

## OLD MECHANICAL BANKS

In this day of easy spending, when thrift is largely set aside as the unpleasant task of extreme conservatives, and penny-saving is forced on children like so much nasty medicine, it is enlightening to recall other days when penny wisdom was not only popular, but fun.

Evidence of this past is offered in this small grouping of old Mechanical banks, and the pictures are representative of the great variety and treatment of design as well as excellence of mechanical perfection.

There exists such a wide range of designs in the cast iron Mechanical Banks that it is difficult to do more than roughly classify them into a few general groups, such as shooting banks, animal banks, bust banks, house banks, etc. Even within such groupings will be found an amazingly wide range of subjects and treatments, and this diversity is accentuated by the fact that various manufacturers, sometimes even different designers for the same maker, tended to treat the same subject differently at various stages of the Mechanical Bank era.

Unquestionably, The J. & E. Stevens Foundry in Cromwell, Conn. is the oldest toy manufacturer in the United States, and both the original and the most prolific designer and manufacturer of Mechanical Banks. This then, is the home of the Mechanical Bank; its birthplace, and the place where for sixty years, more types and larger quantities of such banks were produced than at any other plant.

It is not so long since the last Mechanical Banks of Stevens were turned out; 1928 marked the end of a long and prosperous era when the charm of the Mechanical Bank finally gave way to the manufacture of cap pistols, and which ceased with the outbreak of World War 2, when



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Russell R. Frisbie closed the foundry and subsequently disposed of the plant, due to a number of difficulties, which included inability to obtain the necessary quality of iron, as well as labor difficulties. A decline of interest by the general public as well as the toy industry, also contributed to the demise of this company which was originally established in 1843 by two brothers, John and Elisha Stevens.

The comparative present day scarcity of Mechanical Banks depends to a certain extent upon the period in which it was manufactured, but more upon the quantities which were turned out when the bank was current. It must also be emphasized that these banks were fragile and when dropped were easily broken and then discarded. Children played with these banks, and the usual life of a toy is about two or three months, so it is not at all surprising that even though these banks were made by the many thousands, very few have survived the period ranging from 40 to about 90 years. They have melted like the snow, and the surviving specimens are indeed difficult to find and to purchase.

The first Mechanical Banks were originated in this state a few years after the close of the Civil War, and were made possible by the skill and ingenuity of American craftsmen, largely of Conn. and almost the State of the American toy industry. The manufacture of these banks on a mass-production basis, was made possible by the high state of development that the manufacturing and selling branches of the industry had reached even at so early a date. The types of Mechanical Banks manufactured seem almost endless in design and variety. There were the boys who swallowed the coin and rolled their eyes; Will iam Tell shooting the

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apple off his son's head with a coin; a horserace started by inserting a penny; and several hundred other varieties. The Mechanical Bank was actually a double purpose toy: an object designed to provoke an interest in saving, and a toy to play with.

In conclusion it may be stated that the actual production of the banks; the sculpture, the molding, finishing, assembling, painting, and other operations, was manifestly a craft, and the original creation of the bank was quite definitely a form of art and of considerable importance and interest.

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## THE GIANT BANK

Here is a fine and well executed representation of a real giant standing in front of his cave. Here, indeed is the very giant who Jack Killed, when he arrived at the top of the beanstalk. This is substantiated by an ad found in an old 1885 magazine, with a caption which reads, "THE GIANT THAT JACKED KILLED", together with a picture of the bank. The desirability of this bank is not only its scarcity, but the sentimental relationship with the period of our childhood, and the thrilling story of Jack and the Beanstalk. Depressing the lever causes tongue to extend and the coin is placed thereon. Release of the lever causes the tongue to recede accompanied by movement of the lower jaw and both arms. The coin is carried through an aperture in the back of the neck with enough momentum to cause it to enter into a slot in the rocky cave in the rear. The bank is well sculptured and a fine likeness of a mean looking giant.

## THE HARLEQUIN BANK

This very attractive and desirable bank, was produced by Charles Bailey, the most prolific designer and sculptor of Mechanical Banks. The bank was manufactured by The Stevens Foundry in 1906. The operation of the bank is accomplished by turning the figures which are mounted on a narrow platform, a complete half turn, which locks it into position. The coin is placed into the slot; the lever pressed, and the figures return to the former position. The dancing girl or Columbine received impetus from the semi-circular gear during this release and causes her to twirl or spin for a period.

## GIRL JUMPING ROPE

Produced by the Stevens Foundry and designed by J. H. Bowen of Philadelphia in 1890. This bank differs from the conventional mechanical bank, inasmuch as the animation is of sustained action. This is accomplished by one turn of the wind-up spring; placement of the coin between the rabbit's legs, and depressing the operating lever. The coin drops into the lower receptacle, and the bank goes into action. The girl turns her head from side to side, moves her legs back and forth and skips rope about 35 times in continuous action. A great favorite with little girls years ago, and still a favorite with older collectors today. The foundry had difficulties in its production as well as apertured sales in relation to other banks. The retail price of \$2.00 limited sales to such a degree that production was soon halted. \$2.00 for a bank during the period of 1890 was prohibitive for the average who earned \$7.00 to \$10.00 weekly.

## THE BOY SCOUT BANK

The Boy Scout Bank Commemorates the founding of the Boy Scouts of America on Feb. 8, 1910, and is a picturesque and very attractive bank, illustrating in part the activities of the now world wide organization.

The Scout Movement was founded in England by Sir Robert Baden-Powell in 1908, and was brought to the United States by W. D. Boyce, a publisher of Chicago. In 1910 it was incorporated and it was granted a Federal charter by Congress in 1916.

The Boy Scout Bank has a rather limited action, which is accomplished by placing the coin into the slot on top of the tree, and pressing the lever. This causes the scout to raise the white flag which is lettered "BOY SCOUT CAMP". Release of the lever causes the coin to drop and flag lowered.