4th of July Americana Museum

Golden Age Superhero Comics
Antique Advertising’s Cuddly Combo
Modern yo-yos have been going around the world since Donald F. Duncan introduced them to American youth more than 60 years ago, but the yo-yo itself has a history dating back at least to ancient Greece. A piece of pottery from about 500 B.C. on display at the Museum of Athens shows a young man playing with a yo-yo.

Some historians claim the yo-yo may be almost as old as the wheel itself. The true history of the yo-yo is lost in antiquity.

More recently, yo-yos were a popular toy in France at the time of the Revolution (when they were called l'emigrette); the American Old West (it was called the bandalore); and the Philippines, where it was called the yo-yo, after a Tagalog word meaning come-come.

Businessman and promoter Donald F. Duncan saw a Filipino, Pedro Flores, demonstrating and selling yo-yos in a San Francisco hotel in 1927 or 1928. Duncan bought the rights to the toy, introduced the slip string (which permits the yo-yo to spin or "sleep" and thus makes a great variety of wonderful tricks possible) and applied his marketing wizardry to making the yo-yo one of the most popular toys of all time.

Today the yo-yo is experiencing a mini-revival. Children of all ages are rediscovering the inherent simplicity of a low-tech toy with only two moving parts.

Many former yo-yoers — the author included — have rediscovered the perennial appeal of this stress-reducing, perception-heightening toy as we have reached our so-called middle ages. Along with the thrill of playing with this popular toy from our younger days, we have also discovered the joy of collecting these popular return tops.

Why collect yo-yos? There are as many reasons for collecting as there are collectors. Call it nostalgia. Scientific curiosity. Trivia. Americana. Oneness with nature and her laws. Metaphysical attraction. Artistic delight.

Duncan himself encouraged yo-yo collecting from the beginning. As he told George Malko, author of The One and Only Yo-Yo Book, during an interview near the end of Duncan's life: "We made them different colors and named each top a different name so the kids would get a
The Playable Collectible

By Stuart F. Crump, Jr.

Rhinesone award yo-yo and Rhinestone carved yo-yo, circa, 1956, often used as awards for yo-yo contests.

Hummingbird Toy Company in Arcade, NY.

There are certainly a lot of yo-yos out there to be collected. A 1979 article in the scrapbook of Wilf Schlee, Jr. (who, with his late father, originated and promoted the Cheerio and Festival lines of yo-yos in the 1930-60s) proclaims that a half-billion yo-yos had been sold in the U.S. in the 50 years since the modern yo-yo debuted at the hand of Donald Duncan.

One approach to yo-yo collecting would be to collect around a theme. What sort of theme? Chuck Zornig, who has an impressive collection of about 1,250 yo-yos, which he has accumulated since he began serious collecting in 1982, suggests several: SUPERHEROES, such as Superman and Batman, have been popular figures in yo-yo history.

SPORTS BALLS. Festival yo-yos produced a line of yo-yos that included a baseball, golf ball, football, soccer ball and bowling ball, in a variety of models, many customized as premiums for specific professional sports teams. Sports balls are also currently available from Spectra Star of Pacoima, California.

SCULPTED SHAPES. Leading manufacturer at the present time of shaped yo-yos is Spectra Star, which markets a line of about 20 collectible, plastic, novelty "Radical Yos." These include Earth Zone (a globe), continued on page 46.
Assortment of Disney character yo-yos. Origins obscure. All plastic except Mickey in the center, which is wood.

call them and ask for some of their yo-yos. They sell only through distributors and only in large, customized orders.

"EXECUTIVE" YO-YOS. Yo-yos have always held a fascination for executives of a certain age, a fact that has led most yo-yo manufacturers to produce an "executive" model. The earliest documented case of an executive playing with a yo-yo is depicted in a 1791 painting, which now hangs in the British Museum, of the future King George IV playing with an incroyable, which is what they called the yo-yo in those days.

Even U.S. chief executives are not immune. Time magazine ran a photo of Richard Nixon yo-yoing with Roy Acuff, who has always been fascinated by the yo-yo, in its March 25, 1974 edition, at the height of the Watergate affair. When Acuff tried to teach Nixon a few yo-yo tricks, which Nixon flubbed, the president volunteered to "stay and try to learn to use the yo-yo, and you (Acuff) go up and be president."

CARTOON CHARACTERS. Hundreds of yo-yos portraying Disney characters have appeared over the years. Hallmark produced a line of Charlie Brown character yo-yos in the 1960s.

SPECIFIC BRANDS. The best-known yo-yos are, of course, Dun cans. The company has attracted
many competitors throughout the years. Duncan held the trademark rights to the name "yo-yo" until 1965, when the Federal Court, District of Northern Illinois, ruled that yo-yo was a generic word that anyone could use, putting Duncan on the losing end of a 10-year battle. Legal costs were a major reason Duncan was forced into bankruptcy one month later. The winner in the bankruptcy suit was Royal Yo-Yos, owned by the late Joe Radovan. It was a Pyrrhic victory. The fight drove Royal bankrupt as well.

I have a particular fascination with collecting Royal Yo-Yos. It was Joe Radovan who first introduced

An original Duncan Tournament (wood), circa 1950.

Several antique models. Top (left to right): The Bandalore Co., Rockford, Ill.; original Jewelled Satellite Yo-Yo by Parker. Bottom (left to right): Festival Little Zapper Yo-Yo; Roy Rogers King "Top" manufactured by All Western Plastics, Scottsbluff, Neb.; Genuine Championship Flip-Back Return Top.

Satellite prototype yo-yos were very popular among children in the '60s. (Duncan Family Collection)

Model (left) made by The Bandalore Co., Rockford, Ill. Wooden, probably from the early 1950s. Little known of the company.

Original Duncan Wheels (bottom left, discontinued) and the new model. The difference: the original model has a shiny chrome look in the hub; the new model has a duller finish.
me to the yo-yo in 1954, when I was 9 years old.

Other brands from the early days include Flores, Cheerio, Hi-Ker, Chico, Fli-Back, Festival, Goody, Dell, Bandalore, Imperial and Parker (Canadian, now owned by Canada Games).

Where do you find old yo-yos?

You can advertise for them. Another way would be to call the parents of your old friends from high school and ask them if they have any old yo-yos in the attic. Flea markets and collectible stores are other popular sources.

Other memorabilia you can also collect includes T-shirts, sweaters, songs and sheet music about the yo-yo, books, trick books, caps, contest posters, packages of yo-yo string, buttons, bumper stickers, instructional videos, Smothers Brothers items and contest patches and awards.

Another way to get started is to collect one of every type of standard production-line yo-yo currently made. For future trading purposes, you might want to collect two or three of each available item.

Ten years ago this would have been easy. In 1982 there were only four U.S. yo-yo manufacturers, according to Chuck Zornig of the International Yo-Yo Institute. Today there are 35, and that number is growing.

Duncan Toys Inc. of Middlefield, Ohio, which is now a division of Flamebeau Plasctics, makes 11 different styles plus a host of different colors of each style, making no less than 46 different yo-yos.

Hummingbird Toy Company, the nation’s largest manufacturer of wooden yo-yos, makes six different models and a total of 33 different yo-yos all marketed under its own name. Tom Kuhn Custom Yo-Yos markets an “heirloom” set of 13 different yo-yos. Yomega, which manufactures “The Yo-Yo with a Brain” (which has a centrifugal clutch that automatically returns the yo-yo to your hand when it slows down), markets four different models in various colors and styles. Design in Wood of Austin, Texas, shows no fewer than 14 in its catalog. A new manufacturer of one-piece wooden yo-yos, American Spinners of Wayne, N.J., lists 34 models in its catalog.

These figures do not include the hundreds of “premium” yo-yos each of these manufacturers custom-make for other companies.

Two advantages of collecting contemporary yo-yos: 1) They are readily available; and 2) from a playable point of view, the top-quality yo-yos today are better than ever. Thus, you can enjoy playing with your collection as it grows.

What are collectible yo-yos worth? “Their value is primarily sentimental,” Phil Morin of Bellingham, Massachusetts, said. Morin is one of the few living yo-yo men who still practices the art of hand-carving scenes in the sides of wooden yo-yos, a skill he learned at age 18.
Collectible Accessories

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