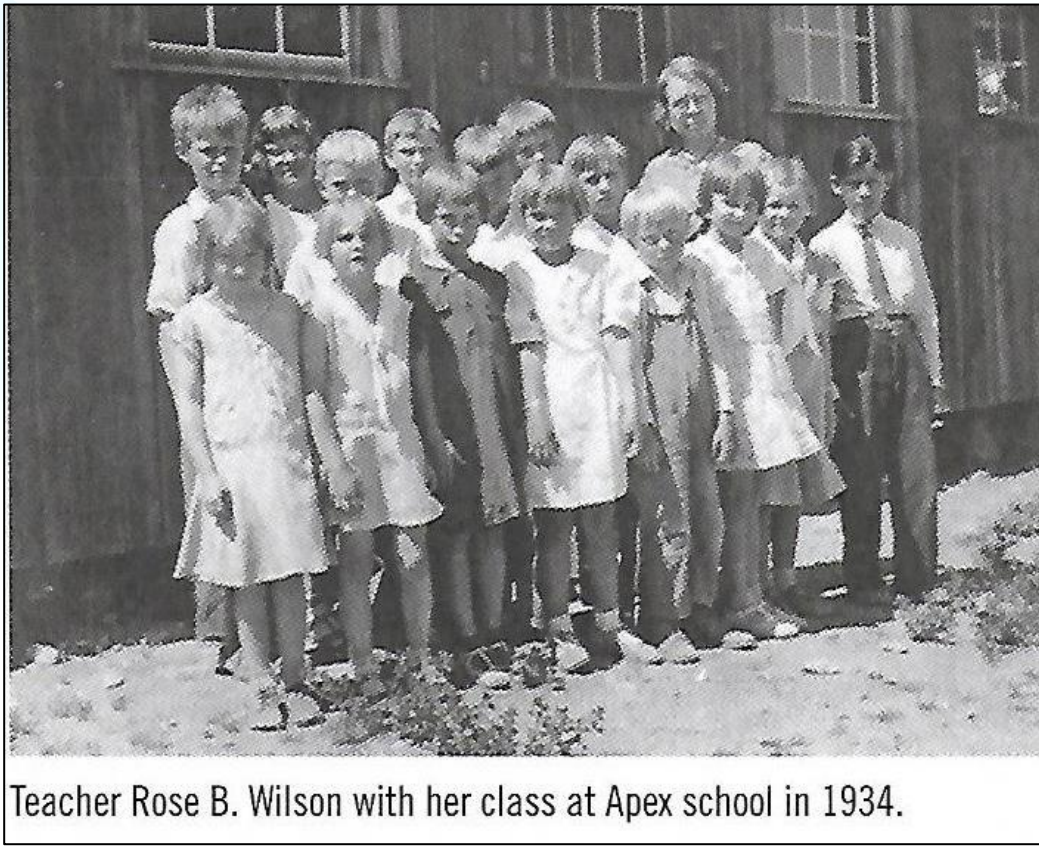


Planes, Trains, and Automobiles: Boys Toys in 1930's Apex Logging Camp

Abstract

Children's toys, often overlooked in historical research, can offer valuable insights into the cultural and social norms of a given time and place. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, toys were distinctly gendered, reflecting societal expectations and influencing childhood upbringing. This study examines toys primarily marketed to boys in the Saginaw-Manistee logging camp in Apex, Arizona, revealing how these toys embody the social norms of the period. Through the analysis of physical artifacts, this research explores how children's play in the camp not only reflects entertainment preferences but also reinforces gender roles and societal expectations. By analyzing these toys, we gain a deeper understanding of childhood experiences and the shaping of social identity within this unique historical context. For this research, I will be focusing on boy toys that have a brand and/or makers mark because they provide insight as to societal norms for young boys.

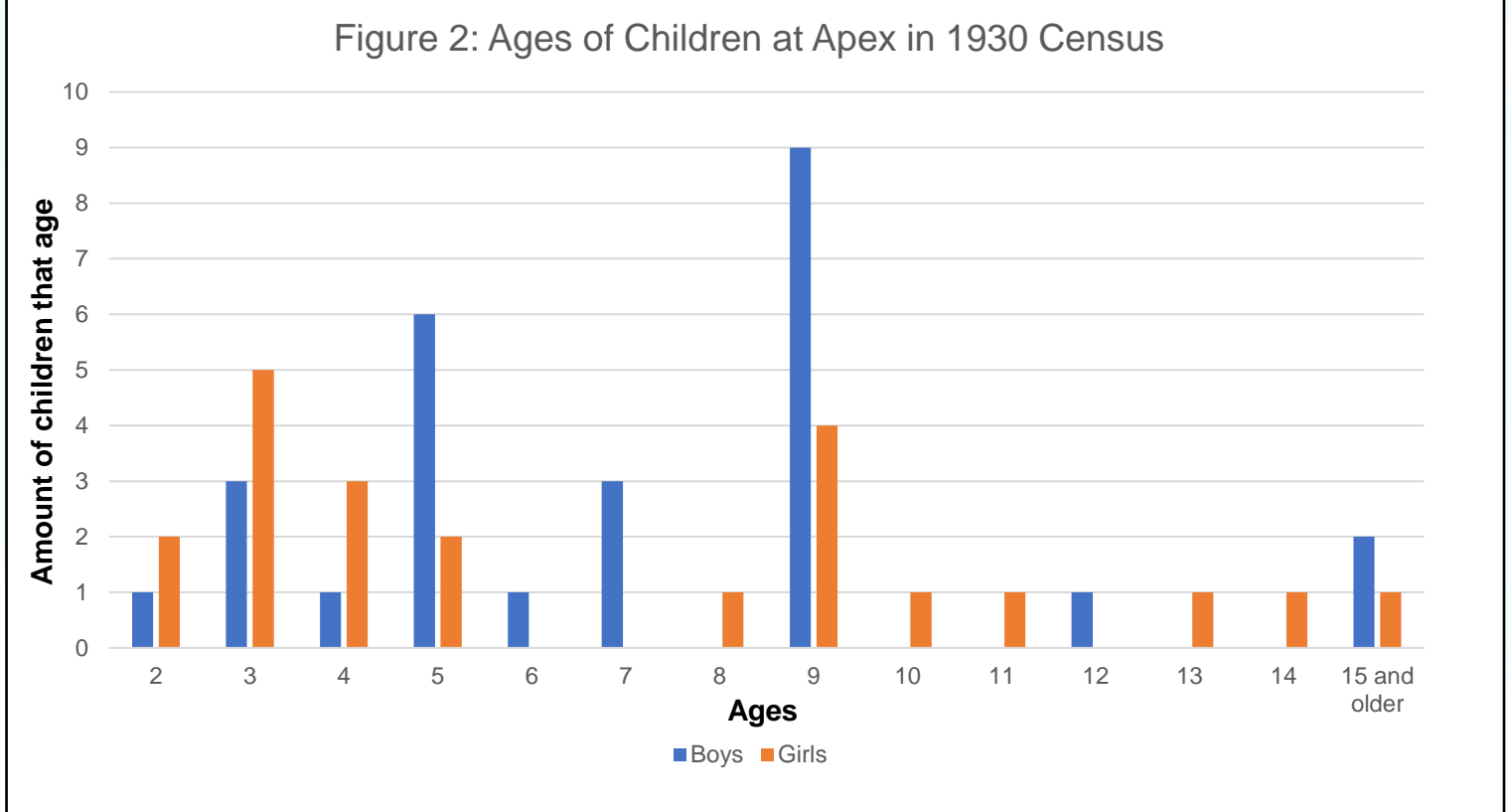


Teacher Rose B. Wilson with her class at Apex school in 1934.
Figure 1

The History of Apex

Apex, founded by the Saginaw-Manistee Lumber Company in 1928, was inhabited until 1936 by around 150 men, women, and children. The camp was divided by railroad tracks with labor workers living on one side, while management and families lived on the other. Apex is notable for being home to one of the few unsegregated schools in northern Arizona (Figure 1, Richmond 2017:86); this school, located on the management side, taught all grade levels and played a central role in the community (Setterland, interview by Richmond, 1984).

The 1930 Arizona Census recorded 41 children across 18 families in the community (United States Census Bureau, 1930; Figure 2). Evidence of the children's presence at Apex is further supported by numerous artifacts, such as children's shoes, slates used in the school, clothing buttons from children's jumpsuits, and food-related items like Ovaltine and chocolate milk powders, which were marketed to children. These artifacts offer insight into the daily lives of the children who lived there and attended the school. This project focused on boy toys to understand the societal norms for boys during the 1930s, to analyze an underrepresented group in the archaeological record, and to examine what was used for entertainment during the 1930s.



Let's Hear it for the Boys at Apex

During the 2024 Apex Field School session, a notable increase from past year's discovery in children's toys was found across five loci, as the session focused on surveying and mapping the management side of the site, which included family housing and the schoolhouse. This session resulted in more recorded toy parts and whole toys than the previous three years combined. In total, the group identified 18 toy parts or whole toys. Of these, 10 were stereotypically boy toys from the 1930s, which were more commonly found at Apex than girl toys, such as doll parts or toy tea sets, providing a deeper understanding of the entertainment and social norms of the time.

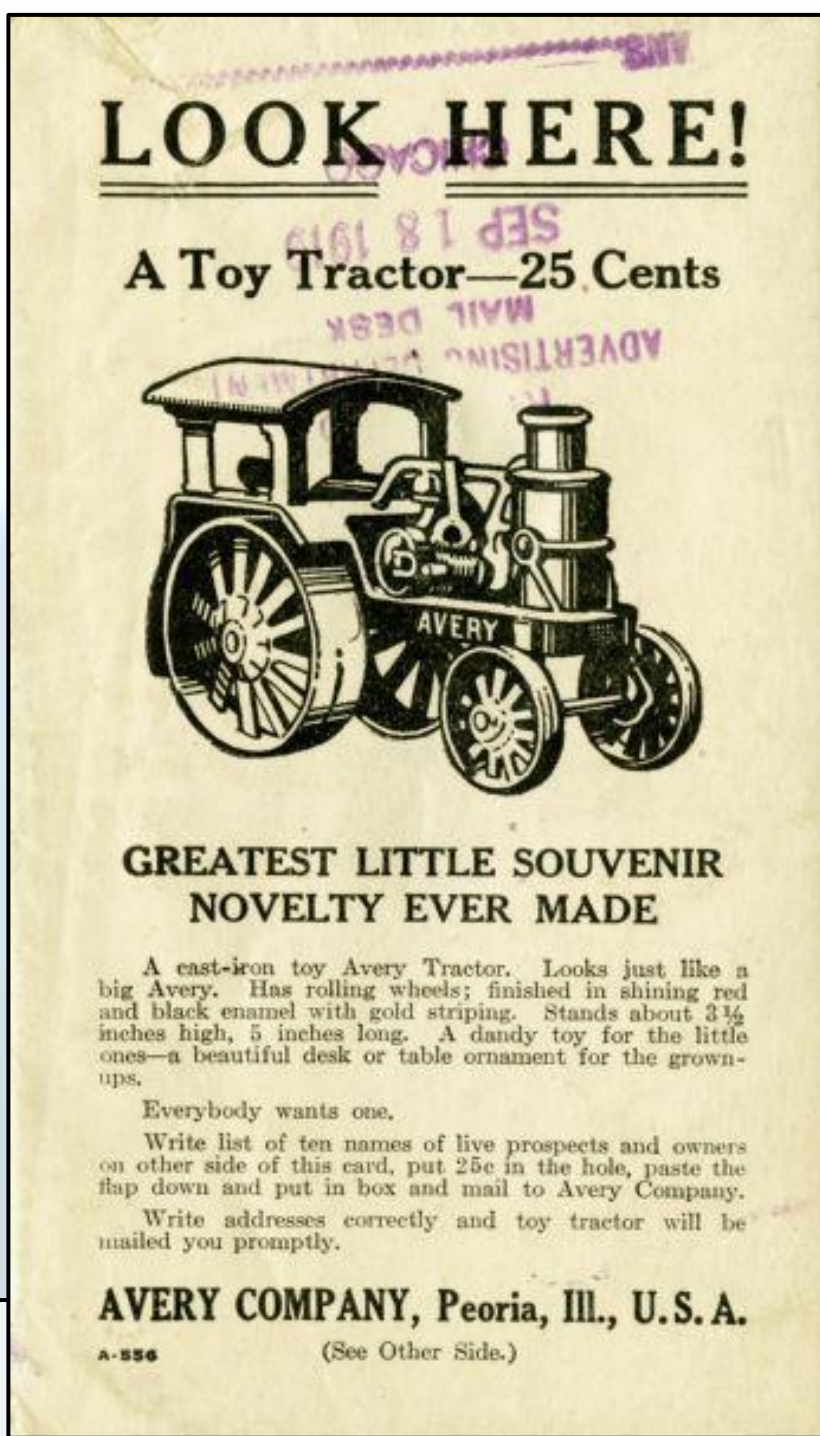
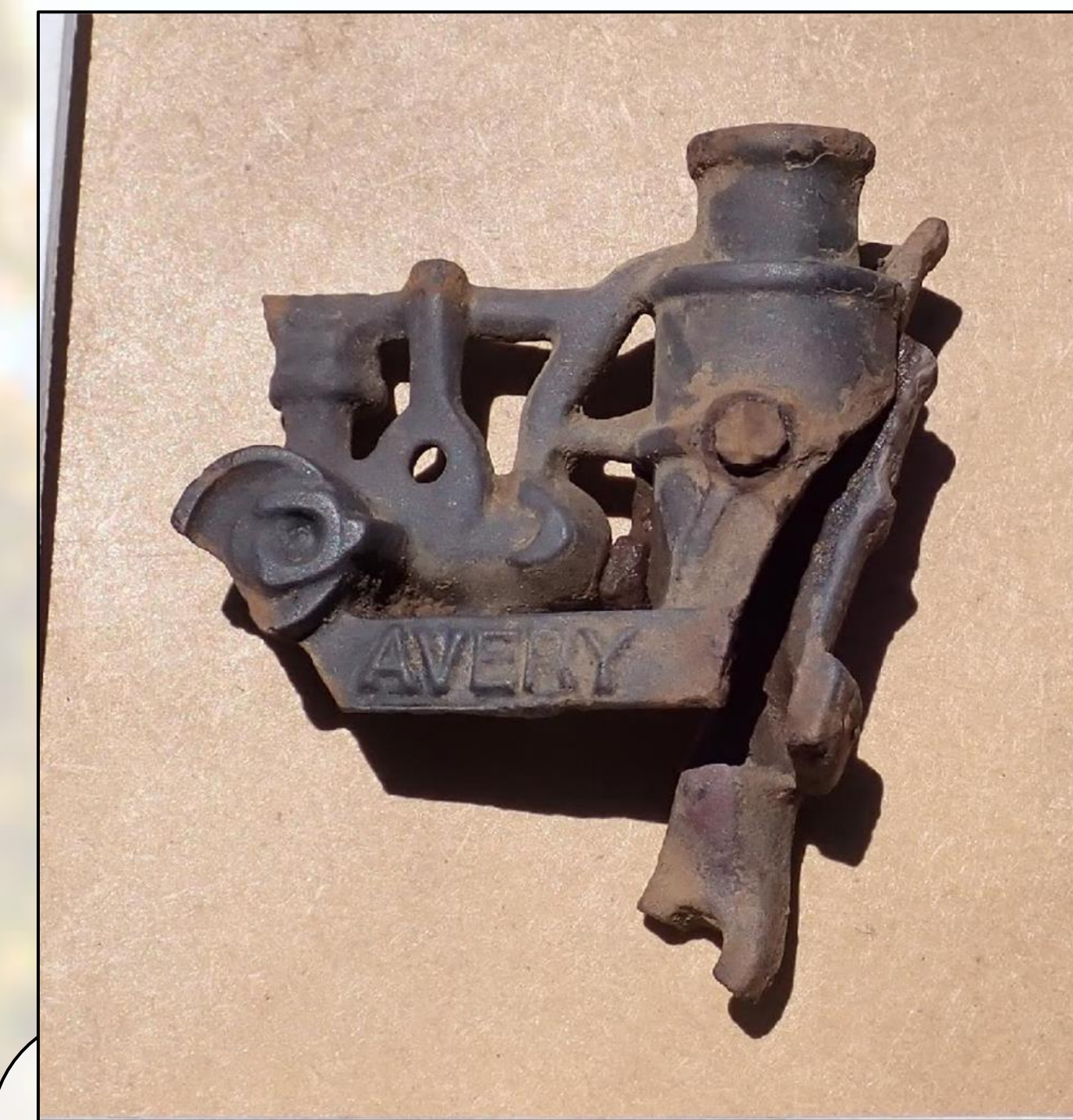
Boy toys from the 1930s, particularly during the Depression era, that were found at Apex were typically made from durable materials such as metal, cast iron, and lead alloy. The toys found at Apex mainly depicted modes of transportation, including tractors, trains, wagons, planes, and trucks. While many of the artifacts were partial, several displayed maker marks or company names along with patent numbers, which helped identify the toys and trace their origins.

Boys Toys of the 1930s and Earlier

In the late 18th century, play began to emerge as an activity accessible to working-class children, while wealthier children always had the opportunity to engage in play. However, this activity was highly gender-segregated (Calvert, 1992, p.81). Boys' toys were typically large, noisy, and required physical activity, promoting teamwork, outdoor play, and competition (Calvert, 1992, p.112), such as whips, marbles, balls, cars, tractors, planes, and trains. Marbles, in particular, were a common toy among boys during the 19th and 20th centuries. Due to their affordability—often made from cheap materials like limestone or glass—marbles were especially prevalent among middle and working-class families (Yamin, 2002, p.120). Many of the toys designed for boys encouraged group play and sparked imagination, reflecting the societal expectation that boys would grow up to engage in physical, competitive, and social roles (Figure 3).



Figure 3: 1930 advertisements displaying pictures of boys playing with toys being marketed to boys (Anon, n.d.).



The Avery Company began manufacturing tractors in 1891. Their unique engine resembled a train engine instead of a conventional steam engine. A toy Avery tractor from Apex (above left) was produced by the Hubley Manufacturing Company, which made cast-iron toys, like motor vehicles and cap guns (Wikipedia contributors, 2023). The Hubley Manufacturing Company produced farm, construction, and fire vehicles as well as motorcycles during the 1930s. Advertisements (*Souvenir Tractor, Print, Wisconsin Historical Society*, 2003) from the Avery company (above right) listed the price at 25 cents.

Avery Tractor



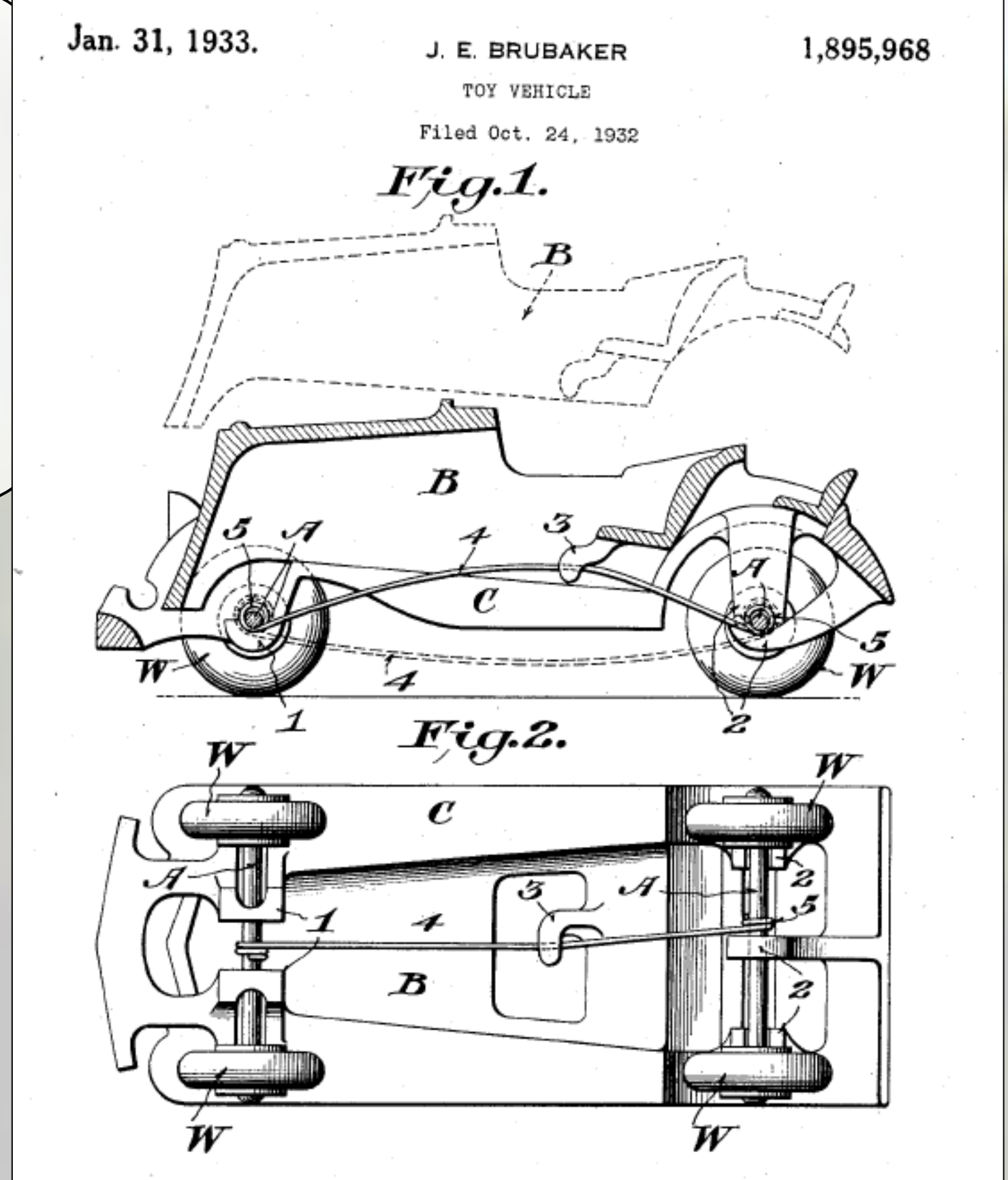
Louis Marx & Co. Tractor

In 1930, Louis Marx & Co licensed a 1920 patent (Number 1,334,539; Huth 1920) for a "Toy Fighting Tank" to manufacture a wind-up climbing tractor (above). The toy came in three different versions, all costing different amounts. The 1930 Montgomery Ward catalog listed the toy for 49 cents (*Marx Toys by Peter - Marx 1930 Tractor*, n.d.), and a 1955 ad (above) listed it at 98 cents. While the toy at Apex (left) was crushed and broken, the patent number was still visible, allowing us to identify it.

Hubley Manufacturing Car

Patent number 1,895,968 was awarded to J.E. Brubaker in October 1932 on behalf of The Hubley Manufacturing Company for a Toy Vehicle (right). The patent allowed for a common chassis that could be adapted to numerous types of die-cast vehicles, like tow trucks, woodie wagons, and cars (Wikipedia contributors, 2023a).

Hubley produced several toys modeled on real cars, such as the 1934 Chrysler Airflow, 1930s Studebaker, and the 1937 Lincoln Zephyr. The broken car at Apex (below) most resembles a 1930 Ford Coupe.



Tip Top Toy Company Plane

A toy plane was produced by the Tip Top Toy Company (left), located in San Francisco, which made diecast and slush vehicles in both the 1920s and 1930s. Their Pewter Toys were made from lead alloy or pot metal. Lockheed produced their first Air Express in 1928 (below). The tail of the plane, though, reads "C / 165" (below), possibly making it modeled after a Cessna C-165 Airmaster which was a personal aircraft owned by private pilots, introduced in 1938 (Jones, n.d.).



Importance of Toys and Interpretations

The artifacts examined in this study were found in Apex's management family housing area, which suggests that these children either left the toys behind by accident when the camp was dismantled, or they viewed their toys as disposable when they broke. The majority of the artifacts found at Apex are transportation-based, which aligns with the site's proximity to a railroad, and common boy toys that were available at the time like wagons, die-cast cars, and sleds (Anon n.d.). Notably, marbles, a common toy among children during this period, were absent from the findings at Apex. This suggests two possibilities: either looters took them, or marbles simply weren't a popular item among the children at Apex.

Studying children's toys, particularly those of boys, provides valuable insights into what it was like to be a child during the Depression Era. Through the artifacts and advertisements of toys, I argue that Apex's boys were learning their place in a future defined by trains, cars, and planes. Advertisements in historic catalogs clearly marketed specific toys to boys when a boy is in the advertisement (Figure 2), as was the case with trains, sports equipment, erector sets, science tools, and instruments. Advertisements also helps us understand the evolution of toys and the role of play and imagination in childhood. More importantly, analyzing boys' toys allows researchers to explore societal and parental expectations at the time. Toys reflecting themes of transportation and labor show how children were subtly shaped by these expectations, as the toys they were given helped prepare them for future roles as hardworking men who would provide for their families.

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