



GREEN SHEET | THIS IS US

Toys at Chudnow Museum of Yesteryear are a window to the past



A large toy display at the Chudnow Museum of Yesteryear features popular toys and games from the 1920s, '30s and '40s. Credit: Rick Wood

By *Kathy Flanigan* of the *Journal Sentinel*

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The doll is kind of creepy-looking. The 1920s Tinker Toy set would fetch a fortune on eBay. And Duck Shooting, a game in which children grab a gun and fire wooden pellets at cardboard

duck figures, probably exists only in digital forms today.

In the spirit of the season, we ventured to the [Chudnow Museum of Yesteryear](#) to see its display of toys from the 1920s, '30s and '40s. The museum, 839 N. 11th St., is a shrine to the many things Avrum Chudnow collected during 92 years of life in Milwaukee.

One corner of the display features a trio of toys aimed at girls — a miniature electric iron, a tiny sewing machine and a small oven that could have been the precursor to the Easy Bake oven.

On another shelf, Milton Bradley's "Easy Money" board game from 1935 looks like a direct copy of Parker Brothers' "Monopoly." Parker Brothers thought so too, and shut it down.

"The 1920s were the beginning of family time," said Steve Daily, the museum's executive director. "They had time to gather around the table."

Families shared trivia cards to quiz each other on famous authors, history or geography.

Daily credits the enforcement of the eight-hour workday for the extra leisure time. Child labor laws were in full effect and students were required to go to school up to the 10th grade, Daily said.

He estimates there are more than 2,000 games, toys, puzzles and books in the museum's collection.

The creepy doll is made of tin and painted to look porcelain. It looks more like an old lady in a wig than a baby.

There are also Lincoln Logs, created by John Lloyd Wright, son of the famed Wisconsin architect. Next to them are Wright's less popular Lincoln Bricks. Unlike the logs, which could be

dismantled and used again, the less popular bricks used mortar to hold the model together, which made the creations permanent.

Chudnow was an avid collector who learned how to find nuggets during rounds with his junk-collector father. When his father-in-law sold his Grafman's grocery, Chudnow bought everything, including the full boxes of laundry soap on display at the time.

Acquiring items was "either a hobby or an obsession" for Chudnow, Daily said.

But don't call him a hoarder. Chudnow was more cultural historian than consumer. Everything was stored in good condition so it could later chronicle life in the '20s, '30s and '40s.

He focused on everyday items and filled the basement and the third floor of the three-story Cream City brick building he used for his law office. After his death in 2005, his family created the nonprofit museum.

Visitors will find the toy display on the second floor. To get there, though, they pass a grocery, a pharmacy, a hardware store and an ice cream shop. There's also a barbershop that leads to a speak-easy, a doctor's clinic and a room dedicated to politics.

The museum is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and noon to 4 p.m. Sunday. It will be open Christmas Day and New Year's Day. Admission is \$5 for adults; \$4 for kids 7 to 17, seniors 62 and older and college students; and free for kids 6 and under. Call (414) 273-1680 or see chudnowmuseum.org.

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