

The Traditional Art of Glassmaking Survives

Written by: **Mary Reisinger**

Glassmaking was once a vital part of the American economy, employing huge numbers of people not only to make the glass, but also to provide the raw materials used in its manufacture, to sell it, to ship it, and to use it for purposes such as containers or windows.

Early American glass furnaces burned wood or coal and were fanned by hand-powered bellows, but when natural gas was discovered, that became the fuel of choice. West Virginia, home to abundant natural gas deposits, became known for its glassblowing, with famous manufacturers such as Fenton and whole towns such as Weston devoted to the glass industry.

Though in recent decades glassmaking has declined throughout the United States, there are still some excellent practitioners operating in this region. Two of these are Scott Meyer of Davis, West Virginia, and Dwight Yoder, of Swanton, Maryland.

Scott Meyer/*Glass by Scott*

From a very young age, Scott Meyer was a maker. He drew the birthday cards he gave, and fashioned gifts by hand. He had art lessons from Pat Witt, now 96, a well-known painter in his hometown of Millville, New Jersey. When an uncle bought him a stained glass kit, Scott assembled it, but putting together pieces of glass paled in comparison to the glass making he had already seen at Wheaton Village. Wheaton Village, which showcases traditional culture and crafts including glass making at the historic Wheaton Glass factory, was near enough to Scott's home that he visited daily.

After a stint in the military, Scott was employed in construction and became adept at welding, mechanical repair, and building. He volunteered at the Wheaton Glass factory



A variety of Scott Meyer's handmade vases are displayed at his studio, "Glass by Scott," in Davis, West Virginia.

PHOTO BY MARY REISINGER

and had opportunities to learn from the glassblowers who worked there. One of the professionals, Joe Mattson, showed him some basics. Scott also experimented when the glassblowers were on break. Eventually, Scott was asked to substitute for an absent glassblower, and his career began. By 1991, he had enough experience to set up his own shop in rented space in Millville. Glassblowing tools are expensive, so Scott used his other skills to make about half of the equipment needed.

In 2003, he moved to West Virginia and worked as a glassblower. Scott went back to Millville in 2009; however, "once you live in West Virginia, you can't live anywhere else," so he made a five-year plan to return. In 2014, he started West Virginia American Art Glass in Weston, but Weston didn't attract enough customers, so he searched for a more suitable location. In 2019, he located a garage at



Above: Scott turns the flower-shaped bell of a hummingbird feeder.

Above right: Glass frequently goes back in the "glory hole" to maintain a workable temperature. Color is added to clear glass.

Inset: Clear glass is dipped or rolled in frit (shown here in cast iron pans) to add color.

Below: Scott especially enjoys making collectible marbles.

PHOTOS BY MARY REISINGER

14470 Appalachian Highway in Davis, West Virginia, near many tourist attractions. After renovating and equipping the building, he set up shop in 2020.

Scott's garage would be easy to miss or to mistake for a flea market or bike repair shop. However, a pleasant surprise awaits those who enter. Inside is a working glass studio. The creations of several potters and other artists are stocked in the shop. Scott is knowledgeable about a wide array of objects such as Schwinn bicycles and vintage photographs, and these also abound in his inventory, but Scott's real purpose is glass, and he makes glass pieces every day.

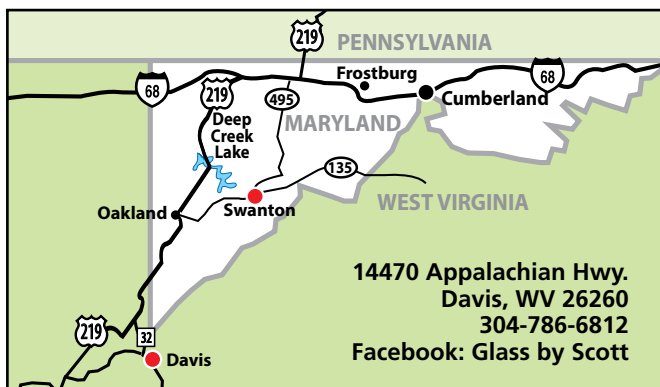
For Scott, creating with glass is play rather than work. The glass finds its own shape, forming the fluted rim of a vase or the curling tendrils of vine over pumpkins. He particularly admires the perfection of the glass sphere. He loves antique marbles, and the first thing he ever made was a marble. His marbles now sell as collectibles, yet Scott was for a long time reluctant to spoil the smooth sphere by signing his marbles. When customers insisted on it, he decided to



use part of his nickname—Old Marble Nut—so his signature is “OLD” and the year.

Scott has been asked to contribute to museum exhibits in Chicago and elsewhere. One piece he made—a ruby and cobalt blue vase with a feathered pattern—is in the Museum of American Glass in West Virginia. He also has marbles on display at the Museum of American Glass in Wheaton Village.

Scott feels a responsibility to his customers, whom he regards as his employers. He’s open 7 days a week, noon to 6 PM, and he’s always willing to provide a glassblowing demonstration, a wide array of other artists’ work, an ever-changing display of collectibles, and shelves of his own work, including vases, hummingbird feeders, and marbles.



Dwight Yoder/Keen and Bright

Dwight Yoder grew up in the Appalachians, with a father he describes as a “history nut.” He was steeped in the lore of the area and in family stories. His childhood was spent largely outdoors. He camped, constructed boats, fished, and hunted.

His first childhood attempt at building a canoe with baler twine, cherry saplings, and canvas never floated, but as an adult he became an expert canoe-maker. Unfortunately, his asthma was triggered by the dust of boat construction. A friend suggested he try glassblowing and Dwight discovered an affinity for it. Dwight entered an apprenticeship program at fine glass manufacturer Simon Pearce, in Mountain Lake Park, Maryland, and has worked there for over two decades, rising to production manager.

Along the way, Dwight worked on a harvest crew, got a GED, learned taxidermy, took some college business classes, and married Jenelle from Iowa, who was in Garrett County doing an internship. They had three children, and earning a living became a priority.

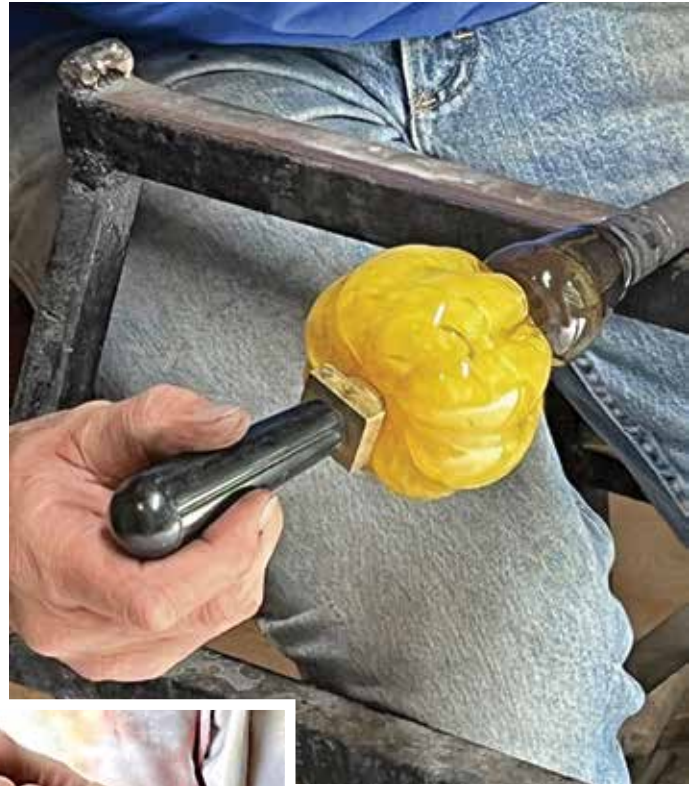
Dwight thinks of his life as metaphorically paddling a canoe; the pandemic brought him to consider that he was



Top: Dwight and Jenelle pose in the basement work room.

Bottom: The “glory hole” is fired up outside in the summer because of the heat it produces.

PHOTOS BY MARY REISINGER



near the other side of the body of water he had been on, and that it was time to find a new lake. His next venture turned out to be going part-time at Simon Pearce and starting his own glassmaking business, named Keen and Bright because of a Canadian children's song: "My paddle's keen and bright, flashing with silver..."

Making many of his own tools, Dwight set up shop in a small basement room. He keeps the "glory hole" (a partially open cylindrical furnace used to generate high temperatures) outside in the summer because of the heat it produces. His pieces can be found in some area shops: the Penn Alps Gift Shop and the High Country Creamery in Grantsville, the Art Gallery in Oakland, and the WV Highlands Artisans Gallery in Davis, West Virginia. Jenelle spends time at the Highlands Gallery required for membership. Dwight and Jenelle also take their wares to fairs and festivals such as Autumn Glory and the Native Plant Sale at New Germany.

Recently, with the aid of a grant from the Garrett County Arts Council, Dwight assembled portable equipment that allows him to demonstrate glass making at outdoor venues such as the Funky Blues Festival at the Garrett County Fairgrounds in August 2023, where he was a featured artisan.



Dwight puffs air into a pumpkin (top left) and custom stamps the bottom of the pumpkin (top right).

Inset: Close up of the Keen and Bright stamp.

Bottom right: Dwight applies the stem to the pumpkin.

PHOTOS BY MARY REISINGER

Glassmaking continued...



Finished pieces such as pumpkins and a basket of hollow glass floats are stored on the shelves in Dwight and Jenelle's "wareroom." PHOTOS BY MARY REISINGER



Dwight's glass pieces reflect his lifelong love of the natural world. He makes glass mushrooms, pumpkins, and flowers, and strives to replicate the natural form of a deer's antler. He envisions various ways to use the antlers—as handles on mugs or as chandeliers, for example. In addition, Dwight makes bowls and glasses and other functional glassware. One special option is for brides and grooms to pour together frit (colored bits) during their ceremony and then give the combination to Dwight who makes a custom piece using the frit and clear glass.

On their website, Dwight and Jenelle post pictures of some of the pieces he creates, which can be bought online. Dwight also writes reflective and compelling journal entries, in which we see how he and his family integrate faith, outdoor activities, family time, and work. It's a balance the couple strive to maintain and something they encourage others to find.

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