

## **First Toy Factory in America Still Running**

December 25, 1902 Boston Globe

Winchendon, Dec 24 – While these are, apparently, Santa Claus' busiest days, he is hard at work all year round making, in his many workshops the toys, dolls, games and other gifts that gladden the hearts of the boys and girls at Christmas time. Few persons have any idea where or how the toys are made.

They go to the store, make their purchases, and give the matter no further thought. They are content to know that the dealer will have an assortment on his shelves and counters from which selections may be satisfactorily made a day or two before the great holiday. The purchasers little realize that the work of preparing toys for the next season's trade begins just as soon as the rush of the last one is over. Even now the manufacturers are getting read for their traveling salesmen samples of the novelties they will introduce for Christmas 1903.

### **Oldest Toy Factory in America**

Santa Claus has many workshops throughout the United States. There are more than 30 firms that make toys. The largest concern is located in Winchendon, a thriving town of 6000 in the northern central part of Massachusetts.

The business was started 25 years ago by a man who became a toy manufacturer almost accidentally. He was engaged in the woodenware industry, and in the course of his work, he received an order to make up a lot of fancy collar boxes. At that time there was a rage for paper collars put up in handsome receptacles that could be converted into other uses when the collars were worn out.

Mr. Converse made an article that could be transformed into a table, and a set of wood dishes was included in each box. This was a big hit, and for months the firm was way behind in its orders. One thing led to another, and before Winchendon residents realized it, the first factory devoted exclusively to toys in this country was firmly established. The start was made with a dozen hands, five of whom are employed today. Beside these, there are 250 others who are kept busy nearly all the year round making toys.

In the factory several acres of floor space are needed to make the different styles that are turned out. Each part of the work is done here, from the arrival of the wood in planks, to the shipment of the finished product.

Almost every kind of wooden and steel toys are made here, but the only use of sheet tin at this factory is for sand pails and the barrels of drums.

Dolls are not manufactured in the United States in any appreciable quantity. The Germans have the faculty of making dolls better and at a less price than they have yet been made on this side of the ocean, but experiments are under way which may reverse the conditions. Today 85% of the toys sold here are turned out in the United States.

### **Horses and Horses**

One part of the Winchendon toy factory is devoted exclusively to hobby and rocking horses. Those come in many sizes that sell all the way from 10 cents to \$25, the latter being an almost lifelike reproduction of a fiery steed. Europeans once held a monopoly of this trade, but the bright witted Yankees quickly devised machinery that far outstripped the competitors across the sea.

The imported horse is composed of a frame on which is place a skin of cloth or cloth covering to imitate horsehair. This is stuffed with excelsior or other material. It is a fairly respectable imitation, but for durability it cannot compare with the American article.

In the Winchendon factory are to be seen many specially built lathes. A square block of wood is put in one lathe and by means of a pattern is shaped into the body of a rocking horse-to-be. Another lathe fashions the head in a similar manner, and still another shapes the legs. These six pieces are glued together in their proper places.

The embryo horse is subjected to a thorough sandpapering to remove the corners and rough places, and the product stands ready for the paint bath. A huge tank containing a grayish white liquid receives them, the dipping being done by an expert who can handle hundreds of horses an hour. The dapple gray is the most popular. to make the darker spots on the body an air pump is used, which blows a powder upon the moist paint, giving the mottled effect.

Next the horse is passed on to the finishing room, where the eyes are put in, mane and tail tacked on and harness and saddle put in position. the eyes are imported from Europe. For those who desire the more expensive article, calf skins are used to cover the wood bodies. The skins are from "slunk" calves, and the hair is short and fine. The entire country is scoured to get these hides.

-----

### **How Miniature Saratogas Are Made**

Perhaps no section in the entire factory would interest the girls more than the toy trunk department. Twelve four foot planks are first cut up into the required lengths, then passed through planers and sanding machines to the different benches where the various sizes and kinds are collected. One attendant puts four pieces together in a machine which automatically drives 12 nails in one blow. The bottom of the trunk is nailed on by the next machine. Then the wooden

box is passed over to the pasters. A girl feeds the paper covering for the trunk on to an endless belt of canvas, which is covered with paste.

A dozen girls standing in double rows at either side of the belt pick off the sticky pieces of paper and paste them on the sides of the boxes which are next passed on to receive their hinges, locks, handles and trimmings. Two barrels of paste are used each day and 18,000 rolls of wall paper are cut up each year to cover just one style of trunk.

Many times this amount of paper is specially printed at this factory to imitate the paneled trunks and fancy styles from 1000 to 2000 being the product each day of three lithography presses.

-----

### **Sand Pails and Toy Trains**

The production of sand pails for the seashore, toy trains, horses, wagons, etc, of steel is a new and important feature at this factory. The pictures and other ornaments are printed on sheets of steel, which are baked in intensely hot drying rooms. Later they are taken to huge stamping machines, which cut out the metal into the correct shapes, and then a machine seizes these pieces, rolls them into shape, fastens the bottom on by turning over the edge, and with the addition of the bail or handle the pail is ready for use inside of a minute after the sheet of tin emerges from the drying room. Thirty-four persons handle the different parts of a pail while it is being made.

Many individuals have in the past held the idea that a toy bearing the imprint "made in Germany" must be superior to the American article of similar design. But "made in America" is now fast becoming the popular trademark. for people are beginning to recognize the superiority of the home-made article.

-----

### **1500 Drums a Day**

There are only two concerns in the United States that make drums, and the Winchendon plant is one of them. Here 1500 drums are turned out each day. Here again the lithograph department comes into play, for the ornamentation of the steel and tin to be used for the barrels of the drums has become a work of art.

Many of the cheaper drums have wooden barrels. Long pieces of thin wood are bent into cylinders and glued, then sawed into narrow rings for holding the heads in place. Strips of tin or

steel are seized by almost human machines, shaped into the barrel of a drum, then passed on for the next stop, the reception of the heads.

There are 600 sheepskins used each day for this purpose and they are imported from Australia. The skins come "split", the softer inside part being removed and use elsewhere as "chamois". The scraps and odd pieces are not wasted by any means, for they are sold to a New York manufacturer to be made into a delicious gelatin.

-----

### **Wood Sailboats Passing Away**

The day of wooden toy sailboats is passing away, for a much better article is now made of pressed sheet steel, which is laid on a pattern, and a huge arm controlled by hydraulic power comes down, presses the steel and thus shapes the body of the boat. A deck is cut out by another machine and turned into position, making a water tight hold. The result is a boat that cannot sink, always is evenly balanced and is practically unbreakable. The sails are made by the thousand in a well-lighted sewing room.

Another department makes a clockwork attachment for mechanical "electric" cars and automobiles.

The comic papers and caricaturists are having a good deal of fun in the toy trust, which was formally launched in New York last week. Thus far 30 toy manufacturers have joined the combination and other are asking admittance. The capitalization is \$4,000,000. The promoters claim that the general public has an entirely erroneous idea of the situation, and the retail price of toys will not be advanced.

Trunks made in Milwaukee are now sold by the thousand in Boston, and Winchendon-made trunks flood the toy houses of Milwaukee. The means cut prices and heavy freight bills. After the combination gets into working order, Milwaukee-made trunks will be sold in Milwaukee and vicinity, while Winchendon trunks will supply the Boston dealers.