

Advertisement

South Jersey sand more than just something at the seashore

Updated: Apr. 02, 2019, 6:31 p.m. | Published: Jul. 05, 2007, 5:00 p.m.



By [Gary Grossman](#)

By **Bill and Mary Kephart**

billkep31@snip.net

Whenever Jersey sand is mentioned immediately the shore pops into one's mind. However, Jersey sand was famous long before the sand and surf of the New Jersey shore.

Most people don't realize that the sand needed for the glass making industry that flourished from 1739 onward was dependent on South Jersey sand. The sand at the shore isn't useful for the glass industry because the grains have been eroded. Seashore sand grains have been rounded and made smooth from the action of the water. The best sand is produced from uniform grains of silica which are even and angular. The sand found in the interior of South Jersey does contain iron as a

contaminant. Iron in the sand used in the early glass industry caused the glass to have an aqua or bluish green color.

Advertisement

Rain water permeates the sand of interior South Jersey and helps to cleanse the sand by leaching out most of the contaminants making it very useful for glass making. That is why so many glass works flourished from 1739, through the 1800s and into the 1900s. Sand from South Jersey was even shipped to the Boston & Sandwich Glass

Company for their making of glass in New England. Boston & Sandwich glass is prized by collectors. How many collectors know that the glass they own may have been made with South Jersey sand?

Henry Shermer Garrison was a native of Stow Creek. After working on a coastal ship, teaching school, fishing, selling cattle and working on public roads, Garrison had saved enough money to organize the Garrison Sand Company in 1881. In 1890 his company merged with the Crystal Sand company of Cedarville, South Vineland and Maurice River. Garrison not only managed the sand properties he also invented sand machinery and built large plants utilizing his inventions. After 50 years in the sand business Henry Garrison sold his interests in 1912. Sand was big business then. There are several sand pits still operating today.



Breaking News Newsletter

We'll deliver breaking news directly to your inbox. As soon as we know, you'll know.

Ex: user@mail.com

Sign up now

Downer is a very small hamlet located in Monroe Township at the intersection of U.S. Route 40 and Fries (pronounced freeze) Mill Road. Driving past the intersection one may notice pits. Sand was once obtained from Downer for the Whitney Glass Works in Glassboro. The Whitneys owned the pits. Downer at one time was even known as Whitneyville.

Advertisement

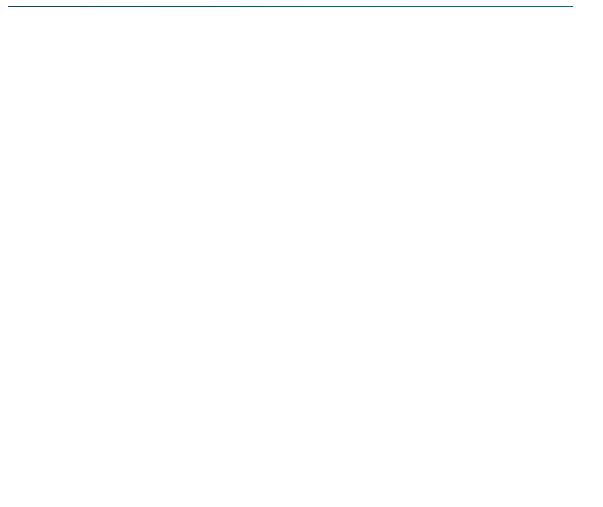
Under the sand lies gravel and the gravel from Downer was considered exceptional. The U.S. Steel Company purchased Downer gravel to use as a mold for iron pigs. Downer gravel was considered the best in holding its shape. When iron left the furnace in a molten state it was poured into the molds of gravel. The pieces of iron when cooled were called "pigs."

If you drive around Gloucester County you will notice many gravel pits. Farmers would sell the top soil first, then the sand and finally the gravel on their land.

Marl or greensand found in Gloucester County is part of a narrow strip that extends diagonally across New Jersey. This causes the soils found along that strip in the county to be fertile. Farmers dug the marl to use as fertilizer. When artificial fertilizers were manufactured in the early 1900s farmers no longer dug marl pits. Marl was also used as an ingredient in some of the early glass formulations. It produced an olive green colored glass. The only remaining marl pit being dug today is by the Inversand Company in Sewell. Many fossils have been found at this site. Today the marl is mainly used in the manufacture of water softeners. Many pits remain in Mantua, Harrison and Washington townships.

Whenever you hear Jersey sand mentioned remember the sand of South Jersey was used for much more than just the seashore.

Advertisement



Note to readers: if you purchase something through one of our affiliate links we may earn a commission.

Around the Web