

Homemade Toys From Kansas

by

Carol Huff

Chances are, most of us born in the last quarter of a century never really had to make up our own playthings or our own games. Our recreation has been ready-made, cellophane-wrapped. We have never actually had to entertain ourselves.

What did kids do before the advent of TV and the Little League?

Mostly, they made their own amusements. A boy without a pocketknife was no boy at all, and nearly every boy was an expert maker-of-things. He made wooden daggers and swords. He carved boats, wagons, trucks, and countless other toys from scraps of wood. From empty thread spools he made tops and racers. With a piece of board and a snap clothespin he could make rubber-shooter guns.

Children could work for hours with a piece of string, forming cat's cradles and crow's feet, or just experimenting. Little girls played house with corn-cob dolls. Little boys played farm with tractors and harrows made from spools and nails and wood scraps. Bigger boys (and tomboys) manufactured stilts, tree-houses, and boomerangs from boards and nails (quite often "borrowed").

Sometimes, especially for children who were lucky enough to live on a farm, there was ready-made entertainment: grapevines that dangled from tree limbs near the creek bank—just the thing for young Tarzans; barrels to roll; haymows to explore; trees to climb; ponds for fishing.

The child of yesterday, too, spent much of his time simply doing nothing. He watched the clouds and the stars and the grass and his thumb, and he wondered if his dad was meaner than someone else's dad.

There was one thing he didn't do for long, and that was to stay bored. He seldom whined for anything to do; he didn't wait for someone else to hand him something to do. He created his own play, independent of the adult world, and tried to stay out of the way of grown-ups.

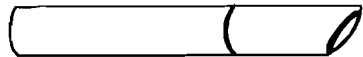
Making noise—then as now—was a favorite occupation for children. Homemade musical instruments were simple to make and effective as noise-makers. A comb harp, or "harmonica," was quick and easy to put together. A piece of paper was placed against one side of a comb and the musician hummed, open-mouthed, with his lips against the other side of the comb. Another way to make a comb harp was to fold a piece of paper (waxed, tissue, cigarette, or cellophane) over the teeth of the comb, and the mouth over the comb as the musician hummed.

A variety of whistles and flutes were made from reeds and sticks. For a flute, a length of hollow reed about five or six inches long could be plugged at both ends. Several holes were drilled along the top side, and a mouthpiece cut at one end of the top side. Small green limbs from which the center could be easily removed made good whistles, simply by cutting a hole in the top.

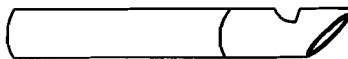
Willow whistles are a little more complicated to make. The branch, cut from a willow tree in the spring or early summer, can be from three to seven inches in length. There should be no knot-holes or twigs in the half from which the bark is removed. The steps for making a willow whistle are these:



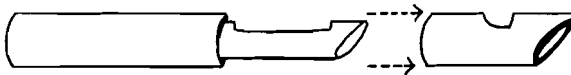
(1) A NOTCH IS CUT THROUGH THE BARK



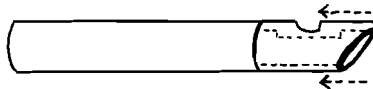
(2) THE END IS SLANTED



(3) V-SHAPE NOTCH IS CUT INTO TOP



(4) BARK IS SLIPPED OFF; NOTCH ON HEART IS EXTENDED

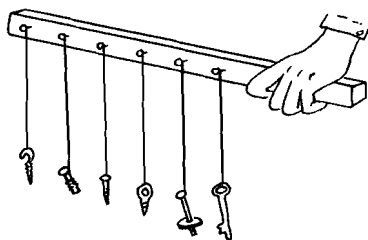


(5) BARK IS SLIPPED BACK ONTO WHISTLE

First, about two inches from one end a notch is cut all the way around the stick (1). That same end is slanted to within about 1/8 inch of the top edge (2). Third, a V-shaped notch is cut in the top (3), and the bark on the short end is pounded all around until it is loosened enough to slide off. The notch of the heart of the stick is extended (4) as illustrated. Last, the bark is slipped back into position, and the whistle is completed (5).

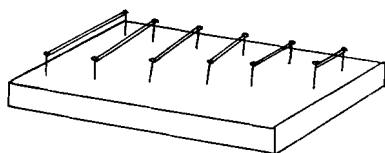
A variation of this whistle simply had a hole through the pith of the willow twig, and a notch in the top side.

An instrument with a little more variety in tone is the musical scale, made of nails, screw eyes, bolts, keys, and what-have-you. According to Dwain Paugh of Emporia, the musical scale is made in this manner: First, get a stick about an inch thick and eight inches long, and sand the edges smooth. Tie a piece of string to each of the tone-producing materials, and tie the other end onto spaced nails on the stick. Use a large nail to tap out tunes. (The notes may have to be changed around many times before the right scale is achieved.)



MUSICAL SCALE

Real tunes, too, can be played on a rubber band harp. The materials needed are a piece of wood about an inch thick, eight inches wide, and ten inches long; nails about two inches long; an assortment of rubber bands. About an inch from one long edge of the board a row of nails should be driven approximately a half inch apart. On a diagonal line starting at a point about an inch from one end nail and going to a point about six inches opposite the other end nail, another matching set of nails should be driven. Different sized rubber bands should be stretched over each pair of nails. Probably a lot of experimentation with the rubber bands will be required in order to get the scale tones that are needed. When the harp is tuned up, it should be played with the thumb and fore-finger of the right hand. Harps and fiddles can be made in much this

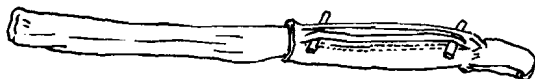
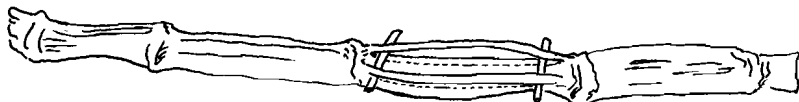


RUBBER BAND HARP

same manner, using small nails, rubber bands, and a cigar box instead of a board.)

Other instruments for noise-making were sandpaper scrape-blocks made of two blocks of wood about three or four inches wide and any length, with coarse sandpaper tacked or glued over the face of each block. These blocks were then rubbed together for rhythmic accompaniment. Tom-toms were made by fastening paper or cloth over the open ends of empty oatmeal boxes or coffee cans. Castenets could be made by tying two unbroken walnut shell halves together.

The corn fiddle is a rather interesting instrument which requires a green corn stalk, a little patience, and a little spit. A section of stalk about two feet long is needed for the fiddle, and a



CORN STALK FIDDLE AND BOW

smaller section of about the same length is needed for the bow. The "strings" are made by gently splitting off two strands of the stalk between two close joints, and bracing them away from the stalk with a couple of cross pieces. The bow "strings" are made in the same manner. Both pairs of "strings" are wetted with spit, and the bowstrings are sawed back and forth across the fiddle strings.



Not all of the efforts of the youngsters were musical, however. Especially if there was a cement sidewalk or wooden porch available, it was great fun to lay two tin cans (quart size are fine) on their sides and stomp them, making the ends curve up over the shoes as clamps. The cans made a delightful noise—KLOMP, KLOMP, KLOMP—when walked on.

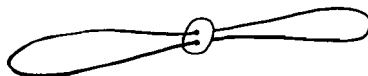
Two children could have fun with tin can telephones, or walkie-talkies as they are now called. Using two soup cans with a hole punched in the bottom of each, they threaded a long piece of fishing line through the bottom of each can and tied a washer or button on the string to keep it from slipping through the hole. When the line was stretched taut, the two could carry on a conversation at some distance, the talker using his can as a microphone while the listener used his can as an ear-piece.



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Another gadget for whiling away time and for making a whirling noise (and, incidentally, for tangling little girls' hair) was a button on a string, called by such names as a "buzzer," "spinner," "hummer," and "button yo-yo."

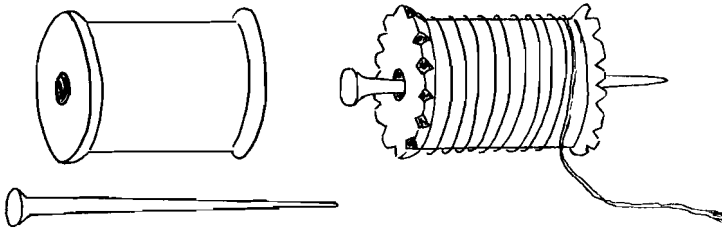
A heavy string at least two feet long was threaded through two holes of a large button. (If a four-hole button was used, two diagonal holes were threaded.) The string ends were tied together and the button was moved to



BUTTON WHIZZER

the center of the string. The loops of the string were placed over the middle fingers or the thumbs, and the button was started spinning by either a quick jerk with both hands or by whirling the button to twist the string. As soon as the button was started, it was kept moving by the string ends being alternately pulled and released. The whizzing string when caught in a little girl's hair was a real pain-maker. Often the only way to remove it was to cut it out—and this usually ended the pastime for awhile.

A good Halloween noisemaker (sometimes called a "tick-tack") can be made from an empty thread spool by cutting notches in both ends. A long string (about arm's length) is wrapped around the spool, and a large nail is pushed through the hollow center of the spool. The spool is held against a window pane or some wooden surface such as a door, with the nail point in one hand and the string in the other. A good stout pull on the string produces an eerie scraping noise.



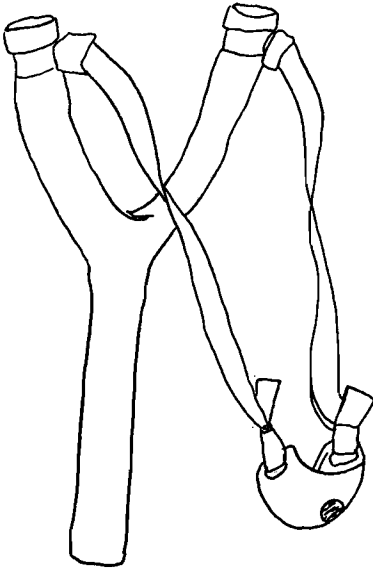
HALLOWEEN NOISEMAKER

WEAPONS

Weapons have always proved fascinating to youngsters, and homemade weapons range from paperwad throwers to fancy slingshots, from wood shaped like a gun to wooden guns that actually shoot ammunition of one kind or another.

In the "good old days" (and even now in many communities), every boy (and nearly every girl) had a slingshot, or "nigger shooter," as they were often called. One type, the single-stick sling, was a strong straight stick about a foot long, with a rubber band (made from an old inner tube) wrapped on one end of the stick. It could be used effectively to throw stones and other small missiles.

The more common type of slingshot was made from a Y-shaped branch. The branches on the forked stick were about four or five inches long and at least four inches apart at the ends. The tail of the "Y" was about four inches long or more, to fit the owner's hand comfortably.



Sometimes the bark was peeled from the branch, but usually it was left on. Notches were cut near the end of each prong to keep the rubber from slipping. Two strips of rubber about ten inches long, cut from an old inner tube, were tied in the notches. An old shoe tongue or similar leather was cut in an oval with a hole cut in each end; the strips of rubber were tied through the holes in the leather oval, and the slingshot was ready for business.

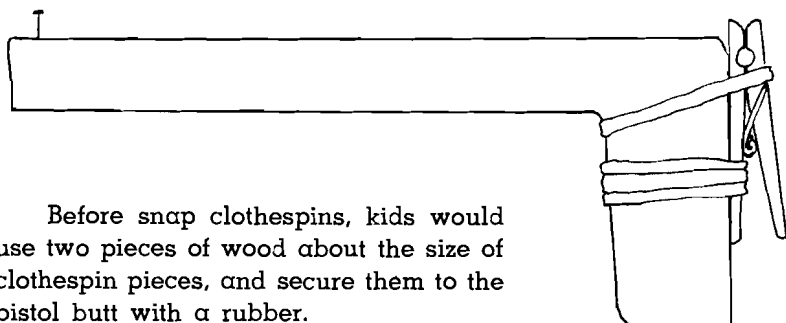
An alternate method of construction was to use only a single strip of rubber. The oval of leather with its two end holes was centered on the strip before the ends were tied to the "Y." A hole cut in the center of the leather helped to hold the ammunition in place, and thus aided precision in shooting.

Guns of various kinds have always provided hours of entertainment. Perhaps the best known homemade gun is the rubber shooter (also called a "nigger shooter"). A board about ten inches long and 3/4 inch wide, carved in a crude L-shape, made a dandy pistol. At the butt end a snapper clothespin was nailed for the trigger, the closed end at the top. At the top front of the barrel, a small nail was driven so that only about 1/8 inch protruded.

The gun was loaded by stretching a large rubber band (a circular cross-section of an inner tube, for example) from the nail to the trigger. When the end of the clothespin was squeezed, the "bullet" snapped off toward the target.

Sometimes a notch was cut at the front end of the barrel; this was used instead of a nail for hooking the end of the rubber band.

Sometimes the band was simply hooked over the barrel end of the pistol.



Before snap clothespins, kids would use two pieces of wood about the size of clothespin pieces, and secure them to the pistol butt with a rubber.

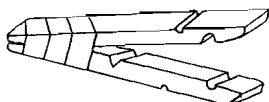
Another method for making the pistol was to use two wood pieces nailed together: one piece was small in diameter and ten or twelve inches long; the handle piece was larger (about 2" x 2") and short enough to be held comfortably. The pincher clothespin was attached to the butt, the closed part at the top. (A favorite target used to be flies on the porch ceiling.)

Snapper clothespins were necessary for making a match shooter, too. The springs were removed from two clothespins. A notch was cut on the inner side of one of the pieces, about 1/16 inch deep (1). Two wood sides were glued together with the half-moons facing each other. The glue was placed on the slanting part, and tape was wrapped around the two glued pieces to hold them in place (2).

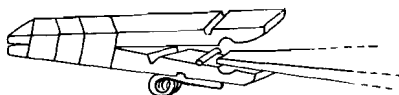
The spring was replaced on the notched part by sliding the spring on from the front to the first notch. One part of the other



(1) SPRING REMOVED FROM CLOTHESPIN; NOTCH CUT



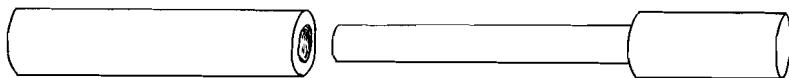
(2) TWO SIDES GLUED AND TAPED



(3) SPRING REPLACED; SECOND CLOTHESPIN USED AS LOADER

clothespin was used as a loader (3). It was used to push the top part of the spring back until it hooked into the notch, thus cocking the gun. The spring was pulled back to fire the ammunition (matches or small sticks). A match placed with the head between the wood sides could be lit when the "trigger" was pulled.

Very effective popguns could be made from a joint of box elder and a piece of dogwood. The box elder limb, about six inches long and an inch in diameter, was hollowed out by pushing out the pith with the dogwood stick (The dogwood had to be about ten or twelve inches long). The plunger part was whittled down to about 1/2 inch diameter and about the same length as the box elder piece. The butt end, four or more inches long, was left whole.



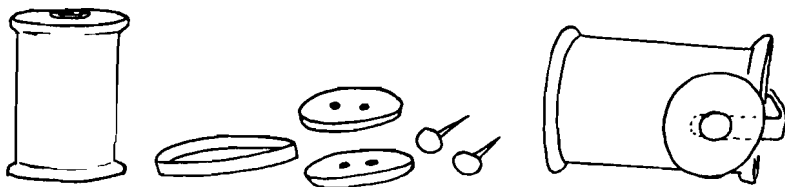
BOX ELDER JOINT HOLLOWED OUT

DOGWOOD LIMB WHITTLED DOWN TO FIT BOX ELDER

To operate this gun, the shooter had to put a tight-fitting paperwad in each end of the box elder barrel. The barrel was held in one hand; with the other hand, the plunger was pushed into the barrel with considerable force. The pressure between the two paperwads produced a loud POP, and one wad would shoot forth.

Another type of gun was a spool cannon. Materials needed were an empty thread spool, a rubber band, two large buttons, and two tacks. The rubber band was attached to the spool (at the back of one side) by placing one folded end on the spool, placing one button over it, and pushing a tack through the button hole, the rubber band, and into the spool. The same procedure was followed for the other side of the spool, the rubber band being stretched across the near end of the spool.

The spool cannon was used when children were playing toy soldiers. Small sticks were fired at the enemy soldiers by placing



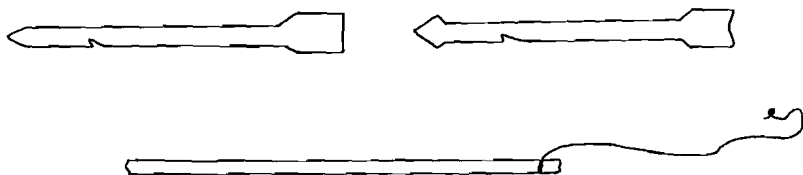
SPOOL CANNON PARTS

SPOOL CANNON

the sticks in the spool "barrel" and pulling the rubber band back and letting it go.

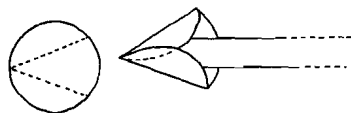
Other types of weapons included darts and dart-throwers, bows and arrows, spears, and swords. Darts were constructed from shingles. The shingle was whittled into an arrow shape about fourteen to eighteen inches long, with a flat tail (about two inches in width and four inches long) at the thin end of the shingle. The point was fashioned from the thick part of the shingle. A notch was cut in the shaft about six or eight inches from the point.

A branch about two or three feet long and ½ inch in diameter, with lots of spring in it, was used to throw the dart. A heavy string three or four feet long was tied near one end of the branch; a knot at the other end of the string was secured in the notch of the dart.



There were two ways to throw the dart. One was to hold the branch in one hand, the dart in the other, and to fling the dart with a quick-springing throwing action with the branch. The other method was to place the dart on the ground and to use the fast-flinging motion with the branch. With either technique, the dart would fly for quite a long distance high through the air.

Ideal spears could be made from dead nettle stalks, sunflower stalks, or other tall straight fairly strong plants. The leaves and all but the main root were removed, and the root end was

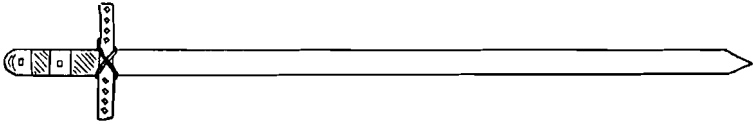


SPEARHEAD MADE FROM TIN CAN LID

used as the point. Spears could also be made with a length of lath (three to five feet long), and a point made from a tin can lid bent over into a V-shape and pinched onto the wood.

Swords could be made by simply tying two pieces of lath, one three feet long and one ten inches long, together at right angles, and sharpening the "blade" to a point. Sometimes the wood sticks from window blinds were used. (It was much better not to take the stick from a blind which was still in use!) One end was whittled to

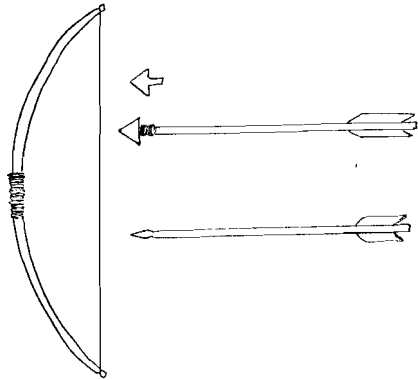
a point and the handle end was rounded over. A five-inch stick was fitted onto the rounded end as a hand guard, about six inches from the end. Designs could be drawn or carved on the different parts of the sword for ornamental purposes.



Small daggers could be whittled from almost any piece of scrap wood. The blade and handle were carved from a piece of wood eight inches long (or more or less) and about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick by an inch or so wide. A guard was carved to fit snugly over the blade, and the dagger was ready for use in all kinds of imaginary adventures.



Bows and arrows, of course, have been around for some time. One type of bow was made from a willow stick about four feet long with notches cut in either end to hold the bowstring. The string was looped around the notches, the bow was curved the desired amount, and the string was tied securely at each end. Pig hickory (first growth hickory) was acceptable for a crude bow, but one expert claims the best bow wood is second-growth hickory.



The bark could either be left on or removed, but a clean-shaven bow was fancier. Sometimes string was wrapped around the middle of the bow as a hand grip.

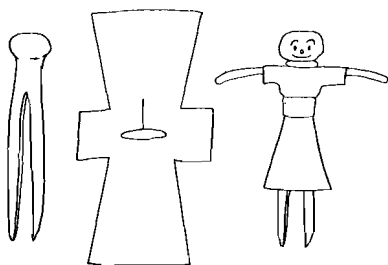
One type of arrow was made from a dowel about a foot long, with a tin arrowhead secured to one end with string or wire, and chicken feathers attached to the other end. A notch was cut at the

feather end to hold the bow string. Other kinds of arrows could be made from any straight stick a couple of feet long. Often one end was simply whittled down to a point for the arrowhead, and turkey feathers could be used as stabilizers.

Perhaps a more practical type of homemade weapon (if it may be called that!) was the fishing pole, a branch six to ten feet in length, with the twigs trimmed off. A length of string was tied to the narrower end of the pole, and a hook and sinker were attached to the free end of the string. Bait was a matter of preference (or availability), with fishing worms doing the job as well as chicken guts or frog livers.

DOLLS

A clothespin doll, made from the old-style pinch clothespin (not the snap kind), a pipe cleaner, and a scrap of cloth or paper,



was an inexpensive and easy-to-make doll. The face was drawn on the rounded end of the clothespin. The pipe cleaner was wrapped about the neck of the pin with the ends sticking out as arms. The bit of cloth, a couple of inches wide and long enough to cover the body of the

clothespin, was fastened on for a dress. A hat could even be made with a tiny piece of cloth glued onto the top of the head.

Today, a doll such as this may seem practically worthless, but little girls once found many uses for their clothespin dolls. With a dab of glue, the dolls stood alone on a board or piece of cardboard. They could serve as cute and colorful Christmas tree decorations. And they fulfilled the universal purpose of dolls: Imagination made them into the little girl's own "baby."

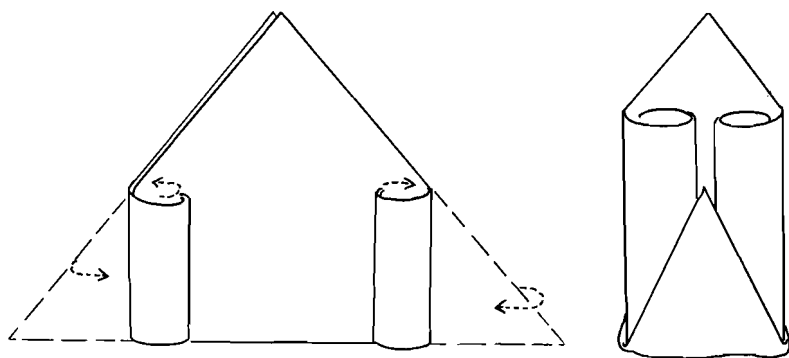
More seasonal were hollyhock dolls. These were made by using one flower, blossom down, for the skirt and body; another flower was fastened sideways onto the body with a sharp twig or toothpick and served as a face. Sometimes a bud was fastened on for the face, and some little girls simply visualized the sepal (the

green part at the base of the flower) of the petal skirt as the doll's head.

Hollyhock dolls wore a variety of colored dresses, and danced with great flopping skirts when a string was tied around the green sepal and manipulated from above.

Homemade dolls were made from practically any available materials around the home—stockings, rags, corncobs, cornhusks, handkerchiefs. Socks or pieces of cloth were stuffed with sawdust, cornhusks, rags, or like materials. Strings were tied around appropriate corners to represent arms, legs, and the head. (The corners could be stitched, of course, rather than tied.) The eyes, nose, and mouth could be inked onto the cloth, or buttons were sewed on to represent the facial features.

A handkerchief or washcloth provided the basic material for "twin dolls in a cradle," also called "twins in a hammock." The cloth was folded diagonally, and the narrower corners were rolled toward each other to form the twins. The other two corners were then separated, and one was pulled back under the twins to form one end of the cradle. The dolls could be rocked by holding the two unrolled ends and gently swinging them. When the twins were asleep, the corner at their feet could be folded over them for a cover.

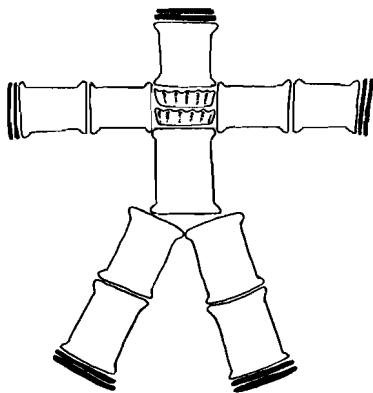


TWINS IN A CRADLE

And what a variety of possibilities a corncob could present to an imaginative little "mother"! She could fasten a scrap of cloth

around the lower part of a cob for the dress, and a "scarf" around the upper end; with a marked-on face, the cob became a real "live" playmate. Cornsilks could be glued on the head for wavy blond hair. Old buttons could be pinned or glued on the face for features if drawing them on was not elaborate enough. The dress might even have a fancy belt or tiny buttons.

Ten thread spools and ten buttons threaded with elastic or twine resulted in quite a different type of doll—a shaking doll. The

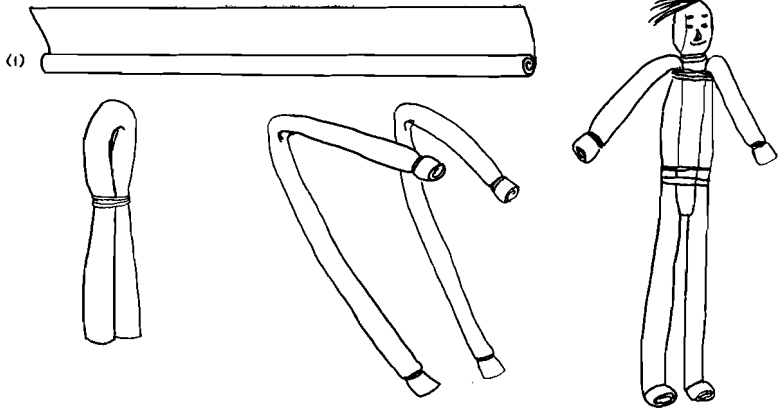


SPPOOL DOLL

string was threaded through two buttons, the head spool, a collar of two bottle caps with holes punched in them, the large body spool, and one leg (formed from two spools and two buttons). Then the string was threaded back to the head and down through the other leg. After a return trip to the head, the two ends of the string were tied together.

The string was then threaded through two buttons and two spools, run beneath the collar, through two spools and two buttons, and back again to form the arms. These two string ends were then tied together. Features could be marked on the face, and clothes, if desired, could be added. This spool doll could dance a jig and accompany itself with a fascinating clickety-click of its parts.

A newspaper doll, according to Mrs. Myron Paugh of Hoxie, Kansas, is made by rolling up a newspaper lengthwise (1), folding the roll in the middle, and tying it together with thread or string (2). Two other long pieces of paper, each long enough to serve as an arm-leg piece are rolled up, and tied near each end (3). These pieces are then tied onto the body, the first roll, with the bend of it serving as the head piece. A face may be drawn on the head. Thread may be glued or sewed onto the head for hair. Hands and feet may be formed by bending up the arm and leg ends just below the ties (4).



(2) FOLD ROLL AND TIE

(3) TIE LONG ARM-LEG ROLLS NEAR ENDS

(4) TIE PARTS TOGETHER

The Jumping Jack is not exactly a doll, but it is great fun for boys and girls both young and old, and it is going to be included here for lack of any better place to put it. Myrtle Stone of Gridley, Kansas, furnished the following directions, with the comment that she used to make jumping jacks for her children to play with twenty or thirty years ago.

Directions for making Jumping Jack: Use medium heavy cardboard. Cut head (1) (Jack can be tall or short, skinny or fat, happy or dour. He can have plenty of hair or a bald spot. He can be handsome or plain. Use your own imagination, and cut the head accordingly.), and draw on the features with crayon or paint.

Cut the body (2), two upper-arms (3), two forearms with hands (4), two thighs (5), and two lower-legs with feet (6).

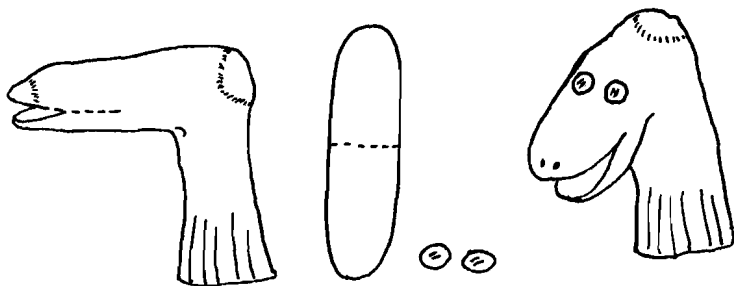
Use a large needle and string to put Jack together. Tie a piece of flat toothpick $\frac{1}{4}$ inch long to one end of the string. Draw the needle through the neck, then through the neck piece of the body and back again. Tie at the back and cut the string.

Next, fasten a quarter-inch piece of toothpick to the string and draw the needle through an upper-arm and through a shoulder from the back. Tie a toothpick to the front side and cut the string. (All joined pieces should fit snugly, but not so tightly that the limbs cannot move freely.)

Attach the forearm to the upper-arm in the same manner: Tie

The puppet is not exactly a doll, either, but it should be included in homemade toys. The materials needed to make a puppet are an old sock, two buttons, a piece of cardboard, a red crayon, thread, needle, and scissors.

The toe of the sock is slit width-wise. The cardboard is cut to "lip" shape to fit the slit in the sock so that when the cardboard piece is folded over, it resembles the upper lip and roof of the mouth (the fold is the throat) and the lower lip and jaw.



SLIT SOCK, CARDBOARD "JAWS," BUTTON EYES = MR. PUPPET

The "upper" mouth is sewed onto the bottom of the sock (inside the slit), and the other half of the folded cardboard is sewed onto the toe-top of the sock, inside. The inside of the cardboard mouth may be colored red at this point, or it may be colored before it is sewn in. The two buttons are sewed on near the heel of the sock as eyes.

Now Mr. Puppet is ready to work. The sock is slid onto the hand, the top of the fingers manipulating the upper mouth and top of the head, the thumb working the lower jaw.

The subject of dolls would not be complete without some mention of accessory toys. Little girls playing house did not always have to run down to the supermarket for a set of play dishes. Leaves of varying sizes were just right for mudpies and cakes. Tiny cups and saucers could be made from nut shells, and the nut meats made good victuals for the dolls' dinner.

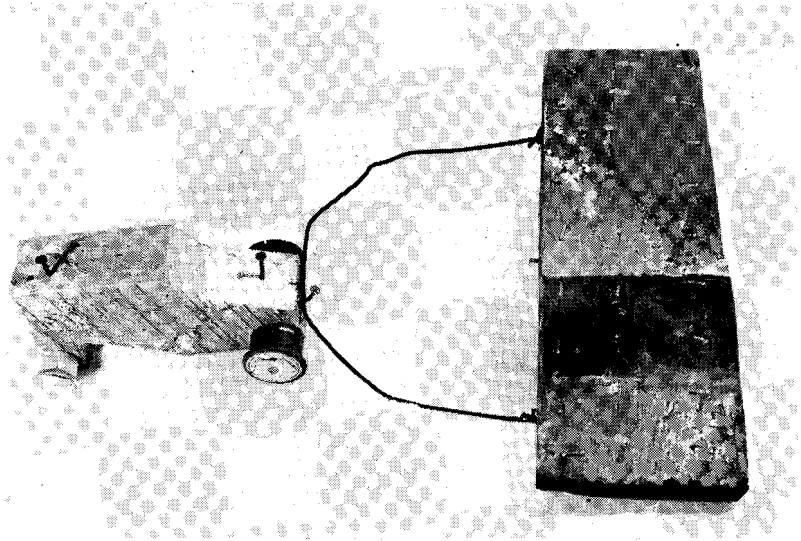
Big brothers in occasional fits of cooperativeness could make quite acceptable doll houses from orange crates. Rooms could be

divided off with boards or shingles. Elegance of living was attained when wallpaper scraps were pasted onto the walls, and the home was stocked with furniture made from spools, buttons, paper, pipecleaners, scraps of lumber, and other such material found around the house.

FARMING TOYS

Farm toys were a lot of fun to make, and could keep the young "farmer" busy for hours if he used a little imagination with his "field work." One of the essential pieces of equipment, of course, was a tractor, if a fellow was going to do any heavy work at all.

A very simple tractor could be made from a chunk of wood, such as a two-by-four about six or eight inches long, whittled to tractor shape. A seat and a hitch were represented with a couple of large nails driven into the block in the appropriate places. Wheels could be formed from practically any round-shaped metal or wood scraps. Large thread spools cut in half, one half of each spool nailed to one side of the tractor body at both front and back, made suitable wheels.

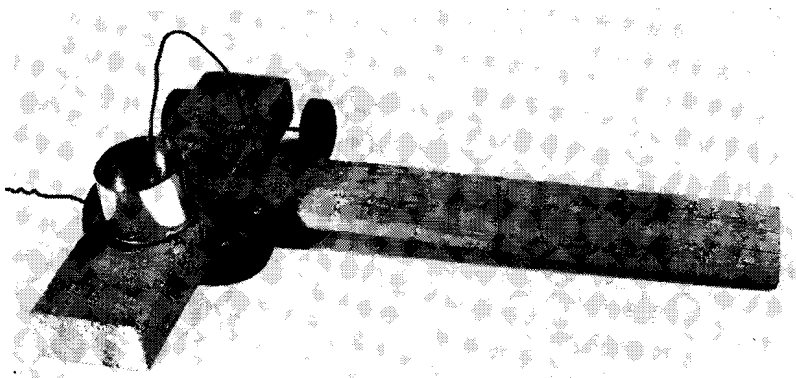


Tractor pulling a harrow. Made from scrap lumber, thread spools, and nails by John M. Meyer, Sabetha.

An easy-to-make harrow could be made from a bunch of two- or three-inch nails and a board of any desired size. (The one pictured is a one-by-four about twelve inches long.) The nails were pounded through the board at spaced intervals, so that the points could do the harrowing job. A bent nail at the front of the harrow made a hitch to the tractor, and a rock on the top gave the weight necessary for tilling the soil.

Another type of harrow was made from a lath, or from the wood strip from an old window blind. The strip was cut into four pieces—two equal-length pieces for the harrow bars, and two shorter equal-length ones for spacers. Small nails driven through the longer strips served as teeth. A string or wire was used for the pulling hitch. A rock on top of the harrow gave it necessary weight.

An interesting combine could be made from a $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 4" x 15" board, another board 2" x 4" x 12", two or more used sickle plates from a real combine, a small can, some clotheshanger wire, and some nails. The sickle plates were attached to the thin board, which in turn was nailed crossways on the two-by-four. The can was nailed on top of the two-by-four for the bin, and the wire was bent and fastened on to make the auger and spout. Wheels were attached (thread spools were often used), and the combine was ready for play.



Combine made from scraps. Contributed by John M. Meyer.

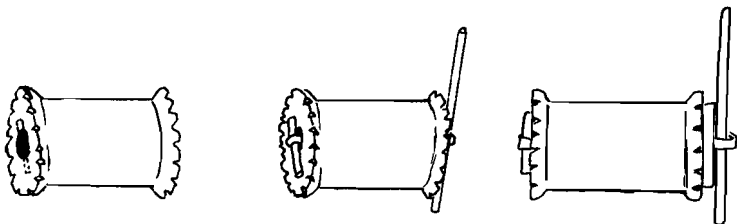
INDOOR TOYS

Although staying inside all day was not the most fun in the world, youngsters used to be able to entertain themselves for long periods of time — even without TV! They could while away a lot of hours with pieces of string and paper and cloth and spools.

Making a spool tractor (or tank, as it is sometimes called) and playing with the finished product might consume an hour or two. These tractors which children used to enjoy so much are hardly comparable to the wind-up tractors found in the dime stores nowadays — but they were a heck of a lot of fun.

All that was needed was an empty thread spool, a rubber band, a couple of kitchen matches, and the inevitable pocketknife. Notches were cut into the spool rims all around to make the traction wheels. At one end of the spool a groove was cut (about a half inch on either side of the hole, in a straight line).

The rubber band was inserted through the center hole of the spool, and secured on the grooved side by an inch-long piece of match stick. This little piece of stick was pushed into the groove, and thus was kept from turning. An unbroken match stick was slipped through the other end of the rubberband and was turned round and round, parallel with its end of the spool, twisting the rubberband. When the tractor was cranked up fairly tight, it was placed on the floor or on a bare table. It would propel itself along until the rubberband was unwound.



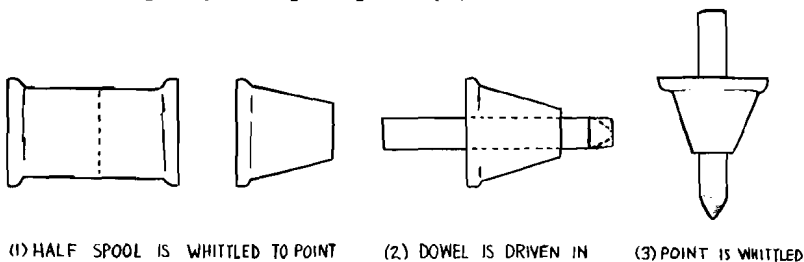
(1) GROOVE AND NOTCHES CUT

(2) RUBBER BAND THREADED ONTO STICKS

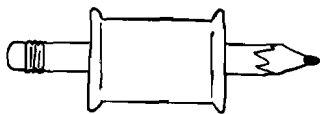
A spool tractor could be made more efficient by placing a piece of soap next to the crank side of the spool, pushing the rubberband through a hole cut in the center of the soap, and then slipping the match through the rubberband. A couple of drops of water or spit on the soap cut down the friction of the moving parts even more, so that the tractor could go faster and further.

A toy traditional for many centuries is the top. Tops were known long before the time of Christ, and are mentioned in such works as Aristophanes' *Birds*, Plato's *Republic*, and Virgil's *Aeneid*. In Eastern cultures, tops are reported to have been made from natural materials such as conch shells, gourds, nuts, bamboo, and stone.

In early Kansas homes, though, and likely elsewhere in this country, thread spools made practicable tops. One spool could be made into two tops by whittling the spool down from each end to a point in the center of the spool (1). A dowel or small stick was driven down through each half of the spool (2). (The dowel had to be about an inch longer than its spool half.) The part of the dowel sticking out of the pointed end of the spool was whittled to a point for spinning; the dowel piece sticking out of the flat end was used for gripping the top to spin it (3).



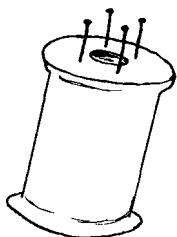
An even simpler top could be made with a pencil stub and a whole spool. The pencil was forced through the spool center. The pencil point was the spinning point; the eraser end was used as the grip.



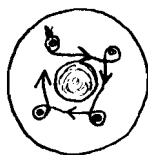
Some fellows recommend using a string (about two feet long) wound around the top to make it spin.

Another rainy day pastime was the knitting spool. Four small-headed nails were driven into one end of an empty thread spool so that the nails formed the four corners of a square. One end of a string was attached to one of the nails with a slipknot. The string was then wound around each of the other nails in a clockwise direction from the inner side of each nail to the outer side and on to the inner side of the next nail. When the string was wound around the first nail, a crochet hook was used to pull the bottom string off the nail over the top string (which stayed in place). The knitter

continued to wind the string around each nail, pulling the bottom string off with the crochet hook each time, and then proceeding to the next nail. Soon there grew out of the bottom of the spool a complex chain of string.



(1) NAILS IN SPOOL



(2) DIRECTION OF STRING



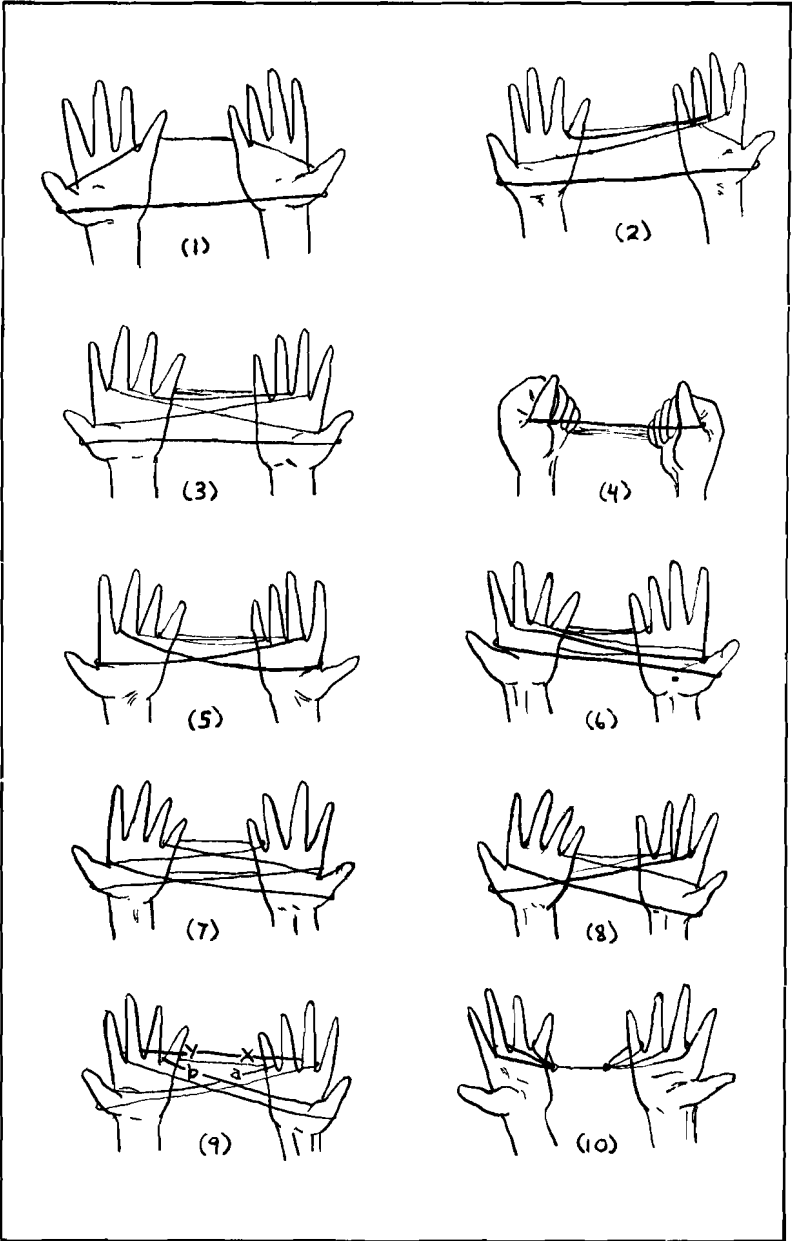
(3) "CHAIN" FORMED

Empty thread spools (woe to the kids if the spools weren't empty, too!) were also good for bubble pipes. Besides a spool, the only other ingredients necessary for making bubbles were a cup of warm water and enough handsoap mixed in for producing good bubbles. (The right amount was found by experimenting.)

One end of the spool was dipped into the soap mixture; then the other end was placed to the lips. If the mixture was all right, gentle blowing with a steady force would produce a bubble. If the mixture needed more soap, the bubble would burst too soon. Bubbles as large as a person's head could be blown, with ideal conditions.

With a little practice, a child could learn to flip the bubbles free of the spool so that they floated in the air. If he were very careful, he could keep such bubbles up in the air by blowing at them very gently. Another technique for getting bubbles in the air was to place the finger over the dry end of the spool as it was being dipped. By moving the spool quickly through the air, an expert could whip off as many as six to ten bubbles (medium size) from one dip.

An interesting distraction occurred if the spool was dipped too far and too quickly into the soap mixture, or if the breath was inhaled when the mouth was placed against the spool.



String toys, also, provide entertainment for kids five to ninety-five. A piece of string three or four feet long is the only material needed for making, for instance, crow's feet. Learning how takes a little time, but after several practices, the learner becomes an expert, and can show off for all his friends. The ends of the string are tied together, and the string is looped over the thumb and little finger of each hand (Step 1), and pulled taut.

The string across the left palm is picked up with the right middle finger (2); the string across the right palm is picked up with the left middle finger (3). The string should now be looped around the thumb, middle finger, and little finger of each hand.

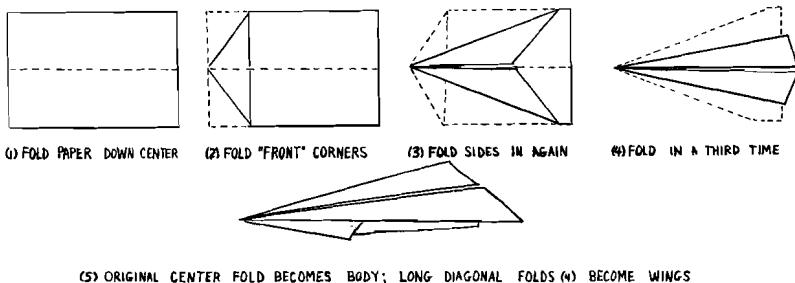
The fingers on each hand are squeezed together so that the loops on the fingers will not slip off. The fingers are now tucked under the string that extends from the outsides of the thumbs (4). The string is turned off the thumbs onto the fingers, and is slipped down over the backs of the hands (5).

Next, the loop from the right middle finger is transferred to the right thumb (6). (Teeth will prove most helpful in working these four steps.) This transfer is duplicated with the left finger and thumb (7). The loop from the back of the right hand is removed and placed over the right middle finger (8). This step is repeated with the left hand (9).

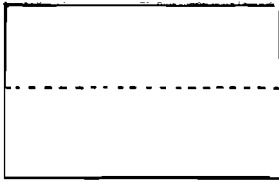
The right little finger is curved over point "x" and under point "a" (10). Then the old loop is removed from that finger. The same procedure is followed by the left little finger (over "y" and under "b"). The loops are dropped off the thumbs, and the crows feet are formed. (If not, start over again!)

Toys made from paper have been popular for a number of years, and every school age child knows about paper airplanes, paper boats, and paper hats. A paper airplane can be made from any size of paper, but notebook paper seems to be used usually. The sheet is folded lengthwise down the middle (1). Then it is opened out flat with the outer side of the fold up. At one end (the "front"), the two corners are folded in to the center to form a point (2).

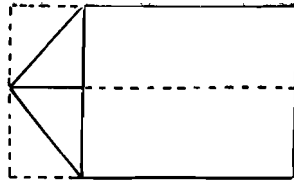
Next, a longer point is made by folding the sides in once again (except for about an inch at the tail) (3). Again the outside edges are folded in to the center (4). The entire sheet is folded together then, and two long diagonal bends become the wings when raised away from the body (the original center bend) (5). The body of the plane is held in the hand and then flipped with a snap of the wrist out into space. A paper clip or straight pin at the point will give more stability and accuracy—but under no conditions should this creation be aimed at the teacher or the preacher!



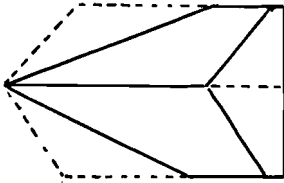
Another variation of the paper airplane is made by folding a regular 8½ by 11 inch paper in half length-ways. The paper is opened flat with the outsides of the fold up (1). The two "front end" corners are folded in to the center line to form a point (2). The two corners just formed are then folded in to the center line, thus making a longer point (3). Next the "tail end" corners are folded out again so that they stand up perpendicular to the rest of the paper lying on the table. Finally, the original fold (and all the folded-in pieces) is brought together, forming the body; the wings are formed by the last folded tail section.



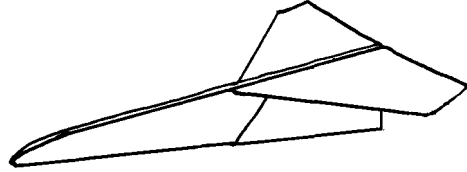
(1) CREASE CENTER



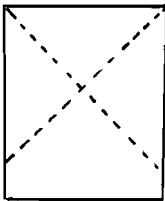
(2) FOLD "FRONT" CORNERS



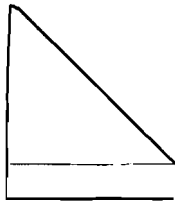
(3) FOLD SIDES IN AGAIN (4) WINGS ARE FORMED AT "TAIL" END



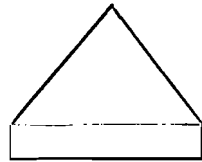
A good hat can be made from a newspaper sheet or other large rectangular paper. It is first folded diagonally from one top corner across to the other side (1) and (2). The other top corner is folded in the same way (3). The corners of the extra length of paper are folded up (4), and the extra length is folded over in half (5). The extra length is then pushed up into the large "crown" of the hat to fasten all the folds. One sheet from the original large triangle is left free; it is pulled out loose to form the hat.



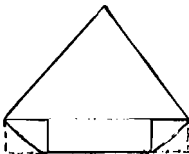
(1) DIRECTION OF FOLDS



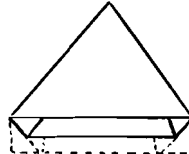
(2) ONE SIDE FOLDED



(3) OTHER SIDE FOLDED



(4) CORNERS FOLDED UP



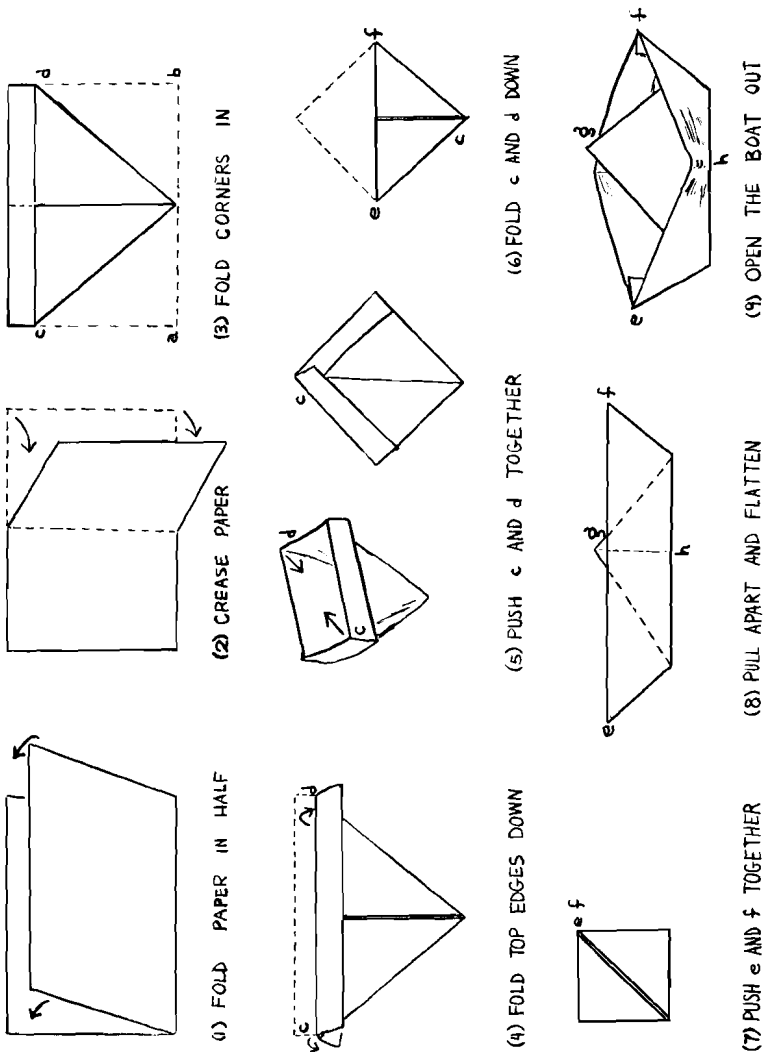
(5) BOTTOM HALVED



(6) BOTTOM INTO HAT

A paper boat is another still popular paper toy. Eugene Schmidt of Syracuse, Kansas, gives the following directions for making a boat with a standard 8½ by 11 inch page:

The idea is to fold this piece of paper in several places so that the finished product is a replica of a row boat that will float on water for a short period of time. Fold the paper in half so that it be-

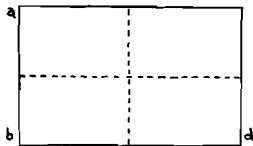


comes a doubled $8\frac{1}{2}$ by $5\frac{1}{2}$ inch piece (1). Fold this in half again so that it becomes $4\frac{1}{4}$ by $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches (2); then unfold. In to the crease just formed, fold points "a" and "b" (3).

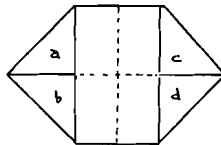
Fold points "c" and "d" back about an inch, each single layer on its own side (4). Grasp "c" and "d" and push them toward each other, thus forming a square; flatten this square (5). Fold the two corners at "c" down, each corner down on its own side, so that a small triangle shape results (6). Grasp points "e" and "f" and flatten them together to form a square (7). Grasp the tuck with one hand about a half inch down from "e," and the equivalent point from "f" with the other hand. Pull these points away from each other. Lay the form on the table and smooth out flat (8).

Hold the boat at point "g" with the left hand, and insert a couple of right hand fingers at point "h" to spread open the pocket there. Pinch the peak at "g" so that the pocket just opened will stay open (9). The boat is now ready to float in the bathtub or some other "pond."

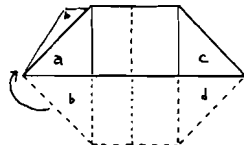
A paper popper can be made with a piece of notebook paper folded according to these directions of Dwain Paugh, Emporia, Kansas: First, fold the paper in half both ways to mark off the middle, and then open it out flat (1). Take each corner and fold it in to the middle line, thus forming a point at each long end of the paper (2). The long halves of the paper (side "a-c" and side "b-d") are folded back to back (3). End "a" is then folded in to meet end "c" thus leaving "b" and "d" facing out (4).



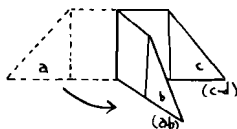
(1) FOLD PAPER, THEN UNFOLD



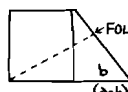
(2) FOLD CORNERS IN



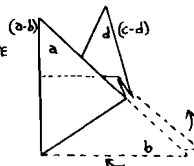
(3) FOLD PAPER BACKSIDE IN



(4) FOLD a INTO CORNER c



(5) FOLD a BACK



(6) FOLD c BACK

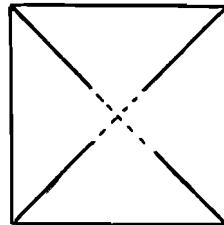
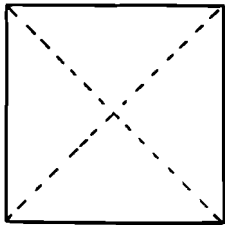


(7) SNAP POPPER

End "a" is then folded back on itself at an angle which will form a triangle (5); end "c" is folded back in the same way so that the corners "b" and "d" are touching (6).

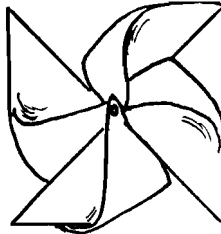
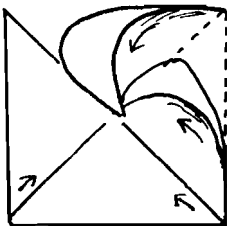
To make it pop, hold point "a-b" between the thumb and index finger, and point "c-d" between the index finger and middle finger (7). With fingers bent, hold the paper tight and snap the hand downward. (It takes a little practice to make good pops.)

A windmill, or windwheel as it is sometimes called, is a toy familiar to nearly every child in the country. The dimestore windwheels are made out of plastic nowadays, but kids used to make their own out of paper. A piece of paper five or six inches square was folded opposite corner to opposite corner, and then laid out flat again (1). Each crease was cut toward the center to about an inch from the center point (2). Every other corner was curved over and pinned to the center with a straight pin (3). With the same pin, the wheel was attached to a stick or a pencil (4). Blowing at it from the front or holding it in the wind would make it turn.



(1) DIAGONAL FOLDS MADE

(2) CREASES CUT



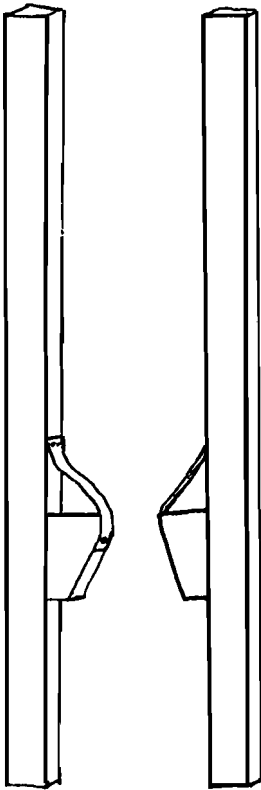
(3) EVERY OTHER CORNER CURVED TO CENTER

(4) PINNED TO STICK

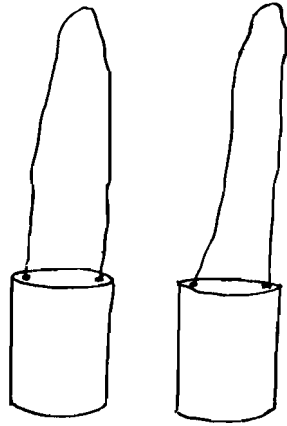
OUTDOOR TOYS

A tradition that seems to be fading out is that of rolling hoops. The metal bands around barrels or kegs made good hoops, and some people report that buggy wheel tires were often used. The pusher stick was either a forked branch, or two pieces of lath nailed together in a T-shape. The short piece of lath was about six inches long, and the longer piece was one or two feet long. A similar pastime coming in somewhat later than hoops was that of rolling a car tire by running alongside it and pushing it with one hand.

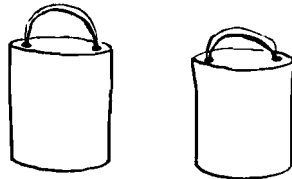
Children always seem to want to get up off the ground in one way or another. Stilts were an easy way to satisfy this desire.



WOOD STILTS



TIN CAN STILTS



TIN CAN STILTS

There were many different ways to make stilts, but the basic requirements are two long pieces of wood (two-by-twos nine or ten feet long, for example), two blocks (two by four by six inches), and two pieces of scrap leather, along with some good sturdy nails. The blocks were nailed, at any suitable height for the owner, to the long boards. The leather straps were nailed to the outer side of the blocks and to the poles a few inches above the blocks. The straps helped keep the feet from slipping off the step, and also kept the steps from breaking off.

If matched boards were not available, it didn't matter, so long as the two stilts were approximately the same length. Timid persons or smaller children preferred a stilt of only five or six feet in length.

Tin can stilts were lower yet, and had the special feature of being much noisier than wood stilts. They were often made from two large juice cans with one end cut out, and two six-foot lengths of rope. Two holes were cut in the closed end of the can, and the ends of the rope were tied together inside the can. The walker stood on the closed ends of the cans and grasped the loops of rope in his hands. He used both his arm and leg muscles to move his feet. (Of course, other cans could be used, and heavy twine could be substituted for rope.)

A variation of the tin can stilts requires two quart-sized fruit juice cans and short pieces of string or twine. Two holes are punched in the closed end of each can, as far apart as the width of the walker's foot. The string is drawn through the two holes in the can, and is tied so that it is just long enough for the foot to be slipped in easily.

Spring shoes were made with a pair of old shoes, two boards at least as big as the shoes, four sturdy springs (such as bed springs), and nails. Each shoe was tacked to a board. On the underside of the board, two springs were attached—one at the heel and one at the toe.

A more thrilling way of getting off the ground was a swing. The standard swing was made by tying two ends of a sturdy rope securely to a stout tree limb so that the loop of the rope dangled two feet or so from the ground. The seat was made from a board one or two inches thick, six inches wide, and about fifteen inches

long. A V-shape notch was cut at the middle of each end of the board to hold the rope in place.

Although a boy or girl could not really get off the ground as he could in a swing or on stilts, he could send his spirits soaring high with a kite. (Many historians believe the kite was invented between 400 and 300 B.C. The Chinese, however, claim that a general of theirs, Han Sin, invented the kite about 200 B.C. for use in war.)

The materials necessary for making a kite, according to Dwain Paugh of Emporia, are two light sticks, about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick and an inch wide (One should be about thirty-six inches long, the other about twenty-four inches.); plenty of string; paper big enough to cover the frame (newspaper will do); glue; and several strips of rags.

First, tie the two sticks together with a piece of string, the short stick tied at its center point to the long stick about twelve inches from one end. Then make a groove on the ends of each stick.

Run a string around the ends of the sticks (through the grooves), and make the string tight. Then put on the paper. It should be about an inch wider all around the frame. The extra edge, then, is folded over the string frame and glued. The tail for the kite should be made from rags and should be eight or ten feet long. It is best if there is one long piece for the tail; onto this length are tied shorter strips (a couple of feet long) a foot or so apart until the best balance for flying is attained. If the long cloth strip is not available, shorter lengths of cloth may be tied together until the best length is obtained. The tail is tied on the wood frame at the bottom.

The flying string is attached at the juncture of the sticks from the paper-covered side. Poke very small holes in the paper and thread the string through. At this point, the only other things that are needed are a wind and a ball of string with a stick poked through the ball for easy unwinding.

Another outdoor toy was the stick horse. Anybody who was anybody in the cowboy world had to have a trusty stick horse. Any long stick (the length depended on the size of the rider) such as the handle of a mop or broom or hoe could be fitted with string, rope, leather, or twine reins. Young marshalls, bandits, and cavalrymen often rode into fame on such mounts, but young ladies

seldom did: riding sidesaddle on a stick horse is extremely difficult!

Easy-to-make bean bags and rag balls used to provide hours of entertainment for young children. A softball could be made by tightly wadding up a pair of old socks, and then tying a string around the wad in several places so that it was held securely. Several layers of tape (surgical tape, for instance) wrapped around held the ball together even better.

An old sock (without holes) filled with sand, sawdust, grass, or other stuffing, and tied at the top, was another kind of ball. A second sock was usually tied over the first to keep the thing from flying apart.

A standard bean bag was made from a cloth bag about six inches square; it was filled with dry beans or peas. A bean bag was used for playing catch, andy-over, or keep-away.

These, then, are some of the toys and some of the ways that generations previous entertained themselves. The children were really "seen and not heard"; they were not permitted to whine, so they kept themselves busy. They evidently did it pretty successfully, too, from the variety of toys they invented for themselves.

By no means are here recorded all the different toys made at home with common available materials and human inventiveness. These are, however, a kind of cross-section of toys that were common to Kansas during and since the settlement of the state.



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