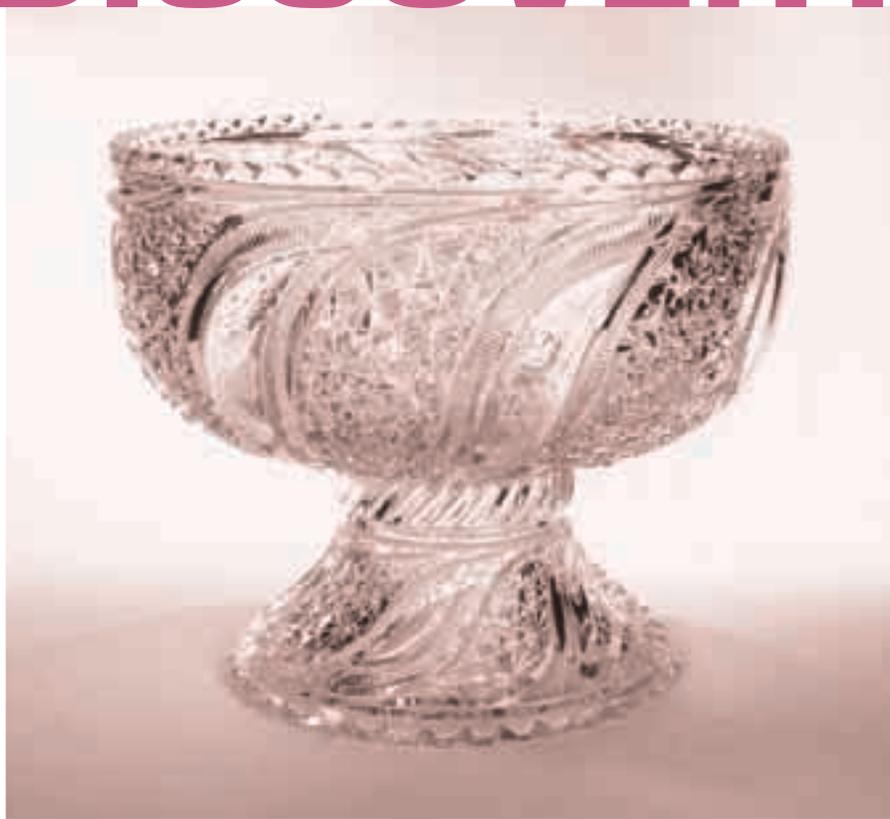


A Glittering **DISCOVERY**



PATTY DEAN

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A

chance occurrence has uncovered the history of a large cut-glass punch bowl displayed at the James J. Hill House historic site in St. Paul. Staff had long recognized the bowl, donated to MHS by a descendant of Hill, to be unusually high in quality. It was thought to be one of the many commemorative gifts Empire Builder Hill received throughout his life.

During the May 1996 meeting of the American Association of Museums in the Twin Cities, Jane Shadel Spillman, curator of American glass at the Corning Museum of Glass in Corning, New York, toured the Hill House. Drawn to the monumental size and intricate pattern of the brilliant-cut punch bowl on the dining-room sideboard, she recognized it as the work of T. G. Hawkes & Company of Corning.

Since this lucky lead, the Hill House staff learned from Spillman that the Hills' one-of-a-kind bowl was part of an exhibit that received a gold medal at the Paris Exposition of 1889. The event marked the first time an American glass manufacturer was so recognized in an international competition. As a result, Hawkes's technological and artistic accomplishments were celebrated extensively in the *New York Times* and the international press.

Further research by the Hill House staff in the Hill Family Papers at the James J. Hill Reference Library in St. Paul turned up an invoice, dated January 1892 and signed by Mrs. Mary T. Hill, for the bowl's purchase from Davis Collamore & Company, Ltd., a New York importer of china, glass, and cutlery. The sparkling object is clearly visible in a 1922 photograph of the dining room, where it would have been admired for beauty, not regularly used.

Some 13½ inches high and 18 inches in diameter, the bowl was free blown, not mold blown like most cut glass, by C. Dorflinger & Sons of White Mills, Pennsylvania. Weighing 33 pounds, it required the construction of a special annealing oven in which to regulate its cooling and prevent flaws and breaking. Later at Hawkes & Company, an artisan marked a design on the blank and then rough-cut the pattern

with tiny rotating disks, the most challenging part of the process. (Before the 1880s cutting was powered by a foot-treadle, which lacked the precision to produce the fine, many-faceted brilliant style.) After additional cutting, glass in this period was polished with wood wheels and then by hand. The result is a very warm, highly refractive surface.

Cut-glass objects became widely available to an appreciative middle-class audience after 1900, when more than 100 cutting houses around the country fashioned glittering vases, candy and pickle dishes, punch bowls, and other tableware from blanks supplied by glass makers. Minnesota boasted at least eight cut-glass companies by 1910, four in Minneapolis, three in Rochester, and one in St. Paul.

Its history revealed, this punch bowl has been loaned to the Corning Museum of Glass where it will shine in a temporary exhibition about Hawkes & Company.

Gift of Elizabeth L. Peyton, 1987.154.1. Photograph by Peter Latner, MHS.





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