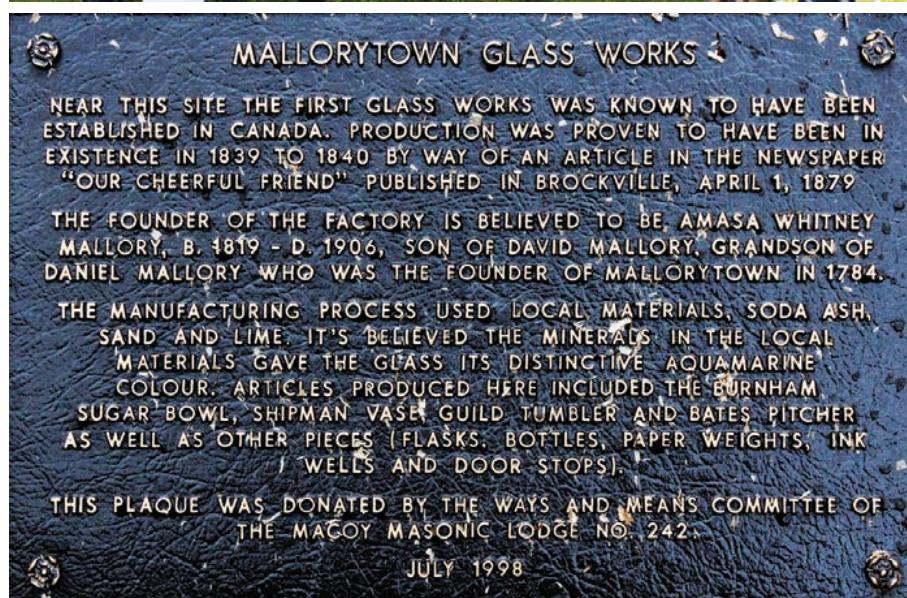
"It closed because Matt kept showing up for work in an inebriated state or just didn't show up at all, and finally Amasa Mallory decided he had enough and said 'we're done'."

Sadly, there were no other experts in either glass making or glass blowing available. Two completely different fields, the factory could not continue without either of them.

However, over that short period of time, some marvellous pieces of art were created.

"They did a few bottles, but lots of jugs and vases. They made bowls and dishes, and even some plates, of course. They also made the whimsy," said Phillips. "That's where the fun comes in. And the sign shows some of that, a little bit of that whimsy in the form of that amazing 26" long fork. It's made entirely of glass, but beautifully detailed and extremely fragile. It has managed to survive all the way to the present with only one broken tine."

There are some surviving pieces of Mallorytown glass, most hidden away in various museums. The ROM boasts six intact



pieces, five of which are probably from Mallorytown. The Arthur Child Museum in Gananoque has a pitcher, and some small pieces may be found elsewhere. Establishing authenticity is always a challenge, and each piece is very valuable historically.

About twenty years ago, the ROM hired artist Jamie Sherman to create accurate reproductions of some of the Mallorytown glassware including the Bates Pitcher, a sugar bowl, and a fruit bowl.

Working carefully, he studied formulae and closely matched the subtle aquamarine color of the originals. Working alone, he was able to create reproductions which would have originally required two or three artisans working as a team.

Although the site of the factory and at least one of its furnaces appear to have been found, it is located on private land. A marker is set up nearby, so as not to disturb the current landowners. LH

To learn more about the Mallorytown Glassworks, please visit <http://ebraadt.blogspot.ca/2009/04/mallorytown-glassworks-1825-183940.html> or drop by Phillips' commemorative sign placed at the Mallorytown Community Centre.