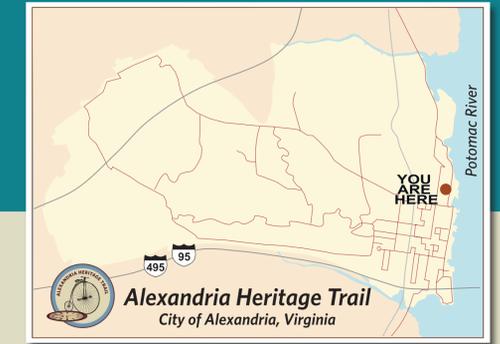


The Old Dominion Glass Company



The Old Dominion Glass Factory, photographed in 1907, was comprised of several buildings for production, storage, and shipping. It contained two furnaces where the glass was blown into their molds and three Lehr ovens where the bottles were finished. The structure was built of timber under the assumption that it would undergo frequent repairs and replacement. (*Souvenir Virginia Tercentennial of Historic Alexandria, Va., Past and Present*, Illustrated by John Wederburn, 1907, Sprouse Room Rare Book Collection, Kate Waller Barrett Branch Library, Alexandria Virginia).

Located on both sides of Montgomery Street between North Fairfax and North Lee Streets, the Old Dominion Glass Company opened its doors in 1901 to produce high quality soda, beer, and medicine bottles. Along with the Belle Pre Bottle Company, the Virginia Glass Company, and the Alexandria Glass Works, it became one of the biggest employers in the city.

While the Old Dominion Glass Company only hired white men as professional glassblowers, it also employed hundreds of black and white laborers who worked together to run the factory day and night. Many of the employed men, women, and children were from the Cross Canal community. Many of the employed children also attended the nearby segregated school, which only went up to sixth grade.

The influential sociologist and photographer, Lewis Wickes Hine, visited the Old Dominion Glass Factory as part of his documentation of child labor in 1911 in a quest for social reform, which he helped achieve when extensive labor laws were passed in the 1930s. Glass factories were particularly hazardous and brutal for children, who were hired as young as seven years old to work shifts for up to 12 or 16 hours for a fraction of the cost of adult labor.

The glassblowers used special tools to transfer molten glass from the furnace to the mold and blow it into shape. Workers who were considered unskilled moved raw materials, ran the furnaces, assisted the glass blowers, and transported finished products to be packaged and shipped out on the railroad, which passed the facility on North Lee Street.



"Some of the youngsters on day shift (next week on night shift) at Old Dominion Glass Co., Alexandria, Va. I counted 7 white boys and several colored boys that seemed to be under 14 years old. The youngest ones would not give names, but the following are a few: Frank Ellmore, 913 Gibbon St., apparently ten or eleven. Been there three months. Dannie Powell, 307 Columbus St., Henry O'Donnell, 1923 Duke St. Leslie Mason, 912 Wilke St. Location: Alexandria, Virginia" (Lewis Wickes Hine, June 1911, Library of Congress).



Artifacts from an excavation at the site of the Old Dominion Glass Factory. Glass bottles, tools, molds, and even raw material for glassmaking were all unearthed. Excavation revealed a wide variety of shapes, sizes, and styles (Alexandria Archaeology).

Fire was a constant threat, so the factory buildings were built of timber with the assumption that they would have to be repaired or replaced on a regular basis. Within the first year of business, the first of several fires occurred at the Old Dominion Glass Factory, likely caused by a gas line used for the furnaces. While the fire disrupted production and damaged sections of the building, the operation was soon up and running again.

The second major fire occurred in November 1920, destroying 1.4 million bottles. The main portion of the plant was saved, and the facility reopened again in 1922. Within three years, yet another fire, this one igniting at the Bryant Fertilizer Plant east of Lee Street, combined with a decline in business during the era of Prohibition, led to the demise of the Old Dominion Glass Company, which finally closed in 1925.



CITY OF ALEXANDRIA EST. 1749

