

# Forgett Collection Yields Archival Treasure Trove

By Roy Williamson

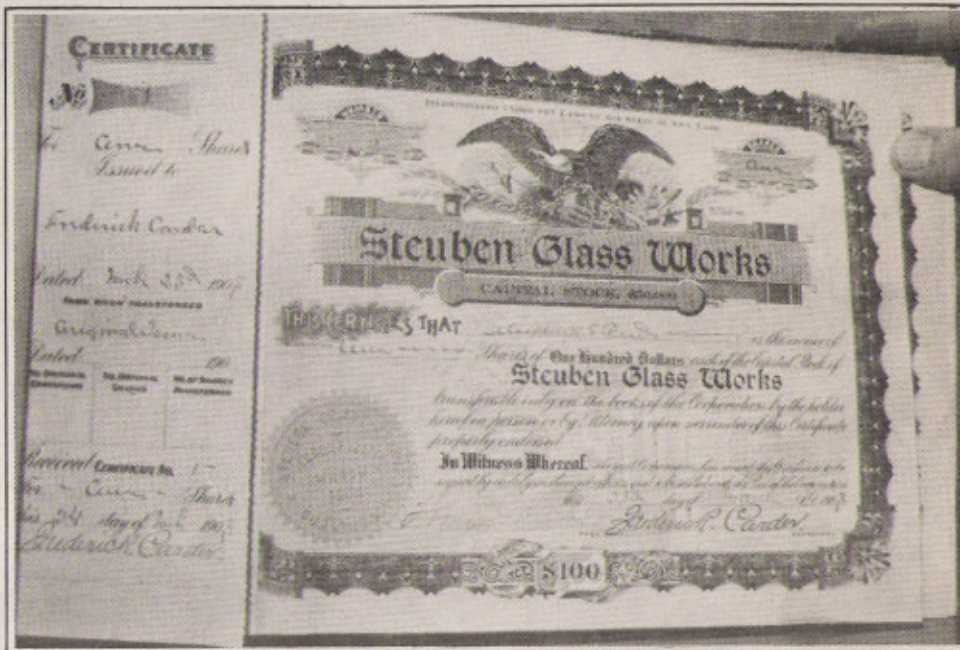
There are several negative aspects to the dramatic market increase of art and antiques in the past decade. Perhaps chief among them is that a given object becomes promoted in itself, and the cultural context, and historical and academic value become of secondary importance. With sensibilities bedazzled by dollar signs, we pay less attention to academic content, and what is deemed newsworthy in antiques magazines is delegated by the price level.

"In the early 50's when the Hawkes Co. fell on hard times, Penrose Hawkes sold to my mother over a period of time the entire archives, including the company records, photographs, specimen glassware, showroom samples and exhibition pieces. The archives also include the catalogs of many notable glass companies, both European and American. Also to be found here is the original incorporation and stock book of the Steuben Glass Works and documents pertaining to the lawsuit by Tif-

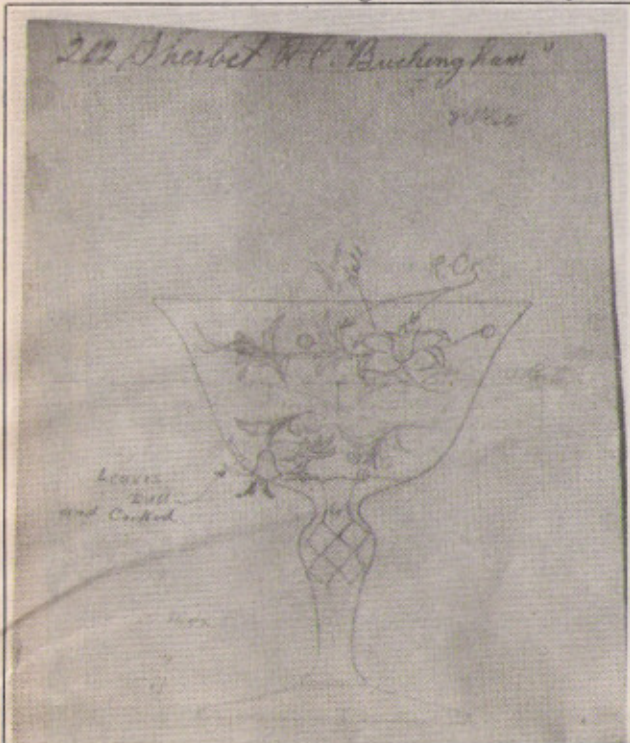
Jenkins mentioned that it did not contain many glasshouse catalogs, as described by Mrs. Forgett's son.

When archival records come onto the market, each circumstance is unique, and assigning a dollar value to this type of material is extremely difficult. The Forgett Collection lot is perhaps the most extensive of its type to be offered, and represents a curator's dream. If only a fifth of the quantity were to surface relating to, say, the Boston & Sandwich Glass Co., Thomas Cains, or the New England Glass Co., it would be the scholar's event of the century. Perhaps, in an attic somewhere,.... well, there's little harm in dreaming.

At any rate, the lot bore an estimate of \$35,000-\$40,000, and was the only lot of the sale to have a reserve. Louise Luther observed that many museums responded to the pre-sale publicity: bidding opened at \$14,000, and the lot was hammered down at \$27,500 (including the buyer's premium) to a gratified Jane Spillman, acting on behalf of the Corning Museum of Glass. Ms. Spillman, Curator of American Glass at Corning, confessed to limited auction experi-



The original stock book from Steuben was included in the archival materials in the Forgett Collection (supporting fingers courtesy of Sandwich Glass Museum curator Kirk Nelson).



tion.

Regarding the accession, Corning Director Dwight P. Lanmon said "I'm thrilled. It's natural and important for us to have it." In an in depth phone interview graciously provided by Head Librarian Norma Jenkins, Ms. Jenkins discussed the acquisition, history, content and importance of the documents. She noted that the lot contained the entire incoming business correspondence of the T. G. Hawkes Glass Co. (of Corning) for the 1880's, its "days of founding."



From the Forgett Collection archival material.

In an event of less monetary consequence, but of major academic and historical importance to American glass scholarship, the Veronica Forgett Collection contained what is probably the largest single body of interrelated glasshouse archival material to be offered at auction. Housed in corrugated cardboard boxes, the vast quantity of documents covered more than five 8' tables in the preview. On this subject, Skinner's press release quoted Mrs. Forgett's son, Val J. Forgett:

fany against the Steuben Glass Works..."

In a post-sale interview, Ms. Norma P. H. Jenkins, Head Librarian of the Corning Museum of Glass, stated that prior to Mrs. Forgett's acquisition of the archival material, it had been stored for more than 50 years close to a coal-burning plant. This was apparent from the condition of the material as presented at the auction: much of it was covered with a fine black soot. Although the lot of documents was indeed important, Ms.

ence, and was visibly relieved when the bidding ceased. J. Garrison Stradling, the pre-eminent U.S. dealer in early American glass, porcelain and pottery, had discussed possible bidding eventualities with Corning, and commented that it was very fortunate that the reserve wasn't any higher, and that Corning's winning bid was close to their limit. Had the lot been bought in, the gallery and the Forgett heirs would have been confronted with the frequently difficult problem of post-sale negotiations. Additionally, the Corning Museum is the best of all possible homes for this important quantity of historical documenta-

its decade of founding. Ms. Jenkins said that this will yield insights into the interrelationship of U.S. and some foreign glasshouses of the era, and provide a minute detailing of business procedures. Eventually, it will provide a complete, three-dimensional picture of an American glass manufacturer in the 1880's.

Hawkes was founded in Corning, NY by Thomas G. Hawkes in 1880. In **Cut And Engraved Glass, 1771-1905**, Dorothy Daniel describes Thomas Hawkes as one of the most distinguished glassmen in America, and notes that he is a descendant of the Hawkes and Penrose families of Dudley, England, and Waterford, Ireland, and is of the sixth generation of glass

A partial view of the tremendous quantity of archival material purchased by the Corning Museum of Glass for \$27,500.

makers and cutters. Daniel also notes that the Hawkes Glass Co. is regarded as one of the foremost glasshouses in America. In 1903, Thomas and son Samuel, along with Stourbridge, England master artisan Frederick Carder, founded the Steuben Glass Works in Corning. Steuben operated as a subsidiary of Hawkes until 1918, when Steuben was purchased by the Corning Glass Co.

In addition to the correspondence, the archives contained many Hawkes design files and

previously unseen catalog pages. Ms. Jenkins stated that "the business correspondence will shed much new light on the relationship between Hawkes and other firms, and the catalog pages will permit the identification of many new designs." Also to be found in the archives were two letter books of outgoing correspondence of Hawkes, one of the 1880's, and one of the 1890's.

As stated by Mrs. Forgett's son, the documents were not ex-

(Continued on Page 73)



These plaster casts appear to be taken from finished cut glass, to be used as reference points for future designs. At the right are some uncut blanks.



Some pattern book pages from the Hawkes archival records.

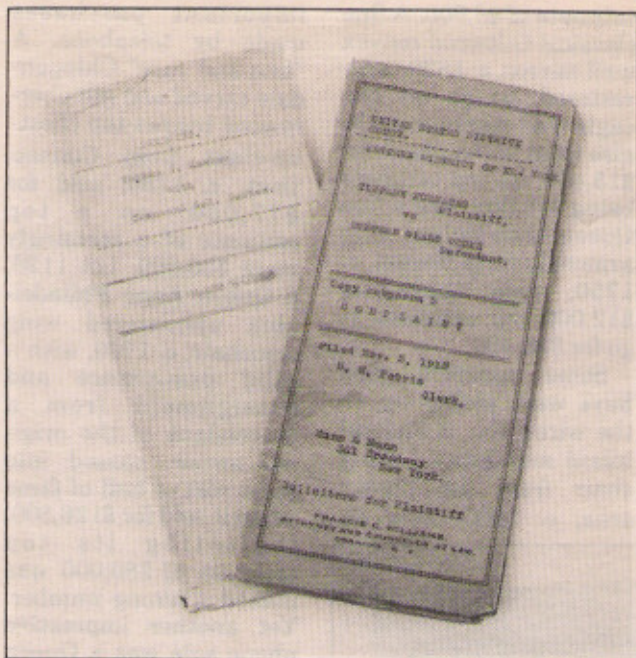
Archival Treasure (Continued from Page 51)

clusively of Hawkes origin. Norma Jenkins mentioned many pages of Sinclaire glass catalogs, and what may prove to be the complete design archives for Sinclaire. Hawkes had acquired three large scrapbooks of J. Hoare & Co., which moved to Corning 1873 and became one of the world's largest glass cutting shops. The scrapbooks are of particular interest in that they illustrate the relationship between the Hoare Co. and Gorham silverplate.

For readers not familiar with the Tiffany lawsuit against Steuben, at issue was Steuben's use of metallic oxides, the iridescence seen in Tif-

fany favrile and Steuben aurene. Frederick Carder held that Steuben achieved the effect by different means, and the suit was eventually withdrawn. While we didn't discuss the particulars of those documents or the Steuben incorporation and stock book, they were present in the lot. Ms. Jenkins further commented that the Corning Museum possesses an equivalent amount of archives for the Belgian glassworks of Val-Saint-Lambert, and the material from the Forgett Collection is probably the second largest amount to ever appear.

Funding for this im-



Right, the lawsuit Tiffany brought against Steuben and left, a Hawkes Agreement.

portant accession was provided by the Fellows of the Corning Museum. All monies generated by this prestigious group are used strictly for library acquisitions. Corning Fellow and noted collector/scholar J. Anthony Stout of Washington, DC said "I'm delighted to learn of this significant addition to Corning's collection of source material."

One point that Ms.

Jenkins wished to stress is that while the library is anxious to have the material available to researchers, the proper cleaning, conservation and cataloging of this large quantity of records will take at least a year. So, for those readers of a scholarly bent who are champng at the bit, be patient, and be grateful that such a clear window into 19th century American glass history has opened.

