

# THE MERIDEN GLASS INDUSTRY

*A Brief History*, by **Bruce Mitchell**, board member, **Museum of Connecticut Glass**, June 2014

Beginning around 1870 and extending into the 1980s, numerous firms in the central Connecticut city of Meriden manufactured wonderful glass products for the home.

Only one firm, however, the **Meriden Flint Glass Company** (1876-1888), appears to have actually operated a glass factory to produce glass. (Although, according to Diane Tobin in her book, "The Meriden Flint Glass Company An Abundance of Glass" © 2012, there is new evidence that a small and short-lived glass factory existed in the neighboring town of Wallingford around 1883.) While the Meriden Flint Glass Company produced glass and, like other Meriden companies, decorated glass by the various techniques of cutting, engraving and painting (enameling), all other Meriden firms only decorated glass using glass "blanks" purchased from glass factories such as the Meriden Flint Glass Company or other factories in America, England or continental Europe.

The established silver industry in Meriden provided the initial impetus for the glass industry with the need for glass objects as a portion of or related to its silver products. The demand for cut glass by the American consumer boomed following the cut glass exhibits at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, heralding the beginning of what has been termed the "Brilliant Period" of cut glass. A number of the Meriden glass firms opened just after the Centennial Exhibition around 1880 and focused on decorating heavy clear lead or flint glass with deep wheel cut designs, characteristic of the "Brilliant Period."

Notable among these highly regarded Meriden firms are **Parker & Casper**, **Bergen & Niland** (and related firms), **C. F. Monroe**, **Meriden Flint Glass Company**, **International Silver Company** (and related firms), and **Silver City Cut Glass Company**, **Aetna Cut Glass Company**, **Webster & Briggmann**, **H. C. Baldwin Cut Glass Shop**, **Hall & Callahan**, and **Helmschmied Mfg. Company**. Some companies also decorated glass either by painting (enameling) or wheel engraving designs onto the purchased glass blanks.

The **C. F. Monroe Company**, known for its beautiful cut glass, and even better known for its painted opal glass lines: **Wavecrest**, **Kelva** and **Nakara**. The Silver City Cut Glass Company, later called the **Silver City Glass Company**, decorated with both copper-wheel engraving and silver enameling. The ubiquitous silver decorated anniversary giftware made into the 1980s is a popular product of the Silver City Glass Company.

And let us not forget the wonderful decorated glass lamps produced in Meriden from about 1875 to 1940, including the **Bradley & Hubbard Mfg. Company**, **Handel and Company**, and **Edward Miller Lamp Company**. Handel, although primarily a lamp company, also produced a fine line of painted opal decorated ware.

