

CORNING MUSEUM OF GLASS

MUSEUM HISTORY



Telling the Story of Glass for Over 60 Years

Conceived of as an educational institution and founded in 1951 by Corning Glass Works (now Corning Incorporated), the Museum has never been a showcase for the company or its products, but rather exists as a non-profit institution that preserves and expands the world's understanding of glass. The original concept of the Museum was developed by Arthur A. Houghton, Jr. (1906-1990) and his cousin Amory Houghton. Arthur Houghton developed the Museum's charter, composed the first board of trustees, and oversaw the Museum's first acquisitions, first hires and first exhibitions. He even developed the Museum's hotspot logo.

When the Museum opened to the public in 1951, it contained a significant collection of glass and glass-related books and documents: there were 2,000 objects, two staff members, and a research library, housed in a low, glass-walled building designed by Harrison & Abramowitz. This building was part of the for-profit Corning Glass Center complex, which also included an auditorium for the community, a Hall of Science showcasing the technology of glass, and

a windowed wall behind which guests could watch glassworking in the Steuben factory.

Under its first director, Thomas S. Buechner, the Museum continued to assemble a comprehensive collection of glass, and its library to acquire rare books related to the history of glassmaking.

Museum Underwater

In June of 1972, disaster struck as tropical storm Agnes emptied a week's worth of rain into the surrounding Chemung River Valley. The river overflowed its banks and poured five feet of floodwater into the Museum. When the waters receded, staff members found glass objects tumbled in their cases and crusted with mud, the library's books swollen with water. At the time, Buechner described the flood as "possibly the greatest single catastrophe borne by an American museum."

Museum staff members were faced with the tremendous task of restoration: every glass object had to be meticulously cleaned and restored, while the library's contents had to be cleaned and dried page by page, even before being assessed for rebinding, restoration,

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or replacement. Conservators from many other museums came to Corning to help. On August 1, 1972, the Museum reopened with restoration work still underway.

Growth and Renovations

By 1978, the Museum had outgrown its space. Gunnar Birkerts designed a new addition, creating a flowing series of galleries with the library at their core, linked to the old building via light-filled, windowed ramps. With memories of tropical storm Agnes still fresh, the new galleries were raised high above flood level on concrete pillars. The new Museum opened to the public on May 28, 1980, exactly 29 years after its first opening.

In 1985, the Museum library was renamed the Leonard S. and Juliette K. Rakow Library in honor of Dr. and Mrs. Rakow, who gave generously to the library as well as bequeathing part of their glass collection to the Museum and endowing research grants and commissions.

By the early 1990's, The Corning Museum of Glass had once more outgrown its exhibition space, and increasing visitation put a strain on guest facilities. In 1996, the Museum embarked upon the first phase of a planned five-year, \$65 million transformation. The first element to be added was The Studio. This state-of-the-art teaching facility for glassblowing and coldworking opened for classes in 1996.

Architects Smith-Miller + Hawkinson designed an addition to the main Museum building, using glass wherever possible to convey the beauty and elegance of the material in the building itself. The Museum's renovation was completed in 2001, and included a new Sculpture Gallery (now the Contemporary Glass Gallery), Hot Glass Show demonstration stage, and a hands-on Innovation Center. A redesigned 18,000 square-foot GlassMarket, one of the largest Museum shops in the country, along with a large auditorium, filled the



entire first floor of the Museum. The Rakow Library was relocated to spacious new quarters across the Museum campus.

More than 60 years later, the Museum has grown into a collecting, exhibiting, teaching, and research facility. The Corning Museum of Glass is now home to the world's largest collection of glass, containing nearly 50,000 objects representing 3,500 years of glass history. The Museum and Library actively acquire materials, curate special exhibitions and conduct extensive research. The renovated facilities annually welcome more than 400,000 visitors from around the globe.

Over the past decade, the Museum's collection, programs, and global impact have grown significantly. The Museum is currently adding a 100,000-square-foot wing, designed by Thomas Phifer, to expand contemporary gallery and Hot Glass Show space. The Contemporary Art + Design Wing expansion will open on March 20, 2015.