

*Streamlined trains designed by Anne Farrell.
Modern children like the streamlined tops.*

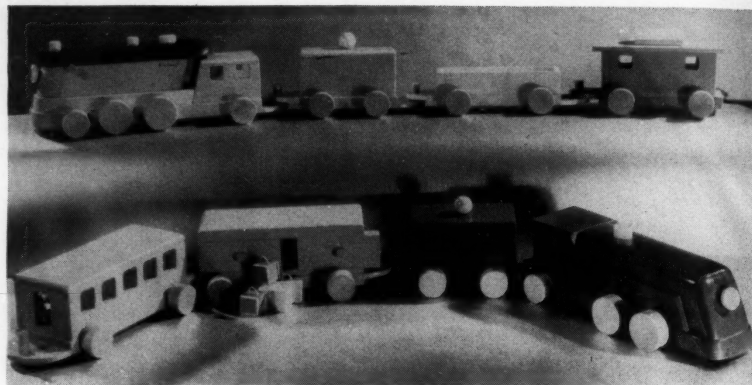
GOOD DESIGN IN TOYS FOR CHILDREN

By HELEN DURNEY



An interesting bobby horse made in Pennsylvania in about 1850. It is made of wood and is reproduced here from a drawing made for Index of American Design by Raoul du Bois.

Modern bobby horse designed by Anne Farrell



• There can be no more interesting study for the designer, the educator and the child psychologist than the problem of toys which usually concerns our present day parents once a year at the holiday season. Since the day of the machine-made article, Christmas is a "big time production" as far as toys are concerned and the most amazing array of intricate and short-lived toys crowd our great department stores.

In the far off days when America was young, parents created simple toys for their children. But these toys often showed that they were made not only with a deep affection but an artisty that

makes them well worth consideration today. Wood then and now was often the most suitable material to use. Familiar animals although considerably abstract appeared in wood, clay, cloth and even corn husks and other lowly materials. We know the children enjoyed these simply made play things far more than our youngsters today enjoy the multitude of complexities with which they are dazzled. Some people have been wondering just what is wrong with the situation and the problem is now being tackled squarely and with results too.

Anne Farrell designs toys to be used the year 'round. Not the gimcrack, knick-

Anne Farrell designer of modern children's toys observes with care the natural reactions of children to her creations. She has a new point of view on an old problem.



knacks here today with gaudy splendor and gone tomorrow when the Christmas tree needles start falling and the ornamental light bulbs begin to burn out. No, her toys are designed to grow with a child filling his psychological needs for years rather than days. Then, wonder of wonders, despite rough treatment, they are still in shape for younger brothers and sisters.

Miss Farrell was born in Detroit not so very long ago and may be remembered by some Design readers as Anne Farrell Herlihy. She dropped the latter name, however, since the first two seemed simpler and more readily remembered. She attended the Mary Grove College and the Crafts Guild in her home city. She worked with puppets both in their construction and manipulation. She is a person vibrating with life, personality and creative ability. She is so young one wonders how her brief span of years since finishing school have allowed for so much progress in times when new departures from tried ways have been slow. The answer is simple for she happens to be a dynamo of coordinated and directed thought and energy.

In Detroit came the inspiration to design toys. Friends, teaching in nursery schools complained of a lack of functional play-things to help children learn more accurately some of the millions of little things they must assimilate in their formative years. These teachers had discovered the run of toys at hand too breakable as well as being made of materials harmful for small hands, heads and even stomachs.

Anne set-to with inspired effort to fill this need. She realized she knew little of functional design for the materials she tried using. New York was the next step. Courses in design, child psychology and merchandising followed. After working with preschool groups, haunting toy departments and never running out of questions, she felt she was really ready to design toys to go onto the markets. Saks Fifth Avenue, whose toy department is above the average, grasped the opportunity to get her services. Here she put her newly acquired merchandising knowledge to work. She learned additional facts by her first hand experience with the toy buying public. The outcome was a series of sand cars which Saks manufactured and sold exclusively.

Well, department store merchandising was but one figure in Miss Farrell's jigsaw so having added to her fact finding she moved on, ready to present designs to manufacturers. Yes, they liked them—But—"oh, my, such a departure from toys which they knew would sell. Was it worth the risk? Everything being more or less uncertain the manufacturers decided, "No!"

Not daunted one whit Anne Farrell wrote a carefully planned prospectus and presented it to the Swedish Chamber of Commerce in New York. Sweden was chosen for several reasons. First, because

of their neutrality policy—incidentally you will find no tanks, guns or wooden soldiers in Anne Farrell's toys—the great forests of Sweden, beech, birch and pine offered the media which she had decided was best for toys. Sweden's acceptance of modern, functional design plus excellent craftsmen rounded out sufficient cause for the prospectus to go where it did.

Mr. William Ebeling, assistant secretary of the Swedish Chamber of Commerce introduced Anne to Mrs. Gunnar Myrdal of Stockholm and Einar Kumm, president of Products from Sweden, Inc., who sponsored her trip and made necessary arrangements for a factory in Sweden to make the toys. Plans went along at top-speed with the help of the Cooperative Wholesale Society of Sweden and in the Akuma factory of Tyninge, Province of Shone, Anne worked side by side with wood craftsmen and her toys began to take shape.

Eight wonderful, thrilling and fruitful months followed.

Healthy, happy, tow-headed youngsters proved excellent guinea pigs and took to these new play things like the proverbial duck to water. Clouds gathering on European horizons were getting bigger and blacker. The day Anne Farrell's toys were placed on the market for eager Scandinavians to purchase was the day Hitler made his march into Poland. Soon came the trip home. It seemed unwise for her to stay longer on foreign soil.

In New York another prospectus was written and presented to Milton Bradley Co., the oldest manufacturer of games and kindergarten equipment in this country. This time America accepted her gifted, farseeing "native son." Her time is divided between the Springfield, Mass., factory where she supervises the making of her toys and where each is signed by her; New York and points west as she displays, demonstrates, creates new designs and tries them out on delighted children whose age group has been considered in their making.

When she was a child in Michigan, in the distance, far from home she watched with regularity a train which with the remoteness and the mist over the hills appeared to her as purple. Always she wanted a purple engine but whoever heard of such a thing! Needless to say, a wooden engine, violet of hue features prominently in her list of toys. We have also seen streamlined, crack trains pulling into Pennsylvania station in New York with the gorgeous leader done up in royal purple. Engineers watched distant locomotives too, when they were little boys.

Anne Farrell could have any one of a number of careers. She could be a Powers model. The field of dress designing would be proud to use her name, she designs all of her clothes including her hats. Juvenile literature is missing an author and illustrator. But she has chosen her field.



The American forefathers frequently proved to be excellent artists since they had much experience in handling wood and other native materials coupled with a directness of treatment and imagination that amazes us today. The hen and rooster above are all that wood should be. They are of cypress wood carved according to local tradition by a negro slave of Jean LaFitte for the old "Absinthe House in New Orleans." It is reproduced here from a drawing made for the Index of American Design by Al Curry.



From the early 19th century America a toy rooster, made with a papier mache body and wire legs fastened to a bellows base. It is reproduced here from a drawing made for the Index of American Design by John Fisk.