

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS at the HILLTOWN GLASSHOUSE SITE [36BU332]

HILLTOWN TOWNSHIP, BUCKS COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

by:

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This essay describes the results of the 2006 archaeological investigations conducted by Hunter Research, Inc. at the Hilltown Glasshouse site 36Bu332. The work was conducted to ascertain the presence and integrity of archaeological remains at the 18th century glassworks complex located on a residential property along Minsi Trail Road (Old Bethlehem Road) in Hilltown Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. This project was jointly supported by a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the Goodfellow Fund. Other assistance was provided by the Historical Society of Hilltown Township and the Bucks County Historical Society.

In 2001 David B. Long recorded the site with the Pennsylvania Archaeological Site Survey as site 36Bu332. An archaeological survey was conducted for the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation by Archaeological and Historical Consultants along both sides of Minsi Trail from December 2001 to January 2002. This work was performed in advance of the replacement of the small bridge that carries Minsi Trail (S.R. 4019) over an unnamed tributary of the Morris Run. Testing south of the stream yielded over 3,000 historic artifacts. This assemblage was dominated by glass slag and vessel glass. The density of artifacts related to the glasshouse was substantially higher on the west side of Minsi Trail suggested the core of the site was to the west.

In the 2006 work, 4,664 artifacts were recovered from 39 (out of 41) shovel tests. The majority, 99.4% of artifacts can be directly related to the production of glass at the site. Just over half, 50.6% of the artifacts are related to the manufacturing process, which includes glass slag (1,376), crucibles (417), refractory shelf fragments (20), cullet (721), drips of glass (180), and threads (46). As expected at a glass manufacturing site, glass cullet or waste was plentiful, represented by 721 pieces. The crucible fragments recovered consisted of a kaolin-like coarse white and pink body with grog temper. The interior and exterior surfaces were “glazed” as a result of extremely high temperatures achieved inside the furnace. The fifteen tabular earthenware refractory shelf/bench fragments exhibited a layer of glaze-like glass on one side.

Numerous artifacts within the assemblage represented rectangular case/snuff bottles, flat or “round” octagonal bottles/flasks, and chestnut bottles. Four glass tube fragments were present, varying in size from 4 to 17 millimeters in diameter and ranging in color from green to pale green to colorless. A total of 419 or 8.98% of the materials are identified as pale green or colorless window pane glass. The window glass fragments recovered were small but of even thickness, suggesting they were manufactured using the cylinder method and the quantity of glass window pane fragments suggested the location of the glass cutting house nearby. A couple of pieces appear to be trim scraps and exhibit scoring and cut marks. Four pieces exhibit rounded edges that were formed when the cylinders were initially cut and flattened. These four curved edge fragments have projected diameters ranging between six and nine inches and may represent portions of un-flattened cylinders. The cylinder diameters are consistent with glass cylinders produced at the Wistarburgh Glassworks, which were between five and seven inches in diameter (Hunter Research, Inc. 2004:4-17).

References:

Archaeological and Historical Consultants, Inc. 2004 Phase I and II Archaeological Survey Report, S.R. 4019, Section 57M, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Prepared for Pennsylvania Department of Transportation Engineering District 6-0, King of Prussia, Pennsylvania.

Hunter Research, Inc. 2004 2001 Archaeological Investigations at the Wistarburgh Glassworks Site [28SA134], Alloway Township, Salem County, New Jersey. Prepared for Wheaton Museum of American Glass, Millville, New Jersey.