

Tryon Toy Makers and Wood Carvers: Brief Notes on a Fabled Workshop

by Kevin McGuire

“What can I do with my hands?” That question asked in a 1917 Ohio newspaper article referred to the labors of young artisans at a remarkable cottage industry in the upstate South Carolina town of Tryon, a progressive hamlet in rural Polk County on the Southern Railway line. The works of their hands traveled long distances and gained a devoted following, particularly among refined city-dwellers hungry for authenticity in an increasingly industrialized world.

This narrative is written from the author’s perspective as a collector and career woodworker focusing on how the figures and playsets were made at the Tryon workshops, and includes bits of essential history of the workshop’s development by its brilliant founders and its position in the national marketplace of the era.

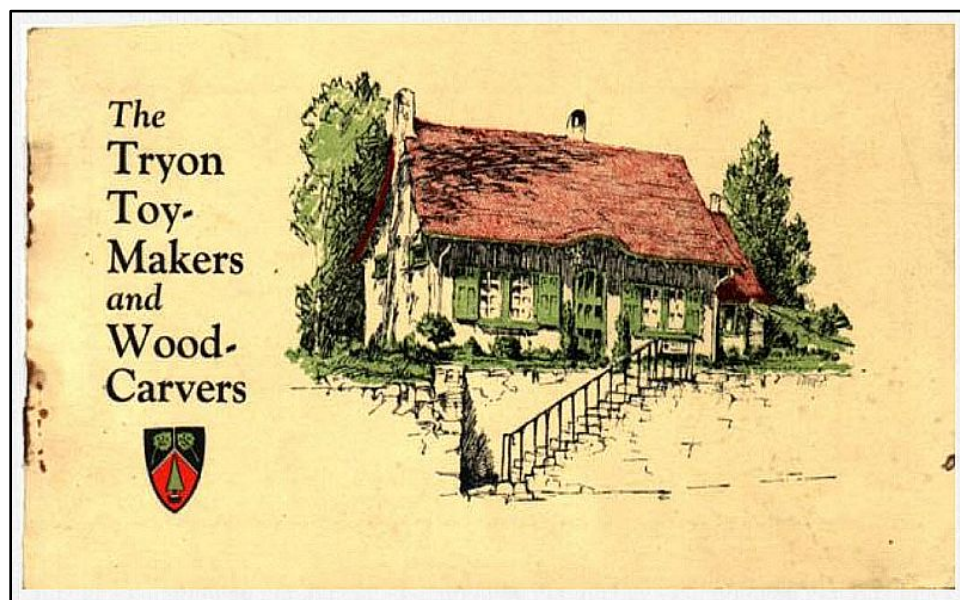
Not often recognized today beyond collectors and devotees of vintage regional crafts, the hand-painted wooden toys made by this small workshop are described by cultural historian and author Michael J. McCue as “...unequaled in charm and quality.” That the toys were entirely fabricated and finished by young people trained under the supervision of two remarkably-talented and socially-conscious women confirms the history of The Tryon Toy Makers as one of the truly unique stories in American toy manufacture.



A circus playset, ca: 1920-1935. Collection: The North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh, NC.

Vogue Magazine, in its 1923 Christmas issue, described wooden dolls handcrafted by the workshop as “toys with souls... [having] an air that immediately sets them apart as something unique.” Ninety-four years later, The Tryon Daily Bulletin described them as the “Tiffany of Toys” in a December 7, 2017 article featuring Julia Calhoun, the fourth and current owner of the business.

So popular were these playthings that they were stocked in leading department stores including Marshall Fields in Chicago and Wanamaker’s in Philadelphia, and visitors from urban centers arriving in Tryon from points east and north stepped off the Carolina Special requesting directions to the “Toy House” on Howard Street. Three of America’s First Ladies visited Tryon Toy Makers, and on Independence Day in 1934 Eleanor Roosevelt publicly praised the company’s handicraft industry as a successful example of employing the region’s mostly-rural youth in creative and remunerative employment during hard times. She departed the Toy House with examples for gift-giving to children in her family and hosted the two founders of the workshop at The White House.



Cover from a small six-page souvenir/advertising pamphlet with illustration attributed to George C. Aid, ca: 1924. Collection: The North Carolina Museum of History.

From the text:

"LOOKING AS THOUGH IT CAME OUT OF A FAIRY STORY, IT SNUGGLES AGAINST A LITTLE GREEN HILL IN THE LITTLE TOWN OF TRYON."

The company’s production included push and pull toys, animal figures mounted on wood bases, lathe-turned figural tops, dolls and doll furniture, at least one riding toy and, perhaps most notably, wee playsets with themes derived from common fables, Bible stories and folk motifs including Goldilocks and the Three Bears, Noah’s Ark, and a Mountain Home group featuring a rustic cabin with a mountain family and their menagerie.



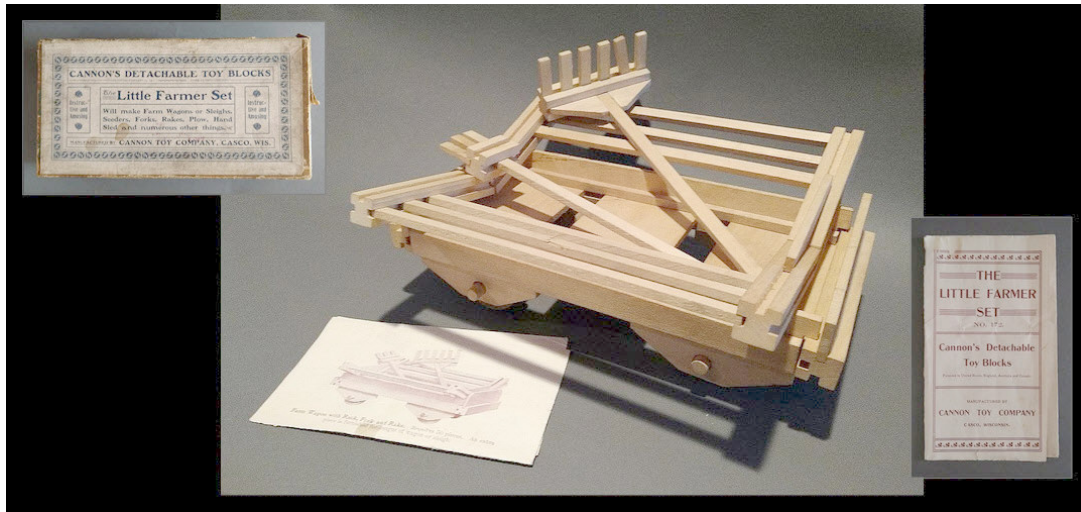
A pair of Goldilocks and the Three Bears playsets illustrating varied paintwork by young workers supervised by Mss. Yale and Vance and their instructors. The Papa Bears stand just 4" tall. Ca: 1920's. Collection: the author.

There is much to admire about Eleanor Vance and Charlotte Yale, the exceptional women who established their Tryon workshop in 1915 after having earlier developed weaving and woodworking production at Biltmore Industries in Asheville with the support of George and Edith Vanderbilt. They had instructed children in making wooden toys as early as 1901 prior to establishing the Biltmore Village workshop.

Vance, already an accomplished woodcarver having studied at The Art Academy of Cincinnati and abroad, developed the woodworking program, and Oberlin College graduate Yale advanced the weaving industry. Both were inspired by the progressive social service spirit of the time, epitomized by Hull House in Chicago. Ms. Vance's designs through the decades were wide-ranging and included carved casework and furniture for churches, commercial establishments and private commissions. A significant champion of their work was Edwin Seely, Asheville entrepreneur and builder of The Grove Park Inn.

Finely-made wooden playsets were of course already well-established in the stateside marketplace prior to the creation of Tryon Toy Makers. Offered not only in city shops and department stores but also in mail-order catalogues and featured in magazine briefs or small back-page advertisements, they were

popular not only with urbanites but also farm families desiring affordable playthings that would arrive at their rural route mailboxes in time for the holidays.



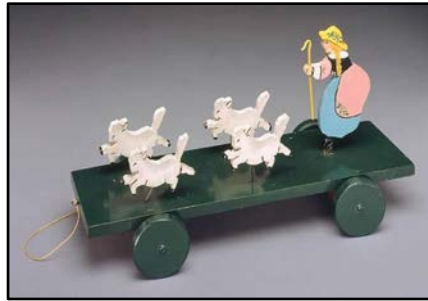
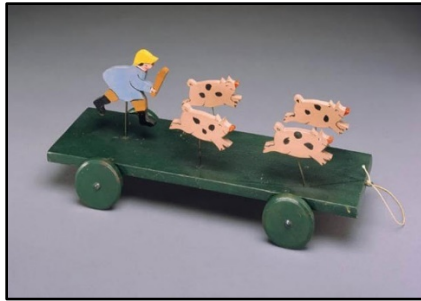
The Little Farmer Set, one in a series of mail-order agricultural implement assembly toys marketed by Cannon Toy Company, Casco, Wisconsin. Ca: 1910. Collection: the author.

Vance's designs for the earliest playthings may have been inspired in part by a well-known New York City social welfare organization, The Old Men's Toy Shop in Manhattan which employed elderly and infirm craftsmen and just preceded the establishment of The Toy Makers. The designers of their toys' remarkably-expressive patterns and color schemes are unknown and may in fact have been the craftsmen themselves.



(L) Animal figures deaccessioned from The Newark Museum's Lending Library, ca: 1915-20. Collection: the author. (R) Image illustrating coping saw work on the moose figures at Old Men's Toy Shop, Manhattan, NY ca: 1915. Image credit: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Bain Collection.

Stationary mounted animal figures and wheeled pull toys were mainstays in their marketing and had antecedents (and competition) from many other makers. As usual, the workshop's examples stand out as to design, quality of construction and visual appeal.



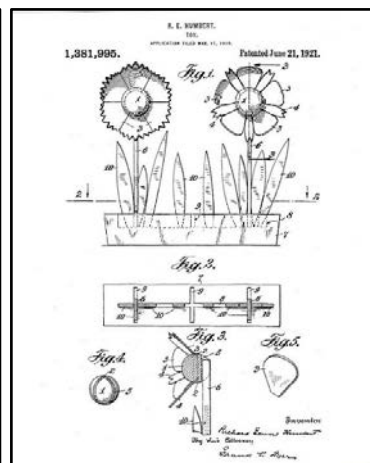
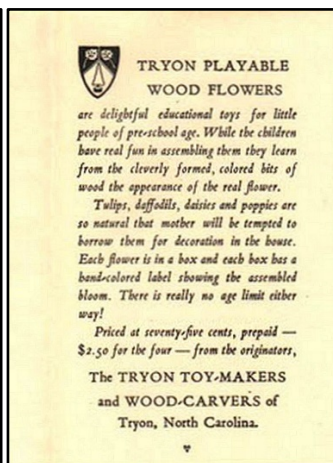
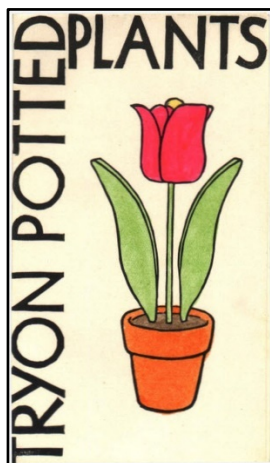
Wagonettes L to R: Boy and Pigs, Mary and Lambs, Flying Geese. Ca: 1923-30.
Collection: The North Carolina Museum of History.

This colorful tumbling bunny was the workshop's fresh take on a traditional action toy well-known from Europe and elsewhere. A tumbling clown figure was also described in their inventory.



(L): Bunny on Horizontal Bars, ca: 1920s-1930's. Collection: The North Carolina Museum of History.
(R): Tumbling clown, artisan-made, signed "U. Pulford," UK. Ca: unknown. Collection: the author.

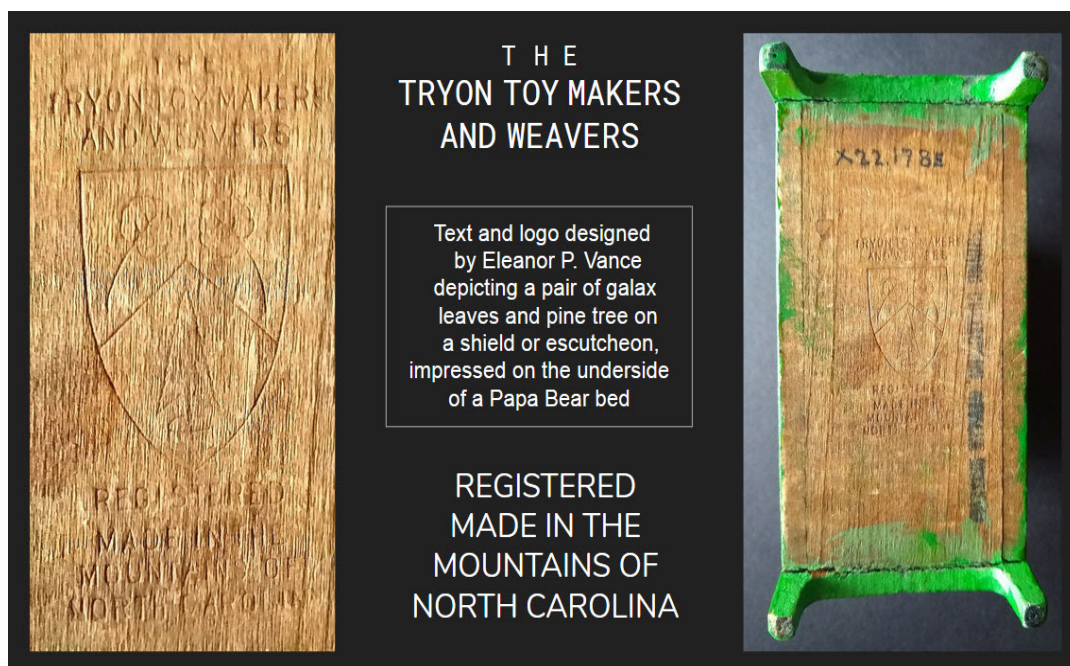
The Toy Maker's Playable Wood Flowers' image and description from an undated leaflet share a similarity with The Humbert Flower Builder, another popular assembly playset patented in 1921. Described in the Tryon pamphlet as "...from the originators," their product (never patented, as with most of their production) predated and may have inspired Humbert's later product.





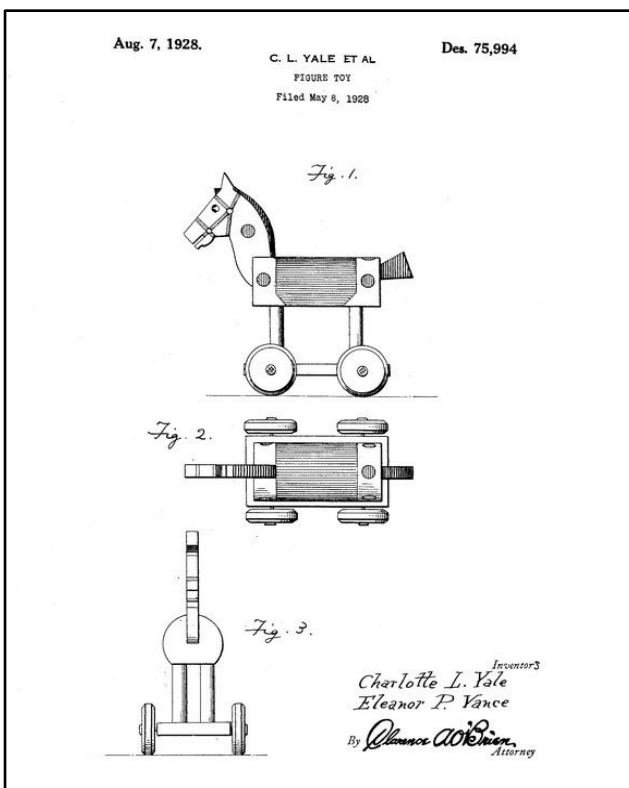
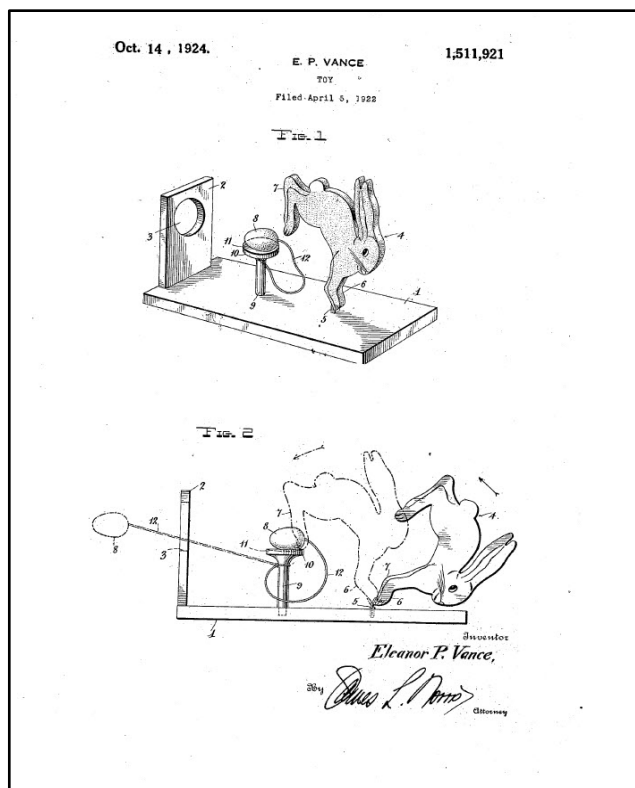
Above left and center: pamphlet pages. Ca: unknown. Collection: The North Carolina Museum of History. Above right and below: The Humbert Flower Builder, The Humbert Toy Makers, Newark. Ca: 1920's. Collection: the author.

In the early years, toymaking and the weaving of fine cotton cloth articles were both developed (hence the name Tryon Toy Makers and Weavers) but by 1922 the weaving business had been sold and the enterprise was entirely concentrated on the production of finely-enameled wooden playthings.



An early impression on the base of a toy bed made prior to the weaving enterprise being passed on to another Tryon crafts business. Ca: pre-1922. Collection: the author.

Vance's 1924 patent for a mechanical rabbit "Toy" (described as a "Kicking Bunny Game" in a 1929 price list) and 1928's "Figure Toy" (also credited to Charlotte Yale and soon to become the iconic Tryon Horse, symbol of the town) illustrate her playful imagination, always exploring fresh concepts.



Credit: Google Patents

Eleanor Vance explored the crafts regions of Europe and was certainly schooled in their various processes by observation; she also studied carving in England during her several overseas trips. Influence would have come from the centuries-old Erzgebirge woodworking tradition (*Holzhandwerk* in German) and other European miniatures and playsets exported at the time. These products varied in quality from very fine to those produced on what was essentially a production line process with individual figures sliced from lathe-turned wooden rings, quickly shaped with carving tools, sanded, painted and boxed for shipping.

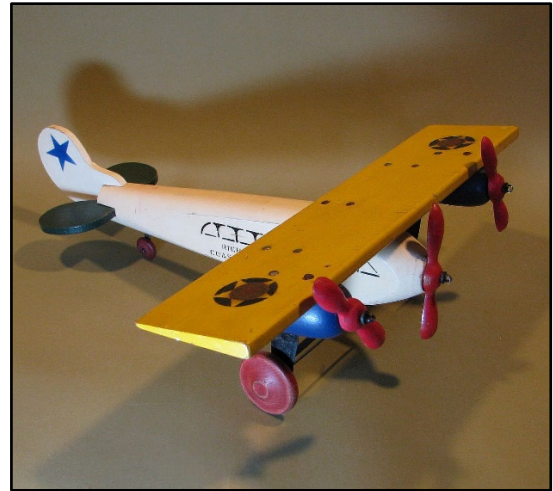
Marketplace competition for wooden toys in America was fierce between 1915 and 1941, the years during which Vance and Yale operated the business. There were other wood toy workshops and small manufactories achieving national fame at the time including Atascadero, California's Poppy Toy Company, maker of "The Famous Hair-Raising" Scarey Ann line of lathe-turned, lever-actuated wooden dolls; Pull-Apart Circus figures made by Playthings Manufacturing Company of Philadelphia; and Logansport, Indiana's Joy Toys. Larger firms such as Holgate Toy Company, Kane, Pennsylvania, also churned out high quality figural playsets.



(Upper left): Scarey Ann mechanical doll, Poppy Doll Company. Ca: 1920's. (Upper right): Pull-Apart Circus playset, Playthings Mfrg. Company, ca:1920's; lower left: Holgate Company's Old Woman Who Lived in the Shoe ca: 1929; lower right: Joy Toy Policeman, Joy Toy Company, ca: 1920's. All restorations by the author excepting Pull-Apart playset, a reproduction by the author of a playset modeled on existing examples, and Old Woman (unrestored). Collection: top two examples, Steve Mayo; bottom two examples, Richard Mueller.

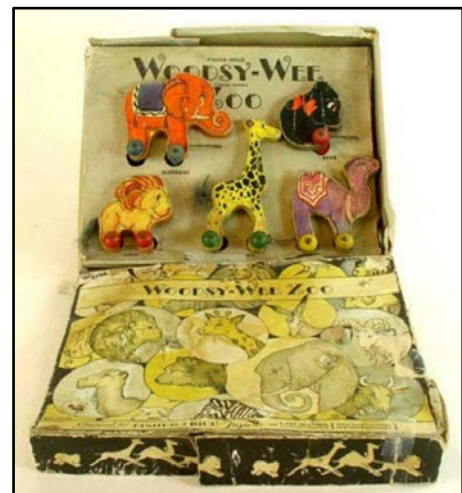
Giants of the toymaking industry tended to crowd the competition from store shelves: The Toy Tinkers of Evanston, Illinois, Ted-Toylers of New Bedford, Massachusetts, Rich Toy Company, originally based in Sterling, Illinois and The A. Schoenhut Company, Philadelphia. Their production volume was astonishing; Ted-Toylers advertised having shipped 50,000 toys a week worldwide in 1928, indicating the post-World War I supremacy of American toy manufacturing at the time. These were high-quality toys marketed at a comparable price point to the Tryon Toy Makers products, although their steel drive mechanisms or their various parts secured by string, rubber bands or springs set them apart as a different sort, the mechanical toy or adjustable figural toy.

These bobbing pull toy characters, spinning propellers and balancing circus performers must have been eye-catching alternatives to Tryon's mostly-static product line in toy shop and department store window displays of the era.



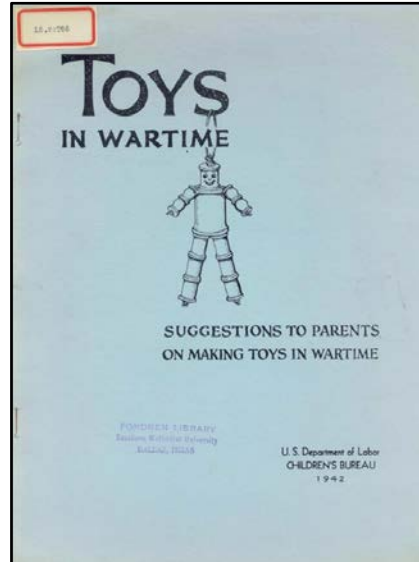
(Upper left): Horse and wagon by Rich Toys. Ca: 1920's. Collection: Richard Mueller. (Upper right): Trimotor plane, Rich Toys. Ca: 1920's. Collection: Steve Mayo. (Lower left): pull and crib toys, The Toy Tinkers. Ca: 1920's-30's. Collection: the author. (Lower right): Schoenhut Humpty-Dumpty Circus box top. Ca: 1903-1935. Image credit: Jim Sneed.

By contrast, inexpensively produced composition figures and playsets molded from various sawdust- or paper-and-binder formulas (including imports between the two wars) and domestic layered cardboard playsets compared unfavorably in fabrication and durability with the more substantial Tryon products.



(L) Animal figures, painted composition with wood bases, Germany. Ca: 1930's. Collection: the author. (R) Woodsy-Wee Zoo wheeled playset, Fisher Price Company. Ca: early 1930's. Uncredited.

Newsstand magazines, books and government publications providing do-it-yourself toy building plans for the amateur maker had enormous appeal particularly during the lean war years, illustrating the public's fascination for "real" toys during an age awash in factory playthings. Inventive home shop crafters produced countless toys during the era including many playsets.



(L): December 1937 issue. (C): U.S. Department of Labor Children's Bureau pamphlet. Ca: 1942. Collection: the author. (R): Wartime publication, date and credit unknown.



(Above left): Large 24" length artisan-built circus wagon with animal figures (note similarity of slotted supports to Tryon playset figure supports). Ca: unknown, based on C.A. Kunou's landmark manual arts training title Easy-to-Make Toys, © 1928, The Bruce Publishing Company, NY. (Above right): Page 55 illustration from the book for comparison. (Below): Detail. Acrobat 6-3/4" H. Collection: the author.



The House that Jack Built, articulated playset figures with straw-roofed house, unknown manufacturer/possibly artisan-made. Ca: estimated 1930's. Collection: the author.



Group of artisan-made toys for grandchildren, maker's family member requests no credit. Ca: 1930's. Collection: the author.

Price points for Tryon's toy products tended towards the upper end for their class, that is, quality hand-crafted wood toys. In 1928, Toy Makers playset prices ranged from \$1.25 to \$12.50 depending on their complexity and number of parts. All things being equal, their impressive Mountain Home playset marketed for \$12.50 would fetch \$160 in 2020 at a cumulative inflation rate of 1182% and probably more, given the continuing robust market since the "second wave" crafts revival of the 1960's. That's a whopping figure for handiwork produced exclusively by youths tutored in a small Southern town straddling the North Carolina/South Carolina line.

Tryon Toy Makers was accepted into the esteemed Southern Highland Handicraft Guild in 1932 and marketed at the Guild's Allenstand shop, further cementing their reputation for quality regionally-crafted goods.

Open All the Year Through

TRYON TOY-MAKERS and WOOD-CARVERS
TRYON, NORTH CAROLINA

ORDER BLANK FOR TOYS

Use Left Column for Quantity, Right Column for Amount.

How Many		\$	¢	Totals
	Bunny Napkin Rings, Pink, Blue, Green, Yellow Rompers	50		
	Chick Napkin Rings, Drum Major	50		
	Kitty Napkin Rings, Blue Eyes; Ribbon Pink, Blue, Yellow	50		
	Girl Tops, painted, very gay. Attractive Favors	75		
	Doll, Pink, Blue, Yellow and Green	150		
	Red Riding Hood and Wolf	125		
	Mary and Lamb	125		
	Barnyard Set with 14 Figures	300		
	Goddolocks Set	175		
	Jumping Jack	150		
	Duck	50		
	Rooster	100		
	Peacock	150		
	Clown on Horizontal Bars	150		
	Bunny on Horizontal Bars	150		
	Kicking Bunny Game	100		
	Fancy Pencil with Girl Head	25		
	Bunny Tooth Brush Holder	100		
	Italian Bear—Will do Stunts	175		
	Heppelwhite Desk and Chair, Blue, Buff, Pink	250		
	Dining Set (Table and Four Chairs), Blue, Buff, Pink	250		
	Doll Cradles (2½ in. x 5 in.), Blue, Buff, Pink	150		
	Doll Lamps with Parchment Shades	75		
	Wagonette, Flying Geese	175		
	Wagonette, Hen and Chicks	175		
	Wagonette, Boy and Pig	175		
	Wagonette, Three Blind Mice	175		
	Covered Wagon with Oxen	375		
	Dump Cart with Pony	250		
	Bunny Book Ends	250		
	Old Woman and Shoe and Family	1000		
	Mountain Horse Set of Cabin Family, Ox Cart and Animals	1500		
	Noah's Ark with 36 Figures	1500		
	Village Set of Church, 4 Houses, Windmill, 6 Trees	300		
	Dump Truck, 13 in. long, Rubber Tires, Red, Green	300		
	Roadster, 9½ in. long, Rubber Tires, Blue	300		
	Block Train	350		
	Toy Shop Dog (Cocker Spaniel)	150		
	Airplane	350		
	Cock Horse	50		
	Horse, 13 in. x 11 in. on Wheels	275		
	Small Horse, Replica of above	50		
	Pussy on Wheels	50		
	Airdale on Wheels	50		
	Pig on Wheels	50		
	Donkey on Wheels	75		
	Elephant on Wheels	75		
	Tiger on Wheels	75		
	Merry-go-round with Riders and Music Box	1000		
	Large Airplane, Rubber Tires	1500		
	(Child up to 8 years can ride on it)			
	Total Amount			

☐ New this year.

To TRYON TOY-MAKERS & WOOD-CARVERS
Tryon Toy Shop, Toy Hill,
Tryon, North Carolina.

Send the above marked Toys to:

Name _____
Address _____
Your Name _____
Address _____

Card Enclosed ☐

Attached is:
Check \$ ¢
Money Order \$ ¢

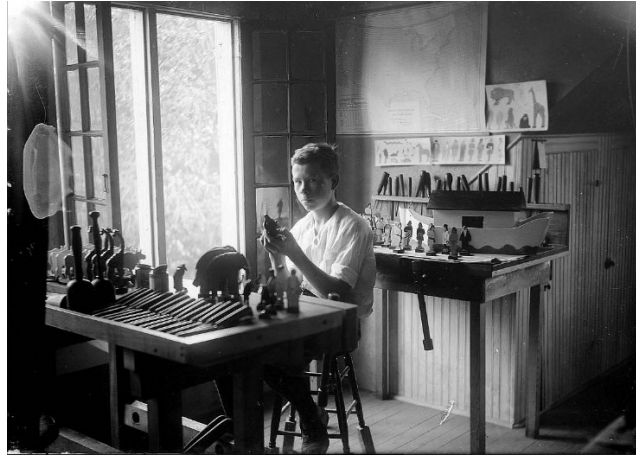
Parcel Post Charges paid on all Christmas orders for Toys this year.

For any special directions, use other side.

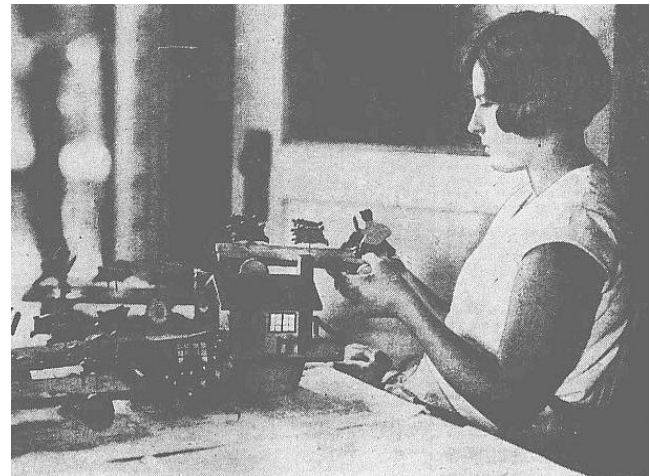
Order form, ca: 1928. Collection: The North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh.

Who were these young woodworkers? The record shows that Yale and Vance, schooled in the social service ethos of the era, wanted to enhance their students' limited employment options during and following the bleak WWI years beyond the factory millwork and other debilitating employment that was their common fate following the limited schooling then available. Both boys and girls were employed in most aspects of the workshop as shown in contemporaneous photographs. The young artisans were not only drawn from the countryside around Polk County, for the daughter of an early apprentice has confirmed that her father is descended from Tryon's only doctor at the time, William Earle Grady.

The youths were paid fairly for their labor, learned practical skills and perhaps most importantly, absorbed life lessons imparted by their instructors, part of the overarching moral and spiritual vision of the two founders. This concern for the welfare of their young charges offered a marked improvement over their typical lot in life.



A vivid contrast is seen between factory work and the Tryon workshop. Note the Vance designs pinned to the wall above the young man in the photograph. Undated images, (L): Library of Congress. (R): credit: Western North Carolina University Library, Special Collections.



Halftone images of Tryon's young artisans at work were regularly featured in newspapers and popular magazines during the 1920's and 1930's. (L): The Charlotte Observer and (R): The Baltimore Sun. A scroll saw is seen in the center background of the Left image.

Traced from Vance's patterns, the toys in the workshop- while largely hand-fashioned with basic tools- were never precisely "handmade," as a number of mechanical tools were employed by the older and more experienced workers. Foot- or motor-powered scroll saws were used in addition to handheld coping saws for roughing out figural shapes. Those destined for flat parts such as wheeled toy platforms and playset figures and their stands were probably machined to at least nominal thickness prior to delivery to the workshop, all to be sawn to proper shape and size and refined by hand work. Lathes were used for turning tiny bowls and other circular parts. Though relatively primitive compared to modern power tools, they were efficient at providing a stock of blanks for the young workers' embellishment.

Woods used have been reported as locally-available softwoods (which might include spruce, fir and hemlock) and lighter hardwoods such as bass (linden) and poplar. Dowels served as legs on some figures including the wheeled horse that was popularized as Tryon's civic symbol. Beyond lumber, one unique variant to this collector is the trio of acorn cap bowls used in place of the lathe-

turned bowls for a Goldilocks playset seen in the image below. Whether they are replacements for original bowls is uncertain.

Assembly involved brads and box-type (headed) nails of small sizes (typically 1/2" to 1-1/4" length depending on the toy), and glues of varying types as technology advanced from traditional animal (hide) or vegetal glues heated in glue pots to commercially-available packaged liquid glues. Metal parts included slotted screws serving as "axles" securing wheels to the bases, and pieces of fine malleable steel rod attaching figural parts to the bases. Bright plated hubs are seen securing the wheels of at least one toy dating to 1932, the horse figure mentioned previously.



Goldilocks playset tables illustrating the variety of turning and decoration of the bowls over time. The acorn cap bowls on the set at lower-right are unique to the author's research. Collection: the author.

Skillful paint finishing of the shaped and sanded parts was of paramount importance to the products' appeal. While revealing a naïve aesthetic approach as would be expected of apprentice work, the surviving toys clearly demonstrate that sloppiness was never tolerated by the program's instructors. Brushwork involved areas of single colors and also considerable fine-lined detailing (often in black but also of varied hues); a third element, colors overlaid and blended on the wood surface (as shown in the face of Papa Bear below) exhibit a striking competency in the production of the best students. This detail work using early enamel paints required brushes at least as fine as No's. 00 and 000 based on today's standard sizes.

Paints were described in a 1934 Marion Grubb article in *The Baltimore Sun* (titled *The Tryon Toy Shop's Artistry*) as having been custom-mixed to Eleanor

Vance's samples, which were painted on small boards and sent to the esteemed Michigan firm Berry Brothers Paint and Varnish Company. The firm responded by "...putting up these colors in small cans as desired, under a special brand." The paints are further described as giving the toys "...an added lustre that will 'stand the punchin'" of small but energetic hands."



Playset figures illustrating color blending on Papa Bear's face, and finely-tipped brushes. Collection: the author. Advertisement for Berry Brothers Paints, The Gastonia Gazette, July 15, 1922.

This carefully-managed intersection of engaging design, skillful fabrication and creative paintwork is the hallmark of the Tryon Toy Makers and is the reason their products are so pleasing to the eye and in the hand. It represents what England's Royal College of Art design professor and author David Pye termed "the workmanship of risk" as opposed to "the workmanship of certainty," that is, techniques encouraged by a marriage of helpful (if rudimentary) technology with established craft tradition so that the young makers' creativity is enabled, rather than diminished as a result.

THE MANSFIELD NEWS, FRIDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1917.		
<p>The Toy-Makers of Tryon.</p> <p>"What can I do with my hands?" he asked.</p> <p>For answer he was seated at a carpenter's bench flanked with carving tools, and the Tryon school of wood carvers and toy makers had its first mountain boy apprentice. In his wake came other mountain and village boys, until today there is a waiting list, for the capacity of the Tryon shop is limited to 12, so that each boy may have individual training and learn what he can do best. In attic and basement the wood</p>	<p>carvers work. Such workshops! The walls are windows that frame the eternal blue of the mountains and catch the fragrance of their riotous bloom. No whistle calls the Tryon wood carvers and toy makers to the work bench; no clock marks wearisome, lagging hours as so often befalls city toilers. Each boy works for the joy of the work; to see what he can make his hands do in the interest of beauty and utility. If money comes, all well and good; but it's not for money alone that he works, as so many of earth's toilers</p>	<p>are forced to do.</p> <p>The Tryon wood carvers and toy makers do not pay a penny for their training. Tools and materials are given them without cost. From the start each boy is paid a living wage.</p> <p>In the attic workshop they learn the use of carving tools, how to saw and plane and to trace patterns on wood from designs prepared for them, for they have yet to learn the rudiments of drawing and design. In the attic, also, they paint and enamel the gay little toys they cut out of a solid block of wood.</p> <p>The bark and grain of every Carolina mountain tree is known to the crafters.</p> <p>Not until a boy reaches his 16th year is he admitted to the basement, where the lathe and band-saw work is done, for until that age he is apt to lack height, muscle development and the care and judgment necessary safely to handle a machine.—Lida Rose McCabe, in St. Nicholas.</p>

Ask for — Get **Horlick's** —

The ORIGINAL **Cafe Malted Milk**

For Infants & Invalids

Substitutes Cost YOU Same Price

A Nutritious Diet for All Ages. Keep Horlick's Always on Hand Quick Lunch; Home or Office.

Numerous articles appeared in far-flung newspapers and periodicals celebrating Tryon's little workshop. This Mansfield, Ohio piece was a clip from a Lida Rose McCabe article originally published in the popular St. Nicholas Magazine. Ca: December 1917

America's toy industry benefited during World War I when the wartime embargo stemming the flood of inexpensive toys from The Continent gave domestic businesses an opening. The company got off to a promising start aided by prominent supporters, a buoyant economy, and the anti-German sentiment among the populace apparent in the advertisement below left.



Here is a picture of Noah's Ark, the most popular toy made by the Tryon Toy-Makers. Noah with his strongly built Ark, his family of seven and thirty-two animals is enough to fascinate the heart of every child to say nothing of every grown-up as well.

All the animals under Noah's charge seem to be animals with souls as one can see by studying the clever expressions on their faces.

Why should we buy foreign toys when a better and more satisfactory product is being made by our North Carolina young people, who are 100% pure Americans and who are trying to build up a worth while Industry for their State?

The price of the Noah's Ark is \$15.00. For further information write to the Tryon Toy-Makers.



Carolina Made Toys

Sturdy and Charming Toys, made from mountain hardwoods and gay enamels.

RICH WOOD CARVINGS

executed by the most painstaking hand tooling, carefully and wonderfully designed.

Visit our booth at the Exposition and place your orders now.

Tryon Toy-Makers
And Wood Carvers
TRYON, N. C.



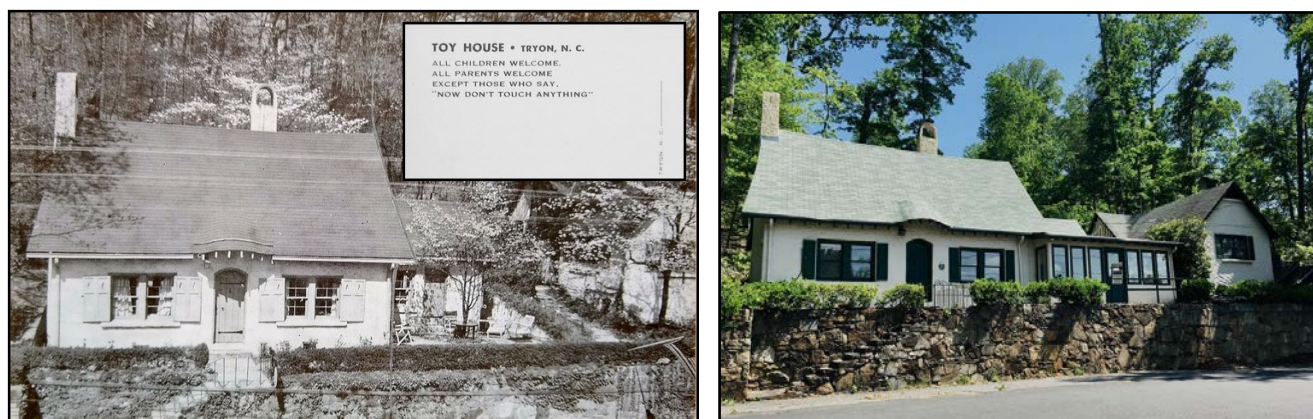
Advertisement for Noah's Ark. Ca: unknown. Collection: North Carolina Museum of History. The Three bears figures, enameled basswood. Ca: post-1921. Collection: the author. Advert, Charlotte Observer, Sept. 27, 1923

Then like most American enterprises, the Toy Makers suffered during the economic catastrophe of the Great Depression when the diminishing market for their relatively high-priced toys- for they were always marketed as premium handicraft products- took its toll. The workshop's founders stayed the course, maintaining perennial favorites and adding new production items to suit the public's interests even as plastics entered the industry, but the grand era of classic wooden toys (both small shop and factory-manufactured) was passing.

In 1936 the founders sold the business to the state's Farmers Federation, continuing in an advisory role until the business was shuttered in 1941. In 1949 they sold the iconic Toy House to a couple who operated it, with their own products, as Tryon Toymakers before closing in the late 70's. Tryon native and entrepreneur Julia Calhoun currently operates her business under the name Tryon Toymakers with her shop located on the small town's Main Street where she markets her recreations of the company's famous line, reinvigorating one of our most beloved native toy enterprises.

The willingness of the young Toy Makers to learn a new craft and language of expression, their tenacity in overcoming the inevitable disappointments at the workbench and finishing table, and surely their abiding camaraderie day-in and

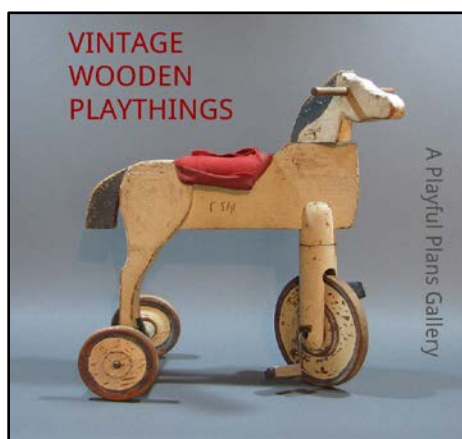
day-out exemplifies America's history of public-spirited manual arts training. May their endeavors inspire us to support similar enterprises in the years to come!



(L): An undated postcard of The Toy House showing a detail of the caption on the reverse side. Collection: the author. (R): The Toy House in 2020. Image credit: GoUpstate.com

As a vintage wooden toy collector and repairer, and author of woodworking titles since 1994, I find the forms, finishes and charm of these century-old playsets created just down the Saluda Grade from my Asheville home inspiring and instructive.

Contact: Kevin McGuire kevin@playfulplans.com Asheville, North Carolina
[Link to the author's collection](#) of vintage wooden toys 1890-1960



This introduction barely scratches the surface of the story of The Tryon Toy Makers and Wood Carvers. Explore my Acknowledgements below to learn more about this fabled crafts workshop and its place in America's crafts tradition.

Any and all errors written or inferred are strictly those of the author.

Acknowledgements

The North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh, NC <https://www.ncmuseumofhistory.org/collections>

D.H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina Asheville <http://toto.lib.unca.edu/>

Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Collection, Bain News Service Collection <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/>

Michael J. McCue, author and cultural historian who “wrote the book” on the Toy Makers. Anyone curious about the workshop’s story is directed to his definitive, highly-readable monograph @ <http://www.condarpress.com/ttm.html>

Eugene Metcalf, author and historian, Emeritus Professor of American Studies, University of Miami, Ohio
<http://www.oldwoodtoys.com/history.htm>

Bruce T. Johnson, author and Director of The National Arts & Crafts Conference in Asheville, North Carolina for his commentaries on the evolution of the crafts movement in Western North Carolina
<http://www.artsandcraftscollector.com/>

David Pye, author, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship* and *The Nature and Aesthetics of Design*, Available in bookstores and online

Thanks to the collectors who have set a high bar by providing free, informative public access to their personal collections:

Richard Mueller Jr., creator of [Old Wood Toys](#), the original online resource for exploring the history and culture of vintage wooden toys.

Jim Sneed, Schoenhut Circus authority, editor of [Schoenhut Collector's Club](#) and current proprietor of [Old Wood Toys](#)’ vast and important archive.

Steve Mayo, mentor, and custodian of his important collection featured @ [Antique and Vintage Toys 1850-1950](#)

Derrick Clow, proprietor @ the terrific [Collecting Keystone](#) website.