

THE MAGAZINE OF THE GOLDEN GLOW OF CHRISTMAS PAST®

The GLOW



Lauscha

The Birthplace of Glass
Christmas Ornaments

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Color ornaments collage [is there a more detailed caption for this?]
Collection of Désirée van Everdingen



Lauscha

The Birthplace of the Thuringian Glass Industry & the Glass Christmas Tree Decoration

by Dr. Gerhard Greiner-Bär with Craig McManus

Translated from German by Craig McManus

Life with Glass

SINCE THE EMERGENCE of Lauscha as a glassmaking settlement at the end of the 16th century and during its development into a world-renowned glassmaking site, two well-known glassmaking families, Greiner and Müller, have played an important role.

On January 10, 1597, the master glassmakers Hans Greiner and Christoph Müller received an official concession from Duke Johann Casimir of Saxe-Coburg to operate a glassworks in Lauscha. The glassmaking settlement was built between 1590 and 1594, as seen in the Nuremberg *Pfinzing Atlas* (below).

In the first 150 years, the village glassworks in Lauscha produced mostly hollow glassware, such as drinking glasses and medical glassware, as well as flat glass panes for windows. The glass melting took place in a rectangular furnace with 12 ports, invented by Hans Greiner. These 12 ports were in great demand and were divided among the sons of Hans Greiner and Christoph Müller. The new Greiner glass melting furnace is mentioned in books by Agricola and Kunckel (authors of definitive texts on glassmaking) who note that the Greiner furnace had considerable energy advantages over the usual round melting furnaces used in Europe at that time.

ABOVE LEFT
A snowy view of Lauscha,
2014
Gerhard Greiner-Bär

ABOVE RIGHT
Handover of the land
concession to glass
masters Greiner and Müller
*Illustration by O. Fickert,
W. Greiner, E. Schötz*



Lauscha glass settlement

A COLOR MAP PLATE from the valuable Nuremberg *Pfinzing Atlas* of 1594 shows Lauscha with the preexisting glassworks settlement. It was drawn by the Nuremberg cartographer and councilor Paul Pfinzing. *Nuremberg State Archive*



Ortsglashütte (local glassworks in Lauscha), "The birthplace of the Thuringian glass industry"
Lauscha Museum für Glaskunst (Lauscha Museum of Glass Art)

GREINER'S FURNACE was a very efficient tool for glassblowers and its design was in use for a long time. Dr. Eberhard Tacke, in his book *325 Jahre Glasherstellung im Hils (325 Years of Glass Production in the Hills [of Saxony])* published in 1949, critiques the Greiner furnace stating, "The transition from the spherical melting furnaces to the elongated Greiner-style melting furnaces was made in the late 16th century. There was little additional change or improvement [of glass melting furnaces] other than the invention of modern tub furnaces by F. and W. Siemens in Dresden in 1856."

Having only 12 ports in the local glass furnace presented challenges for the growing Greiner and Müller families. When the sons of the two original glassmaking families could not all find work at the *Lauscha Dorfglashütte* (village glassworks), they soon founded their own subsidiary glassworks. One example of this is seen in 1616, when the Greiner sons Stephan and Hans, in search of work, relocated to Bischofsgrün where they rebuilt a burned-out former glassworks

in the village. This type of migration of descendants of the glassblowing families is how the entire glass industry of the southeastern Thuringian Forest and beyond was created. However, even with these additional family glassworks springing up around the region, the ever-growing population was too large to find employment in the existing glassworks. This problem was compounded in the second half of the 18th century, since wood stocks were steadily decreasing as land was being deforested. Wood was needed to fuel the furnaces and potash for glassmaking. When an area was devoid of trees, the glassmakers needed to relocate to survive and continue in business.

From in Front of the Furnace to at the Lamp

THE DILEMMA OF a shortage of space at local glassworks was tackled by the local glassmakers in different ways. Some glassblowers switched to working with metallurgical products, the production of which was not as complex as producing glass products like glass eyes and marbles. An even better solution was for glassblowers to start working from home instead of at a central glass furnace.

This change would later have great significance for Lauscha as it heralded the beginning of the Lauscha home industry in the middle of the 18th century, with glassblowers now working at home in front of the "lamp."



German lampworker
 Reproduced from [Diesing], *Die Glasschmelzkunst bey der Lampe* (1769)

Glass Beads & Early Glassware from Lauscha

LAUSCHA'S home glassblowing industry dates back to 1755 and is attributed to Johann Adam Greiner (1728–1802) who, during his sales trips in Europe, witnessed the manufacturing of hollow glass beads that were blown in homes at the lamp. He brought this knowledge back to Lauscha. Together with his son-in-law, glassmaker Johann David Greiner (1738–1808), he began blowing hollow glass beads at the lamp in Lauscha. In the following years, these glass beads became a major hit and export sensation for Lauscha and the surrounding villages. These early hollow glass beads were mirrored on the inside with a lead-tin or lead solution. These types of beads were often used by the millinery industry

Glass melting furnace designed by Hans Greiner
 Print by Hans W. Schmidt



CREATING these early glass beads at the lamp was not an easy task for the glassmakers as they were using less efficient types of fuel in those years like wine spirits, sebum, turnip oil, and later, petroleum. At the time, this was the only fuel available to power the glassblowers' lamps which all resulted in a cooler heat. It was not surprising then that only relatively small hollow beads could be produced over this cooler flame. Higher heat would have made the glass more elastic and enabled the glassblowers to blow larger objects. Unlike the high heat created in the local furnaces, families working from home using lamp flames to blow glass were limited by the cooler heat to producing smaller objects like beads. At the same time, some glassworkers continued producing larger, heavier items in the hot furnaces like drinking glasses and window glass.

Early Lauscha drinking glass from 1750-1800
Lauscha Museum of Glass Art



The home glass workshops got a technological boost around 1820, when a bellows for glassblowing was introduced to the local glassmakers by the glassblower Johann Georg Greiner-Stürmer (1744–1827). The bellows allowed a continuous flow of air to the flame which aided combustion and increased the lamp's operating temperature. With this added piece of equipment, it was now possible for the Lauscha glassmakers to produce larger glass beads, glass toys, and other items of larger diameter. These new, larger glass beads were strung together in chains creating the first glass Christmas tree decorations.

A Family Affair

THE GLASSBLOWERS and their families lived in great poverty from the beginning. Their livelihood was only secured when all family members, from the father, mother, children, grandparents, and great-grandparents, were involved in the production of Christmas tree decorations.

A 15-hour workday was not uncommon. The men worked at the lamp, the women were responsible for the finishing (silvering, painting), and the children for the packaging. In addition, the women were still taking care of the family and were also responsible for transporting the finished goods to the publishing houses/dealers in Sonneberg. Until the construction of the railway line in 1886, women carried the goods over 12 miles to Sonneberg on what was called the *Lauschaer Glasbäserpfad* (Lauscha Glassblower's path). After the railway was completed, these shipments went from Lauscha to Sonneberg by train.



TOP Workshop Image: The family of Weschenfelder work on Christmas balls in their combined living room and workspace in the small village of Lauscha
 ABOVE A Lauscha "Messenger Woman" in 1926 carrying boxes of finished Christmas ornaments to the train station
Lauscha Museum of Glass Art

Women called "messenger women" took over the transport of the goods to the railway station.

A common sight in the workshops of glassblowers were bird cages with songbirds—an important component of every glassblower's room. They served as a reliable indicator of increased and dangerous concentration of the odorless luminous gas used for lampworking. The gas buildup could be a result of unburned gas components or even gas leaking through porous rubber hoses that fed the lamps. Low gas concentrations in rooms caused the birds to stop singing; they were life insurance for the whole family.



Marble scissors
Lauscha Museum of Glass Art

1910 ad from the Leipzig Fair for Elias Greiner Vettters Sohn Company
Gerhard Greiner-Bär

Marbles and Glass Toys

IN THE EARLY to mid-1800s, the glassblowers in Lauscha began creating children's toys from glass, marbles being one important line of these new toys. Lauscha glassmaker Johann Christoph Simon Greiner (1783–1851), who was known as "the Vetterle", began producing handmade glass marbles in 1848, with the goal of producing agate-like glass balls. For this purpose, he invented the legendary *Märbelschere* (marble scissors), which are still used by some artisans today. Greiner's invention was furthered by his half-brother, Elias Greiner Vettters Sohn, who built a glassworks for producing marbles in 1852 with his son, Septimius Greiner.

Glass marbles came into great demand after this, and in the following years, three more glassworks were built, and later another two glassworks were constructed, all producing glass marbles. In addition, some of these glassworks produced the basic materials necessary for the home industry—glass rods and glass tubes. Until World War I, Lauscha had the world monopoly on glass marbles. Subsequently, the development of semi-machine and machine-produced glass marbles began in the United States.

A Colorful Personality in Lauscha

ELIAS GREINER VETTTERS SOHN first trained as a glassmaker. After that he earned a living as, among other things, a porcelain painter. He gained experience during this time dealing with coloring agents for glass and porcelain painting. He used this knowledge to start manufacturing his own line of pigments and paints. In 1820, at the age of 27, he founded "Elias Greiner Vettters

Sohn," which manufactured these paints. He invented a special grinding device with which the colors could be finely rubbed. The paint business was extremely successful for Greiner, establishing his reputation for high-quality glass pigments far beyond Germany's borders. The saying "Greiner's colors are the best" was well-known at the time. The need for glass and porcelain colors in Thuringia was due to the increase in new porcelain manufacturers which was prompted by the invention of a new porcelain mixture in 1761 by Johann Gotthelf Greiner in Limbach (9+ miles from Lauscha). Elias Greiner Vettters Sohn died in 1865, and his son Septimus continued the business, which eventually entered into the production of glass Christmas ornaments which they produced for a very long time. This glassworks still exists today.

Early Christbaumschmuck

ONE OF THE MOST important glass developments in Lauscha and the surrounding region was without a doubt glass Christmas tree decorations or, as they say in German, *Christbaumschmuck*. In their heyday, Lauscha's Christmas ornaments captured the world's attention, along with the market share, becoming Lauscha's bestselling commodity. As mentioned earlier, until the introduction of the bellows in Lauscha around 1820, with which the burner flame could be continuously fed with combustible air, glassblowers in Germany were only able to produce small hollow glass beads and other small shapes up to approximately 10mm (0.393701 inch) using the primitive oil-powered lamp.



Sample card Elias Greiner Vettters Sohn 1884
Lauscha Museum of Glass Art

In their heyday, Lauscha's Christmas ornaments captured the world's attention, along with the market share, becoming Lauscha's bestselling commodity.

Bead Garland and Glass Icicles

SOMETIME DURING the early decades of the 1800s, glass-makers began stringing Lauscha's glass beads into chains and marketing them as the Christmas decorations we know today as "bead garland." This new product was marketed as Christmas decorations in conjunction with the newly created glass icicles. These two Lauscha creations represented the first commercial glass Christmas tree decorations. Over the next 20 to 30 years, further improvements in glassblowing technology (including the addition of the glassblowing bellows) made it possible to create larger beads, glass balls, and other shapes up to sizes from 40 to 50 mm (approximately 1½ to 2 inches).

The First Glass Christmas Ornaments

THE ORNAMENTS from this early period were mirrored on the inside by means of an aqueous lead-tin solution or an aqueous lead solution. The production of these early ornaments involved pouring liquid lead into glass balls and molded pieces, moving the silvering solution around with the turn of the glassblower's hand to distribute the solution. It is thought by some historians that this early silvering did not always adhere properly to the glass, resulting in a random (sometimes deliberate) dappled or streaked pattern of silvering. After the lead/tin or lead mixture dried, the glassblower or a family member would pour liquid paints or dyes into the ornament, filling the non-silvered areas with color.

Schacken and Early Free-Blown Ornaments

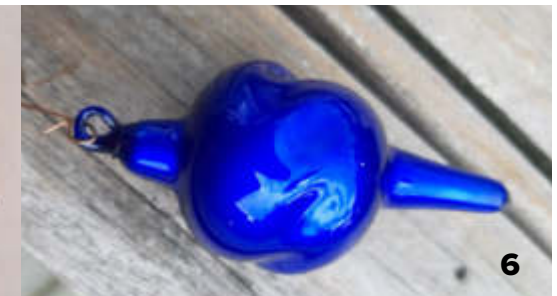
IN ADDITION to ornaments that were fully silvered on the inside, the early "silvering" method randomly created a type of ornament with a dappled mirrored appearance known as *Schacken*, the high-German form of the word *Schecken*, a term used by some collectors today to describe these early glass Christmas ornaments.

In the 1860 catalog of the Cuno & Otto Dressel trading house and export firm in Sonneberg one can see the typical style of Christmas ornaments made in Lauscha around the middle of the 19th century—simple ball shapes with a glass hanging hook and open pike at the bottom. The ornaments were offered by Dressel in three different sizes with some being made as *Schacken* and others being completely silvered. In addition to dealing in Lauscha glassware and ornaments, Dressel was also a major export firm for German dolls.

At the same time, the Greiner family and others living in *Bischofsgrün* were producing similar ornaments, with the main difference being that *Bischofsgrün's* ornaments were blown in clear silvered glass without color added, whereas Lauscha glassblowers used both clear silvered glass with or without colored wax (first) and then (later) used colored silvered glass or clear silvered glass colored with lacquers or dyes to create their ornaments. (Some earlier beads also had an interior coat of colored wax over the silvering.) These early larger free-blown ornaments were probably produced from the 1840s until molds came into use in the late 1860s. The exact timeframe is unknown. Some of these free-blown ornaments were twisted or indented.



- 1 Early Schacken Christmas ornaments silvered with lead/tin mixture
Lauscha Museum of Glass Art
- 2 Early bead garland
Berry Goldenbeld
- 3 Glass icicles made in Lauscha
Lauscha Museum of Glass Art
- 4 1860 catalog page of the Cuno & Otto Dressel trading house in Sonneberg showing early Lauscha Christmas ornaments
German Toy Museum Sonneberg
- 5, 6, 7 Early Lauscha glass ornaments circa 1840-1860s
Berry Goldenbeld





Green grape kugels made in Germany in the 1870s
Collection of Craig McManus



Early "Rosenkugel" changed to a Christmas ornament circa 1850s
Collection of Craig McManus



Early kugel ball with metal cap
Collection of Berry Goldenbeld

Kugels

ANOTHER important glass Christmas ornament was produced in Lauscha near the end of the Biedermeier period—the heavy glass balls that collectors today call “kugels.” In Germany these balls are referred to as *Biedermeierkugeln* or “balls from the Biedermeier period,” although they were produced long past that period and into the 20th century. Kugels are heavy and thick walled and were blown in the glass furnace rather than at the lamp, as were the Schacken pieces. Early kugels had pikes with flanges for hanging or even primitive metal caps. Another version of

this type of ornament was the Rosenkugel which was inverted on a stake or placed in a pedestal in a garden setting. Some Rosenkugeln have been refitted with corks and hanging devices over the years to be used as Christmas tree decorations, mainly for outside use.

Like the lighter Schacken ornaments, kugels were first silvered with a tin/lead mixture. Beginning in the late 1860s, embossed metal caps and hanging rings were added, and a newly developed silver nitrate solution replaced the old tin/lead mixture. This furnace-blown heavy type of glass Christmas ornament was also extensively produced in the Moselle region in northeastern France around the same time. More heavy kugel ornaments seem to have been produced in France than in Germany, and for a much longer period, with France continuing kugel production well into the 20th century. Kugels were both free blown into ball, pear, teardrop, and egg shapes and mold-blown into grapes and other shapes. Kugels came in a myriad of colors with balls and grapes being the most common types found today. Blowing kugels in a hot furnace allowed for larger pieces to be made. While kugels were very durable, they also weighted down the branches of a Christmas tree. Kugels slowly lost popularity as consumers favored the lighter and more detailed lamp-blown ornaments which came in a wider array of designs.

Things Heat up in Lauscha

A GREAT LEAP in the quality, quantity, and cost-effectiveness of molded glass produced over the flame was achieved in 1867, when a local gasworks was built and all houses and businesses were connected to a gas pipeline, making gas available as a resource for glassmakers in Lauscha. In addition, the new Bunsen burner type lamp came into use at this time, replacing the traditionally used oil lamp, thus giving glassmakers the ability to carefully control the flame to produce more concentrated heat and less light.



Bunsen burner used by glassblowers in Lauscha
Adobe Stock image



Many kugels, mostly German
Collection of Craig McManus



Early silvered glass ornaments and silvered glass beads
Collection of Désirée Van Everdingen

Every Glass Ornament Has a New Silver Lining

AS MENTIONED earlier, the first silvering mixture used did not always adhere properly to the interior of the glass. The early lead/tin mixture yielded a gray rather than silver mirroring effect. Until around 1860, the same methods were used for mirroring both Christmas ornaments and hollow glass beads. Thereafter, a new silver-plating process was gradually introduced based on German chemist Justus von Liebig's silvering solution first invented in 1835 and improved upon in 1856. Others also improved upon the silvering process during this time.

Around 1860 Dr. Hartwig Weißkopf, who lived in the Jizera Mountains, succeeded in using the first practical mirroring solution in hollow glass beads.

Lauscha adopted his method. Soon after, Louis Greiner and a Steinach pharmacist named Engelhardt developed an improved formula and modified the process for the production of Christmas tree decorations. The new silvering process developed by Greiner made it possible, in an uncomplicated way, to apply a wafer-thin layer of metallic silver mirror to glass objects of any shape.

It was these two major breakthroughs, a dependable source of gas to drive hot flames and create larger and thinner-walled ornaments, and Greiner's new silvering solution which adhered easily and flawlessly to the interiors of the ornaments, that were the impetus for Lauscha to become a major Christmas ornament producer.



A page showing various glass beads available from Lauscha in the Master Book of Sonneberg trading house Strathmann & Joachim from 1870
German Toy Museum Sonneberg

The Marketplace for Christmas Ornament Producers

LAUSCHA was a town of artisans making goods. If a family wanted to sell its wares, they needed to form relationships with dealers who represented larger retailers or with the trading houses in nearby Sonneberg, a town famous for its production of wooden toys and beautiful dolls. Sonneberg had been a major trading hub in Germany for generations. Glass Christmas tree decorations were still a novelty in the mid-1800s, and if there was anywhere these new products could gain the attention of buyers from around the world, it was Sonneberg.

Due to the commercial privileges given to trading houses, beginning in 1789, the sale and trade of wares like Christmas tree ornaments were reserved exclusively for the firms in Sonneberg. The families could not sell their goods directly to the public at retail nor could they export

them. Each family had to go through a trading house. These traders ordered the goods from the glassblowers for cash, and then marketed the glassware to domestic wholesale buyers and importers from other countries. Lauscha's handblown glass items were sold to these trading houses who combined the goods into their catalog offerings as can be seen in an 1870 catalog from Joachim Strathmann's trading house in Sonneberg showing glass beads made by various artisans.

The trading houses were located in Sonneberg, a little over 12 miles from Lauscha. In principle, the supply to the trade dealers was the responsibility of the glassblowers. For the glassblowers, one order could mean 14 to 15 hours' worth of work. Larger orders often forced the glassblowing families to work for two to three weeks straight. As a rule, the livelihood of the glassblower families depended on all members of the

family taking part in the production of Christmas tree decorations.

For many years the Lauscha glassmakers tried to circumvent the Sonneberg trading houses. Registered dealers called "factors" or agents, representing larger retailers, visited home "factories" to see samples of wares and purchase orders for cash. These dealers were usually not associated with the trading houses in Sonneberg. If a piece was too expensive, an agent might ask the glassblower to make it less detailed to reduce the cost. If the right price could not be reached, an agent might try several other glassblowers in town. Quantity discounts were usually not offered since each piece took the same amount of time to create whether someone ordered a small number or a large quantity. Large buyers like F. W. Woolworth and S. S. Kresge, eventually set up resident-purchasing offices in Sonneberg to bypass the trading houses' markups.



Frank Winfield Woolworth
Collection of Gerhard Greiner-Bär



Woolworth's first successful store in Lancaster, Pennsylvania (postcard)
Collection of Craig McManus

Woolworth and Lauscha— A Match Made in Heaven

1880 WAS a lucky year for who made Christmas tree decorations in Lauscha, when a big potential buyer from the United States, Frank W. Woolworth, was introduced to the glass ornaments of the region. It is unknown whether Woolworth first bought kugels or lighter-weight, lamp-blown ornaments from Lauscha. Both would have been in production at the time. After an initial small order sold out quickly from Woolworth's retail counters in his Lancaster, Pennsylvania, location, Woolworth placed a large order for the following year, beginning what would become a close business relationship between Lauscha glass Christmas decorations and the American retail market.

F. W. Woolworth sold Lauscha's glass ornaments individually at flat prices in its "five-and-dime stores." Woolworth's remained Lauscha's biggest customer for decades, as reported in several newspapers including the St. Louis Star and Times on September 27, 1912, which stated:

"...every inhabitant of the town of Lauscha, Germany, a community of more

than 2,000, is employed eight months of the year in the manufacture of Christmas tree ornaments exclusively for Woolworth stores."

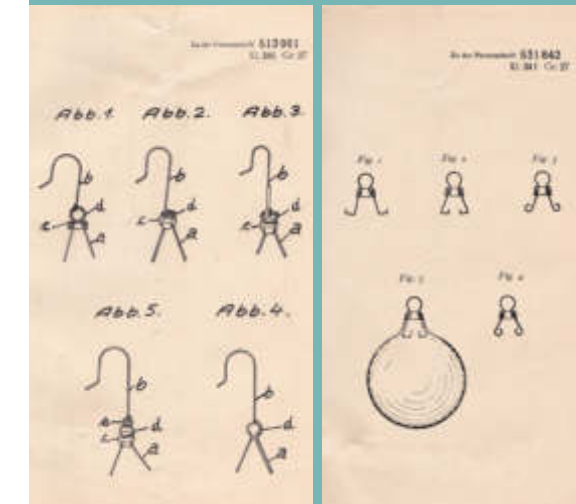
While this was most likely a public-relations-driven exaggeration, Woolworth was the man who put Lauscha on the map for Christmas ornaments and kept the town very busy for decades. Other mail order companies, such as Sears, Roebuck & Co, Newberry's, and Kresge & Co., all entered the Lauscha Christmas tree ornament business a short time later.

Until the outbreak of World War II, Lauscha practically had a world monopoly on the manufacture of Christmas tree decorations. Without the American wholesalers, buyers, and enthusiasts, the glass Christmas tree decorations from Lauscha would never have become a worldwide bestseller. Had it not been for the highly receptive American market, Lauscha's manufacturing industry would never have grown as it did, or produced the abundance of shapes, designs, and patterns of Christmas ornaments that were created by village glassblowers in the early to mid-20th century.



Letter from F. W. Woolworth & Co to Max Greiner-Bechert from 1930
Collection of Gerhard Greiner-Bär

Lauscha



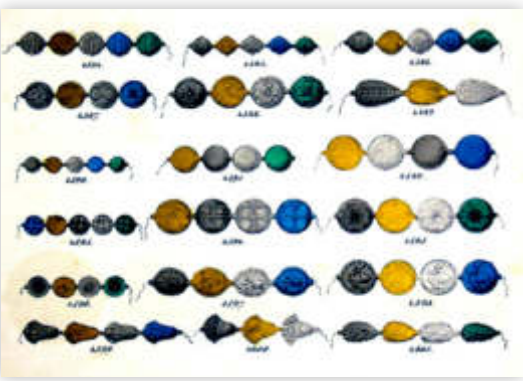
Patents for metal hanging caps manufactured by Max Greiner-Bechert's company
Gerhard Greiner-Bär

A Few Hang Ups

AS SHAPES, sizes, and colors of glass Christmas tree decorations changed over time, their hanging devices also changed and evolved. Originally hooks were part of the ornaments, fashioned from heated and twisted glass at the top pikes. As ornament production evolved, several small, mostly one-man businesses made and supplied metal accessories to glassblowers, such as the metal caps/hangers, candle holders, clamps for birds, etc. This is the reason so many antique German glass ornaments have the same caps, because only a few sources supplied all the metal caps to the Lauscha glassblowers. The manufacturing of metal hangers and accessories was founded in the shadow of the local Christmas tree decorations industry in Lauscha and the surrounding area. By far the largest company in this branch of manufacturing was the Max Greiner-Bechert Company, founded in 1875, and active in Christmas ornament accessory manufacturing until the turning point in the German Democratic Republic in 1990. The Greiner-Bechert company owned a number of patents for hanging devices and also supplied their products to the American market, including the Woolworth company. A recent search of the company's old archives turned up some wonderful historical information on their hanging devices, plus letters from Woolworth's sent to the company, including one in 1930 (left).



Sailboat ornament completely covered in mica flakes, with Dresden sail; the word "Germany" is stamped in ink on the back
Collection of Bob & Diane Kubicki



Sample card showing glass beads for sale
J. S. Lindner trading house, Sonneberg, 1831-1835
German Toy Museum Sonneberg



Wire-wrapped ornaments
Collection of Bob & Diane Kubicki



A family at work in Lauscha in 1901
Collection of Lauscha Museum of Glass Art

Glass Ornaments were a Reflection of the Times

THE MATERIAL OF glass blowing as a sculptural creation of art is glass, whose peculiarity lies in its transparency, in its colorfulness, and in its almost unlimited malleability. During its 200-year existence, the glass Christmas tree decoration saw many changes, some of which were very fashionable and are still in vogue today. While design changes of Lauscha glass ornaments reflected different art epochs, they were especially influenced by changing trends and styles associated with different political and social periods. Since Christmas tree decorations often reflect the political times, it allows one to study the development and conditions of the seasonal industry of ornament production throughout the years.

During the Biedermeier period (1815-1848) one finds Christmas tree decorations first in the form of hollow glass beads attached to chains, along with glass toys with hooks and twisted glass icicles followed by small blown glass apples, nuts, and birds. Various beads were offered by the Sonneberg trading house J. S. Lindner on a sample card in 1835.

Venetian dew covers a five-inch-tall blown-glass yellow rose with an attached fabric leaf. Venetian dew is made of countless tiny balls of glass which reflect light when caught at an angle. In the first photo, taken in daylight, there is no reflection. Second photo is with a flash at night in which all of the "dew" lights up!
Collection of Bob & Diane Kubicki



In the ensuing period of history and the time called Gründerzeit, a period of great economic upswing beginning in the 1840s and ending with the market crash in Germany and Austria in 1873, Germany competed internationally on a world-class level in the domains of science, technology, industry, and commerce. The German middle class also rapidly increased their standard of living and the ability to buy modern conveniences for themselves and their homes. During this period of great optimism, Christmas tree decorations developed as a product of the historical taste between the past and the modern, and led to the development of playful, effective, and, at the same time, refined figural tree decorations. The artistry of this time was partially expressed by the surface treatment of the forms with mica, Venetian dew, and indents to the glass with each process creating multi-reflecting surfaces. This was also the time when the use of thin refined metal wire was introduced to create "wire wrapped" ornaments.



Marbled end-of-day ornament
Collection of Melicent Sammis



End-of-Day ornaments featured in Josef Muller's 1904 catalog from Lauscha
Collection of Gerhard Greiner-Bär

End-of-Day Glass

ALSO, AROUND this time, towards the end of the 19th century, "end-of-day" ornaments were introduced to the Christmas market. According to Glow member Melicent Sammis, this type of ornament arose from the popularity of marbles, especially end-of-day style marbles. End-of-day is the current term for these pieces but is a misnomer as the design on the glass was created with paints, not by mixing batches of left-over glass together, as is how traditional end-of-day glass is produced. End-of-day ornaments were popular into the 20th century and came in all types of forms including the wonderful wire-wrapped pieces featured for sale in the 1904 catalog of Lauscha glassblower Josef Müller.



Rare, end-of-day painted bead garland from Lauscha, circa 1900-1910
Collection of Melicent Sammis

Fadenglas

FADENGLAS or "filament glass" is created when colored or white glass threads are melted to clear glass and then blown into a form or shape. This method of glassmaking design had been around for centuries but saw a renewed interest in the late 19th century. Lauscha produced beautiful Christmas ornaments in this style in various shapes including balls, pears, eggs, lamps, birds, and bells.



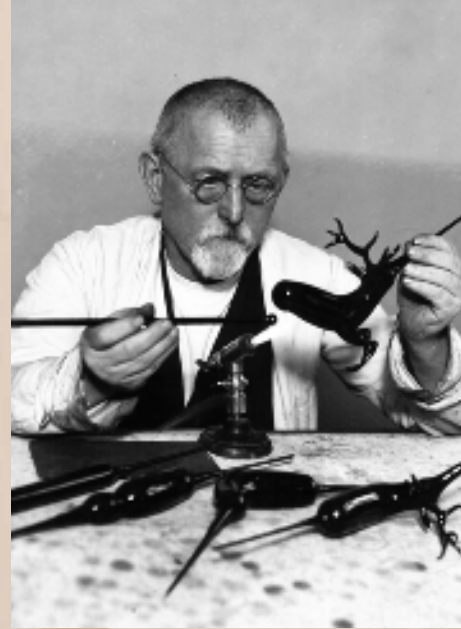
1 Fadenglas lamp ornament
Collection of Bob & Diane Kubicki
2 Fadenglas bell ornament
Collection of Lauscha Museum of Glass Art
3 Fadenglas bird perfume bottle
Collection of Bob & Diane Kubicki
4 Fadenglas egg with daisy kugel cap
Collection of Craig McManus
5 Grouping of Fadenglas ornaments
Collection of Lauscha Museum of Glass Art, photo by Jane Feuert

Art Glass creator Christian Eéhhorn-Sens around 1920
Collection of Lauscha Museum of Glass Art

Lauscha Art Glass

GLASS FIGURINES that collectors today call "Lauscha Art Glass" were another widely produced Lauscha product that are similar to Bimini glass. These whimsical creations included both hollow and solid glass representations of various figures such as animal forms, as well as artistically designed lamp-blown drinking vessels and vases, among other things. Some incorporate the Fadenglas technique as well.

The founding members of this Lauscha glass art, Christian Eichhorn-Sens (1871–1955) and Ernst Precht (1892–1969), played a decisive role here. During the 1930s these glass figures were extremely popular as inexpensive items in five-and-dime stores, with both Woolworth's and Kresge's importing large shipments of art glass animals including stags, stags with vases, elephants, giraffes, and other whimsical shapes during the decade. Erwin Müller-Blech was one of the producers of this type of glass ornament.





ABOVE LEFT
Julschmuck 1939
Collection of Lauscha Museum of Glass Art
ABOVE
German birds with spun glass tails,
circa 1910–1920
Collection of Désirée van Everdingen

The White Wave

IN THE FOLLOWING Jugendstil period, which corresponded to the period known as Art Nouveau (1895–1914), one sees changes in design reflecting the “White Wave” with an emphasis on silver decorations and silvered shapes. “White” trees of this time were decorated with silvered glass ornaments and silver garland. This clean, more elegant style of decoration was a reaction to the lavish and more heavily ornate style of decorating seen during the preceding Victorian period.

Early silvered glass ornaments
Collection of Désirée van Everdingen



Spun Glass Arrives on the Christmas Tree for the New Century

AROUND THE TURN of the 20th century, ornaments made from spun glass arrived in the marketplace. These ornaments were made from the same material as glass bird tails, with the glass fibers often arranged in sunburst patterns and topped with colorful chromolithograph scraps or Dresden stars (below).

Many collectors own at least one or two clip-on glass birds with glass fiber tails. These fibers were first created in 1843 by a young Lauscha glassblower named Friedrich Guido Greiner-Adam (1827-1890). The production of this glass fiber was made by heating a glass rod at the lamp so that a thin glass thread could be pulled off. This thread was then wound on a large wooden wheel. Angel or fairy hair was produced in a similar way, whereby a thin glass thread was pulled from two glass rods with different linear dimensions to create the curls (below right).

Both the Imperial period up to WWI and the period of National Socialism in Germany were marked by the production of politically shaped Christmas tree decorations. In the Imperial period, glass ornaments in the shape of weapons of all kinds were produced along with representations of the popular zeppelin airship (right). During the period of National Socialism, the Julschmuck ornaments with old Germanic motifs became popular (above left).

Glass fiber being made in Lauscha around 1910
Lauscha Museum of Glass Art

The Golden Age of Glass Ornaments

THE PERIOD BETWEEN the two World Wars was characterized above all by its artistically designed commercial Christmas tree decorations, which expressed a great joy of experimentation that was initiated by the artists teaching glass at the Lauscha vocational school. The 1920s into the 1930s is considered by many collectors to be the “Golden Age” of glass Christmas ornaments from Germany. A myriad of beautiful designs were created during this period including those made by Erwin Geyer of Lauscha. (See page 20 for an image from his 1936 trade catalog.)

Airships and zeppelins popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s
Collection of Heinz Lanzen



ABOVE
1950s–1960s German-made ornaments
Collection of Heinz Lanzen

LEFT
Page showing German-made ornaments styles from Deutscher Innen und Aussenhandel Kulturwaren catalog, 1952
Collection of Gerhard Greiner-Bär

Postwar Lauscha

ORNAMENT production slowly resumed after the Second World War. Glass production was ceased by government orders in 1943. After the war ended, there was a shortage of materials and glassworkers. Many former glassworkers were killed during the war; others left for Neustadt or Coburg, in Western Germany, between 1947 and 1951 before the wall went up. It took years for Lauscha’s glass industry to recover from the effects of World War II.

In the 1950s, the range of ornament designs consisted of old shapes with much stronger colors. This more vivid style settled down a bit in the 1960s and 1970s. During this period there was a reduction in the original variety of shapes that was partly a consequence of the prevailing thinking toward automation of production. Machine-created Christmas tree decorations became the norm. With this change to automation, free-blown glass tree decorations were only a small part of the manufacturing economy for many years. During the German Democratic Republic (GDR) period, about a third of Lauscha’s ornament production was sold to countries in the West, a third was sold domestically, and the last third, the cheaper, machine-made ornaments, were sold to the Soviet Bloc states.

Christmas tree decorations now followed the general fashion of the times; less Christian symbolism was used;

and ornaments soon became a more fashionable accessory. The colors were based on the trend of the textile industry. Christmas trees were now decorated in colors of blue, apricot, pink, rose, pastel rose, champagne, red, silver, and various other shades that were in vogue.

In the 1980s, when a wave of nostalgia reawakened interest in old Christmas decorating traditions, there was a rekindled desire for the old ornament forms and decorative themes. When political change hit the GDR in the late 20th century and was followed by German reunification in 1990, manufacturing and sales for Lauscha’s glassblowers changed.

None of the states in the Eastern Block had freely convertible currencies. The export and import of goods between members of the old Soviet Bloc were conducted on the basis of deliveries of goods, using a type of virtual currency called a “clearing ruble” where an exchange value was agreed upon by both parties. Before the fall of the Soviet Union and reunification, over 30% of the production of Christmas tree decorations was delivered to the Soviet Union. With the reunification of Germany and the introduction of the Deutsche Mark in East Germany, all exports of these Christmas ornaments abruptly stopped. Since the Soviet Union did not pay for goods in US dollars or D-Marks, no further sales could be made. The Lauscha Christmas ornament industry had lost a very important customer and would quickly need a replacement.

LUCKILY, THE fall of the Berlin Wall and the drawing back of the Iron Curtain revealed to the world that Lauscha’s brightly colored, shiny shapes of glass with their nostalgic Christmas magic still existed. A new market soon emerged for Lauscha glass, but under different circumstances. The new buyers wanted the old designs, not the newer, modern pieces. They were most interested in the high-quality ornaments and fantasy pieces that hailed from earlier times. It was a new chapter for the manufacturing of glass Christmas ornaments in Lauscha—one that borrowed heavily from Lauscha’s earlier creative artistic history.

Over the course of decades, a tradition of artistic style and quality had formed in Lauscha and the surrounding areas. During all these years of glass manufacturing, an astonishing perseverance was seen. Today, the local glassblowers are aware that they are continuing this special tradition. The artisans of Lauscha have Christmas tree ornament manufacturing in their blood. The forms they create, either inherited historical ones or newly developed designs, are detailed, lively, and precisely defined. The painting of these ornaments is characterized by care and accuracy. Each piece should be the same as the other, but at the same time it must show the uniqueness of this handcrafted work. From the mass-produced products of yesterday, these specialized handcrafted pieces have emerged as Lauscha’s most valuable product.

RIGHT
Die-cut scrap with two musical angels on a large spun glass fan, with gold Dresden paper “Merry Christmas” banner at the bottom. One angel is playing the violin, while the other is singing from a song book. This is a very elaborate spun glass ornament.
Collection of Bob & Diane Kubicki





1936 trade catalog, Erwin Geyer, Lauscha
Corning Museum of Glass



Extra Size Tree Ornaments.
Sampling of an 1899 catalog showing over-sized ornaments
Collection of Craig McManus



1880s indent ornament
Collection of Susanne Wanders-Freericks

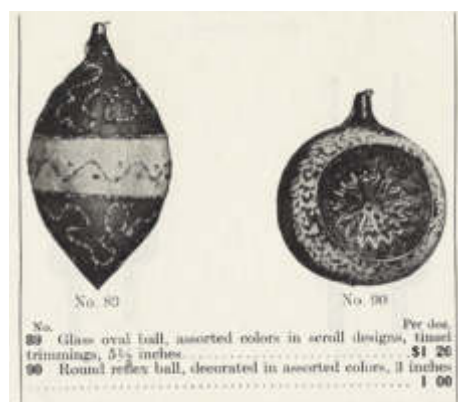
OLD PHOTOGRAPHS of decorated trees can also be an invaluable source of information for the glass Christmas ornament researcher. While ornaments appearing in dated photographs may have been made prior to the date that the picture was taken, it is also logical to assume they cannot be any newer than the dated photograph. In this glass negative image from the collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia, a Christmas tree was photographed, circa 1907, showing beautiful glass ornaments and bead garland, most likely imported from Lauscha, in the home of music teacher and amateur photographer Frank Berry (b. 1863), at his home on Righter Street in the Manayunk section of Philadelphia. By using the date of the glass negative, circa 1907, one may get a feeling as to what ornaments were popular at the time.

The biggest challenge in dating old ornaments stems from the fact that producers used molds until they wore out or until they tired of the piece. Molds therefore may have been used for years, and sometimes decades. This makes it very possible that a design produced in Lauscha in 1890 could still have been in production 1910 or 1920. While new molds were added as trends and tastes changed, old favorites tended to stick around and stay in production. Dating an ornament to a specific year, or even decade, is close to impossible. Dating an ornament to a span of years is much more feasible.



RIGHT
Christmas tree, interior, 1907
Home of photographer Frank Berry,
201 Righter Street, Manayunk,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Library Company of Philadelphia

BELOW
A. C. McClurg Co Catalog, 1908-1909
(detail) Collection of Craig McManus



See additional catalog pages on the back cover.

Dating Old Ornaments

SOME COLLECTORS reading this article may be wondering if it is possible to determine which glassblowing families created which ornaments in the past. Unfortunately, it is difficult, if not impossible, to assign certain old ornament designs to specific glassblowers. It is much easier to determine the producer with modern pieces, since there are more individual house styles and special techniques used by glassblowers on certain ornaments such as birds, bells, tree-toppers, and more unusual

ornaments. For antique ornaments, unless one can find a specific piece in an old glassblower's catalog, there is little chance of determining the manufacturer. Resources to identify older ornaments are scarce. Ornaments were made and sold in large batches to traders in Sonneberg who then combined everyone's goods into larger lots. It was a team effort with the emphasis on the artistry of the region, instead of the styles of individual glassmakers. Trading houses typically issued catalogs of their offerings each year, Christmas

ornaments included. The problem is that most of these old catalogs have not survived, leaving researchers and Christmas historians pretty much in the dark about what types of ornaments were produced when, during the second half of the 19th century. Beginning in the early 20th century things changed; more catalogs and advertising can be found showing Christmas ornaments produced in certain years, helping collectors, researchers, and historians see the stylistic changes that took place over the early decades of the 20th century.



TOP
Ornament molds on display
Collection of John Kardos

ABOVE
Molded bead garland in the "White Wave" style
Collection of Désirée van Everdingen



Ornament Molds

EACH GLASSBLOWER had his own set of molds for creating Christmas tree decorations. The glassblowers did not create their own molds; these were custom made by mold specialists. A glassblower's molds had their own specific shapes, sizes, and designs. These were well guarded as they were costly to produce, and many glassblowers did not have the capital to replace old molds. This is why molds were used for so many years, and what makes it so difficult to determine the production year/decade for old ornaments. Glassmakers also guarded the names of the artists/modelers who created their designs.

I cannot confirm or deny the stories that have been previously reported stating that the first ornament molds used in Lauscha were old chocolate or candy molds. I have found no information about this, but I have to doubt this because the Thuringian chocolate factories in Saalfeld and Pößneck were founded later than the production of early glass figural ornaments.

The first molds used in glassblowing in Lauscha were cut from slate. Strangely enough, with Lauscha surrounded by forests, the molds were not made from wood. There were a number of mold makers that were masters in slate cutting. The slate was quarried in the vicinity of Lauscha and also in Steinach, about three miles away from Lauscha. This was processed into writing slates (small early handheld blackboards used in schools by children) and slate pencils (the precursor to chalk for these early blackboards), with most of the slate being used in the construction of houses. Porcelain was produced in Lauscha and several other places in the vicinity. Later molds were then made from porcelain, with a special

Ceramic molds to produce ornaments
Collection of John Kardos

Ceramic molds to produce beads
Collection of John Kardos



mixture required for the creation of glassblowing molds. One of the best-known ceramic mold makers in Lauscha was Heinrich Wittmann, born in 1833.

During the early production of molded Christmas ornaments in Lauscha, wooden molds were first used but were eventually replaced by ceramic molds. The production of the molds and the special mixtures used to create them were closely guarded family secrets. Today, many new mold shapes are made of cast iron, but they are mostly made from a carbon material. The Lauscha glassblowers, however, still work primarily with ceramic molds.

Who was First?

THE INDIVIDUAL responsible for blowing and inventing the first Christmas tree ornament in Lauscha is a fact now lost with the passing of time. There are many who are considered fathers of the Christmas tree ornament industry in Lauscha, but the one who came up with the idea first or blew the first glass ornament is unknown. According to the Lauscha local chronicle of the glassblowers, Johann Christian Greiner Matzen-Sohn (1786–1849) can be regarded as one of the original fathers of the glass Christmas tree decoration.

Two local Christmas tree decoration manufacturers still producing today are the Greiner-Mai and Müller-Blech families. Their surnames evidence that both families are directly descended from the two founding fathers of Lauscha. A study of Lauscha genealogy and history shows that there are a great number of members of the mentioned families, Greiner and Müller. These families are among the most significant contributors to the history of glassmaking in Lauscha with descendants still manufacturing Christmas ornaments today.



The Tradition Continues

TO THIS DAY glassblowing of various forms can be found in the town of Lauscha and the surrounding area. Most important of all is the manufacture of Christmas tree ornaments. In Lauscha, glass Christmas tree decorations are considered world-renowned members in the pedigree of the glassmaking trade. The production of Christmas tree ornaments is right at home in many households in Lauscha. The people here have a personal connection with glass. For centuries, the townspeople have lived with the production and processing of glass. Glassblowing was and is a tradition for the majority of the local population. Should one generation of a family change to another profession, the next usually returned to working with glass. Perhaps it was this long love affair with glass, and inability of the town's people to turn away from this magical material, that made it possible to process the glass into all of these magical Christmas tree decorations.

Helping to keep the tradition and profession of glassblowing alive in Lauscha, the Lauscha Glass Vocational School, which has existed since 1871, ensures qualified training for future glassblowers with the help of experienced master glassblowers.

Celebrating Glassmaking in Lauscha

EACH YEAR in Lauscha a commemoration of the invention and development of glass Christmas tree



Students learning glassblowing at the *Berufsfachschule Glas* (Lauscha Vocational School for Glass), 1949
Lauscha Museum of Glass Art

decorations 200 years ago takes place. On the first day of Advent, the local children decorate small Christmas trees in the city center with glass Christmas decorations. This has become a beautiful ritual each year. This event is followed by the "Lauschaer Kugelmarkt" (Lauscha's version of a Christmas market like those in other German cities at Christmastime). This market, open for two weekends, is an exclusive and very special kind of Christmas market focusing on the glass decorations made famous by Lauscha, attracting countless visitors from all over Germany and abroad.

Glass ornaments are Lauscha's Christmas gift to the world. As you place your antique glass decorations on your tree this Christmas, or the next time you happen to gaze upon some old German ornaments for sale, remember the wonderful glassmaking families who toiled long days, weeks, and months in their homes, working over hot flames, silvering, and meticulously painting and assembling each piece, bringing these glass treasures to life. ❄️



Lauscha Today

Children decorating trees in 2016 and original Lauschaer Kugelmarkt, 2017
Gerhard Greiner-Bär



About the Author

LAUSCHA NATIVE

DR. GERHARD GREINER-BÄR was born in Lauscha in 1941 and still lives there today. He is a direct descendant of a co-founder of Lauscha, Hans Greiner (Schwabenhans), 14th generation. After studying mechanical engineering, silica technology, and business administration, he received his doctorate in mechanical engineering. He worked in the glass industry for over 50 years, mainly in research and development. In 1992 he founded his own company and worked as an entrepreneur for several years. In recent years he has been researching the history of his hometown of Lauscha and has published several books on it, including three volumes on the history of glass Christmas tree decorations.



Lauscha ornaments being sold today
Gerhard Greiner-Bär