

CARNIVAL GLASS

During the early 1900's, glass companies such as Tiffany and Stueben were producing iridescent glassware. Due to the high price of these pieces, they were often out of reach of the average household. Then, in late 1907, the Fenton Art Glass Company invented a process to produce iridescent wares inexpensively. This iridescent glass became a huge hit with the consumer of the day who used the decorative pieces to enlighten their dark Victorian décor. Soon other manufacturers began to produce similar iridescent wares under such names as Radiumware and Venetian Art Glass. Sold at Woolworths and "five and dimes", this new glassware reached its zenith during the teens although production continued through to 1930. Many shapes and patterns were made. Shapes included vases, water sets, punch sets, table sets, all sizes of plates and bowls, compotes and nappies. Manufacturers designed new patterns and invested in expensive moulds. Patterns were often naturalistic and included peacocks and other birds, lions, panthers, elk, dragons, grapes, berries and all types of floral designs. Geometric designs were also made and included hob stars, flutes, diamonds and sunbursts.

The process invented by Fenton started with molten glass gathered on a rod and dropped into a cast iron mould bottom. When enough glass was in the mould, the glass maker took a pair of shears and cut the glass allowing just the right amount of glass to fall into the mould. Where the cool shears touch the molten glass, the glass hardened resulting in "Shear marks" in the finished piece. The mould top was placed over the mould bottom and the two parts were pressed together distributing the glass throughout the mould. When the glass had sufficiently cooled, the mould was opened. The glass maker had to pick up the still hot glass with a clamp which typically attached to the base of the glass piece. Holding the glass by the clamp, the glassmaker could form the piece if desired by ruffling the edge of a bowl or by swinging a vase to give it more height. Once formed, the piece was reheated. Then a mixture of liquid metallic salts was sprayed onto the surface of the glass. The heat of the glass melted the salts and an iridescent layer was formed on the glass giving the surface the appearance of "oil on water". Different mixtures of salts and the craftsmanship of the glassmaker allowed for a wide range of beautiful glass pieces to be formed and iridized. Because of the process to make it, carnival glass is often described as iridescent moulded pattern glass.

When iridized glass was originally sold, manufacturers named their product based upon the color of both the glass and the iridescence. The color you see when looking at a piece of iridized glass can come from the color of the base glass (from clear crystal glass to deep amethyst glass) or the iridescent lustre on the glass (from satin marigold to electric blue) or even the interaction of the two. The first iridized glass was crystal with an orange/yellow iridescent spray applied which Northwood marketed as "Golden Iris", Imperial as "Rubigold" and Fenton as "Iridill". Additional colors followed such as: Royal Lustre, Alba Lustre, Pearl Iris, Azure, Emerald, Topaz, and Rosita Amber. The use of these names can be seen in trade journals and wholesale catalogs of the time period. However, with the growth of collecting in the 1950's and a then lack of reference material or availability of old publications, new color names were developed. Items originally called Golden Iris were now referred to as Marigold and Azure became Amethyst. As collecting grew, new colors were identified including Blue, Green, Ice Blue, Ice Green, White, Peach Opal, Red, and Aqua Opal. Also, collectors have developed names to describe the different iridescent applications on the glass to include satin, electric, emerald and pumpkin.

During the initial production period of 1907 to 1930, five main manufacturers produced the majority of iridized glass and included:

FENTON: The Fenton Art Glass Company was founded in 1905 in Martins Ferry, Ohio by brothers Frank and John Fenton. Initially, the company bought “blanks” from other manufacturers and then decorated them. In 1906, the company moved to Williamstown, West Virginia where a factory was built. The first glass was produced in January 1907. In late 1907, trade journals talked of iridescent glassware being sold by Fenton. In 1908, John Fenton left Fenton Art Glass to start Millersburg Glass. During the 1910's, Fenton developed over 150 patterns which were made in iridescent glass including Peacock and Grape, Stag and Holly and Dragon and Lotus. The Fenton Art Glass Company continues its operations today in Williamstown.

NORTHWOOD: In 1902, with previous glass experience, Harry Northwood purchased the Hobbs Brockunier Glass Factory in Wheeling, West Virginia where he proceeded to produce a wide variety of glassware. In 1905 he introduced his trademark, an underlined N in a circle. While many Northwood pieces are marked with his trademark, many are not. In 1908, his line of “Golden Iris” iridescent glass was begun in reaction to the 1907 Fenton introduction of iridized glass. Patterns such as Peacock and Urn and Grape and Gothic Arches were developed specifically for iridized production. The most famous pattern, Grape and Cable, was produced in over 50 shapes. The mid 1910's were Harry's peak, but in 1918 he suffered an illness and later died in 1919. While production continued for several years, Harry's innovation was lost and the factory ceased operations in 1925.

DUGAN/DIAMOND: In 1892, in Indiana PA, the Indiana Glass Company was built. In 1896 it passed to Harry Northwood who in 1899 sold the factory to the National Glass Company. Initially, Harry stayed in Indiana, but in 1901 he left. Operation of the factory was turned over to Harry's cousin Thomas Dugan. In 1904, Thomas and some investors purchased the plant and the Dugan Glass Company was formed. In 1909, production of iridized glass began. Dugan patterns developed during this time included Four Flowers and Wishbone and Spades. Thomas Dugan is credited with creating the color Peach Opalescent as most of this color is found today in Dugan patterns. For reasons unknown, Thomas Dugan left the company in 1913. The factory then became the Diamond Glass Company and continued to make iridized glass using the Dugan molds. Diamond created new patterns including Stork and Rushes. The company operated until 1931 when a fire destroyed the factory.

MILLERSBURG: John Fenton left Fenton Art Glass Company and with investors built the Millersburg Glass factory in Millersburg, Ohio. The first crystal glass was produced in mid 1909. Iridescent glass was first produced in early 1910 and was named “Radium” to describe its high gloss iridescence. 1910 saw extensive sales and new pattern development for which expensive new moulds were commissioned. Patterns included Hanging Cherries, Hobstar and Feathers and the Peoples' Vase. However, what John Fenton had in creativity he did not have in financial discipline and in 1911 several businesses sued Millersburg Glass for non-payment. In 1911, the Millersburg Glass Company went into receivership and later that year was sold to new investors who formed the Radium Glass Company. The Radium Glass Company continued to make iridized glassware using the Millersburg moulds but it also struggled

financially and in 1912 shut its doors. Thus iridescent glass production lasted only three short years (1910 – 1912) in Millersburg Ohio.

IMPERIAL: The Imperial Glass Company was founded in 1901 in Bellaire Ohio with its first glass production in 1904. The first iridescent glass was produced in 1910 and its production continued until 1930. Although Imperial patterns are often geometric in design such as Fashion and Broken Arches, they also made floral patterns such as Pansy and Loganberry. Imperial also pioneered new colors such as Helios Green and Smoke. The depression struck in 1929 and in 1931 Imperial filed for bankruptcy. But Imperial survived by making crystal-ware. The Imperial Glass Company was sold several times in the 1970's and 1980's, finally closing its doors in 1985.

Other US companies produced smaller amounts of iridized glass in the teens and twenties including Westmoreland, Cambridge, US Glass and Fostoria.

Iridized glass was also made by companies in countries other than the United States, although their production is thought to be about 10 years later than that in the US. These companies include: Sowerby (England), Inwald (Czechoslovakia), Brockwitz (Germany), Eda (Sweden), Cristalerias Rigolleau (Argentina), Cristalas Mexicanias (Mexico), Crown Crystal Glass Company (Australia) and Jain (India).

Due to the start of the depression in 1929, the introduction of more mechanized production methods and the changing tastes of the consumer, iridized moulded pattern glass fell out of favor and glass manufacturers turned to the production of what is now called "Depression Glass". It was during this period that the remaining manufacturers had leftover inventory of iridized glass that was sold in bulk to traveling carnivals to be used as prizes in carnival games. This story, told many years later, led to all iridized moulded pattern glass to be referred to as "Carnival Glass".

In the 1950's and 1960's individuals re-discovered this iridescent glassware at antique malls and fairs. The glass, made in the 1910's and 1920's, was now coming out of people's attics and being rediscovered for the beauty of its patterns, color and iridescence.

During the 1950 and 1960's there was little reference material for new collectors to use to help them make informed purchases. But as people met in the antique malls and fair grounds, people began to talk more and more about the glass. Early research was done to identify manufacturers, identify the colors and name the various patterns. From 1960 to 1973, Marion Hartung published ten spiral bound books each identifying 100 patterns with hand drawn pictures. She discussed color names and manufacturers and gave beginning collectors critical information to use when buying carnival. Other early published reference material included Rose Presnick's four volumes of pattern books which also showed pattern detail in hand drawn sketches (1964 to 1967) and Sherman Hand's "Colors in Carnival Glass", a series of four books with color pictures (1968 to 1972). Sherman Hand also published "The Collectors Encyclopedia of Carnival Glass" in 1978. In 1980, Bill Edwards published the first edition of the "Standard Encyclopedia of Carnival Glass". In 2010, the 12th and possibly final edition was published by Mike Carwille. In the 1990's, Carl Burns authored books focusing on patterns made solely by one manufacturer: Northwood (1994), Imperial (1996) and Dugan/Diamond (1999). In 1995, Marie McGee

published “Millersburg Glass” and in 1978, William Heacock published “Fenton Glass – The First Twenty-Five Years 1907-1932”.

During the 1960’s, carnival glass clubs were formed across the United States, Canada, Britain and Australia. Early clubs included the American Carnival Glass Club and the Heart of America Carnival Glass Association. Clubs hosted meetings and conventions where collectors could come together to discuss the glass as well as to buy and sell. The conventions offered attendees seminars where many of the various aspects of carnival glass were discussed. Early researchers, such as Don Moore traveled the country presenting seminars to all that would listen. Many of the clubs are still meeting and learning even more about carnival glass today.

Due to the increasing popularity of carnival glass in the 1960’s, several glass manufacturers began to revive its production. Some was produced using old molds and some was produced using new molds. Two of the original producers, Imperial and Fenton, were still in existence and began to reproduce it. Imperial marked this glass with its “IG” mark and Fenton marked its glass with an encircled “Fenton”. Neither Imperial nor Fenton marked its original iridized glass from the 1910’s. Other manufacturers that produced iridized glass through the 1980’s included LG Wright, Mosser Glass, Boyd, and Indiana Glass. Carnival glass produced in this period is referred to as Contemporary Carnival Glass while the original production glass from the 1910’s and 20’s is referred to as Vintage Carnival Glass. Fenton and Mosser Glass continue to produce some iridized glass today.

Today, online resources make carnival glass more accessible than ever. Clubs have developed websites and can be found with a simple web search. Auctioneers who specialize in carnival glass also maintain websites to help collectors locate upcoming auctions. Websites that maintain an abundance of information on carnival glass are maintained by individuals who spend countless hours researching the glass and trends in the collecting community. All these websites are available for use by anyone. Approximately twenty conventions, hosted by different clubs, occur each year across the US, Canada, Britain and Australia, each with a significant auction of carnival glass. Collecting carnival glass got its start in the 1950’s but continues today as enthusiastically as ever.