

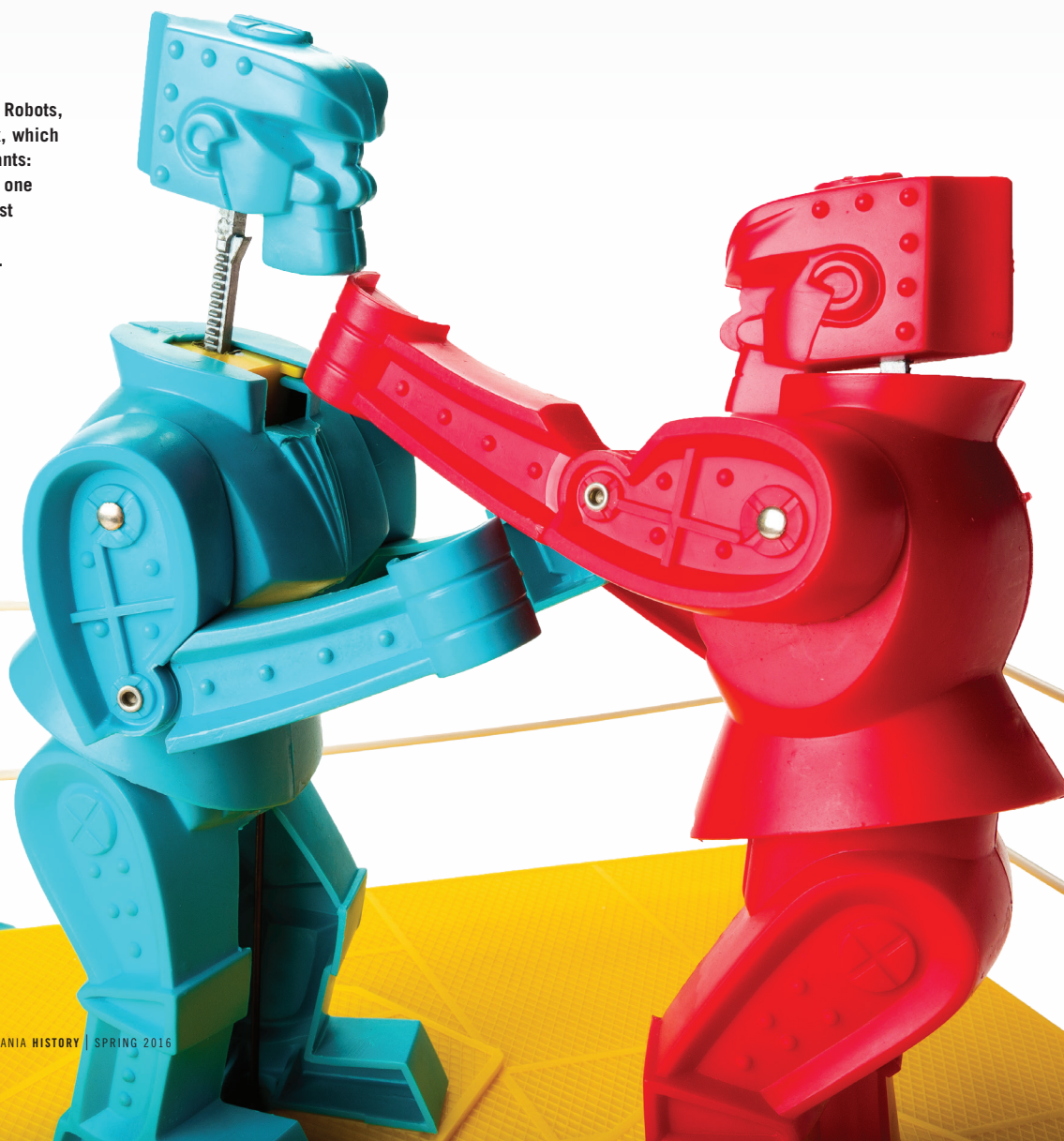
TOYS

of the '50s, '60s and '70s at the History Center

By Emily Ruby

Portions excerpted from *Toys of the '50s, '60s and '70s*
by Kate Roberts and Adam Scher, published by the Minnesota Historical Society Press

Rock'em Sock'em Robots,
produced by Marx, which
had three U.S. plants:
two near Erie and one
70 miles southwest
of Pittsburgh near
Moundsville, W.V.
MNHS Toys Exhibit Collection.





Tonka Toys' best seller, the Mighty Dump Truck, c. 1970-1975.

MNHS Collections, 73.82.3.

“It’s the things we
play with and the
people who help us
play that make a great
difference in our lives.”

—**Mister Rogers**¹

This Zogg robot was a later
addition to the Zeroids line of toys
made by the Ideal Toy Company.

MNHS Collections.





of the '50s, '60s and '70s

Toys link us to the past, they connect us personally to memories, and collectively bond us to the time and place they were created. In reflecting on our childhood and the toys that were formative to our developing years, we often find that what we played with tells a larger story than just our own. Toys reflect culture—their form, their function, and their design serve as material evidence of the culture in which they were created.

Toys of the '50s, '60s and '70s, the newest exhibition on view at the History Center, demonstrates how three decades of toy development can be linked to changes in American culture economically, politically, and socially. From the post-war baby boom and child-focused homes of the atomic age to the dawning of the electronic age, these decades saw major changes in American life and technology. Toys reflect what people were watching, what was trendy, what people cared about or focused on, shifts in the cultural climate, and sometimes changes in society.

Toys have been unearthed by archaeologists back to the earliest cultures. As lifespans increased, so did the years of childhood. Play came to be seen as not just frivolous but an important part of exercising the mind and body. Still, for centuries, toys were handmade, often by parents, and usually reflected their immediate world.

Fisher-Price Little People toy.
MNHS Collections.





“I’m holding a plastic motorboat with an outboard engine that ran on a little battery; I played with it on the French River on family trips to Northern Ontario, Canada. On the chair is a satellite launcher that shot plastic satellites. These were two of my favorite toys that I can remember.”

-P. Thomas Woodman, father of Hayley Woodman, Sales Associate, 1958.

“I recall the tool set. Hammer, saw, hand drill, and various other items that were the staple of 1950s-era carpenters and builders, but in miniature size. I would take my tools to dad’s workshop and I would saw or hammer scrap pieces of wood with no particular objective—but essentially mimicking my dad who was carving or building something of value. I spent countless hours in his workshop, watching and learning. Maybe it was that earlier exposure or the tool set that led me to study engineering.”

-David Marinaro (right), father of Melissa E. Marinaro, Curator, Italian American Program, with brother Julius (left), 1955.



Industrialization & Leisure Time

It wasn't until the advent of industrialization, as home-based work gave way to factory jobs and everyone, including children, began to have a bit of leisure time on their hands and a bit of expendable cash in their pockets, that the modern era of toys dawned. By the late 1800s, the groundwork had been laid for the toy extravaganza of the boomer era. In the United States, forces of production and consumption fueled the rise of department stores where more and more modestly priced goods were available. Retailers acknowledged the link between Christmas gift-giving and increased sales, and extravagant window displays featuring the season's must-have toys flanked the entrances of department and specialty stores. Perhaps most importantly, parents (particularly women) were being told by educators, clergy, and child-rearing experts that their highest calling in life was to raise intelligent, moral young men and women.²

Excerpted with permission from
Toys of the '50s, '60s and '70s



The 1950s

Following WWII, when the United States economy transitioned to peacetime production, the post-war economic boom and the rise in the birth rate led to a proliferation of toy production. There was also an influx of small, cheap toys from Japan as it rebuilt its war-torn infrastructure and economy. Additionally, research discoveries for war production provided new materials and design ideas for toys. The invention of silly putty is a direct result of rubber shortages during World War II. Chemical engineer James Wright, while attempting to create a synthetic rubber, accidentally discovered that the combination of boric acid and silicone oil created a malleable putty that, although it seemed to

demonstrate no practical applications, had many impractical ones.

In a similar vein, mechanical engineer Richard James, working for the navy, searched for a way to use springs so sensitive equipment could be operated in turbulent sea conditions. While conducting his research, one of his springs tumbled off of his desk and the rest, as they say, is Slinky history. The Slinky, originally produced in Philadelphia, eventually moved production to Hollidaysburg, Pa.

As the ownership of television sets spread, more of the population saw and was

“Growing up my tastes were undoubtedly influenced by my older brother, in the 1950s, an avid fan of Roy Rogers and Sky King. I remember watching Roy Rogers with him and being enthralled with Dale Evans who had great clothes and rode a horse named Buttermilk. Even though I was barely three, she seemed like the kind of person I wanted to be—doing good, fighting bad guys, singing, riding her own horse. And, of course, having a trusty six shooter, just in case. My parents obliged for Christmas with a cowgirl outfit complete with holster and gun. I used to practice pulling the gun out of the holster as fast as I could, then trying to twirl it and put it back in the holster. Without much success. I loved it anyway.”

-Lauren Uhl, Museum Project Manager and Curator of Food & Fitness, 1958.

Michael Romano c. 1953, family of Liz Simpson, Assistant Editor/Assistant Registrar.



Michael and Joe Romano with football presents, 1956, family of Liz Simpson, Assistant Editor/Assistant Registrar.

influenced by toy commercials, increasing the desire for and production of toys. Shows such as *Howdy Doody* and *The Mickey Mouse Club* became a toy company's dream as they appealed directly to young viewers. This spurred a genre of toys based on the television shows as well as offering prime advertising space for toy manufacturers. The first toy commercial to be marketed directly to children starred Mr. Potato Head in 1952.

Educational shows geared towards children quickly emerged as a counter to these variety and cartoon-focused shows, which many child-rearing experts did not feel were beneficial to children's development. Toy companies such as Fisher-Price, Playskool, and Holgate heeded the advice

of child-rearing experts both in books and on their television sets and produced more educational toys as well. Pittsburgh's own Fred Rogers, who became involved in children's television precisely because he was concerned with the content of what he saw on television, began his career in the 1950s on the Josey Carrey show *The Children's Corner* produced by WQED in Pittsburgh.

Child-rearing experts also emphasized the role of toys as teaching tools—through play children are trained for future roles in society. Many toys of the 1950s reflected established gender roles, with girls' toys focused on homemaking activities, evident in the home appliances marketed to girls, such as Pittsburgh's Wolverine Toy Company's

line of Sunny Suzy appliances. Many toys for boys prepared them for future occupations or focused on building and construction. A sign of the changing times came in 1959 with the introduction of the Barbie doll. Although she remains a controversial role model, there is no doubt that, as a doll with career aspirations, Barbie helped girls envision a future with more options.

Wolverine Supply and Manufacturing Company

As World War II drew to a close and wartime production and restrictions ended, there were adjustments in many areas of private and public life. Industries transitioned back to pre-war production, gearing up to fulfill the huge demand for consumer products that built up during the war. Even toy companies reevaluated their products, rushing to develop something fun and new for the growing population of children born after the war.

One such business, Wolverine Supply and Manufacturing Company, based on the North Side of Pittsburgh, repurposed toys that suited the war years for peacetime—for instance, a battleship toy became a luxury liner, with deck top guns replaced by a swimming pool and shuffle board.

The company opened in 1903 as a tool and die maker, but soon began producing toys. Founder Benjamin Franklin Bain studied mechanics and engineering in his home state of Michigan. He chose Pittsburgh for his specialty metal fabricating shop because it was the center of the metal industries in the United States at the time. In 1909, the Wolverine Company gained control of the Sand Toy Company's patents due to a bankruptcy settlement. Wolverine had made parts to produce the company's signature product, the "Sandy Andy" sand toy line. Over the next several decades, Wolverine successfully produced and expanded the line of "Sandy Andy" toys and became solely a toy manufacturer. The company's toys ranged from tin battleships to household appliances.

As the times changed, so did Wolverine toys. The evolution of toy appliance lines details changing tastes and technologies. An article from the late 1940s records that, for the first time, the company offered a "built-in" modern kitchen and a giant super market toy, replacing its former corner grocery store toy. Appliance colors changed as well, from pastels to avocado green and gold.

The home appliances were clearly marketed to girls; for boys the company produced bagatelle or pinball games often with a racing or space-age theme. Wolverine also had a line of "career toys" that encouraged "Junior in something that might later develop into his life's



One of many space age-themed bagatelles made by Wolverine. This one features a Gemini Program-style spacecraft.

HHC Collections, 98.17.89. All photos by Liz Simpson.

work." In addition to its own products, Wolverine kept a collection of competitor's toys, especially Japanese toys, which provide a rich history of toy production and competition in the industry in the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. The company moved its production to Booneville, Arkansas, in 1970, and in the late 1990s donated much of its historical collection to the History Center.



**Interior of
a Wolverine
refrigerator with
toy food, 1956.**
HHC Collections, 98.17.182.



Wolverine toy refrigerators ranging from 1949 to 1973.

HHC Collections, 98.17.144a, 98.17.154a, 98.17.348a, 98.17.127a, 98.17.271 a,b, 98.17. 98.17.181, 98.17.262 a.





Playing with Barbie and Ken dolls, c. 1960.

HHC Detre L&A.

Barbie & Gender Roles

When Mattel co-founder Ruth Handler suggested an adult-bodied female doll to company executives in the early 1950s, they were less than enthusiastic. After all, infant dolls had dominated the market for decades and fit the bill in preparing young girls for their future roles as mothers. But when Handler noticed her daughter Barbara (Barbie's namesake) giving adult roles to paper dolls during play, she knew there was a niche to be filled. Handler was in Europe in 1956 when she spotted a blonde-haired, long-legged doll named Bild Lilli, after a German cartoon strip character. Mattel took cues from the Lilli doll and adapted its own design, which appeared as Barbie in 1959. Marketed as a "Teen-age

fashion model," Barbie was the first mass-produced toy in America with adult features and was an instant success, with 350,000 dolls sold in the first year of production. Mattel was a pioneer in television advertising, being the first toy maker to broadcast commercials directly to kids in 1955 as a sponsor for the *Mickey Mouse Club* program. Soon after her debut, Barbie commercials began to saturate children's primetime TV programming, and sales skyrocketed.³

By 1961, consumer demand had reached such a fever pitch that Mattel released a new doll. Barbie's boyfriend Ken (named after Handler's son) debuted in March of that

year, clad in red swim trunks and sporting "molded" plastic hair. Barbie's coterie continued to grow with the introduction of best friend Midge in 1963 and little sister Skipper in 1964.⁴ "My whole philosophy of Barbie," said Ruth Handler, "was that through the doll, the little girl could be anything she wanted to be. Barbie always represented the fact that a woman has choices." Whatever her fate, there is no denying that Barbie has played a significant role as both a mirror and a model for American culture.⁵

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Toys of the '50s, '60s and '70s



Barbie doll, c. 1962.

HHC Collections, 96.232.37. Photo by
Liz Simpson.

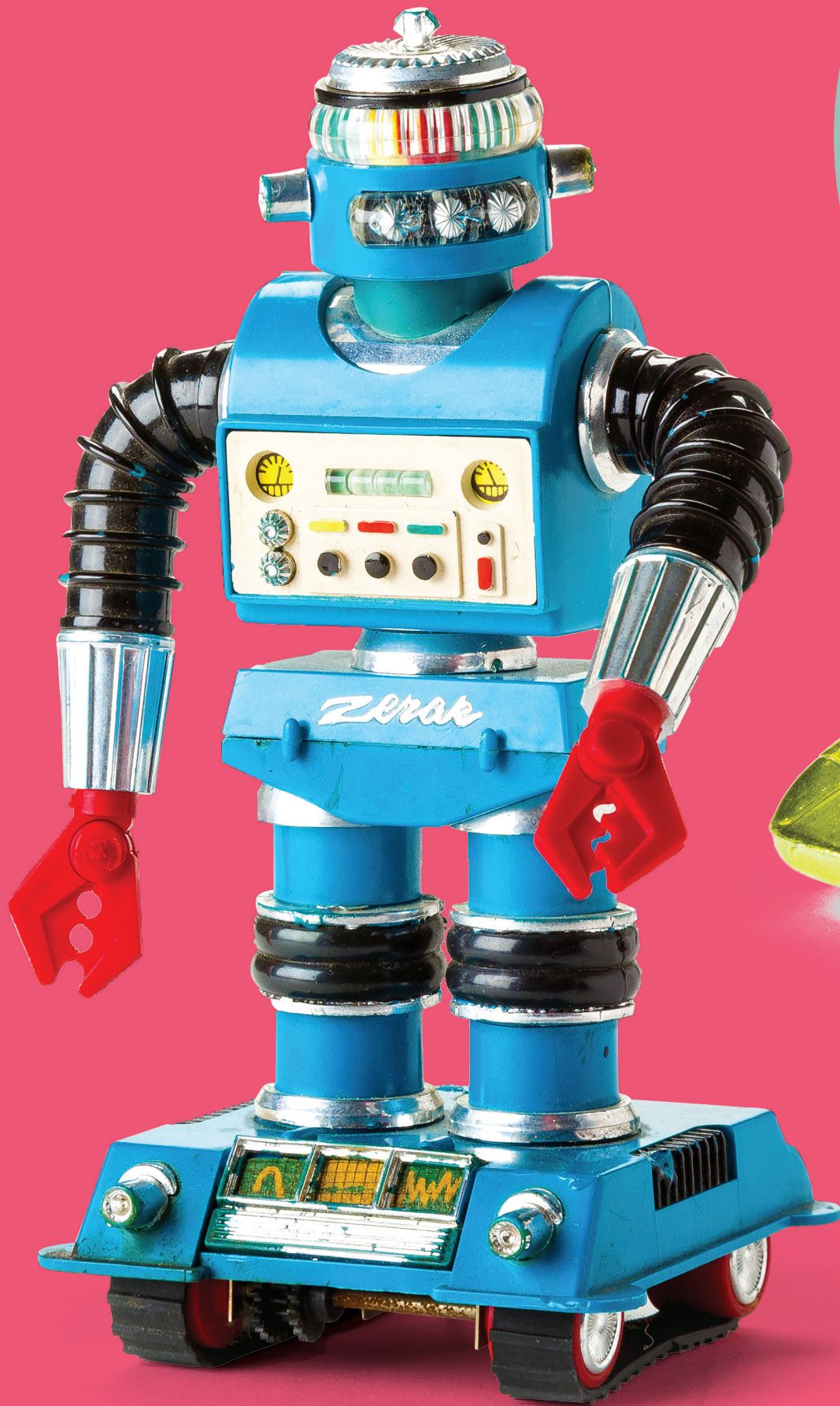
Ken doll, c. 1960.

HHC Collections, 96.232.58. Photo
by Liz Simpson.



Skipper doll, c. 1964.

MNHS Collections. Photo by Jason Onerheim.



Troll doll, c. 1964.
MNHS Toys Exhibit Collection.



Hot Wheels "Redline," 1968-early 1970s.
Mattel introduced Hot Wheels in 1968 and
by 1969 the hit toys had become the most
popular die-cast toys in the world.
MNHS courtesy of David Barnhill.

Zerak, the Zeroid Commander, was
introduced in 1967 as a part of the
Zeroids line of robots made by the
Ideal Toy Company. The robot's right
arm could be used to throw objects.
MNHS Collections.



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Mister Rogers talking to children at Arsenal Elementary School, 1965.

HHC Detre L&A.



The 1960s

Pittsburgh's most famous contribution to children's television, *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, made its national debut in 1968 with Fred Rogers addressing the need for television to bring comfort and stability to children in a time of uncertainty. The turbulence of the 1960s increased questioning of traditional cultural values. Toy makers, however, remained indecisive in their reaction to these new trends. Barbie might have had a job, but the Easy-Bake Oven still told girls to bake cakes with the slogan "Just like Mom's—bake your cake and eat it too!"

The Julia doll, based on the popular television show of the same name, brought more diversity to the doll market after its introduction to the Barbie lineup in 1968. Featuring an African American woman who was a widowed single mother working as a nurse, Julia is an example of the increasing demand for African American-oriented toys. Both the show and the doll were huge hits at the time. Increased diversity in the doll market also included the introduction of Hasbro's G.I. Joe in 1964, a doll made specifically for boys, but marketed as an "action figure" in an attempt to match the success of Mattel's Barbie doll. G.I. Joe inspired a whole new action figure market, many based on popular superheroes. A backlash against G.I. Joe occurred in the late 1960s due to the growing war in Vietnam so, in 1969, G.I. Joe became a "man of action" rather than just a military figure.

With the launch of the Soviet *Sputnik* satellite in 1957, the possibility of seeing a man on the moon, and the Cold War in full swing, the obsession with space-themed toys took off in the 1960s. Not only could you purchase a G.I. Joe astronaut in his own capsule, but you could launch your own missile with the Alph-1 Ballistic Missile. The Cold War, vividly brought into American homes through the Cuban missile crisis, also led to a slew of spy and secret agent toys like the James Bond and *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* board games, action figures, and toy guns that reassured children about their safety and future.

In the popular 1967 film *The Graduate*, the protagonist Benjamin is given one word of career advice: "plastics." Indeed, since World War II plastics rapidly took over the toy world, replacing the wooden and metal toys of previous generations. Cheap plastics allowed toy producers to turn out an array of affordable and replaceable toys. For example, the plastic

Barrel of Monkeys game piece, c. 1966. The toy was first made by Minnesota's Lakeside Industries.

MNHS Toys Exhibit Collection.





Gumby, c. 1960. The claymation characters Gumby and Pokey debuted on the *Howdy Doody Show* in 1956.

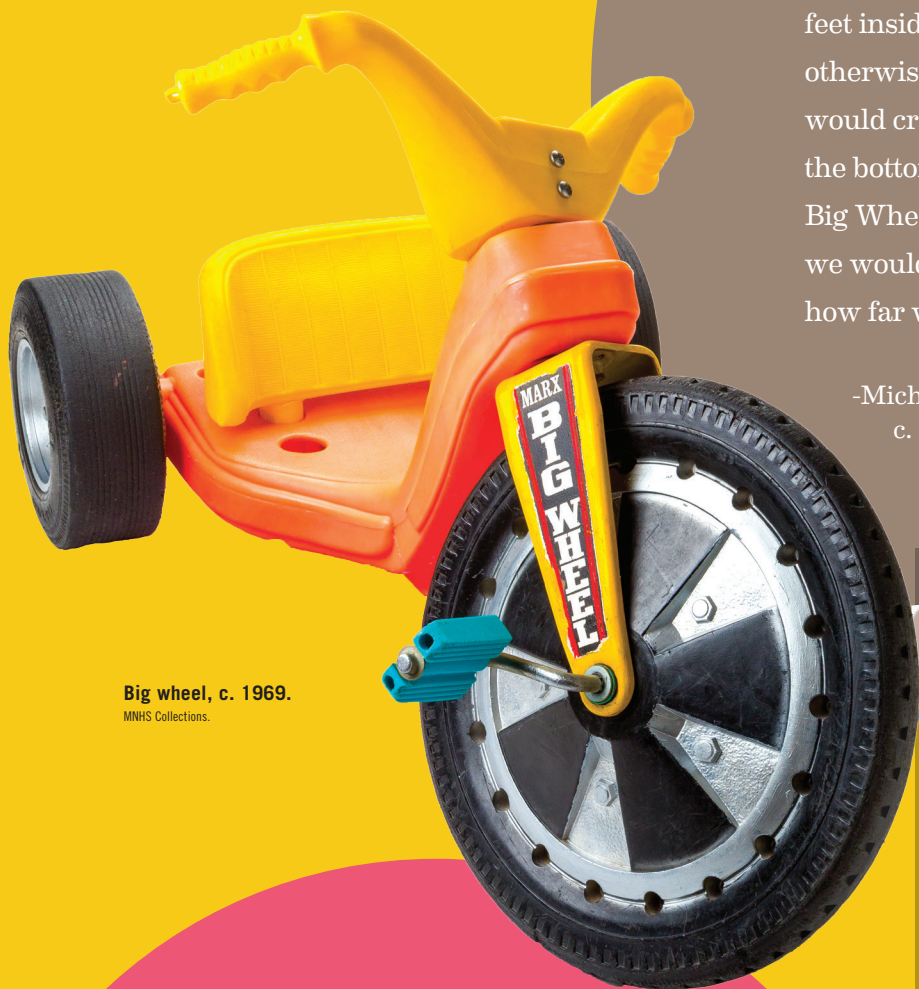
MNHS Toys Exhibit Collection.

parts of the Spirograph often wore out or were broken, but were easily replaceable. Spirograph was a popular pattern-drawing toy that was somewhat educational as it was “based on mathematical principles and precision engineered.”⁶ Out of his fascination with understanding hypocycloids Denys Fisher, a British mechanical engineer, developed the Spirograph as a drafting tool while working to create a new design for bomb detonators for NATO.⁷ The set, later marketed as a toy, was released in the United States by Kenner in 1967.⁸ The toy was released at an ideal time as it gave children the ability to make designs similar to the psychedelic art then in fashion and featured on numerous concert posters. Like many trendy toys, the Spirograph didn’t always live up to expectations, but when it worked, the results were magical.

Perhaps one of the most recognizable plastic toys that debuted in this decade and remained popular into the next was the Big Wheel, introduced by Louis Marx & Company in 1969 and manufactured near Erie, Pa.⁹ The development of stronger plastics and blow molding technology made a toy like the Big Wheel possible.¹⁰ Inspired by inverting the frame of a traditional tricycle, the Big Wheel was a huge hit. It made kids feel like they were riding motorcycles or drag racing, parents appreciated its low cost, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission thought it safer than a tricycle because children sat lower to the ground.¹¹

Matchbox Jeep CJ-5, c. 1969.

MNHS Collections.



Big wheel, c. 1969.
MNHS Collections.

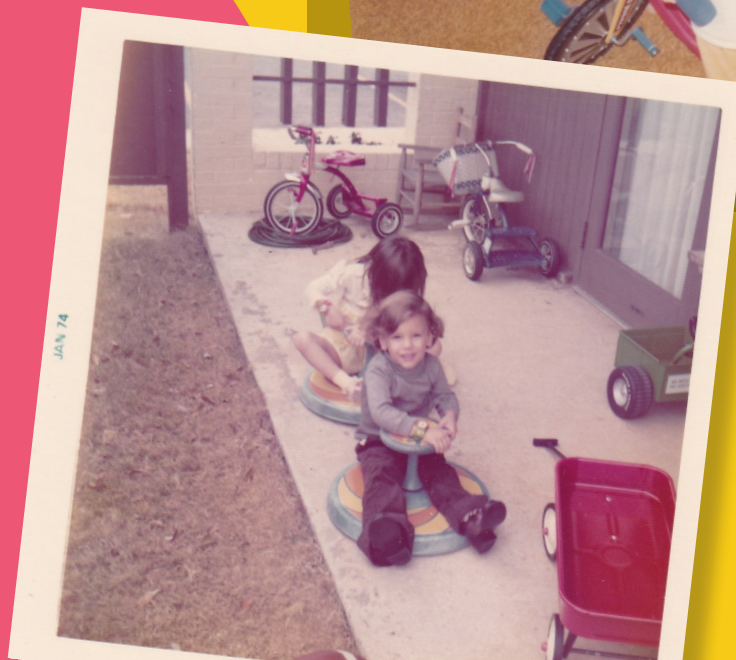
“Every kid in my neighborhood had a Big Wheel so I was excited to finally get one. We would meet at the top of ‘the big hill’ and race down to the cul-de-sac. The key to winning was to ball up, put your feet inside the seat, and let the pedals spin freely, otherwise they would smack you in the shin! We would crash into a barrier constructed of pool floats at the bottom of the hill to stop us. Speaking of the pool... Big Wheels float! When the parents were not around we would jump them off the edge of the pool and see how far we could slide them across the water.”

-Michael Dubois, Director of Exhibits and Design,
c. 1975.



“My sister and I each got a Sit-N-Spin for Christmas in 1973. We would spin as fast as we could, stand up, and try to walk around until one of us fell over. So much fun until you hit something sharp or hard. This is not recommended after eating a huge Christmas dinner!”

-Michael Dubois, Director of Exhibits and Design, 1974.



“Every summer, my sister and I stayed in Pittsburgh for a week with my grandmother in Carrick. Usually we were joined by other cousins. Two family homes sat side-by-side, so the sidewalk between them ended up being one big playground, and the week often involved the purchase of a game or toy to keep everyone occupied. (And to deflect our attention from furious backyard battles with our nemeses, the neighborhood ‘alley kids.’) I remember someone had an old Barnabas Collins *Dark Shadows* game, and we liked playing with the little skeletons that you assembled to win, but my grandmother thought that was a bit dark. For some reason, one year I was obsessed with Spirograph. But after I got it, everyone quickly lost patience with the amount of time and effort it took to make it work. This photo probably shows the moment, camped out on the sidewalk, that we got fed up and soon left to do something else.”

-Leslie Przybylek, Curator of History, 1972.



Simon game, c. 1978. Milton Bradley introduced Simon at a glitzy party at New York City's Studio 54 nightclub on May 15, 1978. It was an instant hit and signaled the beginning of a new category of handheld electronic games.

MNHS Toys Exhibit Collection.



The 1970s

The 1970s is looked back upon as a time of contradiction. An era of both turmoil—Watergate, oil crisis, plant closings, urban decay—and excess—disco, drugs, punk rock, and funky clothes. With an increasing awareness of women's rights, an ever so subtle shift occurred in the toy industry towards more gender neutral marketing. In fact, a recent study by UC Davis scholar Elizabeth Sweet claims that the year 1975 demonstrated the least gender specific toy advertising in the last 40 years.¹² Training girls to be homemakers when many would enter the work force lost a bit of its appeal, but plenty of companies, including Pittsburgh's Wolverine Toy Company, still marketed homemaker toys to girls. Some toys, such as the Playskool Holiday Inn and McDonalds play sets, taught children about attainable jobs and let them play at an adult job in a time of soaring unemployment after the inflation caused by the 1970s oil crisis.

Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*, first published in 1962, brought an increased awareness to environmental issues and in 1970 the first Earth Day was celebrated as pollution issues came to the forefront of American consciousness. In the late 1960s, the Bureau of Land Management invented the character of Johnny Horizon to encourage Americans that it was our land and we should keep it clean.¹³ The toy market followed suit and in 1971 Parker Brothers introduced the Johnny Horizon Environmental Test Kit. The kit provided children with the ability to care for the Earth through play by introducing them to equipment to test both air and water quality.

Mr. Potato Head, c. 1970s. In 1974, concerns over safety regulations caused Mr. Potato Head to double in size and lose his arms.

MNHS Toys Exhibit Collection.



“Although I was born in 1980, many of my toys were my sister's from the 1970s: Lite-Bright, Etch A Sketch, View-Master ... and the list goes on.”

-Emily Ruby, Curator, on sister Erica Bowlin, 1978.



Star Wars & Action Figures

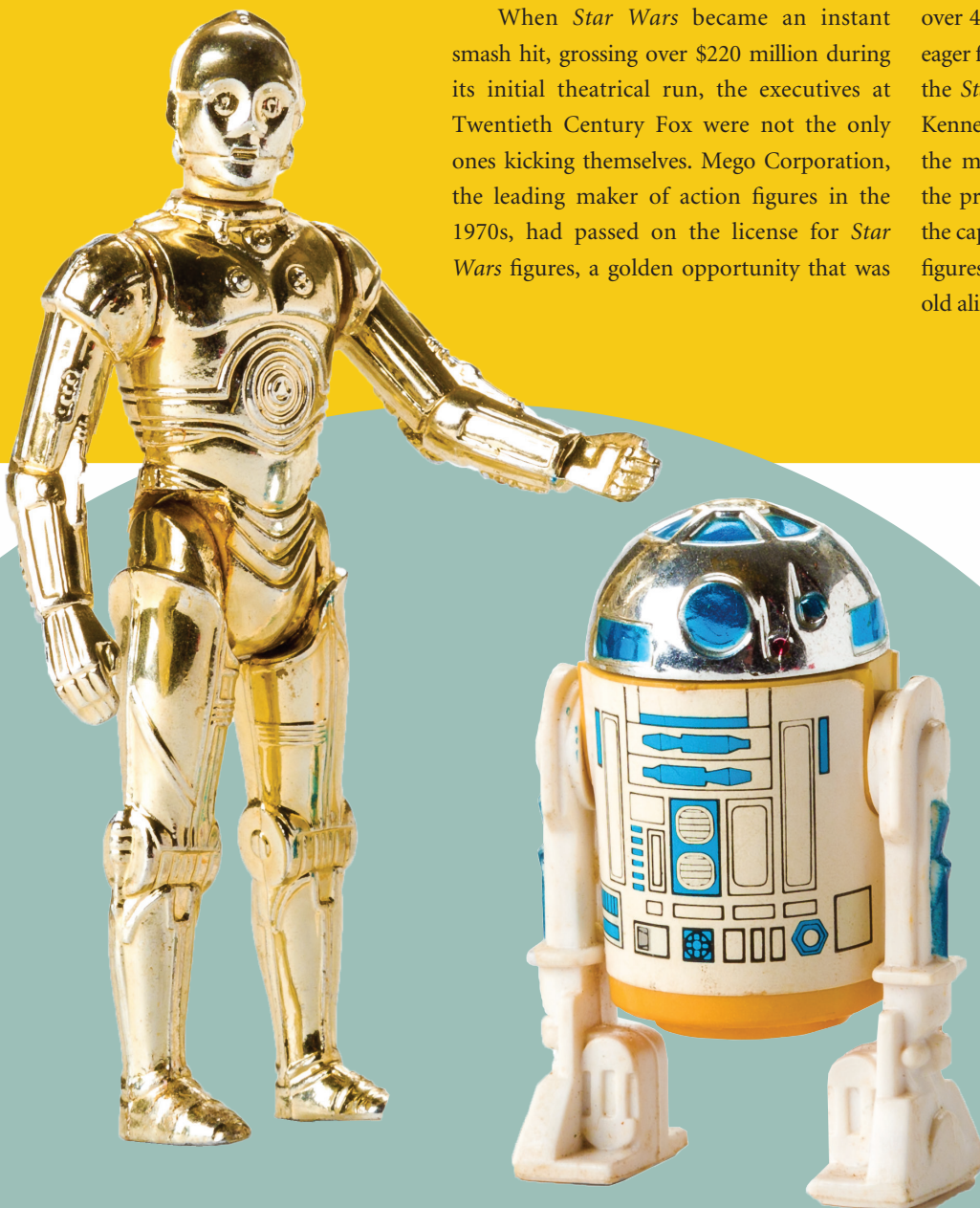
When George Lucas's sci-fi epic *Star Wars* hit theaters in May 1977, America was in the throes of a downward spiral of disappointment and disillusion.... With its archetypal characters, classic struggle of good versus evil, and astonishing special effects, *Star Wars* was just the tonic required to unify a crestfallen nation and raise its collective spirit. The film had an expressly powerful impact on Lucas's target audience—America's youth. "There's a whole generation growing up without any

kind of fairy tales," said Lucas. "And kids need fairy tales. It's an important thing for society to have for kids." Lucas understood the significance of creating compelling characters to embody those tales, from the Jedi war hero Luke Skywalker to the malevolent Darth Vader to the plucky droid R2-D2. The young director also recognized the market potential of these characters and wisely acquired the merchandising rights to the film from Twentieth Century Fox, a decision the studio would sorely regret.¹⁴

When *Star Wars* became an instant smash hit, grossing over \$220 million during its initial theatrical run, the executives at Twentieth Century Fox were not the only ones kicking themselves. Mego Corporation, the leading maker of action figures in the 1970s, had passed on the license for *Star Wars* figures, a golden opportunity that was

then picked up by Kenner Products. But the Cincinnati-based toy maker was unprepared for the film's galactic success and failed to produce sufficient inventory for the holiday season. When the first four figures—Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia Organa, R2-D2, and Chewbacca—debuted, they were less than four inches tall, the result of a cost-saving measure imposed on plastic manufacturers by the 1970s oil crisis. Kenner continued to expand the *Star Wars* line with additional figures, vehicles, and play set accessories, and by 1978 over 40 million units had been gobbled up by eager fans. With the release of each film sequel, the *Star Wars* inventory grew, and by 1984, Kenner had designed 79 unique characters for the market. Although Kenner discontinued the production of *Star Wars* figures in 1985, the captivating spell of "the Force"—and these figures—continues to be with fans young and old alike.¹⁵

Excerpted with permission from
Toys of the '50s, '60s and '70s



C-3PO and R2-D2 figures,
c. 1977-78.

MNHS courtesy of Stephen Yogi Rueff.

“The *Battlestar Gallactica* and *Star Wars* toys evoked a fascinating, futuristic space where imagination led us to heroic acts. Photos and memories of long-gone toys stir up strong feelings of nostalgia. A quick search of eBay indicates that the surviving Battlestar Gallactica launch stations remain affordable, even in their original boxes.”

—Craig Britcher, Project Coordinator & Assistant Curator WPSM, 1979.



**Darth Vader figure,
c. 1977-78.**
MNHS courtesy of Stephen
Yogi Rueff.



**Leia and
Luke action
figures, c.
1977-78.**
MNHS courtesy of
Stephen Yogi Rueff.

“Stretch Monster served as a test of strength, a favorite who I called ‘Stretch Arm Monster,’ confusing his name with the similar Stretch Armstrong. Once he started leaking, I believe he met his demise pinned to a dartboard. Fortunately, my sister Kelly still has her ‘Snoopa,’ who has remained popular over several generations.”

-Craig Britcher, Project Coordinator & Assistant Curator WPSM, 1978.



“One of my best memorable Christmases—a Care-Bear, Barbie dream house, and two Barbies! I was a fanatic about Barbie and Jem—loved the fashion and playing through imagination with my sister or by myself even. Anything seemed possible....”

-Tonia Rose, Director of Administration, 1983.



“My love of baking began at the ripe old age of two where I could be found on a chair perched by the oven watching the cookies brown. My mother encouraged this by buying me an Easy-Bake Oven when I was around four or five years old. I remember using the Easy-Bake Oven packets and my mom would also buy me the Jiffy cake mixes to supplement. I jazzed them up with frosting and sprinkles, something I still love to do. My first baking customers were family and friends and now it is my coworkers!”

-Courtney Keel Becraft, Collections Manager, c. 1980.

“Although I don’t look too happy in this photo (I hated having my picture taken and still do), I was thrilled with my new roller skates with bright orange racing stripes and wheels! They gave me the freedom to race around the neighborhood and risk death by flying down steep hills at speeds heretofore unimaginable. The purple striped knee socks completed the look. If you look closely you can see this was the Christmas we also got Merlin, a new hi-fi, a flashing disco light, and my favorite, my very own Wildlife Treasury set in its own electric green carrying case. Nerd!”

-Sandra Smith, Director of Education and Enterprise, 1980.



The 1980s and Beyond

The beginning of the computer age introduced rudimentary computing games such as the Digi Comp 1, but the 1970s and '80s saw a true explosion of electronic playthings such as Simon, Speak & Spell, and Electronic Football. Computer games and systems such as Atari's PONG heralded a whole new virtual world of toys, but demand remained for simpler toys such as Etch A Sketch, Nerf balls, Rubik's Cube, Sit and Spin, Spirograph, and that 1970s classic, the Pet Rock. In fact, the "must have" toy of the 1980s did not light up, make sounds, or require batteries at all: it was a doll. Of course, this doll could not be bought (it had to be adopted) and it came complete with its own adoption papers, unique name, and features. The demand for Cabbage Patch Kid dolls during Christmas 1983 caused riots and stampedes as retailers struggled to keep up with demand. If you weren't lucky enough to score a Cabbage Patch Kid there were plenty of other collectibles to keep you happy. Television shows featuring lovable and collectible characters such as Strawberry

Shortcake, My Little Pony, and Care Bears offered endless options, colors, and personalities to choose from.

No matter what decade people grew up in or the array of different toys they may have played with, toys demonstrate our commonality and form shared experiences. For many, memories of childhood are inextricably linked with memories of our toys. Whether you rode a tricycle in the 1960s or a banana seat bike in the 1980s, were frustrated by your Spirograph in the 1970s, or loved your Etch A Sketch in the 1990s, toys and play remain a central and formative human experience. Today's children playing games on iPads are said to be spending too much time looking at a screen, but they will surely look back fondly as new games—and new ways to play them—are developed and embraced by their children. In a very real sense, toys are us and act as a cultural symbol to a time in our lives when we were free to play all day and let our imaginations run wild. 🌟

Emily Ruby is a curator at the Heinz History Center. She now appreciates the hand-me-down toys from her childhood that gave her first-hand insight into this exhibition.

¹ Kate Roberts and Adam Scher, *Toys of the '50s, '60s and '70s* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2014), 206.

² Ibid., 5-6.

³ Ibid., 91.

⁴ Ibid., 93.

⁵ Ibid., 93.

⁶ Ibid., 129.

⁷ Tim Walsh, *The Playmakers: Amazing Origins of Timeless Toys*, (Sarasota: Keys Publishing, 2004), 207.

⁸ *Toys*, 127.

⁹ *The Playmakers*, 217.

¹⁰ Jim Martin, "Big Wheel's Been Turning 40 Years." March 24, 2007. GoErie.com.

¹¹ *Toys*, 135-137.

¹² Elizabeth Sweet, "Toys Are More Divided by Gender Now Than They Were 50 Years Ago," *The Atlantic*, Dec. 9, 2014.

¹³ Jamie Lewis, "Forgotten Characters from Forest History: Johnny Horizon," March 17, 2011, <https://fhsarchives.wordpress.com/2011/03/17/forgotten-characters-from-forest-history-johnny-horizon/>

¹⁴ *Toys*, 199.

¹⁵ Ibid., 199-200.



"Looking at this picture now I realize I was too easily pleased with my Strawberry Shortcake figurine. I should have been jealous of the sweet bike my sister got! I am sure it was mine eventually; being the youngest of three girls I got all the hand-me-downs, including toys. I did have my share of '80s toys like My Little Ponies and Strawberry Shortcake dolls, but I never did get the most coveted doll of the '80s, the Cabbage Patch."

-Emily Ruby, Curator, and sister
Erica Bowlin c. 1985.



Melissa E. Marinaro, Curator, Italian American Program, with Cabbage Patch Kid, 1985.



G.I. Joe action figures, c. 1970. After the Vietnam War, G.I. Joe became part of an Adventure Team and was distanced from his association with being a war hero.

MNHS Toys Exhibit Collection.



“Our playroom—my parents made sure that my sister Kara and I had our own room, to not fuss about just to love and live in. Our world, our rules, and why not have tea time in the middle of it all! My sister and I were thicker than thieves when it came to our toys.”

-Tonia Rose, Director of Administration, 1986.

“I got this guitar as a gift on my third birthday. It was my favorite toy for years. The body was made of red plastic. It had a black plastic neck and genuine nylon strings. The strings were tunable. What excited me at the time was the fact that it functioned like a bona fide electric guitar and was also capable of making the same type of sounds. It had a built-in speaker that acted like an amplifier. It was a functional instrument; not just a simple toy with cookie-cutter sound effects. I still have it today, although the electronics no longer work. Many of the strings and tuning knobs are broken from thousands of hours of use. Music remains as influential in my life now as it was back then.”

-Cody Boehmig, Exhibit Graphic Designer, 1990.





“I was getting over having chicken pox this Christmas and was clearly not feeling my best. I remember getting many arts and crafts-related gifts every year and was always making something. I loved to mold shapes with Play-Doh, twist the knobs to create perfect drawings on the Etch A Sketch, and working on latch hook rugs. My brother C.J. built many structures out of the cardboard bricks he got in our living room. We often had the joy of knocking down each other’s creations. We were most amazed by the walkie talkies we got this year since we could be in different rooms and still talk to each other. If only we knew what was to come with cell phones!”

-Liz Simpson, Assistant Editor/Assistant Registrar, c. 1993.

“For my first birthday my grandmother made me a Care Bear cake and I received my most loved toy, one I still have to this day, a Birthday Bear Care Bear. I grew up watching the movies and I never missed an opportunity to give the Care Bear stare!”

-Jaclyn Esposito, Senior Specialist, Collections and Exhibits, 1986.



“My mother tells me that I was absolutely obsessed with Clippity-Clop, my spring bouncy wonder horse. She volunteered at a church nursery with a wonder horse, which is where my fixation first began. In Christmas of 1983 when I was a year and a half, I received my own wonder horse. I rode Clippity-Clop so aggressively the metal bars would lift off the ground and my mother worried aloud to my father that I would fly off the toy. My parents could hear me in my room throughout the house, singing songs to Clippity-Clop, bouncing up and down on the floor boards. So great was my love for the wonder horse that we brought him with us to Brazil when my father was transferred for his job. By the time we returned to the United States in 1989, I was too big for the toy and transitioned to riding real horses.”

-Melissa E. Marinaro, Curator, Italian American Program, 1983.

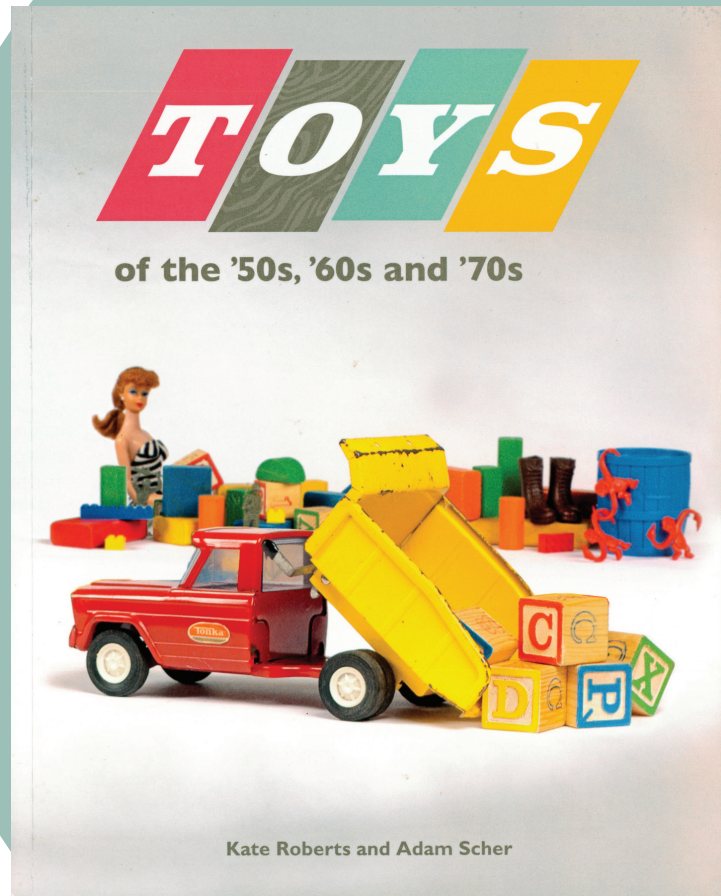


“Christmas Eve was always spent at my grandparents’ house and was often the place where my brother and I got our most coveted toys, including the Spirograph. The colorful patterns in the booklet that came with it were much harder to create than the TV commercials would suggest.”

-Liz Simpson, Assistant Editor/Assistant Registrar, c. 1992.

Toys of the '50s, '60s and '70s is on view at the History Center from March 4 to May 31, 2016. Exhibit highlights include:

- More than 500 artifacts including two from the Smithsonian: Mr. Potato Head from the 1950s and Digi-Comp 1 from the 1960s
- Interactive living rooms from each era
- Play space for visitors filled with classic games
- Staircase where visitors can race Slinkys
- Arcade gallery where visitors can play vintage pinball and games



Be sure to check out the book *Toys of the '50s, '60s and '70s* by Kate Roberts and Adam Scher for more information on the toys seen in the exhibit.



Raggedy Ann and Andy, c. 1965. Inspired by stories published by cartoonist Johnny Gruelle beginning in 1918, Raggedy Ann and Andy were popular designs for handmade dolls for many years.

HHC Collections, 94.84.26, 94.84.27. Photo by Liz Simpson.