

Pre-Electric Holiday & Festive Lighting - by Rick and Berny Baldwin (OH)

'Tis the season to admire and enjoy outdoor holiday lighting in your neighborhood and elsewhere...but in this article, we regress to bygone days before electric lighting...with a focus on the Victorian era. As in the present day, festive and holiday celebrations were adorned during this era by lavish and colorful lighting for the populace to enjoy...particularly in England, but also in other countries. Although the earliest lighting, by wax candles to celebrate the birth of Christ began in the mid-1600's particularly to adorn trees, in the late 1700's and into the Victorian era...glass tumblers, hung with wire bales, and referred to today as "Christmas lights", were introduced to replace earlier candle lighting. Patterns molded in the glass refracted and reflected the light produced.

In the latter 1700's, renowned glassmakers Baron Stiegel and Casper Wistar began producing hand-blown glass lamps, and their efforts were soon followed by glasshouses in Victorian England. During the first-half of the 1800's, molds were incorporated to form the vessels and impress patterns such as swirls, hobs or diamonds, and the resulting lamps typically employed a floating wick on top of a layer of oil, which resided on a layer of water, in the tumbler. Around



Illuminations at Vauxhall Garden in Victorian England

the early 1870's, pressed-glass technology was maturing, the glass tumblers were able to evolve in intricate forms and designs and become mass-produced for the populous, and such utilized votive candles as the light source. These colorful lamps were often marketed as "garden party" decorations, as well as becoming popular for the Christmas holidays.

The single-piece glass tumbler lamps were produced in every conceivable color, and they rapidly became popular as decorations for gardens, parks, bandstands, carriages and buildings for festive occasions. In 1858, Queen Victoria was greeted to a visit to Stoneleigh Abbey by thousands of blown lamps hung from the trees, gardens and the abbey's window and structural outlines. Later, both C.T. Brock and James Pain, who were both in the business of staging extravagant fireworks "illuminations" for festive events and exhibitions throughout Europe, had their own custom lamps pressed for their venues.

Also, thousands of the pressed lamps were used to enhance the grounds and gardens at the Vauxhall Gardens and the Crystal Palace. In the 1920's, the Bournemouth Gardens in England carried on the Victorian tradition for their festive illuminations with their own lamps. Many Victorian and Edwardian-era

parks and bandstands were also decorated with more permanent glass lamps, which were fueled by natural gas. The colored shades were fitted with a brass insert in their bases, which slipped over gas jets protruding from permanent gas manifolds. Numerous tinned wire frames in various patterns were also available to suspend lamps on for ground decorations.



During the latter part of the nineteenth and into the earlier twentieth century, special "figural" form lamps were made by the Eclipse Glass Works in England and marketed by the London-based "Hearn, Wright & Co." to commemorate Jubilee celebrations and included a bust of the Queen for her Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Other figural busts of British royalty are those of Edward VII, King George V and Queen Mary, the latter two being made for their 1910 coronation celebrations. Other figural lamp forms included fruits and nuts, tulips and numerous geometric patterns and several styles with cameos of royalty on their sides.



During the latter portion of the Victorian era, the use of candle illumination lamps for festive occasions was also gaining popularity in the U.S., as well as in France, Germany, Sweden and Australia, and glasshouses in these countries began offering their own unique varieties. Several variants of a "lantern-shaped" lamp form became available in the U.S in the 1890's, as well as a popular pressed glass "thousand eye" pattern in the earlier 1900's.



pattern in the earlier 1900's.

Kunst- u. Gartenbau-Ausstellung **Pain's** Grosse japanische Illumination. DÜSSELDORF 1904.

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A grouping of early blown, pontil-scarred Victorian lamps



A grouping of mass-produced, pressed Victorian lamps



With respect to collecting and displaying these antique "illumination" lamps, very few other glass collectible categories exist that can match the abundance of colors, patterns and unique forms that flourished during their era of production and popularity. As collectors, researchers and caretakers of antique bottles and insulators for over fifty years, the authors have been blessed to include this category in their realm of collecting interests to complement achieving their greatest joy -



that being forming and nurturing bonds of friendships with other collectors over the years! Introducing this category to our interests over forty years ago has resulted in acquiring new friendships from all over the world, as well as the enjoyment of engaging with other collector friends to create many educational exhibits for antique shows and other presentations over the years. In closing, we will always remember our friendships with our fellow collectors who are no longer with us.

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