



Kevin Milaeger

Milaeger's

All-American Christmas Ornaments

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Many of you have heard of the Shiny Brite brand of Christmas ornaments. They were the first American ornament company that had large scale production. They came into their heyday during WWII and especially in the years following the war. The company later foundered, but the name was eventually resurrected by the Christopher Radko ornament company, and the Shiny Brite name is once again on our store shelves with new ornaments. As you might expect, they are now produced in China. The new ornaments look great, and we are selling quite a few of them.



We have spent much time in the off season collecting vintage ornaments to offer to you, and we have found many original, American made Shiny



Brites. They were produced in huge numbers, so they are plentiful, and the price is reasonable. I believe all the vintage Shiny Brites we are offering are under \$6.00.

The wartime ornaments are different from those produced in later years. Many raw materials were in short supply during the war, and all industries had to adapt their products accordingly. The most obvious change to the ornament industry is the creation of the transparent ornament, usually known as an "unsilvered" ornament. The mercury that was used to coat the inside of the ornament was not available, so the makers used clear glass, decorated with paint. Stripes were the most common form of decoration. Other paint variations followed. Also, tinted glass became the norm so we see many red, pink, blue, yellow and other colors of transparent ornaments.



To add some glitz to these unsilvered ornaments, a sprig of tinsel was sometimes inserted, and that was a popular innovation. Another wartime

shortage was aluminum, the metal that was used for ornament caps. Many different solutions were tried but the most common is thick paper, or cardboard. These paper capped ornaments are getting harder and harder



to find. With the paper being fragile, many did not survive, but we do have a few available for you. I really like the unsilvered ornaments. When many are on a tree, it has exceptional depth, since you can see through these ornaments.

Once war rationing ended, ornament makers again

starting using mercury, so most post-war ornaments have the traditional silver look. There are many shapes available, but almost all tend to be non-figural. That is, they are simply "shapes," not meant to replicate a figure, such as a snowman, Santa Claus, angel, or whatever. One notable exception is the ever popular bell-shaped ornament. To increase the

reflective quality of these ornaments, "indents" were used---a multi-faceted indentation on the side of the ornament. This created more reflective surface, so the finished tree was enhanced with these types of ornaments. The "indents" are probably the most common type of Shiny Brites available. Another bit of décor that was



used to add value to some of these ornaments was "sugaring." This was originally done with mica, but I'm guessing that material was also restricted during the war, so other materials that had the same look were probably used. The sugaring was meant to resemble snow and it adds another texture to the smooth surface of the ornaments.

We hope you enjoy these American made ornaments. They are a beautiful testament to American artistry and ingenuity.