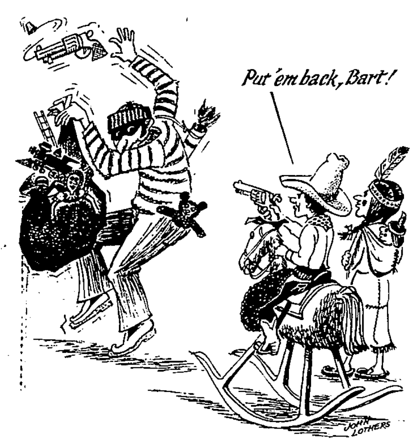

Collectors raid attics for toys

By DONALD FREDERICK
National Geographic News Service

Kids, beware of your toys, especially if they're old hand-me-downs. A sneaky grown-up may lure them away from you.

Nostalgia, a booming antique market and general inflation have created a soaring demand for old toys.

Doll houses, toy banks and electric trains are all hot items. Mechanical playthings dating from the 19th century command a premium.

A bank shaped like a firehouse so enthralled one collector that he paid $500 for it. At the insertion of a coin, a gong sounds, the doors fly open and a horsedrawn firewagon pops out.

A SALE OF antique toys in Los Angeles managed by a prestigious British auction house recently brought in more than $31,000. Other toy auctions are planned in Europe, the United States and Japan.

To the avid collector, money isn't everything.

"Gathering old toys," said one devotee, "is like stamp collecting. But there's more interest to it because there's a history behind each item. They don't become obsolete the way so many modern toys do."

Few of the faithful who rummage through antique stores, flea markets and house sales expect to find playthings in mint condition.

On the contrary, there seems to be even more of a demand for well-loved, sagging teddy bears with patchy fur than for unmarred ones with plush skins and plump bodies.

As one folklorist explained, "A toy in perfect condition is a pathetic thing. The toy which never knew the delight of a child has lost some of the essence that gives it meaning and genuine value."

Adults and children alike lavished love on toys in Colonial times. Most of the tiny animals, doll houses, carts and rocking horses were hand-crafted by devoted fathers for their offspring. Once in a while, if a settler could afford it, he splurged on a sophisticated toy from Europe.

AS THE UNITED STATES filled up and people moved closer together, child's play became more organized and complicated.

The 19th cenbtury brought "tin toys" made first by the local blacksmith, then by factories. They were small, realistic models of everything from stoves to trains. Some factories turned out sleds, wagons, croquet sets and doll houses.

The toy or mechanical bank craze started sometime in the 1870s. Clowns swallowed coins and rolled their eyes. A deposit encouraged dogs to wag their tails, and the right piece of money placed in an eagle's mouth flapped the bird's wings.

Not long ago, one budding collector thought he had found a real treasure. It was a classic 19th-century bucking mule bank. The mule kicks a coin into an open barn door and a small dog appears.

The collector's joy was short-lived. When he examined the bottom of his acquisition, he saw: Made in Taiwan.

Workers prefer flexible hours

More Americans will decide their own hours of work under a program backed by President Jimmy Carter.

Within limits, flexitime allows people to be on the job at the hours they find convenient. The program already is being used by some government agencies and private industries.

President Carter supports proposed legislation that would extend flexitime to more organizations and amend overtime rules so employees could choose to work more than eight hours a day for four days in order to have the fifth day off.

Flexitime doesn't cut back the number of horus a person must spend at work, the National Geographic Society explains. But it lets those who want to come in early quit early, while others who prefer a late start can stay late.

ADVOCATES SAY this reduces absenteeism and tardiness, boosts morale and output, and eases traffic congestion. The idea, in fact, grew from an effort in Munich in 1968 to end tie-ups when shifts changed at an aircraft plant.

In his book, "The Future of the Workplace," Paul Kickson says the plan was adopted by nearly 2,000 West German firms after newspapers reported that flexitime not only enabled traffic to move faster, but saved the company about $40,000 a month.

The concept spread, and by 1972, 30 per cent of Switzerland's industrial workers were setting their own hours. Corporations in Britain, France, the Netherlands, the Scandinavian countries and Japan have instituted flexitime.

In the United States, Hewlett-Packard Co. had 15,000 employees in the program by 1973, while several other firms by now offer "floating work hours," Dickson reports.

Lufthansa, the West German airline, has taken "gleitende arbeitzeit," or gliding worktime, further. Besides being able to start any time between 7 and 9:30 a.m., many employees are given 10 per cent leeway in the number of hours they work in a month.

"MINUS HOURS can be made up the next month, and extra hours can be 'banked' as credit for a day off the next month," the author writes.

While not all tasks lend themselves to flexible hours, a surprising variety of jobs can be adapted to the program.

Foundry crews must work together, for example, so one man cannot arrive later than the others. But a foundry has begun letting teams decide among themselves at the end of each shift when they want to start up again.

Extra parts have been stacked at invervals along an assembly line and workers trained to handle more than one job, so they can spell each other and enjoy more variety. Foremen credit flexitime with increasing production.

The United States Geological Survey has made flexitime a permanant feature for 10,000 employees at its headquarters in Virginia and at 400 field offices throughout the nations.

A spokesman said a trial period showed that when people set their own hours, they did the work with less overtime, which meant savings in the agency's budget.

"Employees report they can schedule their personal activities more conveniently and are using less sick leave," he said, declaring that flexitime increased the agency's efficiency.

In 1974, the Social Security Administration tested the plan among 350 clerks in Baltimore. Many were working mothers, and the problems of caring for children and coping with bus schedules had been forcing them to take days off without pay and to be late in getting to their jobs.

WITH MORE LATITUDE in work hours, these difficulties were overcome. Today, mroe than 4,500 Social Security employees are on flexitime. Some occasionally work extra hours for four days so they can take three-day weekends.

Executives had been worried that flexitime would cost money, since buildings would be opened longer when people worked different hours. But those who have tested the plan ususally agree that benefits outweigh the costs. As most buildings already are lighted and heated for extra hours to accommodate clean-up crews, the costs often are minor.

Permitting employees to fix their own schedules is a revolutionary change from managerial attitudes at the turn of the centruy when foremen used to warn, "If you don't come in Sunday, don't come in Monday."

At that time, factory workers put in 13-day weeks, with every second Sunday off, and the hours on the job were rigidly set at 12 or 14 hours a day.

Today's investor

Stocks are best inflation hedge

By THOMAS E. O'HARA
Board Chairman
National Association of Investment Clubs

From all I read in the papers, stocks have been a terrible hedge against inflation. Yet, you continually suggest people buy and accumulate stocks. Aren't you a little inconsistent?

It's easy to come to the conclusion that stocks are a poor inflation hedge when you go through a period like the past six or seven years when stock prices go down and then fail to rise as high as other prices have risen.

But, over a full economic cycle, stocks are probably the single best hedge that a person can put his money in to protect himself against inflation. Here are some figures that come to my desk recently from the Wayne Hummer & Co. monthy letter.

In the past 20 years, dividends increased six per cent. The consumer price index rose 3.8 per cent.

In the past five years, when inflation has been most severe, dividends are up 9.3 per cent, compared to the annual seven per cent inflation rate. Looking back even further to take one specific example, in 1958 AT&T paid a dividend of $9 a share. Now that share has become six shares and pays a total of $25.50 in dividends. So, from a dividend point of view, stocks have clearly been a superior inflation hedge.

Looking at stocks from the standpoint of price appreciation, they have not kept up with inflation in recent years, but in my belief, this catch-up will take place in the years ahead. All of the assets in back of corporations—their land, their buildings, their machines and equipment—have appreciated in value at a rate equal to or better than inflation.

The cost of the products they produce and the prices they receive for their goods and the profits they make on them have all increased. So, all of the values in back of stocks are substantially greater than they were just a few years ago.

Many people are well aware of this. Foreign corporations are offering to buy the stock of some of our corporations at prices much higher than that at which the stock is currently selling.

This is because they recognize the oportunity to buy a lot of value (which they could not duplicate in many cases at twice the prices they are offering) because our current stock prices are so low. Many U.S. companies are buying other companies at prices way above current stock prices for the same reason.

Gradually, this undervalued situation of stock prices will adjust (and the adjustment may be far ahead of other inflation rates because of the continuallygrowing values) and when it does, then stocks will have proven to be an excellent inflation hedge from the standpoint of price as well as income.

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