

By Brenda L. Holmes



Judson Wright (far left), Bill Malone (dark hat, in back) and Lawrence Coles (far right) eventually served as president of the company. Here they are preparing to set a pot in the furnace that can reach between 2600-2800 degrees Fahrenheit.

1880s

Kokomo Opalescent Glass

BEAUTIFUL REFLECTIONS FOR 132 YEARS

Historical context:

- Founded: 1888
- 45 employees
- Oldest manufacturer of hand-cast, rolled cathedral and opalescent glass in the United States and the oldest producer of opalescent glass in the world
- Factory has been in continuous operation at the same location in Kokomo since it started production

Top destinations:

- Artists who have used the company's glass include John LaFarge, Louis Comfort Tiffany and Frank Lloyd Wright; sought after for restorations
- Found at the Vatican, in all the Disney parks and in the U.S. Air Force Academy Cadet Chapel in Colorado Springs

New leadership:

- Jeff Shaw spent most of his career as an engineer. He was looking to purchase a business when he learned about KOG (and completed the deal in September 2017)
- "I saw what they were doing and some products. ... They had good growth potential. One of the things that was very attractive is how well diversified the company is in regard to customer base. ... And it's been such a part of this community for generations. That's just the whole other layer of what makes us special."

Through the years:

- October 6, 1886: Natural gas is discovered at a depth of 900 feet while drilling in a cornfield in Kokomo
- April 27, 1888: Charles Edward Henry arrives and immediately establishes a glass plant
- November 13, 1888: Production starts at Opalescent Glass Works; first sheet glass shipment three days later to Louis Tiffany
- Early 1889: Sample glass sent to the Paris Exposition (now called the World's Fair) wins a gold medal and secures \$50,000 in orders
- August 28, 1891: Kokomo businessmen Peter Hoss, William Blackledge and John Learner purchase company for \$5,310
- January 13, 1912: Name changes to Kokomo Opalescent Glass (KOG) Company
- 1973: The Op Shop opens, providing customers a retail space to purchase custom art glass
- 1998: The Hot Glass Studio is established, producing a wide range of quality hand-blown and hand-cast glass

The dome above the Maher Gallery at the Richard H. Driehaus Museum in Chicago was created in 1901 using glass from Kokomo Opalescent Glass (*Steve Hall photo for Hedrich Blessing, 2008; courtesy of the Richard H. Driehaus Museum*).

"He (Charles Edward Henry) was the first manufacturer west of the Appalachians. With all the expansion that was happening in the West, he kind of had a lock on that market for a number of years. Our glass is extremely well represented throughout the Midwest, West and Pacific Coast."

Jeff Shaw, owner/president
www.kog.com