

Curator's Choice

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“Wine makes every meal an occasion, every table more elegant, every day more civilized”: The Oxon Hill Wine Rinser

The eighteenth-century well at the Oxon Hill Manor Site (18PR175) yielded some spectacular and unusual artifacts: a leather saddle, gardener's shears, grass clippings (still green!) and what is currently the oldest archaeologically recovered condom in the United States. The glass vessel shown in Figure 1 is another of the unusual finds from this well, which was filled in the eighteenth century.

This three-inch tall vessel has been identified as a wine rinser. Wine rinsers or coolers were used to cleanse wine glasses between dinner wine courses. The diner would invert the wine glass into the rinser, which was partially filled with water. The Oxon Hill example is missing the two everted lips along the rim (Figure 2), where the diner would place the stem of the wine glass. By twirling the glass in the lip groove, the bowl of the glass rotates inside the rinser, washing away all traces of the previous wine (Figure 3).



Figure 2. A circa 1820 British example of a wine rinser. This vessel is just over 3.5" in height.

The Sevres Porcelain Factory produced decorated porcelain wine rinsers, initially as part of a table service for King Louis XV in the mid-1750s (Le Corbeiller and Roth 2000). This luxury item eventually made its way from the royal court to use by the gentry and eventually the middle classes.

Starting in the late seventeenth century, Oxon Hill Manor was home to four generations of the Addison family. The Addisons were “one of the most economically, socially, and politically prominent families of early Maryland” (McCarthy 2010:9). Captain John Addison, who owned the property between 1727 and 1764, was a Captain of the Militia, a Justice of the Provincial Court and a Delegate to the Provincial Assembly. Around 1710, the Addisons built a large (72 x 40 ft.) eight room brick manor house, standing promi-

nently along the banks of the Potomac River. The house symbolized the family's elite planter status and was an impressive entertainment space for this prominent family.

The well, filled with household trash during Captain John Addison's ownership of the property, contained ample evidence of the Addison family's penchant for entertaining. Chinese porcelain cups and saucers would have graced the tea table for an afternoon entertainment, while the over 9,000 fragments of wine and spirit bottles, twelve leaded crystal wine glasses, and a decanter tell of more alcohol-fueled engagements. In keeping with their elite status, the Addisons appeared to have been early adopters of the wine rinser. It is likely that many guests at their home encountered this vessel form for the first time.

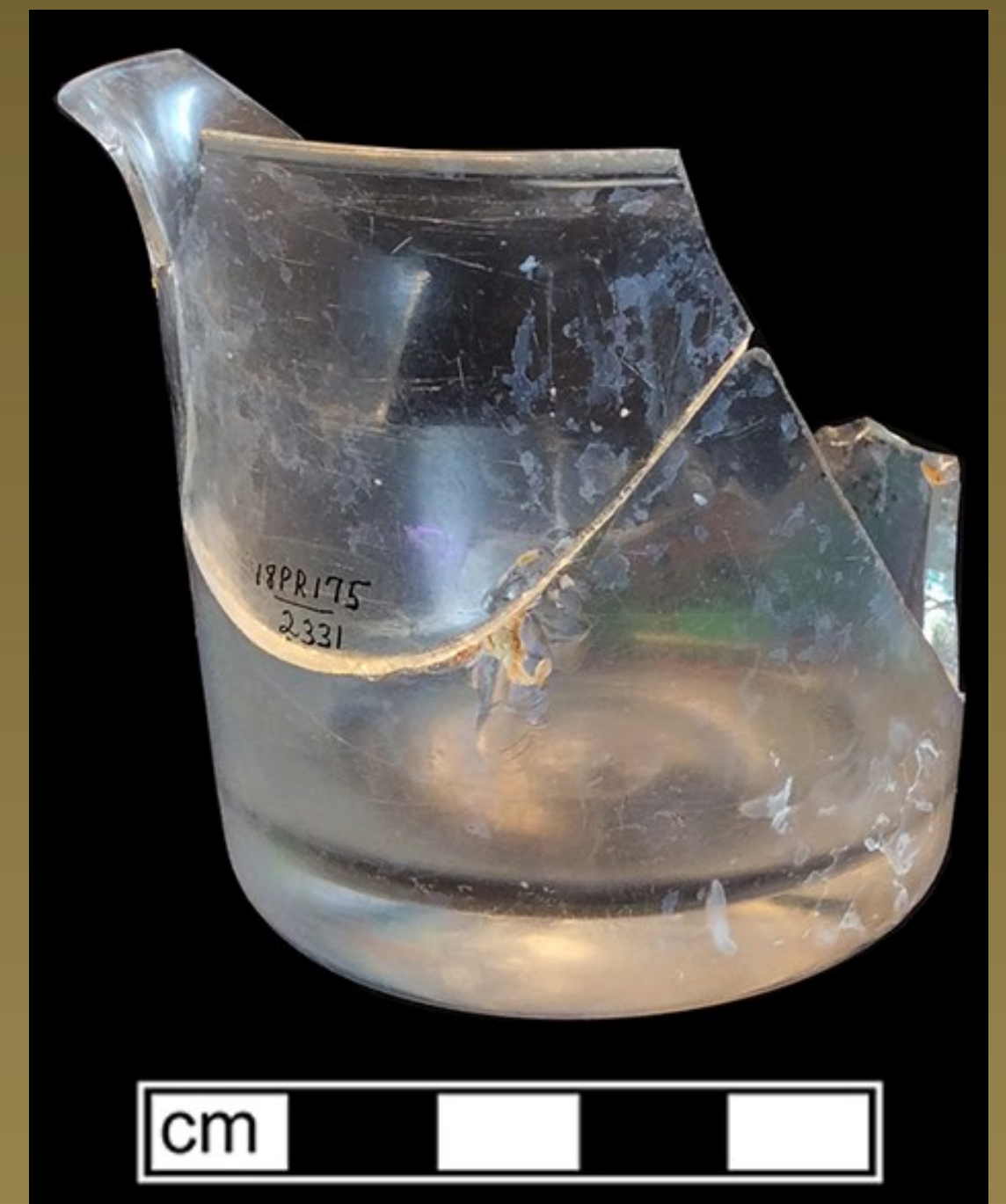


Figure 1. Wine rinser of colorless leaded glass, recovered from an 18th-century well context.



Figure 3. Replica wine rinsers sold at Mount Vernon. Photo courtesy of <https://shops.mountvernon.org/>.

The title of this Curator's Choice is a quote from André Simon, a French-born wine merchant who wrote prolifically about wine.

References Cited

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