

## LEARN FROM HOME

### Early Settler Toys & Games

Did Early Settler and Victorian children have as much fun as we do? This week, we discuss what leisure time would have looked like for Early Settler and Victorian children (1830s to early 1900s).

Here are some questions for discussion:

1. **What are some fun things that you like to do in your spare time?** Answers will vary, but will likely include items like read books, play with friends, and use electronics (video games, FaceTime, iPhones, Nintendo, etc.).
2. **What are your favourite toys and games?**
3. **Did children your age have those kinds of toys 150-200 years ago? What do you think they had?**

### Early Settler Toys and Games

It is difficult to track trends in the popularity and production of toys prior to the industrial revolution as children made their own playthings. Early Settler children used materials that they found in nature or from their parents to create their toys. All toys, even those few that might be manufactured, encouraged children to use their imaginations.



**Dolls** were a favourite toy and were constructed from scraps of fabric, wool and even corn husks! **Toy canoes** were made of birch bark or carved wood. **Marbles** were crafted from all sorts of materials including clay!

A game of **Grace Sticks** was played indoors or outdoors with two pairs of sticks and an embroidery hoop. Often the embroidery hoop was decorated with ribbons and scraps of fabric. Players tossed the hoop between their sticks without letting it drop. The goal was to do this gracefully.

## Victorian Toys and Games

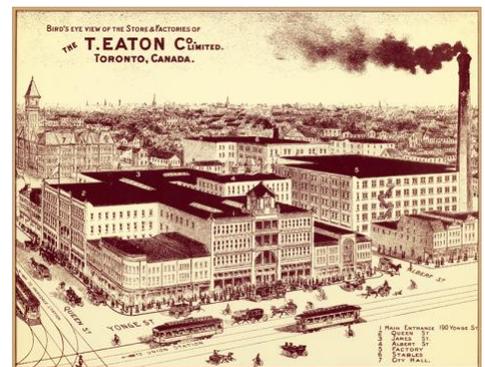
The industrial revolution allowed for the mass-production of goods, making manufactured toys widely available for the first time. Manufactured toy production started around the sixteenth-century in Europe, but only children from privileged and wealthy families could hope to own such toys. By the Victorian period, these toys were available to more families. Even children from very poor households were occasionally treated to small manufactured toys from penny stalls in markets.



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Mechanical toys with clockwork wind-up motors were the height of technology. Metal and wood were the most popular materials in toy production, you would never see a child playing with a plastic toy at this time.

Mail-order businesses such as the T. Eaton Company and Sears Roebuck allowed for the mass distribution of merchandise. Victorian children living in the most rural and remote of locations could access manufactured toys by ordering them through the local general store.



## Life Lessons

Toys were meant to serve a dual function: to entertain and educate. Girls were expected to learn home-making skills at a young age and boys learned about finances and estate management.



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Popular toys for boys included marbles, spinning tops, kites, paper boats, clockwork cars and trains, soldier sets and wooden blocks.

Girls played with skipping ropes, dolls, doll houses, miniature furniture and tea sets. They were also

encouraged to read and draw as their preferred behaviour was meant to be modest and quiet rather than exuberant.



## Victorian Amusements



Mrs. Isabella Beeton

Board games were a popular indoor amusement for the entire family. Domestic diversions were encouraged to maintain a happy household, as is discussed in Mrs. Beeton's *The Book of Household Management*, "It is of incalculable benefit to [children] that their homes should possess all the attractions of healthful amusement, comfort and happiness; for if they do not find pleasure there, they will seek it elsewhere".

The games that families played together were meant to teach the value of good behaviour and hard work.

### Work Hard, Play Hard!

Hard work was a reality of daily life for early settlers. It took the labour of the entire family to keep house and run the farm. Children were expected to contribute to the work of the family, leaving little time for play. Nevertheless, many of the chores of early settler children can be regarded as games and craft projects in themselves. These children found a way to make their work entertaining!

**After discussing the information listed above,** do you think early settler and Victorian children had fun with their toys and games? Has your answer changed from before?

Draw a photo of **your** favourite toy or game! What is it called? What do you like about it?

## MAKE YOUR OWN EARLY SETTLER TOY

Constructing a *ball-and-cup* with everyday household materials!

Ball-and-cup was a very popular early settler toy. All that was required to make this toy was some wood, string, and a crafty hand! Try it for yourselves using items you can find around your house.

### Materials needed:

Small Dixie-style cup  
Yarn or string (about 12-15 inches in length)  
Small ball or clump of tin foil  
Unsharpened pencil or item with similar shape  
Scotch tape

### Method:

1. Decorate your Dixie-style cup.
2. Poke the unsharpened pencil through the bottom of the Dixie-style cup, eraser side down.
3. Fasten a piece of tape to either end of the piece of string.
4. Attach one end of the string to your ball or tin foil, and the other end of the string to the inside of your cup.

### Instructions:

Holding the handle of your newly crafted toy, begin to swing the ball in an upwards motion and try to catch it in the cup.

### **Are you up for a challenge?**

How many successful attempts can you complete in 60 seconds?

Let us know by writing to us at [wsmuseum@townofws.ca](mailto:wsmuseum@townofws.ca) or on Facebook [@WSMuseum](https://www.facebook.com/WSMuseum), and the Museum Staff will take you up on your challenge!

