

## LOCAL HISTORY

# Art in your fishing tackle box

## The history of L&S Bait

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We live in an age when people love to collect stuff.

People love the hunt when they are striving to collect something. Finding a rare piece, or finding the last piece to complete a collection can be immensely satisfying.

Alas, modern marketing has ruined some facets of collecting. Mass reproductions have flooded the baseball card market. The Post Office churns out more new stamps in a month now than it once did in a year. Instead of rare antique plates from the past, we now have collector editions hawked in the Sunday newspaper inserts.

So the beauty occurs when a common item is created with such grace that people want to have it. It wasn't intended to be collected, but it is now. No one thought of it as art at the time, but it's art now.

Such is the reality with L&S Bait Company. Over the course of 75 years, beginning with the Shiner Minnow in 1937, the firm produced hundreds of functional and colorful fishing lures. They are the art of the river and stream.

Those lures, and the stories of their inventors, are lovingly reproduced in "A Million MirrOLures: The



From 'A Million MirrOLures'

**The very first minnow lure, which was hand-carved and articulated in the middle, so it would wiggle in the water.**

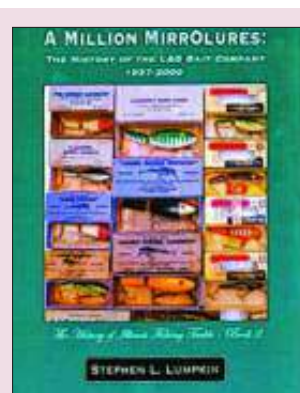
History of the L&S Bait Company, 1937-2000" by Stephen L. Lumpkin. The hardcover book is a limited edition put out by Whitefish Press in 2012. It also is the second in a series on the history of Illinois fishing tackle.

This is a gorgeous book with page after page of full-color plates showing a great variety of fishing lures. Priced at \$74.95, it is not inexpensive, but it is worth every penny. There also is a softcover version. This is a book of great value to those interested in fishing, to those interested in local history and even to those who want a good coffee table-top conversation starter.

Local historians note, a hallmark of this work is its thoroughness. There's an index. There's a bibliography. There are appendices showing lists of prices, production runs and color schemes. There's a lot of research here, and it shows.

This is also an interesting story, both as an industrial history and as a personal tale.

L&S was the creation of Kankakee County brothers-in-law Phil Schriners and Harold LeMaster. LeMaster was the 1933 Bradley High valedictorian. A born fisher-



**'A Million MirrOLures'**  
"The History of the L&S Bait Company, 1937-2000"  
by Stephen L. Lumpkin

220 pages,  
Whitefish Press, 2012.

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on the history of  
Illinois fishing tackle.

Priced at \$74.95  
in hardcover and  
\$39.95 in softcover.

man, LeMaster tinkered and whittled to create lures. In 1937, he invented the "Shiner Minnow." His innovation was to place a joint (using two metal eyes) in the middle, so the lure would wiggle in the water.

He began selling, first directly to area fishermen and then in hardware stores. For three years, all the lures were hand-carved. Tenite plastic arrived in 1940, the first in a long series of changes that gradually transformed the line by adding color, variety, realistic eyes and a reflective body (hence the name MirrOLure).



From 'A Million MirrOLures'

**A stunning collection of historic MirrOLures, many of which were manufactured in Bradley in the 1940s, '50s and '60s.**

Schriner joined the business as World War II ended. He was a civil engineer, a Purdue graduate and the superintendent of the Kankakee Sewer Plant. By 1946 they had a national catalogue. By 1948 they had a factory at 148 S. Vasseur in Bradley.

The LeMasters headed south to Florida, opening a second plant there. The Bradley operation, alas, closed in 1976, with the inventory and equipment relocated to Costa Rica. MirrOLures had to compete with cheaper Japanese knockoffs called Min-o-lures.

The Schriners sold their share to LeMaster. The firm continues to operate,

although the book only takes the story up to the year 2000.

There's lost of interesting insight here. The firm tried to market a fishing reel. It never worked quite right, and flopped. The firm moved into marketing by selling shirts and hats. MirrOLures helped pioneer "catch and release," by designing a lure to make it easy to release the fish.

Author Lumpkin does not spare us the less than politically correct ads of the past. A bikini-clad woman had helped to sell the lures. She looks great in color. L&S also used cartoons to sell its products and had a fictitious

spokesman called "Ol' Pete," sort of like Walter Brennan in "The Real McCoys."

Both the Schriners and the LeMasters were fishermen. This is a book about a product that was loved by its creators. LeMaster once had a 17-hour battle with a Tarpon that made "Ripley's Believe It or Not." The book also ends with another fishing story, a 127-pound Tarpon that pulled LeMaster out of the boat.

This is a book you can pick up, put down and pick up again. Great information. Well researched. Well organized. Beautiful to look at. I cannot recommend it highly enough.