

ENGLISH GLASS IMPORTS IN NEW YORK, 1770-1790

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AS a colonial possession of Great Britain, America was an important market for British manufactured goods, including glassware. Archeological fragments and newspaper advertisements have confirmed the predominance of English glass in colonial America, but the mechanics of the trade have not been well documented. Now deposited at the New-York Historical Society, however, are the business papers of Frederick Rhinelander (1743-1805), a leading glass merchant of New York City; they provide new insights into the importation of English glass in America during the complex Revolutionary period of the 1770s and 1780s and offer interesting evidence of period names and prices of English glass.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, glassware was imported and sold by general merchants who carried a wide range of goods from fabrics to foodstuffs. By 1765, however, some merchants began to specialize in glass and ceramic tablewares, probably because of increased demand as well as expanded production. One of the first such specialists in New York City was James Gilliland, who had an Earthen and Glass Ware House on Wall Street. His detailed advertisement for English imported glassware in the April 4, 1763, issue of the *New York Mercury* is an important record of the forms and patterns popular at the time.

Although Frederick Rhinelander by the early 1770s was clearly "in the China, Glass, Earthenware and Looking Glass way," as he said, his

advertisements were few and were not as specific as those of his chief competitors, James and Arthur Jarvis and George Ball.¹ The Pennsylvania glass manufacturer Henry William Stiegel had a warehouse in New York as well, and in 1773, when he advertised his products, he noted that "It is expected that all friends to American manufactures will do their utmost in promoting this."²

Rhinelander's rival merchants were friends to American independence if not friends to American manufacturers, leaving Rhinelander, as a Loyalist, in a position to dominate the glass and ceramics market in New York during the British military occupation of the city between September 15, 1776, and November 25, 1783.

Rhinelander's Tory leanings were evident in the years preceding the outbreak of war. He explained his political views to his agents overseas in the fall of 1775: "I confess I could not approve of every measure adopted by the Congress yet I profess to be as well attached [*sic*] to the interest of

1. Letter to Smith, Son & Russell, Birmingham, November 7, 1776; Letter and Order Book, Frederick Rhinelander Papers, New-York Historical Society, New York (hereafter FRP). The collection contains twenty-five volumes of Letter and Order Books, Day Books, Sales Books, Ledgers, Memo Books, and other miscellaneous volumes. See, for example, advertisement of James and Arthur Jarvis, *New York Mercury*, January 6, 1772, and the advertisement of George Ball, *New York Journal*, May 24, 1770.

2. *New York Mercury*, March 1, 1773.

America as any man . . . ever viewing the interest of it & *Great Britain* Inseparable no man whiching [wishing] a [reconciliation] more ardently." To his patriot customers in New England this translated as being "Unfriendly to the American cause," and he claimed his business declined in that region as a result. Moreover, they refused to pay him money they owed.³ In New York, the feelings against those with Loyalist leanings grew to dangerous proportions between the time of Rhineland's letter and Sir William Howe's capture of the seaport a year later. By June 1776, "hardly a Tory face was seen on the streets," according to one observer.⁴ Rhineland had left the city in March, only to be captured and imprisoned by New England patriots. He managed to escape and returned to New York soon after the British seized control. There he resumed his business immediately: the sale of a dozen wineglasses is recorded for September 24. Within two weeks Rhineland received the patronage of the Royal Governor, William Tryon.⁵

It has been estimated that the population of New York dropped from 20,000 to 5,000 at the time of the British takeover, but Loyalists who fled to New York from other colonies and the influx of British and Hessian troops swelled the population to 11,000 within six months. By the end of the war in 1783, there were probably 33,000 civilians and 10,000 British troops on the island of Manhattan.⁶

Conditions in the occupied and overcrowded city were far from ideal. "Stinks and ill smells" abounded, and one refugee described conditions in December 1778 as "truly deplorable and almost hopeless."⁷ Residents in the occupied city were unable to get food from the countryside and relied instead on shipments of beef and flour from Ireland and England. Prices, as a result, were high. "How people exist in this town," wrote Lord Carlisle to his wife in September 1778, "is to the greatest degree wonderful. All the necessaries of life," he said, "are dear beyond exception. Meat is from 15 to 17 pence a pound and everything else in proportion. . . . New York weekly bills come to

as much as the house account at Castle Howard when we have the most company."⁸

Rhineland served on the city vestry, a civilian board appointed by the military to deal with such things as relief of the poor, street maintenance, and housing. The last was an especially serious problem because about one-quarter of the city had been destroyed by fire soon after the British seized control. Lodging had to be found not only for Loyalist refugees from other colonies but also for many of the British troops.

Before the war much of Rhineland's business was directed toward the New England wholesale market, and his sales records show that many of his customers were Connecticut shopkeepers. He did conduct retail business as well from his New York store at the corner of Burling's Slip; among his clients was George Washington, who bought over £11 worth of ceramic goods in 1776.⁹ During the Revolution, Rhineland's business of necessity became heavily local and retail. When he placed an order with an English glassmaker early in 1778, he commented that it was "calculated for the present consumption in the retail way."¹⁰ Many of his purchasers were officers in the British

3. Letter to Vigor and Stevens, Bristol, October 4, 1775, Letter and Order Book, FRP.

4. Quoted in Oscar Theodore Barck, Jr., *New York City During the War for Independence*, Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law no. 357, New York: Columbia University Press, 1931, p. 43.

5. Rhineland related his tale of imprisonment and escape in a letter to Rowleson and Chorley, Liverpool, December 28, 1776, Letter and Order Book, FRP. Evidence of business resumption in Day Book, 1774-1777, FRP.

6. Mary Beth Norton, *The British-Americans: The Loyalist Exiles in England 1774-1789*, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1972, p. 32.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

8. Barck, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107.

9. "An Account of the Furniture Bot for His Excel. Genl. Washington," George Washington Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Reference courtesy of Susan G. Detweiler.

10. Letter to Vigor and Stevens, March 21, 1778, Letter and Order Book, FRP.

military, from Sir William Howe to a Capt. Stanley of the 17th Light Dragoons. Prominent Loyalists who filled their glass and ceramic needs at Rhineland's store included James Rivington, print-seller, and publisher of the *Royalist Gazette*.

Most of the glass Rhineland sold was manufactured in Bristol. His ceramic goods, mostly of Staffordshire origin, were shipped to him from Liverpool, and because the freight charge from there was less than from Bristol, in 1776 he placed a trial order for glass with Josiah Perrin, manager of the Bank Quay glasshouse at Warrington near Liverpool. "If your terms and the quality [*sic*] of the Goods will answer," he wrote, "I shall turn the whole of my trade this way." Rhineland added, "I have seen many Invoices of Glass Ware from Liverpool, but none equal to what I have from the Makers in Bristol."¹¹ Perrin's shipment proved no exception. As Rhineland reported to Vigor and Stevens, manufacturers at the Redcliff Banks glassworks in Bristol, "the fine glass" of Liverpool is "so much inferior to yours and so unsuitable to the present consumption that it will not do to have Glass from that market." Moreover, the Liverpool glass was expensive with dram bottles charged at two shillings sixpence per dozen instead of the usual eight pence.¹² In 1775 he had received a shipment of glass worth £163 from Richard Cannington & Co. of the Temple Gate glassworks in Bristol, but the bulk of his glass business was done with the firm of Vigor and Stevens. In 1780 Rhineland wrote a Stourbridge glassmaker about possible trade, but the New York merchant continued to patronize Vigor and Stevens, even though the Stourbridge manufacturer offered pint tumblers and cut glass of all forms at a lower cost.¹³

Rhineland purchased glassware in large quantities. His January 20, 1781, order, for example, enumerated 1,461 dozens of glasses—over 17,500 individual items. Nearly all the glasswares he imported were table forms; only rarely are bottles and window glass mentioned in Rhineland's orders or sales records.

Drinking vessels predominated, with tumblers

and wineglasses the most frequently mentioned forms. Rhineland sold tumblers of common flint and double flint qualities in sizes from half-gill (two ounces) to one quart. Decorated tumblers are listed only occasionally; in 1776 he sold a cut flint half-pint tumbler and in 1780 ones in a "cut diamond pattern." Half of the common, quart-size tumblers ordered in 1779 were to have covers. On one occasion he specified that the half-pint tumblers were to have handles. Mugs and cans, which presumably had handles, were also sent from Bristol in capacities from half-pint to quart. Rhineland asked for cans in both "upright" and "silver" shapes, terms which seem to describe cylindrical and baluster-shaped bodies.

One shipment received from Vigor and Stevens in August 1773 included over 250 dozen wineglasses of common and fine sorts. Other invoices list wines of common, flint, and best flint qualities. Rhineland sold to Governor Tryon wines as described as "best double flint."

Rhineland frequently ordered what he called "dwarf" wines. This term apparently refers to stem rather than bowl size, because in 1779 he asked that "the Wine Glasses to be all Short Shank'd or dwarf," and in another order wanted the "short shanks not to exceed 4 inches high." These glasses may have resembled the set of "Loyalist" glasses in the collection of the Wads-

11. Letter to Josiah Perrin, December 28, 1776, Letter and Order Book, FRP.

12. Letter to Vigor and Stevens, March 21, 1778, and Letter to Rowlnson and Chorley, March 21, 1778, Letter and Order Book, FRP.

13. Evidence of the Cannington & Co. purchase, February 27, 1775, Day Book, 1774-1777, p. 71. Rhineland wrote John Hill, Stourbridge, August 30, 1780, and mentioned it in a letter to Vigor and Stevens of the same date, Letter and Order Book, FRP. The prices quoted Rhineland by his English suppliers are in £ sterling; the prices at which Rhineland sold glass at his store are in New York currency, estimated to be half the value of the British. Because of that and the wartime inflation, no effort has been made here to determine Rhineland's profit levels.

worth Atheneum.¹⁴ Standing slightly over four inches high, these glasses are engraved with inscriptions of Loyalist interest and would have been most suitable for Rhinelander's clientele. However, they have opaque twist stems and are of the firing type of glass with thick feet; Rhinelander specified dwarf wines with cut shanks in addition to "common plain" ones. Only "some" of the 150 dozen of the latter were to have "stout & thick bottoms." Firing glasses per se do not appear in the Rhinelander records.

Rhineland ordered other short-stemmed glasses which he called "claret glasses." Although their stems could be cut and beaded or plain, they had to be *very* short—a point which he emphasized with a sketch. The drawing shows an almost rudimentary stem supporting a large bowl of hemispherical shape and set on a round foot. The sketch resembles what is usually called a rummer. Rhinelander did use the term "rummer" in other orders, but seems to have preferred the term "half-pint glass." Claret glasses were available in pint and half-pint sizes, and in 1782 he ordered them with square feet.

It is generally believed that the taste for enamel-twist stems declined in the 1770s and was superseded by cut styles. This is supported by the Rhinelander evidence, because enameled stems are mentioned only rarely. "Diamond" stems appear in the first Vigor and Stevens invoice of August 30, 1773, and all subsequent orders include "cut shanks." Some wineglass shanks were to be cut and beaded, a description which may refer to panel cutting heightened with vertical rows of tiny cut ovals or circles.

Rhineland consistently demanded wines of two bowl shapes, globe and lemon. Globe must describe those of hemispherical outline, while lemon bowls may be what is known today as ogee. A 1774 invoice of the Bank Quay glassworks, sent to Rhinelander as an indication of Liverpool prices, lists pear bowl wines—the period term for the so-called pan-top wines, but Rhinelander only ordered bowls of this form in 1782.

Bowl decoration is described simply as engraved

or flowered, though references to enameled wines may denote enamel-painted decoration of the Beilby type. "Common" wines must have been of relatively poor quality, but they were often decorated with engraved designs nonetheless. In 1775 Rhinelander made retail sales of a dozen engraved wines for both ten and eleven shillings, enameled wines for eleven shillings, and cut wines for eighteen shillings a dozen.

Rhineland bought "Spanish" wineglasses, an item which occurs in earlier colonial advertisements.¹⁵ The precise identification of the form of these glasses for drinking Spanish wine is not known. Other drinking vessels mentioned in the Rhinelander papers in connection with specific beverages are ale glasses, plain and engraved; beer glasses, engraved, and engraved and flowered; cider glasses; lemonade glasses; and punch glasses with handles. Two porter glasses were sold in 1777, the only record of the form that has yet been found in colonial sources.

In October 1776 and May 1778, Rhinelander sold pairs of "water goblets"—probably stemmed glasses from which water was drunk. There are many more references to "wine and water" glasses, items first listed in American records in 1762.¹⁶ Some historians have felt this was a term used to describe wine rinsers—a type of bowl that held water in which wineglasses were rinsed. That the "wine and water" glasses supplied by Vigor and Stevens were not rinsers, however, but were rather stemmed glasses is shown by the 1776 order for them which specifies lemon bowls of half-pint capacity and cut shanks. They are among the more expensive glasses in Rhineland-

14. Dwight P. Lanmon, comp. *Glass from Six Centuries: Wadsworth Atheneum*, Hartford, 1978, no. 59.

15. Advertisements of Cooper and Curtin, *The South Carolina Gazette*, November 20, 1752, and James Gilliland, *New York Mercury*, April 4, 1763.

16. Advertisement of George Ball, *New York Mercury*, May 17, 1762.

er's store. In 1774, for example, an engraved pair cost four shillings and sixpence while a cut pair brought six shillings. An "Elegant" pair sold in 1776 for £1 4s. These forms were probably intended to contain a mixture of wine and water for drinking. When Axel Klinkowström visited New York during his trip to this country in 1818–1820, he found the drinking water "poor and brackish" and observed that the residents "usually mixed [it] with some French brandy or gin to make it safe to drink."¹⁷

Decanters were popular items in the New York market of the Revolutionary era. Most of those listed in the Rhinelander papers were of half-pint, pint, or quart size, although in 1776 he ordered a few of half-gallon and gallon capacities, perhaps for a particular client. Before 1779 Rhinelander ordered decanters in only two shapes: champagne and sugar loaf. A 1755 invoice of London glass-cutter Thomas Betts includes "Neat Ice Champagne Quart Decanters," a reference that has been interpreted to mean those peculiar decanters with a pocket for ice.¹⁸ The first mention of champagne decanters in America occurs in the advertisement of James Gilliland placed in the April 4, 1763, issue of the *New York Mercury*: "gallon, three quarts, and quart Champagne decanters, cut and ground Madeira, Port, Claret and Mountain ditto." Here the listing of champagne decanters separately from decanters that are obviously engraved with the names of wines suggests the champagnes were set apart by their form. While these could well have been the ice-pocket type sold by Betts, it hardly seems possible that Rhinelander's market could have borne thirty-seven dozen of them. Champagne is also used in eighteenth-century records as a designation for green bottles, so perhaps Rhinelander's champagne decanters reflected their particular shape.¹⁹

The sugar loaf styles were doubtless so named because of their resemblance to the loaf in which sugar was molded. In 1781 Rhinelander asked for some of the "new sugar loaf pattern," indicating that the tapered style had been further refined. The rest of his decanter order on that occasion

was for barrel-shaped examples, a type of decanter first advertised in England by Christopher Haedy in 1775 as "cut on an entirely new pattern."²⁰ Other decanter forms first mentioned by Rhinelander in 1779 were of "oval or egg" shape.

In the Vigor and Stevens invoice of August 30, 1773, but in no later entries, the number of decanters that were to have stoppers is specified. Of sixty-nine dozen decanters, only thirty-nine and two-thirds dozen had stoppers. Of the thirty-seven dozen of the champagne sort, three dozen had "ground bottoms and cut stoppers." While this last may refer to cut decoration at the base of the decanter, it more probably means that the pontil marks were ground and polished away. These decanters were priced to Rhinelander by the dozen at three shillings and sixpence for the quart size and two shillings and tenpence for the pints. The other thirty-four dozen decanters were sold by weight at eightpence per pound.

Decanters, like the drinking vessels, were available plain, engraved, or cut. Two dozen decanters of the August 1773 invoice were to be "labell'd," that is, engraved with the name of the beverage they were to contain, a fashion which is documented to the 1750s. Quart-size ones cost Rhinelander four shillings and sixpence per dozen. In 1776 and 1778 he received "fine cut and sprig'd" decanters, probably with cut flutes at the base or neck and horizontal bands of short floral sprigs.

17. Axel Klinkowström's *America 1818–20*, trans. and ed. by Franklin D. Scott, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1952, p. 69.

18. Published in W. A. Thorpe, *A History of English and Irish Glass*, 2 vols., London: Medici Society, 1929, vol. 1, p. 308.

19. Advertised, for example, by Jonas Phillips, *Norwich Mercury*, May 8, 1762, quoted in Sheenah Smith, "Glass in 18th Century Norwich," *The Glass Circle* 2, eds. R. J. Charleston, Wendy Evans, and Ada Polak, Old Woking, Surrey: Unwin Bros., Ltd., p. 55.

20. *Bath Chronicle*, December 21, 1775, quoted in G. Bernard Hughes, *English Scottish & Irish Table Glass*, New York: Bramhall House, 1956, p. 262.

Rhinelanders had customers in 1779 for "fine Cut Quart Decanters very neat telescop'd," which may be interpreted as decanters step-cut with deep, horizontal bands. He also ordered "cut diamond pattern" ones, a style that had been available in New York in 1774 when Christopher Baucher advertised "best diamond cut" decanters from Bristol.²¹

Among the items requested from Vigor and Stevens in September 1780 were decanters "Cut with a star & beaded neat." Rhinelanders supplied an illustration of what he wanted, namely, an oval decanter with short cut flutes around the base, a faceted neck, a band of tiny cut "beads" around the body, and at least one large cut star. What is most interesting about the order is that a set of glassware was to be decorated to match: decanters of quart, pint, and half-pint sizes, pint crofts [carafes], half-pint glasses, pint, half-pint, and gill tumblers, lemonade cans, wines, and clarets. It would seem to be a special order, but unfortunately the corresponding sale of these items was not found.

The cruet bottles which Rhinelanders carried in his store probably followed the shapes of the decanters. Vigor and Stevens sent cruet frames with four and five bottles; the bottles were available plain, cut, engraved, and topped with silver. Some cruets were labeled in the manner of decanters. No colored cruets are listed in Rhinelanders's records. The rival importing firm of the Jarvises, however, offered "blue and white soy cruets & stands with gilt labels" for sale in 1772.

The only colored glasswares mentioned in Frederick Rhinelanders's orders were wash hand basins—finger bowls—and sugar bowls, both in blue and in purple, and milk jugs in blue. This is the first reference to purple glass in America that has been found. The blue and purple wash hand glasses Rhinelanders wanted in 1780 were to be "scollopd & beaded." Three dozen blue ones with plates and "cut starr'd, etc." were shipped two years later. Others, probably in colorless glass, were to be "cut with a star and hanging border the same as the last you sent."

Glass salts are not described in detail in the Rhinelanders records. An order for twenty dozen common ones of "low flatt shape, strong," indicates that practicality was the major requisite in this form. That shipment included only three dozen cut salts, low-priced, and three dozen best cut. A pair of engraved salts sold for one shilling and sixpence in December 1773. Rhinelanders also sold glass liners for silver saltcellars in both oval and round shapes.

Other glass tablewares in Rhinelanders's inventory were pickle plates, "long, but not engraved," mustard pots, and jelly glasses. Butter tubs ordered in 1779 were to have a "low flat shape." Tea canisters ordered in 1778 were to have "Screw'd tops." Rhinelanders purchased glass bowls of pint and quart sizes, some with engraving, in 1781 in addition to fine cut salad bowls. The market for the latter was poor; indeed, only one sale of a salad bowl is recorded in Rhinelanders's daybooks. When Rhinelanders unexpectedly received more salad bowls in his next shipment from Bristol, he wrote "we had all the former parcell still on hand (which from their high price are rendered unsaleable here) we should by no means have wished to received [*sic*] any more."²² New Yorkers had been very well supplied with glass salad bowls from 1763 when James Gilliland advertised "Dimond, moulded and threaded" ones. Cut salads were among the products carried by George Ball and James and Arthur Jarvis; in 1775 Ball had some with stands.²³

Rhinelanders did only a small business in non-table glass. Among the few forms associated with lighting are the two large shades which he sold in 1779 for twenty-four shillings apiece. Whether these were for wall lights or table candlesticks is

21. Supplement, *New York Gazette*, June 13, 1774.

22. Letter to Vigor and Stevens, January 25, 1782, Letter and Order Book, FRP.

23. Advertisement of George Ball, *Rivington's New York Gazetteer*, July 27, 1775.

not known. He received bird pots and fountains in 1779.

There are a few sales of bottles recorded. One hamper of quart-size bottles sold retail for £2 10s. in 1774. In 1779 Rhinelander ordered white (colorless) square bottles for canteens. Several physicians bought green glass vials from Rhinelander in half-ounce to four-ounce capacity. Two gross (288) vials cost Dr. Townsend £2 in 1775. Other medical glassware sold at the Burling's Slip store were nipple shells and piped breast glasses.

Conducting an importing business during the Revolutionary War was not without difficulties. There was always fear and uncertainty as to the receipt of orders and safe shipment of goods. Rhinelander urged Vigor and Stevens in September 1779 to pack his glass in "good, strong Crates & in the best manner send them by the first Vessel that sails with Convoy without fail." This was not only a safety measure but an economic one as well, because Rhinelander added, "it makes such a saving in premium." Considering the risks, Rhinelander seems to have been very lucky. Only one loss at sea is recorded, when the *Dimsdale*, carrying a shipment of window glass from Vigor and Stevens, was captured by American privateers.²⁴

Rhinelander seems to have had fewer complaints with his glass shipments than with his earthenwares and china. Price was always a matter for discussion, however. In 1771 he received some glass from an unidentified manufacturer at a cost of about £316—"the Charge of which forbids any farther Connection." He went on to say that "the Cut glass is charged 3/sterling p. Doz. more then I have some from London. The Crat[ing] is to[o] high & the proof glasses . . . good for nothing & the whole is the worst order of any I ever saw with respect to Brackage [*sic*]." ²⁵ With Vigor and Stevens, however, he lodged few com-

plaints about quality. On one occasion he asked that the cruets be "neater than the last," and when a shipment was unpacked in 1780 Rhinelander found "the present Ware is not so white and clear as we have had from you before."²⁶ Their choice of patterns and styles apparently satisfied him. Although his customers were refugees and soldiers, they were fashion-conscious; Rhinelander often closed his orders with the note that "A few pieces of any New fashioned Glass Ware as patterns will always be acceptable." Occasionally he found Vigor and Stevens's prices high, as in the case of the salad bowls. He warned that the firm might not always be assured of the New York market. "A friend of ours in this business," Rhinelander wrote, "has got two Glass Cutters from England indented to him for three years, by which means he says his Cut Glass comes much lower than it can be imported. They are exceeding good Workmen. This branch of business will be lost to you at New York unless you can afford the Cut Glass something lower than usual, there is a great deal of Cut Glass used here at present."²⁷

Rhinelander's warning was slightly off-target. Although a tradition of independent glasscutting had indeed begun in America, it was not American glassmakers or decorators who posed the most serious threat to English business in the years following Independence, but rather the glass manufacturers of Germany and Bohemia who quickly established trade connections with the new republic.

24. Letters to Vigor and Stevens, September 21, 1779, and January 25, 1782, Letter and Order Book, FRP.

25. Letter to Henry Crugar, December 13, 1771, Day Book, 1774-1777, FRP.

26. Letter, August 30, 1780, Letter and Order Book, FRP.

27. Letter, May 17, 1778, Letter and Order Book, FRP.