

# Curator's Choice

## *An Amelung Decanter?*

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This largely complete wheel-engraved decanter, found in a Baltimore privy, may have been a product of one of North America's most famous glass manufacturers. German immigrant John Frederick Amelung opened the New Bremen Glass Manufactory near Frederick, Maryland in 1785. At the time, the United States was a new nation anxious to promote industry. Encouraged in his endeavor by George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, Amelung brought 68 experienced German glass workers to staff the new factory (Lanmon and Palmer 1976). Within five years, Amelung employed between 400 and 500 workers and was producing a range of glass vessels, including "1/2 gill to quart tumblers, 1/2 to 1 quart Decanters... Wines, Goblets, Glass Cans with Handles, different sizes." (Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser 1788).

Unfortunately, Amelung's ambitious project did not prosper, prompting him in 1790 to seek financial assistance from Congress. His petition, however, failed to convince Congress and the New Bremen industry collapsed around 1795 (National Register 1972).

Today, Amelung glass is considered "the most refined and distinguished glass made in America until the 19th century (Corning 1963). Only a few authenticated pieces of Amelung glass are known today; institutions like Winterthur Museum and the Corning Museum of Glass own pieces of Amelung glass.

The closing of the New Bremen Glass Manufactory did not spell the end of Amelung's career in glassmaking. Moving to Baltimore in late 1796 or early 1797, he began an operation that produced container glass and flat glass. Although Amelung died in 1799, his son Frederick continued operating the business (Ruckert 1980:63). The company lasted less than three years before going bankrupt.



*Tentative reconstruction of the Amelung glasshouse, as suggested by archaeological excavations (from Lanmon and Palmer 1976).*

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*Journal of Glass Studies*  
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This wheel-engraved decanter would have been used to hold alcoholic beverages. The inside of the upper neck of the bottle has been ground to help secure the stopper, which was usually made from glass. Decanters can be dated by their body shapes and decoration. This particular decanter appears to have been made in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.



*Decanter discovered in a Baltimore privy filled around the time of the Civil War. Attribution to the Amelung New Bremen Factory is not certain, but it did produce similar decanters in the late 18th century.*



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Jefferson Patterson Park and Museum is part of the Maryland Historical Trust, an agency of the Maryland Department of Planning, Baltimore.

