

Rosendale Historical Society Newsletter

Winter/February 2026

PO Box 254, Rosendale, WI 54974

www.rosendalehistoricalsociety.org

Next meeting ~ Saturday, February 14, 2026 at 1:00 pm at Peace Lutheran

Topic ~ sharing old or unusual Valentines and recalling stories of how it was celebrated

In January, Sarah Ludwig led an interesting program on fossils. She had many samples, where they were found, and how she acquired the vast collection. Several children were in attendance and they, along with adults, had the opportunity to draw one of the fossils and have others guess what it was.

Feature Article:

Our Wisconsin winters can be long and cold. For the past 20 or so years they have not been nearly as cold or as snowy as they were in the last century. Although there were many fun things to do outside in winter, there were days when it was just too cold. Before schools were consolidated, many of our members attended rural schools. Outdoor winter games included “fox & goose” (where kids made many tracks in the snow to form a maze and then played tag within those tracks.) Some made large snow forts and others were close enough to a frozen farm pond to skate during recess. Playground equipment was wood and steel and there was always the dare to put your tongue on a pole or slide that was steel. I also remember playing card games like **Rook, Pit, and Finch** if it was too cold to go outside. This got me thinking about what toys or games we played at home in winter. I asked people of various ages what they played and then did some research for games & toys that were popular from the 1940’s and later – all before video and computer games took over. Following are some interesting things.

Winter of 1922



Probably everyone had a pull or push toy when you were very young. Things like wooden chickens or dogs that were on a string. Some were homemade and by the 1940’s a little more colorful ones were purchased. Fisher Price made a variety of pull toys and push toys like a **corn popper** in the 60’s. Two popular toys for preschool kids were a **Jack in the Box** and a

metal top in which the handle in the middle was pushed up & down several times causing the top to spin on the tip. Perhaps some remember the tin chicken who laid an egg when pushed down or hand crank sewing machines that had thread & crudely stitched. Then there were brightly colored &

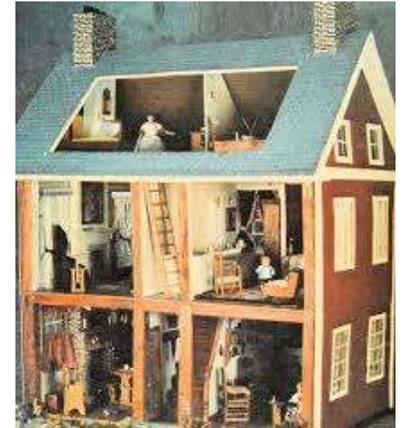


shaped wood pieces with a hole that could be strung. Many of these first toys have survived throughout the decades.

1940's – 1950's: Books of **paper dolls**. The first ones had thin cardboard dolls and then many outfits for the dolls. These all had to be cut out with a scissors and one had to be careful to leave 2 tabs at the top so these tabs could be folded over to attach to the doll. It wasn't until the 50's when the books of paper dolls had outfits that could be punched out rather than cut. Much later some had magnets to attach the dresses to magnetized flat dolls. Girls spent many hours playing with paper dolls and I'm uncertain if paper doll books exist today.



Metal & homemade wood **doll houses** were great. They enabled kids to choose a variety of furniture & accessories for rooms. There were small dolls who "lived" in these doll houses. Kids' imaginations could come up with all sorts of stories for the families in these houses. Celesta Griffiths recalls playing with her doll house was one of her favorite things to do in the 60's.



In 1914 **Tinker Toys** were invented using spools with holes & sticks to encourage open-ended construction. They continued to be made until 1985 when the wood was replaced with plastic. **Lincoln logs** and plastic bricks were along the same line, but both came a little later.

While girls had dolls, boys had toy farm machinery, trucks, and cars. In both summer & winter, boys had their BB guns. Phil Pinch said he played cops & robbers with Dennis Wittchow using his **Daisy BB gun** and no one ever got shot. Jim Westphal had a **Red Ryder BB gun** which he used to shoot sparrows that were under the eaves of the barn and cats sat near catching them when they fell.

Going way back to the mid-1800s-1900's, the tinplate era originated in Germany, utilizing thin steel sheets coated in tin, often with wind-up mechanisms. These toys were durable, affordable and many had colorful lithographed designs. From 1910–1930, companies like Buddy L



introduced heavy-gauge, durable toys that resembled full-size trucks & construction equipment. Tonka introduced trucks in 1946. Following WWII, steel surpluses allowed companies like Tonka to make pressed-steel trucks & steam shovels. It wasn't until the 1950's that Ertl made its mark with realistic die-cast farm machinery, while Nylint continued refining pressed-steel vehicles, including in the late 1940's popular wind-up models. Sarah Conrad's wind-up roller coaster in the 50's was one of those lithographed steel toys. For kids with imaginations, there were **Erector Sets** which were invented in 1911. **View-Master** looked like today's binoculars because one held it next to the eyes, inserted a disk that had 7 pair of



colored scenes and viewed what appeared to be 3 dimensional scenes. The View-Master was invented in 1940 and replaced the Tru-View which had black & white film viewed through a similar viewer.

Board games were also popular. **Monopoly** was invented in 1903, but it didn't become popular until Parker Bros. bought it from Charles Darrow & marketed it in 1935. This was a game the entire family could play. The early ones had little metal pieces – a car, iron, and shoe that moved from place to place when dice was shaken to determine how many places one could move.



Then came the 1960's -1970's with toy farm machinery and construction toys like bull dozers and dump trucks which continued to be staples for kids. The **Barbie** Doll entered the world in 1959 but wasn't on the market until 1960. A market for Barbie accessories followed with campers, houses, cars and play sets. Elizabeth Crook remembered playing with her Barbies for at least 10 years. In 1963, Easy-bake ovens, powered by a light bulb brought cooking fun for kids. **Shrinky-dinks** were little figures one was able to design. **Creepie People** in 1965 was a 5 mold set which formed strange heads, arms and feet. When assembled on a pencil, weird, troll-like creatures were formed.



1967 was the beginning of **Lite Brite** where translucent pegs were poked through black paper onto an illuminated grid. The results might be kept for some time & plugged in for display. Rebecca Westphal says this was one of her favorite toys. The first **Nerf ball** was invented in 1969 and was marketed as the first safe indoor ball. Over the next 20 years Hasbro (they acquired the franchise in 1991) made Nerf balls for every sport and eventually Nerf guns shooting soft projectiles. These continue to be popular. **Legos**

were first sold in the 60's but didn't become popular until the 70's. Both Nerf toys and Legos are still sold.

In the early to mid-1950's almost every home had a **television**. The large black & white pictures replaced many hours that had been devoted to playing with toys. TV only offered 3 or 4 channels and they were not on the air 24/7. Usually at midnight they played the National Anthem and were then "off the air."



Toys in the 1980s were sometimes taken from TV shows. In 1977 the Star Wars film series began and from that, figures representing the characters in the show were sold. **Transformers** were robots that could be taken apart and turned into cars, planes & semis. **My Little Pony** was put on the market in 1982 and millions were made until in 1992 they were discontinued.



Kyle King said for him in the 1990s, **Power Rangers** (developed in 1993), **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** (1988), and **Jurassic Park Dinosaurs** (1993) were his favorites. He also liked Legos, which proves how staple some toys have become.

One toy that I had in the 1940's is still sold today (under \$5) and that is the **Slinky**. It was created by accident when Richard James was working on tension springs to stabilize warships and 1 spring fell down and "started walking across the floor." He and his wife then got the idea to make similar springs and the first one was sold in 1945.



I hope this brings back memories of toys that you had or perhaps have kept for sentimental reasons. Can you guess how many of the toys in this letter are in our Museum? Come and take a look to see how many you find.



*Winter of
1959*



Gifts to RHS

- In Memory of their cousin – by Chuck Marousek & Lynn Moon
- Gift from Kleone & Phil Nelson

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