In the 19th century, nearly all glass products were made by hand through a process of glassblowing. The glass making starts with washing and sifting the sand. Next, it was taken to the furnace room, where it was put into clay pots and slowly melted at a high temperature, producing molten glass, or "melt." When the glass was cool enough to be worked, the glass blowers were called (Carlisle 2000). At the Vermont Glass Factory, the glass would have used the cylinder method to make their glass (Basic Antiques).

The Vermont Glass Factory used the cylinder method to make their window glass. This method starts out with a long, blown glass cylinder, five to eight feet long and around a foot in diameter. The cylinders were made so large by being swung over a torch, with the worker leaning over a suspended platform, and then widened by a second worker. Next, the end cap of the cylinder was removed, as well as the pipe end, and allowed to settle to the form of a large rectangular piece of glass (Firth 2011). Annealing involves the slow cooling of a completed glass object in the furnace, so that it is not allowed to cool too quickly, which can result in easily breakable, highly strained glass (Pocket Dictionary). The cylinder method is illustrated in Figure 2.

Vermont’s glassmaking industry started in 1812 with the Vermont Glass Factory, a small window glass-making company built on the northern shore of Lake Dunmore in Salisbury, Vermont. (See Figure 1). It could easily be said that Vermont’s glassmaking history was set into motion by the War of 1812, when a trade embargo was placed on imported goods, blocking much of the New World’s access to such commodities as imported window glass (Heidler 1994). As Vermont developed, with a growing population and growing prosperity, board houses rapidly replaced simpler timber houses, and, with limited transportation (railroads had not yet arrived in Vermont), there was a steadily growing need for locally made window glass in the early 19th century, where there had been none before (Basic Antiques). Though promising at the start, Vermont’s first glassmaking factory attempt was quite short-lived—in 1849, industry gave way to summer recreation when the Lake Dunmore Hotel Company purchased the glass factory and all of its property (Basic Antiques).

Despite this fact, the glass making industry in 19th century Vermont provided an essential product for the inhabitants of the Champlain Valley while it was running, and many examples of the Vermont Glass Factory’s glass survive today in private and public collections.

The Cylinder Method

In the 19th century, nearly all glass products were made by hand through a process of glassblowing. This method starts out with a long, blown glass cylinder, five to eight feet long and around a foot in diameter. The cylinders were made so large by being swung over a torch, with the worker leaning over a suspended platform, and then widened by a second worker. Next, the end of the cylinder was removed, as well as the pipe end, and allowed to settle to the form of a large rectangular piece of glass (Firth 2011). Annealing involves the slow cooling of a completed glass object in the furnace, so that it is not allowed to cool too quickly, which can result in easily breakable, highly strained glass (Pocket Dictionary). The cylinder method is illustrated in Figure 2.

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