

The Jeannette Glass Study

Gray Fitzsimons



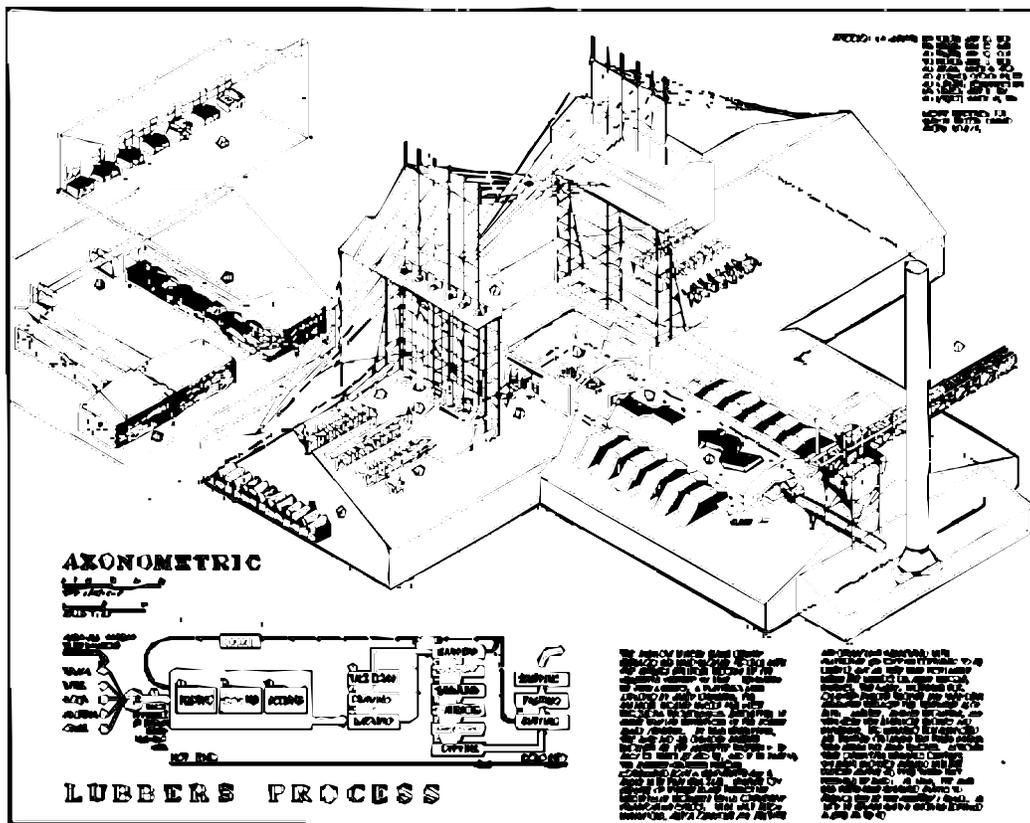
Columbe Hotel. Built in Jeannette ca. 1892. Visitors and glass workers rented rooms on the upper floors. The first floor contained a restaurant and tavern. In the 1930s the Flint glass workers union of the AFL occupied part of the first floor. Photo by Jet Lowe, 1988, HAER.

From its inception in the 1930s, HABS has produced hundreds of architectural drawings and numerous manuscripts on architectural history. Much of this work has been largely descriptive: the structural features and architectural ornaments were discussed in the histories and delineated in the drawings, the builder or architect was identified, and major alterations to the buildings were noted. With the formation of HAER in the late 1960s, this same approach to history was adopted. The emphasis remained primarily on the descriptive; engineering and industrial works were thoroughly described and a great deal of attention was focused on inventors, engineers, or industrialists. In recent years HABS/HAER has attempted to push its work beyond the simply descriptive and has begun to examine the material fabric in a larger social and cultural context. One such study carried out in 1990-91 reflects these concerns as well as an evolving methodology for carrying out HABS/HAER documentation.

Initiated after a comprehensive inventory of historic industrial sites was completed in southwestern Pennsylvania in 1989¹ the HABS/HAER documentation of the glass industry in Jeannette, PA, examines the technology of window glass production there, along with the glass workers and managers, and the community in

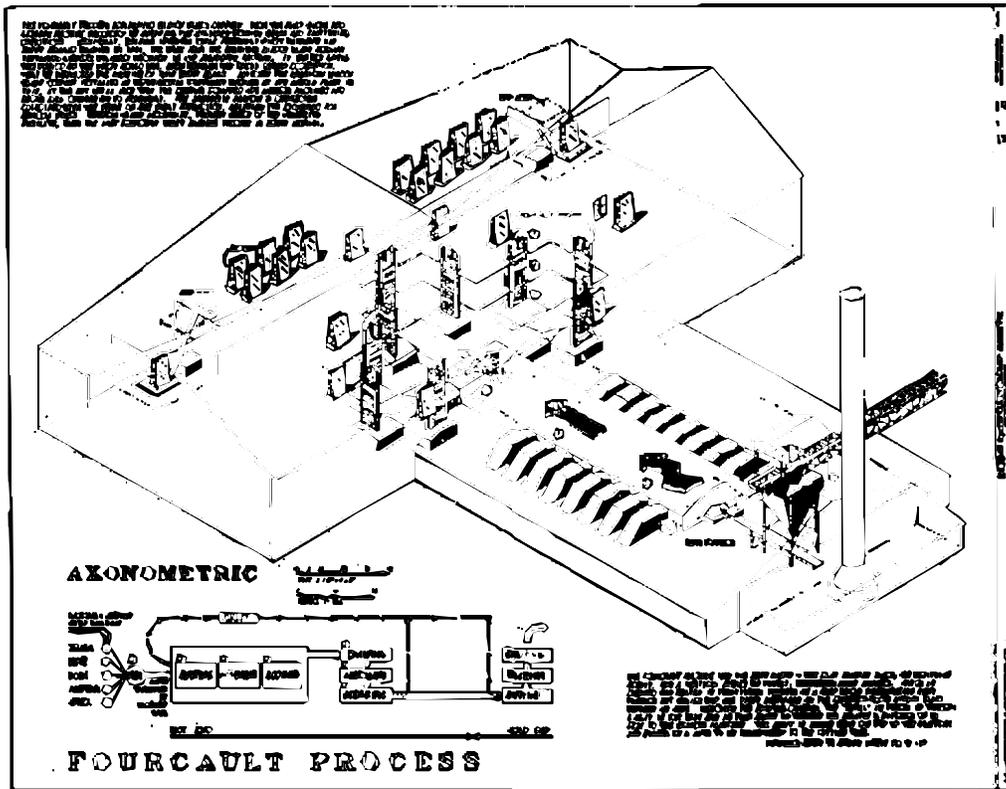
which they lived. A group of Pittsburgh glass makers, led by James Chambers and H. Sellers McKee, established Jeannette in 1889. Located about 30 miles east of Pittsburgh, the city and glass works were built on the gently rolling hills flanking Brush Creek. Chambers and McKee chose this site because of its proximity to natural gas fields and because the main line of the Pennsylvania railroad extended through this section of Westmoreland County. Their enterprise and those of other glass manufacturers were developed and expanded throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

By 1910 Jeannette was one of the largest window glass producers in the United States. Although bottles and tableware were also produced in Jeannette, the HABS/HAER study focuses largely on the window glass industry. It examines the window-making process and changes in factory production—from one requiring traditional artisan skills of melting, blowing, shaping, and finishing the glass, to one which mechanized the blowing process, and finally to one which adopted the Fourcault machine which largely mechanized the drawing, shaping, and finishing of the glass. These changes occurred roughly over a 30-year period, years which saw Jeannette's population grow from nearly 4,000 residents in 1900 to about 15,000 persons in 1930. The city's largest producer, the



Lubbers Cylinder Process for making window glass, developed in the early 1900s by John Lubbers of Jeannette, PA. Delineated by Sharon Krankel and Sanford Garner, 1992, HAER.

(Glass—continued on page 31)



Fourcault process for making window glass, patented by Belgian inventor Emile Fourcault in 1904. Installed at Jeannette in 1928. Delineated by Cecilie Trolle and Sanford Garner, 1992.

(Glass—continued from page 13)

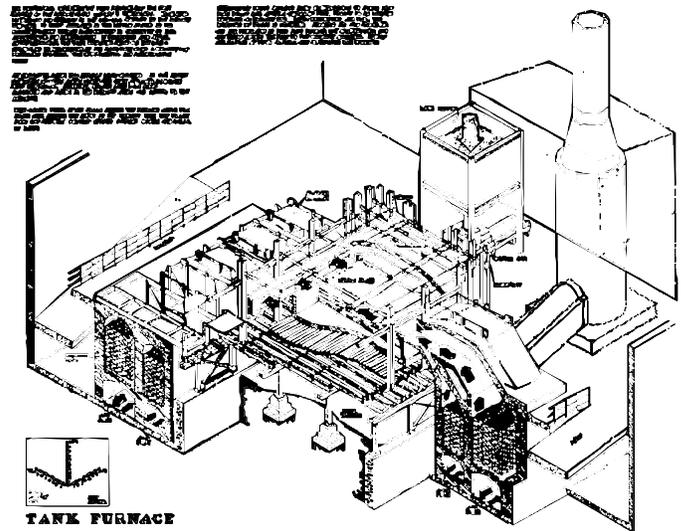
American Window Glass Company, employed as many as 1,500 workers during this time. The influx of workers into the enlarged and mechanized glass plants required more dwellings to house Jeannette's rising population. In addition to its residential buildings, the construction of new social halls and taverns reflected the city's building boom in the early 20th century. New waves of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe shaped the city's social, cultural, and political life. The HABS/HAER study looks at changes in Jeannette's resi-



Double House, 312-314 S. Sixth Street, built around 1900. A typical brick double house in Jeannette constructed by a building speculator and occupied by skilled glass workers and their families. Photo by Matte Maldre, 1989.

dential and commercial development as a result of this population growth, and in relation to changes in factory technology, management, and the workforce. Using census reports, tax records, deeds, maps, and a survey of existing buildings, this study shows how managers, merchants, and workers affected the physical development of the city. The social and cultural character of Jeannette's various neighborhoods is linked to class, workers' mobility, and ethnicity.

The final draft of the study will incorporate the technological and social history of Jeannette with the HABS/HAER drawings and photographs of the window glass factory and buildings in the city. Prepared under the direction of HAER Historian Dr. Richard J. O'Connor, the manuscript has had a number of contributors, including Gary Koll, Joseph Socki, and Laura Dreimeyer.



Tank Furnace. The first one in the U.S. was constructed at Jeannette in 1889. Delineated by Amy McGroarty, 1992.

¹ This comprehensive inventory was conducted in concert with America's Industrial Heritage Project, a National Park Service effort in southwestern Pennsylvania which aims to preserve and interpret significant cultural resources related to the region's historic industry and transportation.

Gray Fitzsimons, engineering historian for HAER, has served as HABS/HAER project manager for the division's multi-year documentation work in southwestern Pennsylvania.