

expected to follow. Eventually, the database's creators hope, an extensive reference tool for use by anyone interested in Canada's culture and heritage will be widely available. As a bonus for readers of *Material History Review*, a printed version of this index up to the end of

issue number 34 should be available sometime in 1992. CHIP itself is expected to be released for use in the first half of next year. For more information, contact Merridy Bradley at CHIN, tel.: 613 992-3333, fax: 613 952-2318.

## The Art and History of Canadian Toys

DAVID R. GRAY

As a collector of toy boats in the days before Malcolm Forbes sent the prices of toys to the far horizon, I became aware of the scarcity of Canadian-made toy boats. This was surprising, given our marine heritage, but I soon realized that the scarcity was not just in the world of toy boats but applied to all Canadian toys. Even more surprising was the lack of information on even the few well-known Canadian toy manufacturers. In the many books on toys produced in the United States or in Europe, there was barely a word on things Canadian. Looking into the situation I found that apart from articles written by Janet Holmes, a curator at the Royal Ontario Museum, and Evelyn Strahlendorf's book on Canadian dolls, there has been virtually nothing written about Canadian toys. At the moment, there appears to be no one researching the history of Canadian toys. For the last few years I have been trying to fill that gap.

My broad objectives are to research the history of all Canadian companies that manufactured toys, to write articles on Canadian toys and toymakers, and at some point, to compile these histories into a publishable form, perhaps as a book. I also hope to produce the material necessary for an exhibit of Canadian toys that could perhaps travel throughout Canada.

For the moment, because this project (especially as a purely avocational activity) is really too much for one person, I am concentrating my efforts on the companies that made transportation toys: cars, trucks, airplanes, and boats. Within that restriction I am also concentrating on the design of the toy in relation to demand, art, "real" objects and history. Since there is no way I can devote enough time to this project to cover all of the Canadian manufacturers at once, I have started my investigation with a few companies that were active from just before World War II. For these companies it is still possible to interview people who were directly

involved, though unfortunately several key people have died recently, before I was able to interview them.

The first company on my list is the well known line of mainly toy trucks called "Lincoln Toys," of Windsor, Ontario. From telephone contacts based on research in the National Archives, in particular the old city directories, I was able to contact one of the founding owners of Windsor Steel and Lincoln Specialties, the makers and distributors of Lincoln Toys, from who I received a great deal of useful and fascinating information.

In February 1990 I received the \$500 Brian O'Brien Bursary from the Canadian Toy Collectors Society to continue my research on these Canadian toys. In May I visited Leamington, Windsor and Tilbury and interviewed several former employees of both Windsor Steel and Ellwood Toys, the two manufacturers of toys distributed by Lincoln Specialties. I spent some time in the Windsor City Hall, Library, and Archives and in one of the former homes of Lincoln Toys. In Tilbury I visited the site of the Toy Factory (which burned down in 1986) with the members of the Ellwood family and interviewed several people connected with the production of Lil' Beaver Trucks (a division of Irwin Toys) after Lincoln Toys went out of business. These interviews and research in the Tilbury Library produced a new lead on the later history of the Lincoln-Lil' Beaver toy line and its final demise in the 1960s.

I have also begun interviewing people involved with the Reliable Toy Company of Toronto, once the largest toy factory in the British Empire. Reliable is an important target because of its size and range of production as well as having been in the forefront of the Canadian plastics industry.

The purpose of this note is to provide information on my research for those with similar interests and to seek out others who might be

able to help in compiling the history of Canada's few original toy-manufacturing companies. One special need is for access to any catalogues of toys made by any of the Canadian companies. Canadian catalogues for reference are scarce and I would really appreciate direction to any new sources.

In the meantime, I am continuing the collection of Canadian-made toys, related information and artifacts including catalogues,

company records and history, manufacturing techniques, and personal reminiscences of individuals involved in the Canadian toy-making industry. I am learning a great deal, I am enjoying the research, and I am confirming my impression that there is a whole chapter of Canadian industrial and social history that is being lost even as we try our best to record it. David Gray, R.R. #3, Metcalfe, Ont., K0A 2P0, 613 821-2640 evenings; 613 954-2663 days.

## Research Query: Mobile Hanging Cradles

In the History Collection of the Canadian Museum of Civilization is an unusual bent-wood hanging cradle. The frame of this cradle has at one end a pair of cast iron wheels and at the other a small curved handle by which the bed may be pulled. Although the cradle was purchased in Gananoque, Ontario, and an almost identical one in the collection of the Canadian Centre for Folk Culture Studies at CMC was bought at Shakespeare, Ontario, near Stratford, a similar cradle is shown in Lyndon C. Viel, *Antique Ethnic Furniture* (Des Moines, Iowa: Wallace-Homestead, 1983) and is associated with the American Upper Midwest.

Mr. Viel refers to this latter cradle as a Norwegian "field" cradle, so named because it could be taken with the family to the fields during harvest. This interpretation seems to be improbable, at least with respect to the CMC History Collection cradle. An examination of that object demonstrates that the small cast iron wheels can lift the frame only a couple of inches off the ground, and the overall construction, while sturdy, is not robust. Not only could it not endure much rough treatment, there are no marks reflecting non-domestic use.

A picture of the CMC History Collection cradle published in the *Ottawa Citizen* as part of a feature on the *Comforts of Home* exhibit resulted in a contact from a local man who had a similar cradle in his possession. This cradle was used by the man's father as a baby. That information places the cradle in Ancaster, Ontario, around 1888. Other information from



◀ **Fig. 1**  
Cradle, History Division, acc. D-8835. The supporting framework or "runners" of the cradles owned by the Doon Heritage Crossroads collection and privately in Ottawa converge at both ends. Both also have wooden wheels. The privately-owned cradle has a wooden stretcher between the runners in the centre at the bottom, and its handles are turned on a lathe. The Doon Heritage Crossroads cradle lacks an axle between the wheels; instead, assemblies fasten a wheel to each runner. A chain attached above the wheels, possibly a replacement for a leather strap, keeps the runners from spreading apart. (Courtesy Canadian Museum of Civilization)

the Doon Heritage Crossroads collection in Waterloo, Ontario, indicates that they also have a very similar cradle, which they refer to as a "corn cradle."

While all four Canadian cradles show some differences of construction in the frames, pulling handles and wheels, they are substantially similar. All appear to have been factory made and all but one have been decorated with yellow or gold pinstriping.

The Canadian Museum of Civilization would like to know more about possible origins and uses of these cradles. Readers with any information are invited to write or telephone Dr. Peter Rider, Atlantic Provinces Historian, telephone 819 776-8365, or Magnus Einarsson, North European Folklorist, 819 776-8226, Canadian Museum of Civilization, P.O. Box 3100, Station "B," Hull, Quebec, J8X 4H2.