

Wineglass Coolers—



Figure 1. Wineglass cooler, c. 1770-1800, H. 4" D. 4" Probably English. Free-blown of clear, colorless, lead glass in the form of a globular bowl with two tooled lips, applied pinched trellis and applied foot with ground pontil. Anonymous collector.

TECHNOLOGY & TERMINOLOGY: In the 17th and 18th centuries, the English preferred chilled wine—no mean feat in closed rooms with braziers, fires and candles blazing. Wineglasses made from flint glass, a form of lead glass, readily absorbed this radiant and ambient heat. A device, or vessel, was needed to cool the glasses. This led to the creation of the *monteith*, a large scalloped edged bowl that held ice water to cool the glasses. Developed in about 1683 the monteith was popular through the mid-18th century and often cooled upwards of 8 glasses. Made of silver, pewter, ceramic, or glass it was designed so that each scalloped depression would hold one glass. The bowl of the wine glass rested in the ice water, the stem rested on the scalloped edge, and the foot of the wineglass protruded from the monteith. Individual wineglass coolers made in glass became popular, particularly after their use at the coronation of George III in 1761. Frequently molded and/or cut with fluting, and generally of lead glass, the sides are usually straight and the bottoms flat. The glass was either clear or colored. Bristol was known for its cobalt blue glass. The Washingtons had a set of cobalt blue coolers, still extant, at Mount Vernon. A fragment of a cooler in a smoky colorless glass was found archaeologically at their Ferry Farm.

According to Hughes “Wineglass coolers were known to their contemporary users as water-glasses and until about 1790 it was customary for them to be accompanied by glass water-plates.”¹ Often sold *en suite* the coolers and finger bowls were similar in overall size and shape. However, the coolers bowls have two lips to support the inverted glass, whereas finger bowls are smooth brimmed. Butlers were instructed to place coolers to the right of each person and in the early 19th century: “hock and champagne glasses are to be placed in the cooler, two wineglasses upon the table”. After using the glasses they were returned to the cooler until they were needed for another round of wine—cooler bowls are now referred to as “rinsers”.

Although a common form on the more affluent dining tables of the second half of the 18th through the 19th centuries, little attention has been paid to individual wineglass coolers in 20th and 21st century literature. The information for this panel has primarily been gleaned from G. Bernard Hughes, *English, Scottish & Irish Table Glass*, Bramhall House, 1956. Herbert Jenkins’ classic *Irish Glass* illustrates three examples, but mislabels them as “fingerbowls”². Neither McKearin’s³, nor Lanmon’s,⁴ nor Palmer’s⁵ works mention them.

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