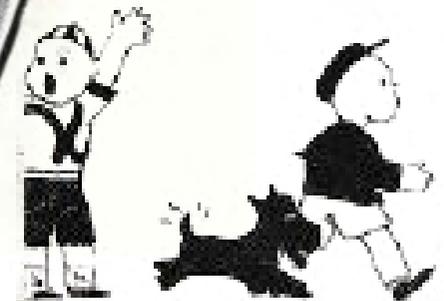


**The Story of Toy Manufacturing in the
Central Connecticut River Valley**



TOYS

ON VIEW AT THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF
CHESHIRE COUNTY
246 MAIN STREET, KEENE, NH



Introduction

The history and development of toys dates back to ancient times. Some of the earliest toys discovered by scientists date back 45,000 years ago in regions such as Russia and South Asia. These types of playthings seem universal across time and space, toys that mimic daily life; toys that educate; and toys that spark the imagination.

Toys of the Central Connecticut River Valley originated with the Abenaki families who inhabited this region for thousands of years. The European settlers who traveled up the Connecticut River to establish new settlements at the turn of the 18th century also brought with them similar traditions of childhood play and handmade toy construction..



The Central Connecticut River Valley's toy story is tied to the development of its manufacturing industries, to technological innovations of its residents, the history of childhood play theory in America, popular culture, national events, and international forces such as war. From the 1850s to today, toy manufacturing has been present in this region with a variety of toy types and forms

17th - 18th Century

Up to the late 19th century, children were expected to do their share of work around the home and the family business. Little time was given to games and toys; it was seen as a form of idleness--a vice. It was a common belief that any form of childhood play was meant to serve God, serve the community, or serve his/her family. Toys and games were designed to teach skills, cultural traditions, and inform a proper way of life. And for the most part, toys came from the imagination of the child.

In many ways, Native American families of the 17th and 18th centuries allowed children more time to play than their European counterparts. Some Native toys were adapted to European use.

Generations of Abenaki children in the Central Connecticut River Valley, probably played with things such as dice games, a type of cup and ball game, a buzzer toy, corn husk dolls, and bows and arrows.



18th century cup & ball game and hoops



17th - 18th Century

European children arriving in the region in the early 18th century played with similar types of toys and games. Scraps of broken farmyard equipment, husks from corn at dinnertime, items in nature such as sticks, stones, leaves turned into imaginative playthings. Colonial era games included some that may be familiar to residents of the region today: marbles, whittled wooden toys, dolls made from various scraps, balls (stuffed bladder), baking in pretend kitchens, running with a hoop and stick, wooden stilts, cup and ball, cat's cradle, tea sets, jump rope, and buzzers/bull roarer.

In Colonial New England, wooden toys were often carved for children for use on Sunday as a form of religious instruction, a day commonly set aside for worship rather than work or play. Noah's Ark toys may have been the most common variety used to teach bible lessons. Consisting of a house boat and pairs of animals, Noah's Ark toys were also mass produced for a consumer market into the 20th century, providing children with the means to play on Sunday. The Red Shed Company of Peterborough, NH, for example, made Noah's ark toys in the mid-20th century.



Above: rubber Noah's ark figurines by Red Shed Rubber Toys of Peterborough, 1950s-1960s.

Below: 19th century hand-carved Noah's ark toy



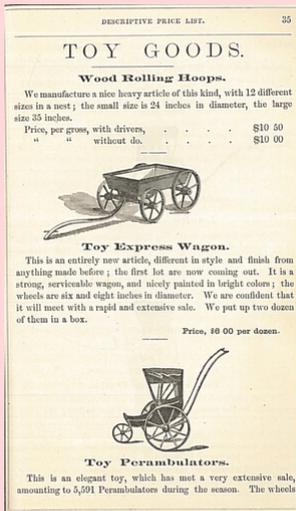
Civil War Era



Portrait of a girl with doll, 1765. Unknown artist.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, well-to-do families of the 18th to early 19th century had the option of traveling to toy stores in cities such as Boston or Philadelphia. Elegant dolls, mechanical toys, and musical instruments were imported from countries such as France and Germany for resale to an American market. Yet, most likely, the bulk of families living in the Central Connecticut River Valley relied on hand-made playthings.

The 19th century brought with it a slow change in attitude towards children in society. Even with the vigors of an agricultural life or industrial life, historians have found evidence of a growing cultural trend in America to nurture children and provide more free time for play. This cultural shift helped support the development of American toy manufacturing by the mid-19th century.



Above: Page from a catalogue of toys manufactured by Ellis, Britton, & Eaton, Springfield, VT, 1868

Below: 1880s Express wagon made by S.A. Smith Comany, Brattleboro, VT



Civil War Era

The earliest record of a toy factory in the Central Connecticut River Valley date to 1858; both the S.A. Smith and Ellis, Britton & Eaton Companies of Vermont were incorporated in the same year. S. A. Smith Company was established by Alva Smith of Guilford, VT, for the manufacturer of wooden riding vehicles for children. The Ellis, Britton & Eaton Company of Springfield, VT, became nationally recognized for its manufacture of children's carriages and toy carriages. Their wooden wheels were also manufactured for sale to other toy manufacturers across the nation.

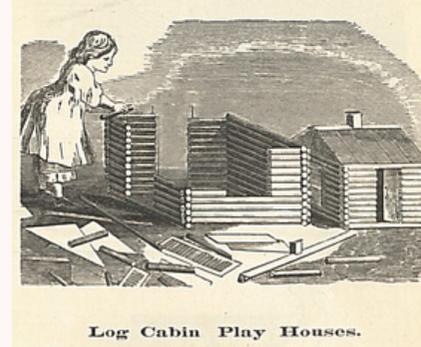
Toy production in the United States was minimal in the 1860s during the Civil War. As the war came to a close and the nation sought to rebuild itself, mills and factories developed along its waterways. In the Central Connecticut River Valley, woodenware industries provided a means of producing toys as a side business. In a few cases, toy manufacturing factories were established to make cast metal toys, children's carriages and wagons, musical instruments, and doll furnishings.

Industrial Revolution

By the 1840s, American culture transformed from agrarian to a more industrial economy. Increased automation and mechanization in factories, along with new methods of tooling and creating interchangeable parts, contributed to the economic growth of the nation. Water power from rivers like the Connecticut River, West River, and the Ashuelot River allowed mills to transform textile fibers, wood, and metal into consumer products, machine tool production, and storage containers. The Connecticut River Valley became significant for its manufacture of textiles, woodenware products, guns, tools, and clocks among other things. Toys became a side venture for some of these manufacturers.

The Industrial Revolution changed daily life for many families, which, in turn, informed many parents' views of childhood play. As more members of the family found work outside of the home, the home itself became a private, more sacred space, a retreat from the vigor of a public work environment. Toys were introduced to educate children in the home and prepare them for an adult life.

By the end of the 19th century, birth rates among many middle class American families had declined significantly.



Above: Log cabin play house by Ellis, Britton, Eaton Company of Springfield, VT, 1868.

Right: S.A. Smith American eagle push toy, 1860s-1880s

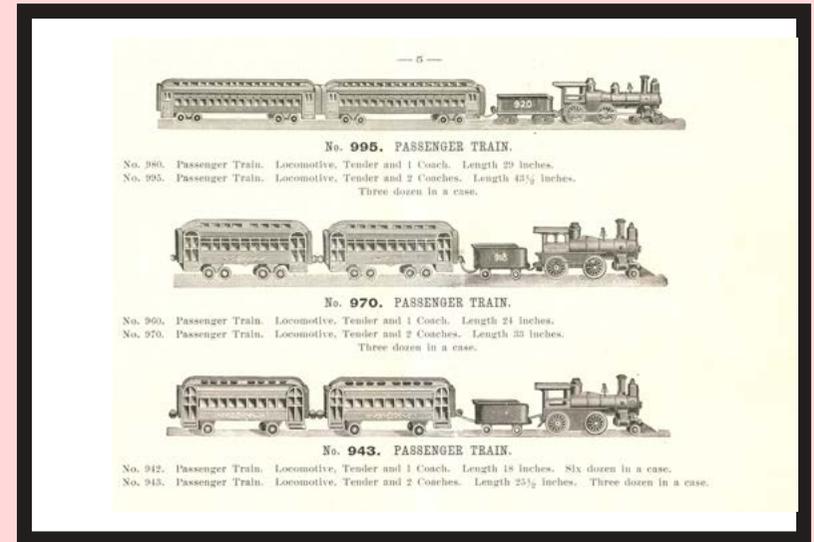


Historians surmise that the average white American female in the year 1800 could expect to bear 7.0 children; by 1900, this number was 3.6. Fewer children at home led to a cultural shift in the role that children played at home. By the turn-of-the 20th century children had significantly more playtime than their Colonial counterparts with more toys to play with. To meet demand, more American toy manufacturers were established nationwide. Wooden, tin, and cast-iron toys entered the market in larger numbers .

Cast-Iron Toys

During the Industrial Revolution, cast iron toys were some of the most prolific forms of playthings. Cast iron toys ranged in size from small “penny toys” such as rakes, hatchets, and other tools, to large cast iron stagecoaches, horse-drawn fire engines, and trains.

J. E. Stephens Company of Cromwell, CT, produced some of the first cast iron toys in the United States during the 1840s-1850s, using scrap metal from its production of hardware. In the Central Connecticut River Valley, the Triumph Wringer Company, founded in Keene by David Piper who was subsequently joined by James Wilkins, began making beautifully casted cast iron toys in the 1880s. This business became so successful that the wringer and other lines were set aside and the company became the Wilkins Toy Company in 1890. They produced cast iron toy vehicles including trains, steamboats, carts, and horse-drawn carriages during the 1880s.



Wilkins Toy Company catalog page, 1895.

By the turn-of-the-20th century, cast iron toys transformed from horse-drawn vehicles to miniature automobiles. Once one of the most popular forms of toys, cast iron products were slowly replaced with more malleable and cheaper materials such as sheet metal, plastics, and wood. Kingsbury Manufacturing Company of Keene, NH (successor to Wilkins Toy Company), replaced its cast iron line of toys with pressed steel varieties including fire trucks, automobiles, banks, garden tools and other items by the 1920s. Today, cast iron toys are amongst the most plentiful in the antique toy world.

Wooden Toys

Wooden toys, perhaps, make up the longest reigning form of childhood playthings in human history. The earliest discoveries of carved wooden toys date back to the stone age, 2.9 million years ago, and include dolls and tools such as axes and bows. Just as they are used today, ancient toys educated children about the adult world.

The commercial manufacturing of wooden toys began in the mid-1800s in the United States. Wooden boats, trains and doll furnishings quickly became favorite family purchases. As many as twenty wooden toy manufacturers were located in the Central Connecticut River Valley of NH and VT between the 1870s and the 1930s. In the Monadnock region of NH, alone, listings for wooden toy manufacturers during the era have been found in Troy, Hancock, Swanzey, Marlborough, Rindge, Winchester, Wilton, Keene, Jaffrey, Peterborough, and Hinsdale.

Following World War II, wooden toy production slowed. Cheaper materials, such as plastic or



Early 20th century photograph of the O.C. Whitcomb & Co factory in Troy, NH, makers of children's tool chests and novelties.

fabric, became more readily available and plastic manufacturing firms soon surpassed woodenware manufacturers in the production of toys by the late 20th century. The Red Shed of Peterborough, NH, began producing mold injected rubber toys in the 1940s.

Today wooden toys remain popular for use with young children because they are durable and easy to clean. This is especially true in daycare centers and preschools. Whitney Brothers began making wooden toys for early learners in 1904 in Marlborough, NH. Today, located in Keene, NH, the company dominates the market with the manufacture of wooden toys, children's furniture, school furnishings, cribs and accessories.

Musical Instruments

The production of musical instruments for use by children has remained an industry in the Central Connecticut River Valley for almost one hundred years. Toy pianos and organs as well as drums and fifes have been manufactured in Vermont by more than one company.

Toy pianos were produced in Germany in the 19th century and imported into the United States for sale in big city toy stores. After the American Civil War, the mass production of toy pianos for children began in the United States. Schoenhut Piano Company was founded in Philadelphia by German immigrants in 1872 and has become a leading manufacturer of musical instruments for children into present day.

The Estey Organ Company of Brattleboro, VT, began producing a small child's reed organ in the early 20th century. By the 1930s, the company was manufacturing three types of organs for children. The toy organ for children ages five to twelve weighed about 30 pounds and could easily be moved around the house. A larger 'junior organ' was a 4-octave organ for older children and came either pedal or motor operated.

And the 'student organ' was designed with two sets of reeds on the manual and on the pedal. The pedal board could get folded up under the keyboard when not in use. Toy pianos continued to be made by Estey until the company closed in the 1950s.

Today, the Central Connecticut River Valley remains dedicated to musical instrument manufacturing. Cooperman's Company with its team of about a dozen artisans produce 16th century reproductions to contemporary drums and fifes for an international market, including children's instruments.

1940s advertisement for the Estey Organ Company's child reed organ.



**THE ESTEY MINIATURE IS
A REAL INSTRUMENT**

—yet it costs little more than a good toy

Since 1846 Estey has been producing organs whose tones and quality have made them known throughout the world. The "first name in organs" proudly presents this new Miniature—designed particularly for children, yet possessing the same standard mechanism (keys, reeds and valves) to be found in the larger Estey models.

**TO DEVELOP YOUR CHILD'S
APPRECIATION FOR MUSIC**

Music teachers and students declare the *sustained* tones created by a reed organ such as the Miniature cannot be surpassed in training the musical hearing of children; with a piano, on the other hand, the tones rapidly depart, and are not sustained. The keyboard is full-size. The finish is a pleasing walnut.

THREE OCTAVE RANGE

Again we stress the fact that this is a real reed organ, scaled down to juvenile size (see last page for dimensions), with easy-to-play pedals and a three-octave range that is eminently suitable for playing the type of music children love. At that, adults find they can produce surprising volume and faithful production of the more difficult selections

on this mighty Miniature! . . . Light, portable, a handsome piece of furniture and a real musical instrument at a price far less than you would expect—the new Estey Miniature will make a wonderful present for *your* child.

ESTEY ORGAN COMPANY : BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT, U. S. A.
One Hundred Years of Fine Organ Making

Toys & Gender



Above left: 1960s Whitney Brothers Company of Keene catalog advertising to little mothers.

Above middle: 1970s Whitney Brothers Company catalog with creative play toys for boys and girls.

Above right: 2019 Whitney Brothers online catalog advertising creative play toys for boys and girls.

Below left: Douglas Toy Company of Keene, NH's 2013 photo for the blog post "How to Pick the Right Stuffed Animal for Your Child."

Below right: 2017 Douglas Toy Company ad for its new line unicorn-related toys including Dreamycorns and Rainbowcorns.



At the turn of the 20th century, there were 16 or more toy manufacturers in the Central CT River Valley, producing anything from doll furnishings for girls to transportation toys for boys. Many other locally-produced toys were gender neutral in scope. During the 1910s, Kingsbury Manufacturing Co. produced some of the first toy vehicles with female drivers, marketing their line of transportation toys for both boys and girls.

Between the 1920s and 1960s, toy advertisements for girls focused heavily on the societal desire to teach girls domesticity and nurturing. Such toys were designed to prepare girls for motherhood and homemaking. Toy ads for boys often focused on their need to become strong men.

The rise in gender neutral toys in the 1970s and 1980s is attributed to the fact that more women had entered the workforce. Hancock Associates of Hancock, NH, for instance, began producing gender neutral wooden toys in the 1970s.

Today, some scholars assert that toys have become even more divided by gender than they were in the 1920s. A look at the Disney store's marketing or the Lego aisle in a toy store show that clear delineation. Toy manufacturers in the Central Connecticut River Valley today continue to make toys that appeal to all genders. Whitney Brothers of Keene, NH, markets its line of imaginative play toys such as kitchen sets to a gender neutral market. Douglas Toy Company of Keene, NH, produces a gender neutral line of plush animals while also marketing a stuffed unicorn, mermaid, and fairy line of products for girls.

Transportation Toys

Transportation-related toys have always remained one of the most important toy products manufactured in the Central Connecticut River Valley. Some of the earliest playthings produced included horse-drawn vehicles, ships, trains, trollies, tractors and other farm equipment. When Harry T. Kingsbury of Keene, NH, began manufacturing toys in 1895, his company produced a catalog of 85 different cast-iron products available for sale; 98% of them were transportation toys.

Since its earliest years as the Triumph Wringer Company, Kingsbury produced horse-drawn vehicles like farm equipment, carting wagons of all types, carriages, and sulkies. Its line of steam-powered vehicles included cast iron railroad trains, both passenger and freight, and cast iron paddle-wheeled and propeller-driven boats. During the 20th century, Kingsbury began motorizing its automobiles with a clockwork motor which became the hallmark of the company.



S.A. Smith Co. wooden riding toy

S.A. Smith Co. of Brattleboro, VT, wooden horse-drawn coal truck, late 19th century.



Toy manufacturing in the region also involved the manufacture of child-sized carriages, carts, riding toys, preambles, and rocking horses. Ellis, Britton, and Eaton of Springfield, VT, manufactured toy carts and gigs for 10 years, becoming internationally recognized for their toys. Their successors, Vermont Novelty works continued to manufacture toy vehicles for another twenty years.

Wooden transportation toys are still produced today by Whitney Brothers of Keene, NH, and sold to schools and childcare facilities across the country.

Transportation Toys

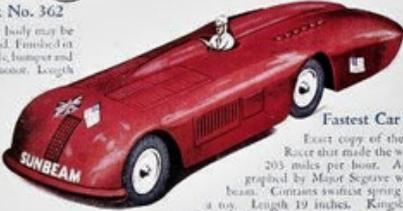
KINGSBURY MOTOR DRIVEN TOYS



Kingsbury Dump Truck No. 362
This clever toy is hinged so that body may be raised at an angle to dump out load. Finished in natural colors. Rubber tire wheels, bumper and other accessories. Strong spring motor. Length 14 inches. Price \$3.00.



Kingsbury Passenger Bus No. 788
Looks for all the world like those big ones that run from city to city and town to town all over America. 17-passenger model. Beautifully finished. Rubber balloon type tires. Strong, long-running spring motor. Length 16 1/2 inches. Price \$2.50.



Fastest Car in the World!
Exact copy of the famous Sunbeam Racer that made the world's speed record, 203 miles per hour. Approved and autographed by Major Segrave who drove the Sunbeam. Contains swiftest spring motor ever used in a toy. Length 19 inches. Kingsbury Toy No. 335. Price \$3.00.

FREE—New Catalog Write for It

*Prices slightly higher West of Mississippi and in Canada.



Kingsbury Town Car No. 340
Just like Fifth Avenue—Aristocratic! Smart! Big balloon type road wheels. Spare wheel, trunk, etc. Strong, long-running spring motor. Length 15 1/2 inches. Price \$3.00.

Dreams Come True!

Delightful dreams of toy-bringing toys! Toys like life! Toys that last! That's the real important thing. Kingsbury Motor-Driven Toys are built to outlast most every toy that peeps from Christmas stocking or hangs from Christmas tree. Good toy stores all sell them. Prices to fit every pocketbook. Ask at the store where you buy toys.

KINGSBURY MANUFACTURING CO.
KEENE, N. H.
In the Foothills of the White Mountains

DEALERS: Kingsbury Toys are always "best sellers." Write for our proposition.

SEND 10c FOR NOVEL ERASER
A real Kingsbury disc wheel, in big balloon tire made of pure, solid Eraser Rubber. 10c. Set of four, 35c.
Kingsbury Mfg. Co., 42 Myrtle St., Keene, N. H.
I enclose \$..... Please send me.....
Please send me your FREE Catalog.

Name

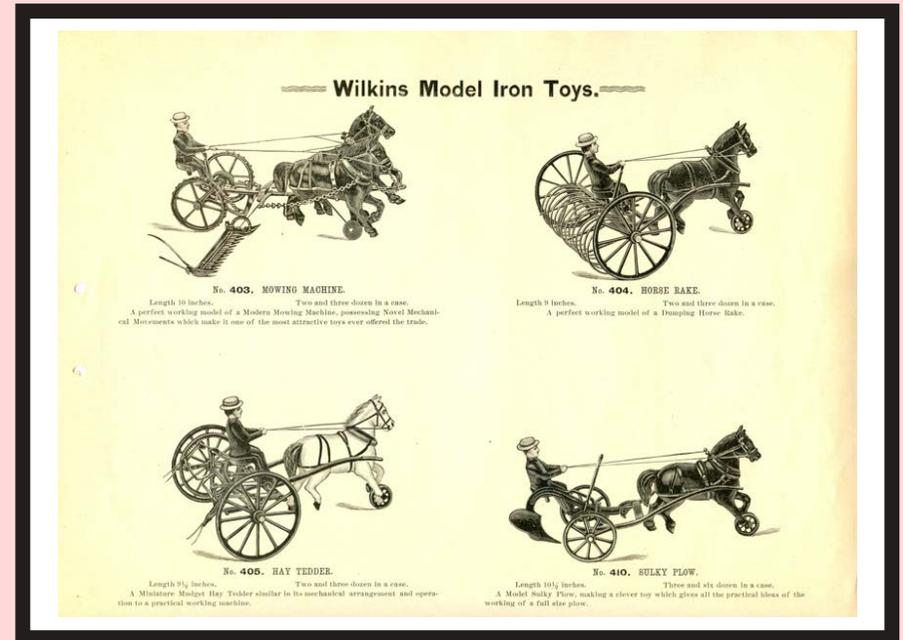
Address

Kingsbury Toy Company of Keene, NH, advertisement.

Farm Toys

Agriculture has remained an important way of life in the Central Connecticut River Valley throughout its long history. Local toy manufacturer's capitalized on the region's economic ties to the land by producing farm-related toys for children. Miniature versions of adult tools and equipment, as well as toy animals, mimicked everyday life. In the 1890s, Harry T. Kingsbury of Keene, NH, began casting iron farm equipment toys. From 1894 to 1942, the Kingsbury Manufacturing Co. produced cast iron and pressed steel hay rakes, tractors, milk delivery trucks, wagons, carts and more. The company continued to include farm toys in its product line into the 1940s.

During the mid-20th century, developments in rubber and plastics led to new forms of toys including farm figurines, farm animals, agricultural buildings, and vehicles. The Red Shed was a byproduct of a sculptor's art. Mary Hotchkiss Williams began making hollow rubber animal toys in 1945 for her 7 children.



Wilkins cast-iron toys catalog page depicting farm-related vehicles, 1890s, Keene, NH.

After sculpting her toy design in clay, her husband Sydney (also a sculptor) would make a mold and they would mass produce them as toys.

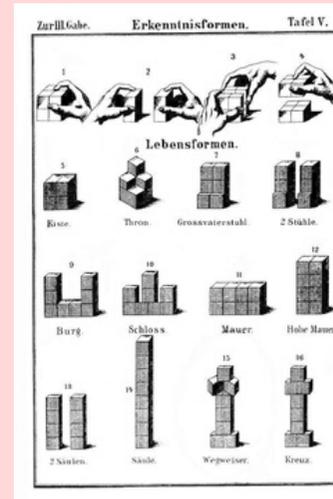
Today, Douglas Toy Co. continues to make plush farm animals in Keene, NH.

Educational Toys

As early as the late 17th century, philosophers and educators began arguing that children need to be shown how to learn and that toys could act as teaching tools. In 1693, John Locke outlined various ways in which parents could incorporate education into their children's everyday lives. One suggested activity involved using blocks as a means of teaching children the alphabet.

Education reform movements of the Progressive Era in American history (1890s-1920s) were led by pedagogists such as Friedrich Froebel and Maria Montessori. These progressive educators advocated for creating structured learning environments such as nursery schools and kindergartens. They promoted education through play as a very purposeful means of developing young minds. And they supported American toy manufacturers who were willing to create playthings that could be used as hands-on learning tools.

American culture at the turn-of-the-20th century demanded more durable, educational toys for use in daycare centers, kindergartens, and homes.



Friedrich Froebel of Germany was an early childhood education advocate in the 19th century. His instructions on the use of blocks for play and education prompted a demand for wooden blocks around the world.

1960s catalog page. Beginning in Marlborough, NH, in 1904, Whitney Brothers Company produced wooden playthings as teaching tools for young children.



It also led to a significant boom in the American toy industry with more than 400 toy manufacturers in the US by 1936, producing about 10,000 different types of playthings.

The Central Connecticut River Valley had a few dedicated toy manufacturers in operation at the turn-of-the-20th century. However, many local woodenware manufacturers made toys on the side over short periods of time (typically 2-3 years), cashing in on the nation's demand for wooden toys.

Wooden Blocks

Since the 17th, blocks have been used to improve literacy skills in America's youth with each component of the toy depicting a letter of the alphabet and a corresponding illustration. Turn-of-the-20th century woodenware manufacturers in the Central Connecticut River Valley often produced blocks. Today blocks may be still found in most pediatric waiting rooms, parents' homes, and preschools.

Whitney Brothers of Marlborough, NH, began producing educational wooden toys in 1904. A main part of their product line has always included varying sets of blocks. Today, their expanded product line includes furnishings for early learning and childcare centers, creative play toys, and stem and sensory toys. Other makers of wooden blocks from the region included Hancock Associates (Hancock, NH) and C. E. Bradley Company (Brattleboro, VT).



19th century alphabet blocks

Puzzles

In March 1880, the Manchester [VT] Journal reported that “the toy factory at Springfield [VT] is turning out each week sixty thousand of the ‘fifteen’ puzzles, and the demand for them increases daily.” Originally invented by a mailman in New York in 1874, the fifteen puzzle is a sliding puzzle consisting of 15 square tiles numbered 1-15 and a blank space to allow for movement. Players need to slide the tiles around until the numbers are in order. Almost immediately, some toy factories began turning out thousands of these puzzles to meet their popularity with consumers.

Some of the earliest and most popular forms of puzzles produced in the United States were dissected maps. Maps of America, broken into multiple pieces, served a dual purpose: to teach American children the geography of their country and to develop motor and spatial reasoning skills. They were made as early as the 18th century and increased in popularity throughout the 19th and 20th century. In the 1950s, Red Shed Company of Peterborough, NH, manufactured over-sized rubber maps of America puzzles and sold them to educational toy distribution companies in New York.



Left: 19th century example of a dissected map of the United States of America
Right: Elzzup Puzzle manufactured by Lucia Rogers Colony of Keene, NH

By the beginning of the 20th century, puzzles were no longer just for children; they became an increasingly popular hobby for adults. By 1908, the Parker Brothers Company of Salem, MA, invented an interlocking style of manufacturing puzzles to prevent individual pieces from falling off. In this region, Mrs. H. H. Colony of Keene, NH, had a small business cutting and boxing wooden puzzles for sale as early as 1907. Her puzzles depicted paintings by Charles M. Russell, an American artist who painted the Old American West.

From small shape placement puzzles for toddlers to 12,000 piece jigsaw types, the puzzle has long been a staple in the American household.

Puppets



Puppets depicting three generations of a family, manufactured by Red Shed Rubber Toys of Peterborough, NH, in the 1950s and 1960s



Plush fox puppet, advertised as washable and safe for babies, manufactured in the 1950s-1970s by Douglas Toy Company of Keene, NH.

A puppet is defined as “a movable inanimate object or figure that is controlled by strings, rods, or by placing one’s hand inside its body.” The history of their use in civilization is long and rich, dating as far back as 3,000 years ago. Not only an entertainment form, the puppet has been used for educating youth. The Kindergarten Movement at the turn of the 20th century highlighted the power

of puppets as important teaching tools used by educators to develop focus in children, to relay important information, and for children to share or retell what they have learned.

Later, puppets would frequently be used as role playing devices to help educators and parents share moral concepts with children, such as how to deal with bullies and how to behave in public settings. Hand puppets slowly gained popularity in the average household, encouraging children to use their imagination to express new personalities, emotions, and voice new goals.

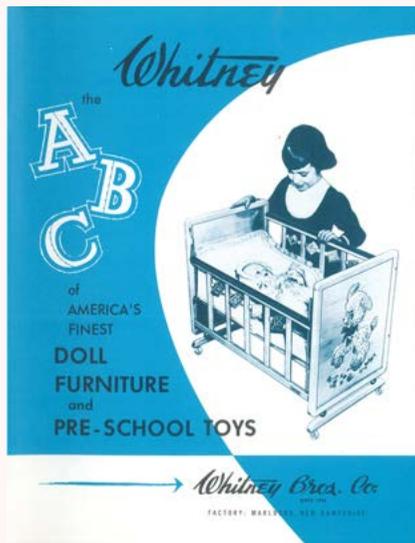
Puppets, as products to encourage role playing and imaginative play, have been manufactured in the Central Connecticut River Valley since at least the late 1940s. Following World War II, professional sculptors Mary Hotchkiss Williams and Sydney Williams Jr. established the Red Shed Co. in Peterborough, NH, manufacturing a line of rubber puppets in the shape of children, parents, and grandparents.

Since the 1960s, Douglas Cuddle Toys of Keene, NH, has been manufacturing stuffed dolls, including puppet varieties, with a goal “to promote imaginative play and emotional connection for children of all ages.”

Today, puppets still play a major role in the lives of American children. It seems that our childhoods would not have been complete without the many voices and characters of Jim Henson’s Sesame Street, or without the destruction of the occasional singular white sock found in our laundry.

World War I

Prior to World War I, German and other European toys dominated the American market. American toy manufacturers were contributing to the toy retail market but remained relatively low in number. During the war, European toy and doll factories were forced to shut down, causing American companies to pick up the pace to meet American demand for playthings. When a war-time embargo on German merchandise went into effect, American toy manufacturers capitalized on the opportunity. It also led to a shift in the types of toys produced.



1950s Whitney Brothers Company catalog cover, Keene, NH

During the 19th century, toys and dolls were considered novelties, playthings that were generally expensive, fragile, and not used on a regular basis. During the 1910s and 1920s, American toy companies began to focus on toys for all boys and girls, inventing more safe and durable playthings. Mechanical toys and dolls that could be manipulated in various ways became a popular type of toy.

Children could now interact with their toys in a much more practical way. As reported by the Toy Manufacturers of USA's James L. Fri in 1936, bathing dolls had become one of the favorite playroom sports because of this shift in the way that toys were produced. "Changes such as this have made America the center of the world's toy industry as far as ideas, development and standards are concerned." By the 1910s and 20s, early childhood educators, child psychologists, and parents had formed organizations to help toy manufacturers determine which toys were appropriate for different ages. During this era, Whitney Brothers of Marlborough, NH, began marketing its durable playthings and furnishings to early childhood educators to capitalize on the nursery school market.

Stuffed Animals

Stuffed animals are often a baby's first friend and can be cherished even into adulthood. Early forms of stuffed animals date as far back as 300 BC in the Roman empire and stuffed rag dolls were popular well into the 20th century.

German seamstress Maragarete Steiff brought stuffed animals to a new level after she introduced a small stuffed elephant to the market in 1880. Originally produced as a pin cushion, Steiff quickly realized its potential in the hands of a child. By the early 1900s, stuffed toys of all kinds were being manufactured for an international market. Eight years after Steiff's elephant, Adolf Gund of Norwalk, CT, began producing stuffed bears in the United States.

Stuffed animals weren't produced Central Connecticut River Valley until the mid-20th century. With a story similar to the accidental Steiff toys, KenToys of Peterborough, NH, began manufacturing stuffed dolls on accident. Local blanket and sheet manufacturer Kenwood Blankets created a toy land-themed trade show booth for its Easter show in New York City in 1952. To complement their line of bedding materials, the company used scraps of blankets to produce small stuffed sheep for their display. The toy props stole the show, even with the hefty \$50 price tag used to deter their sale. Soon KenToys Co. was formed to make and sell stuffed toys to a national market. The company remained in operation for a short time.



1904 advertisement for Douglas Toy Company of Keene, NH.
2019 promotional photograph for Douglas Toy Company of Keene, NH.

Douglas Cuddle Toys Co. of Keene, NH opened in 1945 with the production of small plush animals for infants. Today, the company successfully produces over 600 types of plush toys for ages birth to adult, which are distributed throughout North America, Europe, Asia and Australia.

World War II

Wooden toys were some of the most common varieties of playthings available on the market into the 20th century and the most common type of toy manufactured in the Central Connecticut River Valley. By the 1920s and 1930s, American toy manufacturers were focusing on durability and producing mechanical toys that young children could manipulate. Kingsbury, for instance, introduced pressed steel, mechanical vehicles including miniature replicas of each new Airflow automobile model introduced by Chrysler. The company boasted how lifelike its toys were with windup mechanisms to make the car 'drive', electric headlights and radios, and real rubber tires.



Above: Rubber horse and toy mold for making horses, produced by Red Shed Rubber Toys of Peterborough, NH, in the mid-20th century.



Right: Wooden rocking horse manufactured by Hancock Associates of Hancock, NH in the 1970s. This horse came in three sizes: doll size, child size, and daddy size for adults.

Wooden toys made a dramatic comeback during the 1940's. The attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941, threw the United States into World War II in the Pacific. Access to materials was difficult as many resources were marked as critical to the war effort. Kingsbury Manufacturing could not get the steel and rubber it needed to produce its mechanical vehicles. To adapt to these new demands, many toy companies began replacing their production lines, making board games, puzzles, dolls and buildings with wood and paper. Others joined the war effort.

World War II

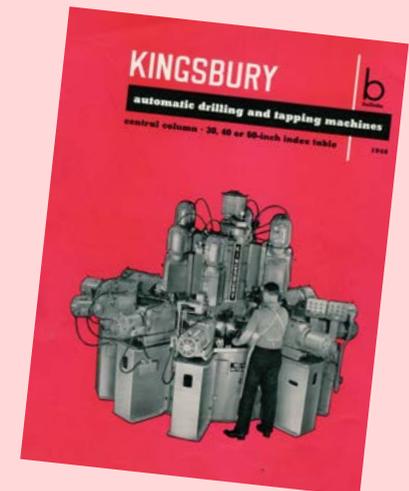
Toy production slowed dramatically when manufacturers were asked to re-use their facilities to produce goods that would support the war effort. In 1942, Kingsbury Manufacturing ceased its operation of toys and put more emphasis on its machinery production capabilities. The company produced rifle bolts for the military, encouraging employees to 'kick the axis' out of the enemy.

Following World War II, new toy companies and new types of materials flooded the market. Companies like Kingsbury never went back to manufacturing toys, seeing an opportunity, instead, to produce machinery for the booming auto industry.

Mold-injected rubber and plastic products for the production of toys and dolls became significant. Companies worked to create playthings that were unbreakable enough for everyday use by children and washable. Red Shed of Peterborough, NH, began producing rubber toy figurines of animals and people in the late 1940s, a business they continued for about twenty years in the Monadnock region of New Hampshire.



Above: 1930s advertisement for Chrysler Airflow and Desoto model toy cars manufactured by Kingsbury Toy Company, Keene, NH.



Right: 1948 catalog cover for Kingsbury Manufacturing Company after ceasing its production of toys, in favor of automatic drilling and tapping machines.

Toys Today



The format of toys has changed considerably over the past 175 years. Despite monumental changes in the design of toys resulting from technological developments, the themes of toys in the 21st century are surprisingly similar to those produced in the mid-19th century. This is true because the purpose of childhood play has not changed at all; toys are created to entertain and to help children learn.

Many of the popular toys of the 21st century relate to current pop culture and incorporate electricity in one way or another. These include things such as robots, Batman, Disney's "Frozen" movie toys, super heroes, and Star Wars – many of which use electronics for enhancement. Furthermore, many toys are now made using plastic in their construction; this is an area of manufacture that companies in the central valley never became involved in.

If you study these items, however, the basic composition of toys today is much like those from the past. Among the most popular toys of 2019 are dolls, stuffed animals, construction sets, wheeled vehicles, and finger puppets. Although some of these are enhanced by technology developed in recent decades, they are still hands-on playthings that entertain while also expanding the knowledge and creativity of young people.

Four toy companies still create playthings in the central Connecticut River Valley. The Cooperman Company of Bellows Falls creates traditional toys, games and musical instruments just like those children would have played with long ago. Harrisville Designs of Harrisville makes toy looms in various sizes and formats that encourage children to create woven items through planning and design. The Douglas Toy Company of Keene still makes plush toy stuffed animals like those that started the firm almost 75 years ago. Whitney Brothers of Keene has long been in the business of creating educational playthings and still makes wooden building blocks, play room ensembles, slides, and similar toys for use in the educational field.

The development of modern technology has altered the toy industry in ways that our ancestors could not have imagined. For example, children now play on computers from a young age. The computer programs that shape their play, however, serve the same purpose as the blocks, wagons, and cast iron trains of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Central Connecticut River Valley of New Hampshire and Vermont was a toy manufacturing center whose factories, machinery and creativity played an important role in the development of the American toy industry.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the success of the exhibit
Toys: The Story of Toy
Manufacturing in the Central Connecticut River Valley



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