

WHS Museum  
1975.108.3a-b  
197.332.7

WHS Museum, 1943.124.128

# Scooters, Ska

## Toys Against Delinq

By Daryl



*A Milwaukee street scene, ca. 1930.*

WHS Museum, 1985.121.6

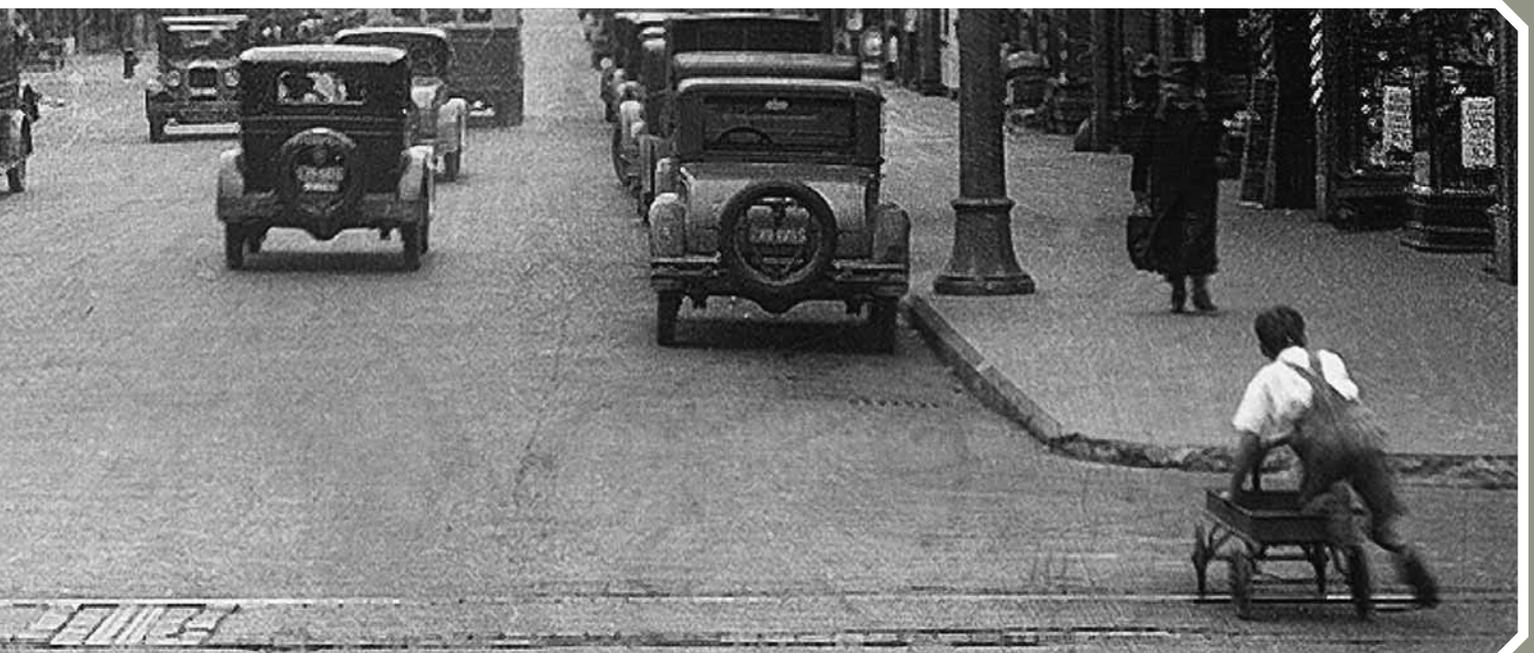
WHS Museum  
1970.29.9  
1988.236.18

*The treasures of  
childhood could be found  
at Milwaukee's Toy  
Loan Centers. Children  
discovered longed-for  
skates, sports equipment,  
games, and dolls, like the  
ones pictured at left.*

# tes, and Dolls

## uency in Milwaukee

Webb



Courtesy of the UW-Milwaukee Golda Meir Library Archives, Serial # 29681-1

A crowd of eager children, about fifty boys and girls, milled about the corner of Milwaukee Street and Michigan Avenue early on an April morning in 1938. The young residents of this downtown neighborhood had begun to arrive at the still-closed doors of the city's newest center, a place just for them, a place that held on its shelves the very thing that they wished for: toys. Posters had recently appeared near their schools and in the local shop windows stating that here on this corner, on this day, April 11, at 8:00 AM, children could enter into this center and emerge with a doll, a game, a baseball mitt, or other borrowed treasure. And they were treasured, for the hardship of the Great Depression had robbed many children of the joys of playing with even a single toy. When the doors finally opened, excited boys and girls rushed in and dolls, trains, toy trucks, and a host of games greeted them. After they had thoroughly investigated all the center's shelves, kids checked out their selections. "Really, truly, it sews," one little girl commented on a toy sewing machine, "now I can make my doll some clothes!" In the center's first three weeks, 639 children borrowed toys.<sup>1</sup>

The significant response to this first Toy Loan Center, and to the others that appeared in its wake, reflected the stresses that many families endured during those years of financial hardship. It was not surprising to find such a program in Milwaukee, a community that had provided programs geared to children and family needs for over two decades. A toy loan program specifically for children had hardly seemed necessary only eight years earlier, when in 1930, a *Milwaukee Sentinel* editorial praised the city for its low juvenile crime rates. The editorial explained that Milwaukee's wholesome environment prevented its young from going down the path of delinquency and crime. The city, the *Sentinel* proclaimed, furnished children with the "right methods of spending leisure time," and the paper pointed to the city's parks, playgrounds, and social cen-

ters as positive influences on kids. As the Great Depression took root, however, jobs for youth became almost impossible to find, and juvenile delinquency rose dramatically. Juvenile crime rates more than doubled in the United States during the 1930s, and a 1936 study on crime in nine middle-sized northern cities found that Milwaukee had the highest incidences of juvenile delinquency. The following year youth crime in the city doubled.<sup>2</sup>

But it was not the 1936 study or the statistics from 1937 that planted the seeds for the toy loan program. It was fear—fear of what children would do with their idle hands if they had no toys to fill them. This fear was not based on statistics but on nine days in the autumn of 1935, and the crime spree that two Milwaukee boys went on before they met a grisly end.

A bomb blast rocked the usually quiet village of Shorewood on the night of Saturday, October 26, 1935. The explosion ripped through the suburban Milwaukee neighborhood, blowing a large hole in the village hall, breaking windows, and rattling walls of area homes. While police and fire trucks raced to the scene, the two bombers escaped into the fall night. Nineteen-year-old Isador "Idzi" Rutkowski and sixteen-year-old Paul "Shrimp" Chovonec had graduated from petty thieves to teenage bombers.<sup>3</sup>

The following night, Idzi and Shrimp bombed two branches of the First Wisconsin National Bank. The attacks threw the city into a state of panic. Police officials stationed guards at all banks and public buildings, stepped-up patrols in the city, and called in the FBI to aid in the investigation. Despite these efforts, Idzi and Shrimp struck again on Halloween night. In an act of defiance, they bombed two police precinct stations, spreading a new wave of fear through the city. The bombing campaign came to an end on November 3. The two boys had met at Idzi's garage, apparently to create a more sophisticated and powerful bomb, when something went terribly wrong. The bomb detonated. The blast leveled the Rutkowski garage, literally blowing Idzi and Shrimp to pieces. It also ripped the walls off the neighboring Malnarek home. When the house came crashing down, nine-year-old Patricia Malnarek lay dead, buried beneath the rubble.<sup>4</sup>

Idzi and Shrimp's horrific crimes were just the beginning of a youth crime wave in Milwaukee. As the Great Depression deepened, youth crime jumped dramatically and community leaders searched for solutions to the crisis. One approach was to open Toy Loan Centers throughout the city. These centers

*Children's court officials, meanwhile, thought play could help combat the youth crime wave.*



WHS Museum  
1979.64.176  
a & b

*This Radio Line scooter, cousin to the Radio Flyer wagon, is similar to the ones loaned in Milwaukee during the toy loan program's first two decades. Scooters became less popular over time, until their resurgence in the last few years.*

# BOMBER BLOWS SELF TO BITS; CHILD KILLED

## BOY CRIMINAL WAS PRODUCT OF SLUM LIFE

Rutkowski Known as Malcontent, Gang Leader.

The life story of Hugh Rutkowski, a South Side boy who today is a victim in a slum area, is a story of crime and tragedy. He was a product of a slum area, and his life was a struggle for survival. He was a gang leader, and his life was a story of crime and tragedy.

## Innocent Victim



Although victim of a bomb blast, the boy was not a criminal. He was a child, and his life was a story of tragedy and innocence.

## TERRORIST READY TO BLAST THEATER

Mad Threat Note, Scoffed at by Police, Proved Genuine by Stolen Typewriter.

A mad note, the boy, threat to a commercial theater at 11th and State, was scooped up by police. The note was a threat to blow up the theater. The note was a threat to blow up the theater.

## Hoist by Own Petard



Here's the alleged master mind in the Milwaukee bombings, killed yesterday by his own infernal machine, Hugh F. Rutkowski. The police show him as he appeared just before the explosion he made used his criminal career.

## VICTIM'S FRIEND MISSING; NEARBY HOMES WRECKED

100 Sticks of Dynamite Let Go; Whole Block Feels Shock.

Milwaukee's week long reign of dynamite terror came to an abrupt end yesterday afternoon when the dynamite—a 21-year-old boy with communist beliefs and a hatred of law and order—blew himself to bits with a super-bomb he had planned to use to avenge the death of a friend.

## Police Chief Answers Sentinal Questions

Actual questions to Commissioner of Milwaukee's Police Department, Chief of Police, and other officials regarding the bombing and the search for the bomber.

## Long Record Of Crime by Slain Youth

Here's the long record of Hugh F. Rutkowski, slain in the Milwaukee bombing. He had a long record of crime, including theft, assault, and other offenses.

## Boy's Body Found; Victim of Meron

WRITING that the body of the boy was found in the rubble of the theater. The boy was a victim of the bombing, and his body was found in the wreckage.

## Revenue on Liquor Climbs to Record

WASHINGTON, Oct. 31.—Liquor revenue climbed to a record high in the month of October. The revenue was a record for the month.

## Hope May Be in Van, But Parents Of Rutkowski's Pal Await His Return

With police retained custody of the van, the parents of the boy's friend are waiting for his return. They are hoping for a safe return.

## Map Shows Spreading Terror



Locations of five Milwaukee dynamite attacks since Saturday last are shown in the map above. No. 1 was the Shorewood village hall, bombed Saturday night; No. 2 the Citizens branch of the First-Wisconsin National bank, bombed Sunday immediately before the dynamite attack; No. 3 the East Side hardware store, a Pellin St. building.

## Keep Their Emotions Hidden; Police on Watch Also

With police retained custody of the van, the parents of the boy's friend are waiting for his return. They are hoping for a safe return.

## Family Had Attempted to Break Up Friendship

The family of the boy's friend had attempted to break up the friendship between the boy and his friend. They were trying to separate them.

## A Fowl Affair!

Yield county farmers their crops destroyed by certain insects who get to being too dirty. The insects are causing damage to the crops.

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The city of Milwaukee was relieved to learn that the nine-day bombing spree was over, but shocked to learn that the bombers were two teenagers.



Milwaukee Sentinel

The Milwaukee Sentinel coverage of the bombings included this photo that clearly shows the devastation caused by the bombers' mistake on a neighborhood in the city's south side.

Also covered in the Sentinel was the impact of the bombing spree on the city of Milwaukee as a whole.

Milwaukee Sentinel

lent children a variety of playthings in hopes of keeping them out of trouble. The city's children created a complex relationship with the Toy Loan Centers. They received recognition for borrowing toys, games, and sports equipment and in return took ownership of the toy libraries, aiding staff members. As the Great Depression came to an end, the community's adults began to debate the program's effectiveness and cost. This disagreement led to an unsuccessful attempt to close the program in 1943.

With youth crime on the rise and horrific crimes being committed by youths, like Idzi and Shrimp, juvenile justice officials continued their search for the root of the problem. The 1935 *Blue Book* describes juvenile delinquency in Wisconsin as being dealt with in regular courts by a judge designated annually by his peers to serve as a juvenile judge with "jurisdiction in all cases involving dependent and neglected children and delinquent children under eighteen years of age." Idzi, had he lived to pay for his crimes, would have been tried as an adult; Shrimp would have been considered a juvenile. Two major theories on the causes of juvenile delinquency existed: psychology versus sociology. The first accepted the problem as psychological in origin. This theory traced its roots to a juvenile delinquency study conducted by William Healy, a noted child psychologist. He used psychological tests, medical histories, and family backgrounds in an attempt to determine the motivation of youth criminals. While unable to provide any specific causes, his emphasis on psychology advanced the idea that a child's mental development was the key factor in determining delinquency. If children were given the proper mental guidance, reasoned juvenile justice experts, youth crime could be prevented. This helped promote child guidance clinics across the nation. These clinics, which became



WHS Milwaukee ARC, Manuscript Collection AX

*Milwaukee's city hall called citywide attention to the toy loan program and to one of the many toy drives that took place over decades as the program continued into the 1970s.*

prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s, were grounded in the theory that juvenile delinquency was a mental defect that could be cured through psychoanalysis. By 1931, there were 232 child guidance clinics in twenty-three cities.<sup>5</sup>

The competing theory accepted juvenile delinquency as a social problem. Sociologists at University of Chicago examined the environmental basis of youth crime. They believed juvenile delinquency was not a moral failure or a psychological maladjustment, but rather a reasonable reaction to a child's surroundings. They argued that urban decay, deteriorating neighborhoods, and family troubles devastated children. Kids raised in such environments saw criminals as their role models and sought recognition from juvenile street gangs. This environment created juvenile delinquents. These sociologists believed the problem needed to be addressed at the neighborhood level and programs should be created to redirect the activities of delinquent and potentially delinquent children.<sup>6</sup>

Milwaukee juvenile justice experts saw validity in both ideas. In a 1935 study of youth crime in Milwaukee County, Dr. Gilbert J. Rich pointed to both environmental and psychological aspects of juvenile delinquency. While Rich could not isolate the source of juvenile crime, he did point to three factors that made children most susceptible to becoming delinquent. First, kids who lived in poor neighborhoods were the most likely to commit crimes. Children from broken homes were also likely to have run-ins with the law. Intelligence was the final factor. Rich argued that kids with low IQ's, whom he labeled "dull children," were more likely to break the law than kids of average or high intelligence. In a 1938 report to the Milwaukee Metropolitan Crime Committee, Earl C. Kelley agreed with Rich's assessment, but further developed the connection between the environmental and mental factors. Kelley argued that "starved environments, starved economically, socially, morally, and culturally, breeds dullness." He went on to explain that "dull children," raised in such a starved environment, desire recognition and will do anything necessary to get it, including violating the law.<sup>7</sup>

To address the problem of youth crime, Milwaukee leaders had developed a sound juvenile crime-fighting apparatus. The children's court and probation department were established to punish *and* to rehabilitate youth perpetrators. Civic leaders also enacted preventative measures. To prevent economic starvation, Milwaukee officials supported the creation of numerous private and public welfare organizations such as the Catholic Social Welfare Society and the Milwaukee County Department of Outdoor Relief. The Boy and Girl Scouts,

Goodwill Community Center, churches, and various religious and ethnic centers helped combat cultural and moral starvation. These agencies worked with approximately thirty thousand children per year during the Great Depression.<sup>8</sup>

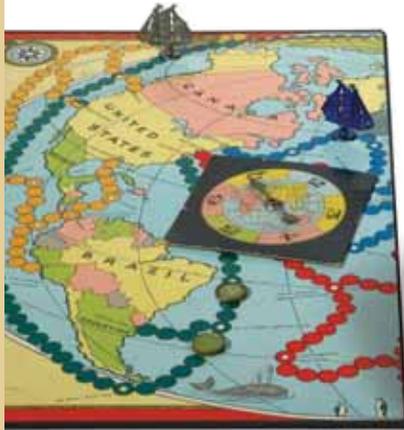
These programs, however, did not prevent Idzi and Shrimp's nine-day bombing campaign or a dramatic increase in youth crime during the 1930s. By 1937 Milwaukee was in the midst of a "juvenile crime wave." Youth offenses increased 34 percent over 1936 and juvenile offenders committed over half of all car thefts and 71 percent of all burglaries. This dramatic jump in youth crime demanded action from the city's law enforcement officials. Police Chief Joseph Kluchesky campaigned for the creation of a crime prevention bureau within the department. The Metropolitan Crime Prevention Committee called for greater emphasis on child guidance and improvements in the children's court.<sup>9</sup>

Children's court officials, meanwhile, thought the simple act of playing could help combat the youth crime wave. By the 1930s, play was seen as a tool to help prevent juvenile delinquency and develop good, well-adjusted citizens. Child experts argued that play helped a child develop socially and morally. When a child's "play instincts" were "thwarted" or misdirected, a 1932 White House Conference on Child Welfare concluded, play became mischief and mischief led directly to delinquency. In fact, Milwaukee had long used play to help prevent mischief and combat juvenile crime. Between 1890 and 1920, Milwaukee leaders worked to create wholesome play opportunities, tapping into the strength of private organizations such as the Boys Club, Girl Scouts, and Young Men's Christian Associations. Milwaukee city and county government created an extensive parks system, supervised playgrounds, and ran social centers to help keep kids out of mischief.<sup>10</sup>

By the 1930s, using play to prevent juvenile delinquency was part of Milwaukee's juvenile justice system, so it was natural for experts to consider play to combat the most recent youth crime wave. Children's court officials noted that a common factor among juvenile delinquents was the lack of playthings. They pointed to this absence of toys as a "chief cause" of youth crime. Crime could be prevented, they reasoned, if playthings were provided to delinquent and potentially delinquent children. Using the Los Angeles toy loan program as a model, Milwaukee officials decided to open toy libraries in poor neighborhoods where juvenile crime was the highest.<sup>11</sup>

By late 1937 the Toy Loan Project had received \$1,500 from

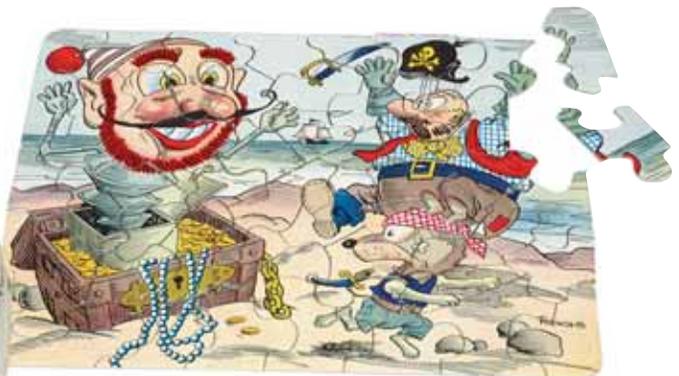




WHS Museum 1977.109.1 a - f



WHS Museum 1980.62



WHS Museum 1985.121.6

*The “Racing Ship” board game consists of a board that is a global world map, ca. 1935, with several ’round-the-world routes marked, and color coordinated with the playing pieces.*

*Helmets like this one from the 1930s were coveted by boys in the toy loan program. Although it sports numerous coats of paint, the original colors are orange and black.*

*Colorful puzzles of popular cartoon characters, like Professor Oscar Quackenbush and Oscar, were part of the offerings at Milwaukee’s toy loan program.*

the Works Progress Administration to hire staff and open the first toy library. In December, Helen Lange, a probation officer with the children’s court, became project supervisor. Lange and her staff then began a toy donation drive. They placed posters in schools and community centers asking for playthings. Lange convinced numerous schools, clubs, and civic organizations to hold “toy days,” where people brought old toys to their meetings or school to donate to the project. By March, officials had collected and repaired fifteen hundred playthings.<sup>12</sup>

After the first toy library was up and running, officials started collecting toys for new centers. Staffers persuaded churches, service clubs, and labor unions to hold toy drives that collected thousands of toys. Many local businesses donated billboard space and radio and newspaper advertising. Local department stores donated toys left over from the 1937 Christmas shopping season and the Milwaukee Brewers and several movie houses held toy days where a toy served as the price of admission.<sup>13</sup>

With toys coming in, program officials began opening centers in strategic locations throughout the city. The Italian- and Polish-dominated east side had Milwaukee’s highest juvenile crime rate, so a toy library was established at the corner of Brady Street and Humbolt Boulevard. A toy library was

placed in the Ninth Street Elementary School to reduce youth crime in the impoverished African-American neighborhood on the city’s near north side. Kosciuszko Park became home to a center because Toy Loan officials recognized that the children of poor and working-class Poles in that south side neighborhood were at high risk for getting into trouble. Toy Loan officials also placed centers in industrial suburbs experiencing high unemployment. Children in working-class communities like Cudahy and West Allis were also susceptible to bad influences, officials believed. By the end of the Great Depression, twenty-one toy libraries were operating in almost every one of the city’s poor neighborhoods.<sup>14</sup>

Children primarily used their neighborhood Toy Loan Center because it provided them with toys and fun. Photographs captured their smiling, enthusiastic faces as they played with borrowed toys. Kids described the centers as “swell,” “marvelous,” and “just grand.” “I like it, gigantic!” exclaimed one little boy. The sheer number of loans demonstrated the hours of joyous play children experienced. Robert Schoerner checked out ninety toys in one two-and-one-half month period, and the six-year-old Golos twins, Irene and Alice, amassed 115 loans during that same period.<sup>15</sup>

However, the Golos twins and other children found more than just toys at the centers; they also found a nurturing envi-

ronment. Toy Loan clerks took an active interest in their patrons, not just as borrowers, but as children. They frequently took troubled children under their wing. One nine-year-old, nicknamed "Jack Dempsey" for constantly getting into fights, was a good example. When the lad first began using his neighborhood center, he returned his playthings damaged and broken. However, through the intervention of the staff, "Jack" started taking care of his loans and getting along better with other children. Another youngster bullied other kids. He even ambushed neighborhood children outside the toy library and stole their borrowed playthings. When the local beat cop caught the youngster in the act, the officer appealed to the Toy Loan staff. The neighborhood clerk got the boy involved at the center. Through the boy's interactions with workers, he not only improved his behavior, but also his school marks. Staffers also cared enough about their patrons to discipline them. When one little borrower failed to return a baseball bat, the clerk sat the boy down and lovingly admonished him, reminding him of the consequences of his actions.<sup>16</sup>

Workers even cared enough about the children to listen to and attempt to honor their requests for specific toys. Clerks made a special call for baseball and softball equipment in 1938, when the demand for balls, bats, and mitts continued to outpace the supply. A year later, staffers made a special plea for roller-skates. When teens complained that there was not enough recreational equipment, clerks persuaded the Milwaukee Teachers Association to sponsor a drive for golf clubs, tennis rackets, and other sporting goods.<sup>17</sup>

Participants also received praise and recognition due to their involvement with the Toy Loan Project. The newspapers highlighted seven-year-old Edward Carlson for borrowing the most toys in 1939, and crowned Jackie Casanova the 1940 champion. The papers also celebrated children's clubs and organizations that donated toys, like the Girl Scouts and Junior Red Cross. A 1940 article congratulated the ten children in the Premke family for being prompt returners and

### Toy Loan Project Gets More Skates

An additional 75 pairs of roller skates have been donated to the Milwaukee county WPA toy loan project through E. V. Perry, president, and H. M. Stratton of the Milwaukee Grain and Stock Exchange. It was announced Tuesday. Some 36 persons at the exchange made donations to the skates which, with donations from clubs, churches and other groups, brings to 324 pairs the number available at the 13 toy loan centers. Officials of the loan centers said, however, that "thousands of pairs" are needed to meet demands of children and returned housewives in taking skating skates or other toys during the house cleaning season.

### Roller Skates Donated by Grain, Stock Men

A donation of 75 pairs of roller skates to the Milwaukee county WPA toy loan project by 36 members of the Milwaukee Grain and Stock Exchange was announced Tuesday by E. V. Perry, president, and H. M. Stratton, a member.

The skates bring to 324 pairs the number which have been given to the project by clubs, lodges and unions.

At all 13 toy loan centers, requests for skates by children have been so heavy that thousands of pairs are needed to supply the demand, project officials said Tuesday.

### Plan Toy Loan Center for School in Cudahy

WPA toy loan project officials Saturday announced plans to establish a new lending center at the Kosciuszko school, Cudahy, next Friday. With the completion of two more centers on the northeast and west sides early in July, a total of 16 centers will be in operation this summer.

Members of the National Association for Child Education in Milwaukee convention here this summer will study the toy loan program, officials said.

Miss Mary Leeper, executive secretary of the association, visited the project headquarters at 527 N. Broadway Thursday.

### Girl Scout Troop No. 46 Leads in Toy Donations

More than 30 toys were given Thursday to the Milwaukee county WPA toy loan project by troop No. 46 of the Milwaukee Girl Scouts, the first of 247 troops to complete its share of a recent campaign to gather old playthings. The troop is composed of 32 girls between the ages of 10 and 13. Leaders of other troops ready to report donations are asked to call the project at Marquette 6327. Next week 5,000 Boy Scouts and Cubs will start collecting toys.

### Outside Toys in Greatest Demand At West Allis Toy Lending Offices

Scoters, tricycles, roller skates and coasters are in the greatest demand now by West Allis boys who loan toys, games and play equipment in the Central Park center at E. Sixty-ninth and W. Orchard streets. Doll buggies, doll houses and sidewalk bicycles are the most popular articles being loaned to girls, according to Walt Harris, publicity director.

Since the opening of the tennis season many youths have been asking for rackets which the lending center has been unable to provide. Requests for softballs have been so numerous that the amount in stock is quite small compared with the demand.

At the Fairview center, E. Sixty-eighth and W. Arthur streets, wheel toys and baseballs are being sought the most by boys. The supply now is inadequate because of the increased popularity of the toy lending activities. The dishes and doll buggies are wanted the most by girls at this center.

Children in 12,242 families in Milwaukee county now are being "made happy by loans of toys from

### Toy Loan Centers Set Record in Loans

Kosciuszko and Pulaski park toy loan centers this month are likely to set a new high record for loans. Both are reporting a gradual increase over May when they added 400 loans to their previous high records, set in April.

Kosciuszko, with 2,500, was second to Red Arrow park, county leader, at the end of May. Pulaski finished with 2,337 loans. The other South Side center, furnished by the fire department at 1004 W. National avenue, totaled 2,012.

During a one-year period ending in May, when county loans amounted to 132,184, the children of Milwaukee's south side showed a definite tendency to take advantage of the privileges being offered.

Labor unions thus far donated 281 pairs of roller skates to the toy loan project.

Children who are not registered at the centers are being reminded that all are qualified to borrow the playthings they like. The purpose of the project is to create as much happiness as possible for children through the use of games, toys and play equipment.

### FRIDAY, MAY 19, 1939

#### WPA Toy Lending Record Anticipated

The WPA toy loan centers will have made more loans for the first three months of the fiscal year ending June 30 than during the entire previous year, it was announced Friday.

Loans for the first quarter of this year will be about 110,000, compared with 108,991 for the entire year.

Because of the demand upon the facilities of the 14 centers already operating, the opening of the new center in the school at 2418 W. Walnut st. is being delayed, it was stated.

A plea was made for new donations to stock this center.

#### 23,860 Toys Loaned In May at 13 Centers

During May, 23,860 toys were taken home by children from the 13 WPA toy lending centers in Milwaukee, establishing a new monthly high, according to figures released Friday. The movement of toys exceeded April figures by 2,500. The busiest centers were those at Red Arrow, Kosciuszko and Pulaski parks; the one maintained by the fire department; and the one at Cudahy. Children registered as eligible for loaning toys now number 17,112. During the period from April, 1938, to May 31, 1939, the toy loans totaled 150,114.

#### SKATES, CASH DONATED

Thirty-five pairs of roller skates and \$25 in cash were donated Wednesday to the WPA toy loan project, which operates 14 lending centers in the city. The cash came from the Milwaukee Teachers' association. International Ladies' Workers union 174 gave 12 pairs of roller skates; the Milwaukee Joint board of the International Ladies' Garment Workers, 20 pairs, and Ladies' Garment Workers 186, three pairs.

#### Another Toy Loan Center Is Opened

Opening of a new toy loan center in a school building at 2418 W. Walnut st. on or about July 25 was announced today by Milwaukee county WPA toy loan officials. With its establishment, a total of 15 centers will be operating.

Some of the articles that are to be put into use at the new center are gifts from Boy and Girl Scout troops which recently delivered 1,682 pieces to the toy loan headquarters, 527 N. Broadway, after a county-wide drive.

In order to offer an adequate stock of playthings at new centers, housekeepers throughout Milwaukee county are being asked to keep the "toy loan" in mind when ready to discard a used plaything. "Phone Marquette 0357, and a truck will pick up the gift.

#### Schools in Toy Campaign Will Win Honor Plaques

Honor plaques will be distributed to 176 public and parochial schools for participating in a drive to gather used toys for the Milwaukee county toy loan project, it was announced Saturday by the project.

Among recent donations to the project is a gift of \$20 from the Kiwanis club for soft balls and bats; \$10 from the Milwaukee Brewers' association for balls and bats; and \$14 for roller skates from the Milwaukee Social Culture club.



THE COUNTY'S largest family of toy borrowers—the Premkes of 1015-A W. National av.—"shops" for toys at the Firemen's WPA toy loan center, 1003 W. National av. Shown are (front row, from front) Genevieve, 3; Cecelia, 4; and Gladys, 5, and (rear) Alfred, 6; Margaret, 11; Agnes, 8; Frank, 9; Rose, 12; and Esther, 13, holding Richard, 2.

—Journal Staff Photo.

WHS Milwaukee ARC, Manuscript Collection AX

*A page from a toy loan program scrapbook named various groups, like the Girl Scouts, that provided toys; mentioned several different locations in the Milwaukee area, including West Allis and Cudahy; indicated record levels of toy borrowing; and attested to the popularity of roller skates in the program's heyday.*

another article praised the Cegeiski family for taking good care of their loans. Children also received praise from Toy Loan officials. Staffers congratulated children who donated to the 1939 toy drive by giving each participating school a special plaque to display in its trophy case. In 1940 each school that donated toys received a poster announcing its membership in the "gold star club."<sup>18</sup>

The children involved in their neighborhood toy libraries felt a sense of responsibility to the program and worked for its successes. Children in organizations like the Junior Optimists



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*Even toy cars needed time in the shop after being in the hands of so many enthusiastic youngsters. Adults fixed toys, washed and sewed doll clothes, and provided general maintenance.*

and Boy Scouts organized toy drives and gave thousands of toys to the program. The Junior Red Cross ran the most successful drive, netting 16,612 toys. Children also donated toys through school drives. The 1941 school drive, for example, was extremely successful, netting over 13,500 toys with the Hartford school alone contributing almost 2,000 toys.<sup>19</sup>

Along with donating toys, kids also helped the program by donating their time. A group of kids volunteered to put together recently-contributed puzzles, ensuring that all the pieces were in the boxes. Several Cudahy senior high school girls washed, ironed, and repaired doll clothes. Children also helped staff members by recruiting new borrowers and helping them with the registration process. Dan Reynolds and Robert Zenisek both enrolled seven neighborhood kids. Patsy Best, Mary Rupnik, and Thomas Pringle also recruited and enrolled new borrowers. One little boy even took it upon himself to ensure that loans were returned on time. He constantly reminded other borrowers to return loans promptly and pressured kids to bring back overdue toys.<sup>20</sup>

These were not the actions of passive clients, but rather active participants helping to define the program. Children helped determine what appeared on the centers' shelves by donating toys and lobbying staff members to stock specific playthings. They also aided in the Toy Loan Project's operation by volunteering their time to repair toys, put together puzzles, and perform other tasks. Finally, by recruiting their friends and neighbors as new clients, they ensured the success and growth of the program. These were the actions of a group of people who had a significant stake in the Toy Loan Project, and took action to both ensure its success and shape the program to meet their wants and needs.

However, the Toy Loan Project did not meet the wants and needs of all Milwaukee children. Irving Harris, for example, lived just three blocks from his neighborhood Toy Loan Center and never used it. Richard Straka rarely used his neighborhood toy library, stating in an interview given later in life, "The toys were not to my choice." Straka believed that grown-ups selected the toys and he was uninterested in the

center. Other children were not even aware the program existed. LaVerne Koelsch Jones and William Callahan both lived just three blocks from their neighborhood toy libraries and neither even recalled knowing the program existed.<sup>21</sup>

Despite the fact that not all of Milwaukee's children used the program or were even aware of its existence, the Toy Loan Project had a large and influential group of adult supporters. The city's leading juvenile justice and child experts supported the program and continually lauded its benefits. Their most powerful argument was that the program prevented juvenile crime. Milwaukee attorney Eugene J. Sullivan explained that the toy loan program took away a child's propensity to steal. Ninth Street School principal O. A. Beir stated that since the opening of the Toy Loan Center in the neighborhood, juvenile shoplifting had been markedly curbed. According to Milwaukee children's court judge August Braun, there was a significant reduction in juvenile crime among children who used the Toy Loan Centers.<sup>22</sup>

Advocates also argued that the toy libraries benefited children's mental health. Proponents explained the centers made children happier and more content. In an evaluation of the

program, WPA official Walter Harris asserted that toy loans created the security so important to a child's development. "Where actual toy starvation has been offset . . .," he stated, "a feeling of inferiority has been overcome. . . ." Principal Ethel M. Gardener noted better behavior and happy children at the Andrew Jackson School. "I have seen some of the toughest little children," Gardener explained, "transformed into happy youngsters by the loan of a scooter."<sup>23</sup>

Supporters also praised the program for helping to build character. Milwaukee District Attorney Herbert Staffes explained that the centers helped develop the characteristics of good citizenship. The Cudahy School Superintendent J. E. Jones stated the program instilled a sense of responsibility in borrowers. Others argued that the Toy Loan Project developed sharing, trust, respect for property rights, neatness, promptness, courtesy, cooperation, and truthfulness—all aspects of good character.<sup>24</sup>

Not everyone in the community was convinced that the program was a cure-all, however. Detractors believed the Toy Loan Project could not develop a child's character or prevent juvenile crime. They were also concerned about the cost of

*Children checked out toys, like this doll stove, much as they checked out books in the library, with a card system, and for a specified amount of time. Children often became more vigilant than the adults in tracking late and lost toys, pressuring borrowers to return their overdue playthings.*

U.S. National Archives 69-N-18153-C



the program and felt it was a burden to taxpayers. Initially, however, they refrained from openly criticizing the popular project. Toy Loan opponents apparently believed that taking on a popular program supported by the city's most prominent juvenile justice and child experts would be futile. Additionally, critics were more concerned about other much larger WPA projects and the cost of relief programs. The Affiliated Taxpayers Committee, for example, privately opposed the program during the Great Depression. This organization of conservative business people, however, called for "drastic reductions" in all welfare budgets. The tax dollars spent on all relief programs, they argued, drained money from the private sector and hindered economic recovery.<sup>25</sup>

By 1942 World War II defense spending was fueling the economic recovery and many New Deal programs were being discontinued. In March, WPA District Director J. R. McQuillan announced that the Toy Loan Project would be closed. This thrilled opponents and disappointed supporters. The program's champions, however, quickly called on the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors to assume responsibility for the project. On March 24, before critics had the chance to mobilize, the Board voted 17–1 to temporarily take over the project.<sup>26</sup>

The following year, when the issue of making the project permanent came before the County Civil Service Commission, opponents seized the moment. Commissioner Thomas Kattnig insisted on abolishing the program. The Toy Loan Project, he argued, "wasted manpower and material and is useless." It would be more cost-effective, the industrialist argued, to give the few remaining poor families playthings rather than to operate costly toy libraries. The Affiliated Taxpayers Associations wholeheartedly agreed. They asserted that the toy libraries had outlived their usefulness and were a burden to taxpayers. Work relief, they explained, should be turned over to long established and better qualified charities. Opponents continued their assault at a special hearing on the matter. They questioned the legality of the program and wondered if Milwaukee County even had the authority to operate toy libraries. At the conclusion of the hearing the issue of the program's legality was referred to County Corporate Attorney O. L. O'Boyle.<sup>27</sup>

On February 24, 1943, opponents of the toy loan program gained a victory. O'Boyle announced that Milwaukee County did not have the legal authority to run the Toy Loan Project. He explained that the county could compel those on relief to work, but the type of tasks that they could perform was limited. The work done at the toy libraries, he stated, fell outside the approved tasks. Without the power to operate the Toy Loan Project, the County Board Supervisors voted unanimously to close down the program.<sup>28</sup>

Supporters immediately called on the State Legislature to grant Milwaukee County the power to operate the Toy Loan

Project. The legislation was introduced to the State Senate on March 19. It quickly won approval in both chambers and was signed into law on June 10, 1943. Five days later the County Board voted 14–4 to reopen the program.<sup>29</sup>

Opponents would continue their campaign against what they saw as an unnecessary and wasteful program for the next thirty years. Within a decade, they succeeded in cutting the program in half, and by 1969 only eight toy libraries were still operating.<sup>30</sup> In 1973 opponents finally closed the program permanently.<sup>31</sup>

At the program's high point, however, the community embraced the project and believed it prevented juvenile delinquency during those Depression years. While it is impossible to know the program's exact impact, for children seven to nine, the main users of the program, crime rates dropped. In the three years before the program began, an average of 129 complaints were filed against children in the seven to nine age group. In 1937 the number of complaints against this age group peaked at 143. In the program's first year, complaints against this same age group dropped 45 percent. For the rest of the Great Depression the crime rate for children in this age group averaged only 81 complaints per year.<sup>32</sup> The Toy Loan Project and the community's other preventative measures certainly helped keep younger children out of trouble.

The program, however, did more than help reduce youth crime; it also helped poor children cope with the Great Depression. During those years, poor children lived in a world of hunger and insufficient clothing. Families were under the stress of stretched finances and unemployment. Many poor kids even moved to cheaper housing in new neighborhoods, which forced them to make new friends and adjust to new schools.<sup>33</sup> The children suffering from these hardships were the very same children who were the Toy Loan Project's clients. The borrowed toys and the nurturing environment they found at the centers helped them cope with a world of poverty and want. ❧

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>"WPA Lending Project Opens," "Children Take Fine Care of Borrowed Playthings," Toy Loan Clipping File, Milwaukee Public Library (MPL).

<sup>2</sup>"Crime in Milwaukee," Crime Clipping File, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (MCHS); United States Department of Commerce, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, DC: Bureau of the Census, 1975), 415; Earl C. Kelley, *A Statement on Youth Problems: A Report to the Metropolitan Crime Prevention Committee, Jan. 18, 1938*, 4, File 32, Box 2, MSS 2828, John Zussman Collection, MCHS; "Why Do Hundreds of Children Drift into the Juvenile Court," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 26, 1935; "Kluchesky Has Plan to Curb Youth Crime," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Nov. 21, 1937.

<sup>3</sup>"Shorewood Village Hall is Dynamited," *Milwaukee Journal*, Oct. 27, 1935; "Bomb Victims," *Milwaukee Journal*, Nov. 4, 1935.

<sup>4</sup>"Bank, Public Buildings Are Guarded After Blast," *Milwaukee Journal*, Oct. 28, 1935; "Police, Deputies War on Bombers," *Milwaukee Journal*, Nov. 1, 1935; "Clue in Theft of Dynamite Hinted by Ad," *Milwaukee Journal*, Nov. 2, 1935; "City is Tense While Blasts Are Awaited," *Milwaukee Journal*, Nov. 3, 1935; "Two Killed in Blast; Believed Bomber a Victim," *Milwaukee Journal*, Nov. 4, 1935; "Bomb Victims," *Milwaukee Journal*, Nov. 4, 1935; "Bomber Blows Self to Bits," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Nov. 4, 1935.

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<sup>5</sup>Robert M. Mennel, *Thorns and Thistles: Juvenile Delinquency in the United States, 1825-1940* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New Hampshire, 1973), 161-163; Joseph M. Hawes, *Children Between the Wars: American Childhood 1920-1940* (New York, NY: Twayne Publishers, 1997), 98-101; Margo Horn, *Before It's Too Late: The Child Guidance Movement in the United States, 1922-1945* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1989), 14-15.

<sup>6</sup>Hawes, 98-100; Mennel, 181-195; Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790-Present* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1977), 256.

<sup>7</sup>"Why Do Hundreds of Children Drift into the Juvenile Court," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 26, 1935; Kelley, *A Statement on Youth Problems*, 3.

<sup>8</sup>Steven L. Schlossman, *Love and the American Delinquent: Theory and Practice of "Progressive" Juvenile Justice, 1825-1920* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1977), 137; Kelley, *A Statement on Youth Problems*, 6.

<sup>9</sup>Chief Asks New Bureau to Slash Juvenile Crime," *Milwaukee Journal*, Nov. 21, 1937; Kelley, *A Statement on Youth Problems*, 4, 7-9.

<sup>10</sup>James Edward Rogers, *The Child and Play, Based on Reports of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection* (New York, NY: The Century, 1932), 15-17, 22-24, 34; Kelley, *A Statement on Youth Problems*, 6; John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee, WI: MCHS, 1999), 268-269; Daniel W. Hoan, *City Government: The Record of the Milwaukee Experiment* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), 287-290, 294-305.

<sup>11</sup>"Toy Library' Plan Favored," Toy Loan Clipping File, MPL; "Toy Loan Project Proposal to the Works Progress Administration, Jan. 4, 1938" Project File 07704, Box 10, MSS 733, Milwaukee County, Special Committee on Works Progress Administration Projects Collection, MCHS.

<sup>12</sup>"Toy Loan Project Starts," "Toy Library' Plan Favored," "WPA Lending Project Opens," Toy Loan Clipping File, MPL.

<sup>13</sup>"Toy Loans Were Made to 29,000 Children During '39," Toy Loan Clipping File, MPL; "AFL Unions Give Roller Skates to Toy Loan Project" United States Works Progress Administration; "Roller Skates Donated by Grain Stockmen," "Church Members Aid Toy Lending Project," "Parish to Collect Toys for Lending Project," "Moose Lodge Begins Drive For WPA," "Toys Tickets At Brewers Tilt," "Toys Will be Tickets to Movies On December 16," "AFL Unions to Gift Skates," "Toy 'Library' Project Starts," Toy Loan Center Scrapbook, Milwaukee MSS Collection AX, Wisconsin Historical Society Milwaukee Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, hereafter cited as Toy Loan Center Scrapbook; "Give Plaque in Toy Drive," Wisconsin Works Progress Administration, *Wisconsin Works Progress Administration Profession and Service Division* (1939), 47.

<sup>14</sup>Toy Loan Centers, Project File 07704, Box 10, MSS 733, Milwaukee County, Special Committee on Works Progress Administration Projects Collection, MCHS; Gurda, 173-174, 176-177, 258; "Why Do Hundreds of Children Drift Into Juvenile Court," *Milwaukee Journal*, May 26, 1935; Letter to Sanford P. Stark from O. A. Beir, Feb. 14, 1939, Project File 07704, MSS 733, Milwaukee County, Special Committee on Works Progress Administration Projects Collection, MCHS; "Toys Handed to the WPA Will Brighten Vacations," Toy Loan Clipping File, MPL.

<sup>15</sup>Photographs, Toy Loan Center Scrapbook; Photographs of Milwaukee Toy Loan Project in the Photo Gallery on the New Deal Network Web Page, <http://newdeal.feri.org>, accessed July 30, 2002; "Youngsters Amass Records for Toy Loan Borrowing," "Inspection Tours at Toy Loan Centers," Toy Loan Center Scrapbook.

<sup>16</sup>"Cut Real Blow to Toy Project," Toy Loan Clipping File, MPL; Works Progress Administration, *Wisconsin Works Progress Administration Professional and Service Division* (1939), 46-47; "Toy Lending Centers Aid In Accident Prevention," Toy Loan Center Scrapbook.

<sup>17</sup>"Children Take Fine Care of Borrowed Playthings," Toy Loan Clipping File, MPL; "Skates Cash Donated," "Toys for Teen Agers at Loan Centers Soon," "Outside Toys in Great Demand at West Allis Toy Lending Office," "Softballs, Bats, Given to WPA Project," Toy Loan Center Scrapbook.

<sup>18</sup>"Youngsters Amass Records For Toy Borrowing," "Jackie Aged 5, is Leading Borrower at Toy Center," "10 Children Are Toy Borrowers In This Family," "Schools Will Get Posters for Assisting Toy Project," "Schools In Toy Campaign Will Win Honor Plaques," "Mid Year Drive for Toys to Start," "Spread Joy With Toys," Toy Loan Center Scrapbook.

<sup>19</sup>"Spread Joy With Toys," "8,000 Toys Collected for Loan Project Here," "Schools In Toy Project Will Win Honor Plaques," "Scouts In Drive To Gather Toys," "Catholic Schools Give Toys," "Mid-Year Drive for Toys to Start," Toy Loan Center Scrapbook; "Toys Handed To WPA Will Brighten Vacations," Toy Loan Clipping File, MPL.

<sup>20</sup>"Puzzle In Puzzles at Toy Loan Center a Puzzle No More," "Toy Loan Centers Aid In Accident Prevention," Toy Loan Center Scrapbook; "West Allies Youth, 6, Leads Toy Borrowers;" Wisconsin Works Progress Administration, *Wisconsin Works Progress Administration Profession and Service Division* (1939), 47.

<sup>21</sup>"Milwaukee Children in the Great Depression Questionnaire" completed by Richard B. Straka, Oct. 18, 2002, in possession of author; "Milwaukee Children in the Great Depression Questionnaire," completed by LaVerne Koelsch, Nov. 6, 2002, in possession of author; "Milwaukee Children in the Great Depression Questionnaire," completed by William Callahan, Oct. 17, 2002, in possession of author; "Milwaukee Children in the Great Depression Questionnaire," completed by Irving Harris, December 1, 2002, in possession of author.

<sup>22</sup>Letter to Sanford P. Stark from Eugene J. Sullivan, April 26, 1939; Letter to Sanford P. Stark from O. A. Beir, Feb. 14, 1939; Letter to Sanford P. Stark from August Braun, May 1, 1939, Project File 07704, Box 10, MSS 733, Milwaukee County, Special Committee on Works Progress Administration Projects Collection, MCHS.

<sup>23</sup>Letter to Sanford P. Stark from Herbert J. Staffes, May 2, 1939, Project File 07704, Box 10, MSS 733, Milwaukee County, Special Committee on Works Progress Administration Projects Collection, MCHS; Memo to Jules H. Burbach from Walter Harris, March 26, 1940; "Cuts Real Blow To Toy Project," Toy Loan Center Scrapbook.

<sup>24</sup>"Toy Loan Lending Centers Aid In Accident Prevention," "Medrow Is Aid to Cudahy Toy Center," Toy Loan Center Scrapbook; "Boys and Girls Ask for Skates At Toy Loan Center," Toy Loan Clipping File, MPL; Letter to Sanford P. Stark from O. A. Beir, April 27, 1939; Letter to Sanford P. Stark from J. E. Jones, Project File 07704, Box 10, MSS 733, Milwaukee County, Special Committee on Works Progress Administration Projects Collection, MCHS; "Boys and Girls Ask for Skates at Toy Center," Toy Loan Clipping File, MPL.

<sup>25</sup>"Asks Abolition of Toy Project," *Milwaukee Journal*, Feb. 14, 1943; Memo to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors from Affiliated Taxpayers Committee, Oct. 23, 1939, Affiliated Taxpayer Manuscript Collection, MSS 8, MCHS; Letter to the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors from Edwin Zedler, chairman of the Affiliated Taxpayers Committee, Oct. 27, 1939, Affiliated Taxpayer Manuscript Collection, MSS 8, MCHS.

<sup>26</sup>"Toy and Handicraft Projects Will Close," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 11, 1942; *Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Milwaukee for the Year Ending March 24, 1942*, 1149-1150 (March 24, 1942).

<sup>27</sup>"Asks Abolition of Toy Project," *Milwaukee Journal*, Feb. 14, 1943; Letter to Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors from Edwin Zedler, Chairmen of Affiliated Taxpayers Committee, Feb. 18, 1943, printed in the *Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Milwaukee for the Year Ending April 3, 1943*, 1167 (March 1, 1943); "Asks Abolition of Toy Project," *Milwaukee Journal*, Feb. 14, 1943; *Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Milwaukee for the Year Ending April 3, 1943*, 1178-1181 (March 1, 1943).

<sup>28</sup>*Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Milwaukee for the Year Ending April 3, 1943*, 1178-1181 (March 1, 1943); "County to End 16 of Projects," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 2, 1943.

<sup>29</sup>*Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Milwaukee for the Year Ending April 3, 1943*, 1270 (March 22, 1943); *Journal of the Proceedings of the Sixty-sixth Session of the Wisconsin Legislature, Jan. 13-August 3, 1943*, 443 (March 19, 1943); *Ibid.*, 873 (May 6, 1943); *Ibid.*, 1184, (May 25, 1943); *Ibid.*, 1215 (June 10, 1943); *Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of the County of Milwaukee for the Year Ending April 3, 1943*, 211-212 (June 15, 1943).

<sup>30</sup>"Santa's Helpers Busy In County's Toy Shop," "Toy Lending Center Year Round Affair," "Toy Project Shift Asked," Toy Loan Clipping File, MPL.

<sup>31</sup>The Toy Loan Project became part of the Milwaukee County Department of Public Welfare in 1942. The Department of Public Welfare records for the 1970s are unavailable. The program's closing date was therefore determined by using the Milwaukee telephone directories. The Toy Loan Project was listed in the directory published in Nov. of 1973, but did not appear in the 1974 *Milwaukee Telephone Directory*.

<sup>32</sup>"WPA Asks Toys For Teen Age Children," Toy Loan Center Scrapbook; Frank P. De Sio, John H. Sichling, Philippa Rowe, and Robert U. Stolhand, eds., *Report, Milwaukee Juvenile Court Probation Department: Statistic Data for the Years 1930-1944 in addition to Selected Topics on Various Allied Subjects*, 15, MSS 2632, Reports Collection, MCHS.

<sup>33</sup>Doris Bergen, "Introduction" in *Play as a Medium for Learning and Development: A Handbook of Theory and Practices* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Education Books, 1988), 3; Doris Pronin Fromberg and Doris Bergen, "Introduction" in *Play From Birth to Twelve and Beyond: Contexts, Perspectives and Meanings* (New York, NY: Garland Publishing Inc, 1998), xviii-xix; David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1999), 86, 88; Hawes, 104-106.