

## CHILDHOOD PLAYTHINGS

Toys reflect the society that produced them. By showing us the world in miniature, toys offer us a glimpse into the attitudes, lifestyles and technology of times past.

Prior to the Victorian era, children were treated as small adults. Their lives were highly structured with strict rules of behavior and little idle time for play. Children even dressed in adult fashions. Girls wore elaborate outfits – with stays, hoops, gloves, hats and fans - like their mothers and boys sported waistcoats, breeches and wigs like their fathers. During the 19th century, attitudes towards children changed. Rules of behavior eased, allowing more time for childish pursuits. Clothing became simpler, looser and more comfortable. Children’s magazines, designed to entertain as well as educate, appeared. Children became the center of Victorian family life and they were showered with attention, and toys.



Toys show us a child’s world, in miniature. Dollhouses and their furnishings reflected the homes children lived in. Toy household appliances and utensils taught young girls how to be homemakers and show us what would have been in a typical home. Girls polished their sewing skills dressing their dolls and the resulting clothes reveal the fashions of the time. Young boys played with small versions of the wagons, tools and equipment they would use as adults. (*Wind-up car, Lehmann Co., Germany, c.1910*)



Society’s technological advances are reflected in the kinds of toys and how they are made. As the objects of everyday life change, so do the toys that mimic them. Horse-drawn wagons and carts, a favorite toy in the early 1800s, gave way to trains, cars and planes as methods of transportation evolved.

Prior to 1840, few toys were made on a commercial basis. Most were home-made or produced by small, local shops and craftsmen. The technological advances of the industrial revolution spurred the growth of factories producing consumer goods and fueled a boom in toy production. Toymakers quickly adopted the latest techniques and materials. Tinsplating, chromolithography, cast iron, molded

plastics, clockwork mechanisms, stamped steel and many other developments all played a role in the rapidly changing world of toys.

Toys are appealing because of their beauty and ingenuity and, also, because they remind us of simpler times. But, if we look closely, they will also hold up a mirror to the past. This exhibit presents a sample of the toys that have been loved and played with in Carroll County over the past two centuries.

## DOLLS

Dolls have been made since ancient times. The early Greeks, Romans and Egyptians made dolls from clay, bone, wood, ivory and terra cotta. While some may have had religious significance, most were simply children's toys. Paintings of children in the 16th and 17th centuries often included toys, especially dolls.

In the 18th century, the production and distribution of dolls became an industry. Dolls became more plentiful and more sophisticated in design and materials. A highly organized distribution system sent German dolls around the world.

The 19th century saw the greatest changes in dolls as the industrial revolution led to the use of new materials and new production methods. In the first half of the century, techniques for mass-producing papier mâché and wax dolls were introduced. Porcelain factories adapted their production techniques to the manufacture of china dolls. The start of large-scale production of bisque dolls in the 1860s marked the beginning of the "golden age of dolls." The use of eyes which opened and closed, socket heads that could turn and jointed bodies that could move and sit resulted in more life-like dolls.



*Papier mâché doll, Ludwig Greiner,  
Philadelphia, Pa., c. 1875*

Few dolls were commercially produced in the United States until after the Civil War. Most were imported from Europe, especially Germany and France. Germany, a major producer since the Middle Ages due to an abundance of raw materials and skilled labor, created exquisite dolls of all types. French dolls were especially noted for their expressive glass eyes and beautiful clothes. In the 18th century, dolls came into the United States primarily as individual special orders. By the mid-19th century, dolls were arriving in huge quantities.

China dolls first appeared in the 1750s but did not reach the height of their popularity for another hundred years. By far the greatest number of china dolls was made in Germany though some were made in France. The china used for dolls is a fine, glazed porcelain that is almost translucent. Typically, only the head is made of china though small, one-piece dolls called "frozen Charlottes" were also made. The vast majority of china dolls had painted eyes. Blue was the most common eye color but brown was also used. French dolls were more likely than German to have inset glass eyes. Most china heads – about 80% - had black hair, though by 1900 blond hair was becoming more prevalent. The hairstyles on china heads changed quickly to keep pace with the latest fashions.

*(China doll, German, c. 1900)*



Bisque dolls appeared around 1870. Bisque is an unglazed porcelain with a fine texture. While it is essentially unglazed china, the lack of a shiny glaze gives bisque a more life-like appearance. The finest bisque heads, when polished and tinted, have a strikingly realistic appearance. Some bisque dolls were untinted and are referred to as "parian." Bisque heads were made mainly in Europe, especially Germany and France, though a few American and Japanese companies also produced them. While Germany produced the finest bisque heads, France produced some of the most famous dolls. The French "Lady" or "Fashion" dolls were renowned for their delicate features, expressive glass eyes and exquisite clothes. French fashion experts dressed these dolls in the latest styles and prizes were offered each year for improvements in the



*designs. (Bisque doll, German, c.1890)*

In most cases, a doll is the product of several companies. The parts of the dolls – head, eyes, wig – were made in different factories. The body was typically made where the doll was assembled. Some dolls were imported completely assembled and dressed but more often just the finished heads were imported. The imported heads could then be placed on American-made bodies. Often, the heads were sold separately and the buyer could then make a body for a new doll or use the head as a replacement for a broken one. Commercially produced doll clothes were available throughout the 19th century but many dolls were sold "undressed" – wearing only a chemise. In a time when nearly all women sewed, girls polished their sewing skills by making clothes for their dolls. It was also not unusual for a woman to make clothes for her daughter's doll.

While 19th century dolls were produced in countless sizes and shapes, most were made as women. Male dolls were uncommon, as were children. French manufacturers introduced "bébés" – dolls depicting children about ten years of age – but many "child" dolls were simply smaller versions of adult designs. (*Bru bébé doll, late 1860s*)



The end of the 19th century saw the introduction of character dolls which were lifelike depictions, especially of infants and children. These baby dolls with realistic faces and soft bent-limb bodies would become the dominant type of doll in the 20th century.



World War I ended the importation of German dolls. French, Japanese and American companies quickly stepped in to fill the void. Anti-German sentiments lingered for years after the war and it was not until the mid-1920s that the German doll industry revived. (*"Bye Lo Baby," copyright 1922*)

## TEDDY BEARS

*Teddy bear, c. 1905*



One of the most enduring toys of the 20th century was the Teddy Bear. In November, 1902, President Theodore Roosevelt, an avid sportsman, traveled to Mississippi on a hunting trip. During the trip, a small bear wandered into camp and was captured. The President took pity on the creature and refused to shoot it. Word of the incident spread quickly and Clifford Berryman immortalized the encounter in a cartoon which first appeared in *The Washington Post*. The cartoon soon appeared in newspapers across the country. Morris Michtom was the owner of a small confectionary shop in Brooklyn and a loyal supporter of President Roosevelt. Michtom wrote to the President asking for permission to manufacture a toy bear

designed by his wife, Rose, and market it as "Teddy's Bear." Roosevelt granted permission and soon Michtom's new business, the Ideal Novelty and Toy Company, was turning out thousands of bears. The Teddy bear craze spread quickly. A number of companies began producing bears in a variety of styles, many of which bore a striking resemblance to Michtom's original design. The Teddy bear even became the hero of a series of children's books which took Teddy B. and Teddy G. on adventures all across the country. Both bears wear hats and glasses similar to those worn by President Roosevelt in the famous cartoon. Though styles have changed over the years, Teddy Bears remain popular to this day.

## METAL TOYS

The earliest metal toys were made by local craftsmen of scrap tin and then hand-painted. These toys were light in weight, fragile and featured simple two-dimensional designs and two-piece construction. Large-scale manufacturing of tin toys began in the 1830s. Production was a simple and inexpensive process. First, the outline of the toy was cut or stamped from a sheet of tin-plated steel. The piece was then shaped by bending over a wood mold. The two halves of the toy were soldered together. Finally, the toy was hand-painted.



Improvements in manufacturing techniques led to the introduction of cast iron toys in the 1880s. Manufacturing these toys used sophisticated technology that required large and expensive production facilities. The resulting toys, while beautiful and durable, were very expensive.

*(Sulky bell toy, tinplate, c. 1880)*

To produce a cast iron toy, a designer first created a three-dimensional model, or die, of the toy. The die was then pressed into a mold, made of a box filled with damp sand, leaving an exact image of the die. Molten iron was poured into the mold and allowed to cool. Once cool, the piece was removed from the mold, sanded and polished. Each part of the toy was cast separately and the finished pieces were pinned, bolted or riveted together. The sand casting process allowed for three-dimensional designs and intricate detailing. Cast iron toys were noted for their realism and many included accessories such as detachable reins, harnesses and lamps. Despite their high cost, cast iron toys became widely popular and quickly replaced tinplate as the material of choice for the best toymakers.

Thrift was highly valued in the 19th century. Parents sought to instill this virtue in their children and banks were a colorful and entertaining way to encourage children to save their pennies. The first cast iron mechanical bank appeared in 1868. These banks became wildly popular with both children and adults. While some banks were merely amusing toys, others were designed to appeal to adults by offering a sly commentary on events of the time. (*Tammany Hall mechanical bank, J.&E Stevens Co.*)



Cast iron toys remained popular well into the 20th century and many models were produced for decades, making it very difficult to determine exactly when a toy was made. Around World War I, the designs of cast iron toys became simpler with fewer moving parts, less detail in the designs and simpler paint schemes.



*Police wagon bell toy, cast iron, c. 1880*

Not everyone could afford cast iron toys, so tinplate toys continued to be produced. Through the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many of these were rough, miniature copies of popular cast iron models. These "penny toys" were crudely constructed, featured little detail and often sold for a penny. The years between the two World Wars saw a revival in the popularity of tin toys as improvements in chromolithography allowed detailed, multi-colored images to be printed on the flat pieces of tin before they were molded into toys. These detailed, inexpensive toys remained popular until the latter part of the 20th century.

As processes for stamping sheet metal improved in the 20th century, heavy gauge steel toys, such as large trucks, appeared. Steel toys dominated the market in the

years after World War II, effectively putting an end to the production of cast iron toys. In the last quarter of the 20th century, metal toys faced stiff competition from inexpensive, colorful toys made of injection-molded plastic.

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