

# HISTORY OF CARNIVAL GLASS

By Jerry and Carol Curtis

## AMERICAN CARNIVAL GLASS

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the American Housewife wanted attractive glass for both utility and beauty to display in her home. The great majority of households could not afford the costly glass made by Steuben and Tiffany so in 1905, beautiful, yet inexpensive, glassware was introduced to the market that oftentimes has been referred to as “Poor Man’s Tiffany” and in later years, Carnival Glass. The process of making Carnival Glass was much simpler, thus, less costly than the Tiffany glass. Metallic spray solutions were applied to the surface of the glass once it was removed from the molds. The glass was then re-fired and the beautiful iridescence on the surface of the glass was the result, and to many, superior in appearance than the more costly Tiffany glass.

Major manufacturers of Carnival Glass included:

- NORTHWOOD            1908 – 1919
- IMPERIAL                1904 – 1972
- MILLERSBURG        1909 - 1913
- FENTON                 1905 – PRESENT DAY
- DUGAN/DIAMOND    1904 – 1931

Several smaller companies also produced Carnival glass:

- CAMBRIDGE    JENKINS        WESTMORELAND        FOSTORIA        HEISEY
- L.E. Smith     HIGBEE        ANCHOR/HOCKING     JENKINS        US GLASS
- FLINT            MCKEE        CONSOLIDATED

Factories also sprung up worldwide in:

ENGLAND    SWEDEN    FINLAND    DENMARK    POLAND    FRANCE    HOLLAND  
GERMANY    CZECHOSLOVAKIA    AUSTRALIA    ARGENTINA    MEXICO    CHINA    PERU    INDIA

As the era of Carnival Glass matured, color variations were added to the original Marigold which was the predominant color. Although the Marigold color is very desirable and collectible, many collectors seek the more vivid color variations that are much more difficult to find and of course, more expensive. In the latter days of the early production era, the Pastel “Ice” colors were introduced and subsequently shunned by the typical housewife who preferred the Marigold and vivid colors to provide a dash of sunshine to a home’s drab interior. As a result, the pastel colors were sent to overseas markets such as England and Australia. Today, those pastel colors are more expensive and highly sought after by the advanced collector.

Also favored by today’s collectors are miniatures, whimsies, and lettered or advertising pieces that were especially produced for many businesses and were given to their favored customers. A “whimsy” was a piece that was originally a part of a production line and a worker using his own discretion, and, probably without the

knowledge or consent of the foreman, would reheat and reshape a piece often resulting in one-of-a-kind “whimsy”.

There are many books on the market today that an inexperienced collector may use as a reference guide to assist in beginning his/her own collection. To date, over 2300 different patterns have been identified and listed. Many more are being added with each new publication. The knowledgeable collector must be aware of “reproduced” or “reissued” pieces. Reissued pieces became popular in the 1950’s by factories using the old moulds to reproduce an earlier pattern. In the 1960’s efforts of authors and associations of Carnival Glass Collectors were able to convince the manufacturers to “mark” the new reissued pieces so the collectors would not pay a premium price for a new version of an older pattern. Some earlier manufacturers applied marks to some of their glass but not to all. A collector must be knowledgeable about new marks, old marks, and absence of a mark, and, the effect it has on the value of a piece. Most of today’s publications provide price guidelines and alert the collector of a pattern that has been reproduced.

At the height of the Carnival production era, the manufacturer’s stocks became too great. Glass had been made and sold for years and shipped all over our nation in barrels packed in straw. The market had greatly diminished and many the Glass Companies sought new markets. The traveling Carnivals and County Fairs began purchasing the glass for its premiums. Many of today’s treasured pieces of Carnival Glass were won at these Carnivals in games such as the Penny Pitch, Baseball Throw, or Shooting at Targets.

Carnival Glass has now been in existence for over 100 years. The beauty and durability of this glass has withstood the test of time and use. It is difficult to believe that glassware used this long could still maintain its beauty and integrity, yet many of these 100-year old pieces still have the same beautiful appearance as when they came off the assembly line. The process of producing the iridescence has proven to be capable of resisting use, scratching, wear, and natural degradation due to exposure to the elements.

The patterns on Carnival Glass are varied and all encompassing. Animals, insects, Flowers, Fruit, Vines, and Geometric Designs, as well as Advertising and Special Lettered pieces became commonplace. Bases of the glass might be footed, collar based, or smooth cut. Edge Treatments had many variations as well such as saw tooth edges, flutes, panels, smooth, rounded, 3 in one and candy ribbon.

Shapes were varied as well including bowls, plates, vases, hat shapes, tooth pick holders, match holders, cruets, sugar and creamer sets, butter dishes, spooners, mustard containers, water pitchers, tumblers, goblets, decanters, wine stems, shot glasses, kerosene and electric lamps, spittoons, candle holders, jelly compotes, punch bowls, pickle casters, and numerous other shapes that were designed to enhance the interior of the home or as useful utility ware.

Several Carnival Glass Associations are spread throughout the United States as well as worldwide. The Texas Carnival Glass Club [TCGC] is an in-state club whose membership is mainly comprised of fellow Texans but has members from many neighboring states as well as scattered nationwide. The TCGC has an annual convention in Texas, quarterly meetings, and bi-monthly publications that include educational articles and information on Carnival Glass. We are a small association with membership numbering around 140 families who share their love and knowledge of the glass with everyone.

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