

# Wooden toy — “A cart pulled by horses”



- Author Antoni Burkat
- Date of production 1960s
- Place of creation Osieczany, Myślenice district, Poland
- Dimensions length: 45 cm, width: 23 cm
- ID no. MRM/E/177
- Museum [Museum of Independence in Myślenice](#)
- Subjects [daily life](#), [rural areas](#), [sculpted](#), [entertainment](#)
- Technique [sculpture](#), [turning](#), [polychrome](#)
- Material [wood](#)
- Object copyright Museum of Independence in Myślenice
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- Digitalisation RDW MIC, Małopolska's Virtual Museum project
- Tags [rzemiosło](#), [dzieci](#), [sztuka ludowa](#), [zabawka](#), [3D](#), [pojazd](#), [3D plus](#), [domena publiczna](#)

A cart pulled by wheeled horses or rocking horses used to be one of the most favourite toys for children. Nowadays, it is coming back to store shelves in a fashionable and ecological design.

This wooden cart is part of a larger collection of toys from the museum in Myślenice and the object used to present the history of folk toy manufacturing in general. Folk toys are more than merely usable items as all of them have their own history and all members of a family were engaged in the production process. They were made mainly by peasants in the winter time, when they were able to carve toys because of less agricultural work. Manufacturing of these colourful masterpieces was a good way to earn some extra money during that time. Toy centres consisted of several villages and focused on special types of toys, manufacturing and ornamenting methods. Certain villages were famous for special types of toys produced there. The oldest toy production centre was in the region of Żywiec, known for its manufacturing of folk toys since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The type of materials toys were made from was strictly related to the given region. Wooden toy manufacturing developed mainly in the poor and forested areas of southern Poland. Toys were produced in sheds or kitchens. In many cases, the whole family worked on making toys. Fathers treated the material and cut the main elements of the toys, sons assembled them, and wives and daughters decorated them. Clay was an equally popular material — mostly used by children to prepare toys from it, creating bird-shaped whistles and the tiny elements of dinner sets for girls playing house. Clay moulds were easy to treat as they did not require the use of sharp tools, thus children did not harm themselves. They often learned various jobs as well. Making toys from straw or roots was popular too.

Among the most popular folk toys were wheeled and rocking horses. Children eagerly played with coaches, little furniture, or human and animal figures. Toys with movable parts like birds with clattering wings (*klepoki*) and rotating carousels with figures were very popular. Among such toys were also pecking hens, woodcutters, cars or planes.

A manufacturing workshop for toys was simple and it did not require a large investment. In case of wooden toys, it consisted of a trestle, a drawknife, saws, chisels, a knife and sometimes a wood-turning lathe. Moulds used to draw shapes, brushes and paints were also important. Clay toys were made manually, sometimes using a potter's wheel.

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## History of toy manufacturing in the Myślenice region

The tradition of manufacturing toys in the region of Myślenice started between World War I and World War II. An important place for manufacturing toys — even if it was for a short time — was Poręba and then the villages of Trzemeśnia, Łęki and Osieczany.

Production was started by the three Witas brothers from Poręba: Jan, Stanisław and Wojciech. They were soon followed by Antoni Pachacz and Władysław Jaśkowiec from Trzemeśnia, and Antoni Burkat from Osieczany (the creator of [the cart shown in the portal](#)), the best known craftsman in this field.

All these activities emerged in the Żywiec region, the then famous centre for manufacturing cabs, wheelbarrows, hobby horses, rattles and other wooden toys.

The first toys from Poręba were quite primitive technically. The scope of toys was widened thanks to, among others, middlemen that before 1939 brought designs for toys produced in the town of Jaworów (at that time in the territory of the Soviet Union). The most popular toys were cabs, carts pulled by purple horses, butterflies and birds with clattering wings (cut out in a funny way, with a flourish), cradles and brightly painted and engraved wheelbarrows (decorated with engraving, which was done by hand or with a compass). When it comes to new designs, we should mention cocks with box-shaped bodies, single horses, forging blacksmiths, rattles, carousels and all kinds of automobiles and airplanes.

Initially, cabs, carts, wheelbarrows and cradles were assembled from manually carved parts, decorated by hand or with circular engraving against the coloured background. After World War II engraving was replaced by painting with aniline inks by means of a birch stick split at the end. The Cepelia Polish Art and Handicraft Foundation tried to implement the technique of burning a pattern by means of a heated chisel, used in Poręba to decorate salt-cellar; however, without any success.

Carrying their stuff on their backs, on market days the middlemen wandered to Myślenice, Wieliczka,

Mszana Dolna, Skrzydlina, Dobczyce and to Kalwaria for church fairs. Some of them had their items sold in Krakow shops.

Among the exhibits in the Myślenice museum are 58 wooden toys, including a set of little animals carved by Ignacy Majerek from the village of Skomielna Czarna.

A separate group is a set of 26 clay toys manufactured by the famous potter Józef Gacek from Skomielna Biała. The toys are ornamented in a way similar to items from the region of Rabka and include sugar bowls, a pipe, a little jug, money boxes, salt-cellars, a watering can, little elliptical baskets, cake moulds and sets of tiny cups painted in various colours.

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## Wooden folk toys

In the past wood was the basic material used to manufacture toys, just like plastic is nowadays. Children were able to acquire toys in one of three ways: they could make them by themselves (among the exhibits from Małopolska's Virtual Museums there is a [bicycle made by a 12-year-old boy](#)); they could be carved by adults or older siblings, a member of the family or a craftsman; or they could be bought on market days during local church fairs and from middlemen.

Among the most popular toys were wheeled horses and tiny tools, carts or wheelbarrows, horses pulling carts (see the [cart from the collection in Małopolska's Virtual Museums](#)), hens pecking grain, carousels, cradles and various types of pinwheels and birds.

The imagination of children was activated by toys made of several linked wooden slats that could be assembled and disassembled. They often had some carved figures of soldiers and dolls mounted on them (see [the march of Lajkonik](#) from the collection in Małopolska's Virtual Museums). Such sophisticated constructions with driving mechanisms and the beautifully carved and painted figures were often made by folk sculptors and handymen.

Kraków was one of the toy manufacturing centres — toys were sold here during traditional church fairs of Emaus and Rękawka that took place on the Monday and Tuesday after Easter.

Elaborated by the editorial team of Małopolska's Virtual Museums,



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Tags: [The Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków](#), [folk art](#), [toy](#), [children](#), [Creative Commons licenses](#)

## Jan Oprocha's World of Toys

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century and up to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Kraków was a major centre of the folk toy industry. This was because during winter (when bricklaying ceased), the masons of the suburbs of Kraków: Zwierzyniec, Krowodrza, Czarna Wieś, Ludwinów and Podgórze (which was a separate town until 1915) could earn extra money by building and selling cribs, as well as going carolling with puppet nativity

scenes. They were also engaged in the production of popular toys to be later sold during annual spring fairs.

One of the few artists creating wooden toys in Kraków known by name is the creator of [\*The Lajkonik Parade\*](#), Jan Oprocha, born in 1858. He created his works up to the start of World War II. He made not only figures of Jews, but also other figures typical of Kraków and its suburbs, seen in various situations. His toys, which have been preserved in the collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, are easily recognisable because of his distinctive and unique style. All of them are slightly grotesque, with rounded shapes and chubby faces, which may not always make one laugh, but at least it brings a smile to the faces of people seeing them. Oprocha was the author of many figures representing professions and activities today long forgotten, for example a wandering herb trader, a wandering shoe trader, a dog catcher on a wagon pulled by horses. In his toys, he also presented funny situations such as: *A carrier with a lady in the boat* or *A drunkard with a bottle on a swing*. The artist also depicted one of the games popular in Rękawka up to the 1950s. With the pulling of a string, a wooden figure of a boy climbs up a rod imitating a pole in order to win the longed-for prize, as on the top of the rod there are shoes, sausages and a bottle. It must be remembered that these were mass-produced toys intended for sale. Figurines, often repeatable, composed in different groups or independent, were placed on stands. Under their shoes or feet they had springs, so they could move, sway or bounce. This usage of springs in the construction of wooden figurines, depicting not only Jews, is a characteristic feature of the toys made in Kraków by masons. The same can be said about the stands on which the figurines were set, which were painted green, and sometimes decorated with white, yellow or pink borders.

Jan Oprocha's name and work were carried on by his son until the late 1970s. His figures were similar in style, but they didn't have the same grace as those made by his father. In the collection of the Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, the Lajkonik procession made by Jan Oprocha Jr. can be found, in the form of an arrangement placed on a stand without wheels, with figures fastened on springs, as well as the numerous figures of Jews, scythe bearers, a pair of Kraków citizens and a policeman with a dog.

More information on the toys of Kraków can be found in: Małgorzata Oleszkiewicz, Grażyna Pyła, *Czar zabawek krakowskich (The charm of the toys of Kraków)*, Muzeum Etnograficzne im. Seweryna Udziela w Krakowie (The Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków), Kraków 2007.

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[Toy “Wooden locomotive”](#)

Tags: [Kraków, tradition, The Seweryn Udziela Ethnographic Museum in Kraków, nativity scene, puppets, folk art, toy, Myślenice, Jews, Lajkonik, The Aleksander Kłosiński Museum in Kęty, market, children, Kęty, vehicle, © all rights reserved](#)