

**Michael
OWENS**
and the glass industry



Michael Owens, center, with the first Owens Bottle employees. (Owens-Illinois Glass Company Records, MSS-200, the Ward M. Canaday Center for Special Collections, University of Toledo)

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Quentin R. Skrabec, Jr.



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To my grandfather, Finnerty, and Our Lady of Czestochowa



Glassblower with a foot mold, 1908. (Library of Congress)

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Preface and Acknowledgments

When I began this book project, I was advised to spend my energies elsewhere. Several Toledo authors had tried over the years to write a biography of Michael Owens, only to find the paper trail too thin. First- and secondhand business and personal contacts have passed on by now. Michael Owens himself kept no records and used blackboards for his drawings. At Owens' request, no church records were kept of his many donations. Owens wanted no plaques to honor his philanthropy, and some of his many contributions at Rosary Cathedral remain unmarked. Most of his one-on-one cash donations were personal and given with the requirement that they not be revealed. Mike had told the local press that his family was off limits, and in those times such a request would be dutifully honored. In addition, a great deal of the available history related to his business opponents, who outlived him by decades. Some corporate records have been adjusted to support a collection of industrial myths perpetuated in the local press over the years as well. In the last several years, some new manuscripts have become available, such as the Paquette papers at the University of Toledo archives and the Thomas Hallenbeck manuscripts at the Lucas County Library. Kim Brownlee, of the University of Toledo, was critical in researching the corporate archives. The Hallenbeck papers include many handwritten notes of interviews with Owens' chief engineer, Richard LaFrance, previously unavailable to would-be biographers.

On the very first day of my research, I was blessed to meet Michael Ryan. He is a librarian at the Toledo Museum, and his friendly help was reassuring. Mike was a biographer's dream. The whole staff at the museum contributed to my research. Another helpful group was the staff at the Lucas County Library's history section. Greg Miller must be noted in particular for introducing me to the Hallenbeck manuscripts. I have worked with many local-history libraries over the years, but the professionals at the Lucas County Library are exceptional. The same customer service and professionalism was demonstrated at the University of Toledo archives. Without such help, this biography would not have been possible.

Being Owens' first biographer led me on many trips to Wheeling, Pittsburgh, and southern Michigan—all haunts of his. Owens left few footprints, but there were always a few pieces of new information. Homer Brickey, of the *Toledo Blade*, was an inspiration in his work to nominate Owens for the Inventors Hall of Fame. Hopefully, these new pieces of information in my book will bring this unique inventor to life for the reader.

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