



Play On

The Good Ol' Days

Old-Fashioned Toys Take The Spotlight At The Charlotte Museum Of History BY NICOLE M. SIKORA



History meets science and recess at the Charlotte Museum of History's "Toy Time" exhibit, an interactive showing of larger-than-life folk toys, scheduled to run through March 2008. Museum guests, both young and old, are invited to participate in a personal encounter with historic playthings — simple, basic, and, yes, educational toys and games that came well before batteries and electricity. There are samples of toys from Appalachia and early America, when "play was just plain fun." Some toys are from the museum's own collection, which dates from 1870 to 1975.

The nine-foot tall Jacob's Ladder gives a fun

lesson on hinges and gravity, while your family takes turns operating the crank. In another exhibit, you can pull a lever and make a six-foot tall figure swing and flip about, just like the "Amazing Acrobat" jointed figurines of long ago. Learn about friction as you pull ropes to start the "Climbing Cousins" race to the top. Make the giant pecking chickens tap in time.

A huge ball track demonstrates the principles of gravity, mass, velocity and momentum. Rub a stick against the shaft of the gee-haw whimmy diddle to make a propeller spin, and learn all about resonance, oscillation, energy and frequency. Wrap a string around an oversized spinning top and send it flying onto a

table, as you watch centrifugal force in action.

Each toy is astonishingly large in scale, yet simple enough to be manipulated by one person. The entire collection and display is the brainchild of Tom Wilson, furniture artisan and director of exhibits at the SciWorks museum in Winston-Salem. Toy Time's appearance at the Charlotte Museum of History is the exhibit's first stop on a multi-city tour.

According to Kris Carmichael, chief operating officer of the Charlotte Museum of History, Toy Time positively "comes alive" with children. "They can relate," she says. "I think the kids even surprise themselves with how much they can enjoy simple things." **TCW**

Home For The Holidays

In Charlotte, where shiny new condos and skyscrapers dot the landscape like freshly lit candles, catching a glimpse of simpler times is closer than you may think ... at the Charlotte Museum of History.

The museum's modern-day history started in the 1940s, when a Revolutionary War-era home was threatened with demolition. Local chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution rallied to save the structure, once owned by pioneer homesteader Hezekiah Alexander, and identified as the oldest surviving house in Mecklenburg County. Through that successful effort, the Hezekiah Alexander Foundation was born.

The 5,000-square-foot rock house was restored over time, and today boasts about 90 percent of its original stonework. The interior features period furnishings and décor that completes the home's return to its 1774 appearance. During the holidays (and throughout the year), you can tour it, as well as the nearby modern museum, which houses some 13,000 artifacts dating from Charlotte's Colonial past to its contemporary history.

WantToGo?

Charlotte Museum of History is located at 3500 Shamrock Dr. Hours of operation are 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tue. through Sat.; 1 to 5 p.m. Sun. General admission is \$6 for adults; \$5 for students and senior citizens; \$3 for children ages 6 to 12; and free for children ages 5 and under. Sunday is Family Day, and admission is free. Guided tours of the adjacent Hezekiah Alexander Homesite are available at 1:15 and 3:15 p.m. daily. For information, call 704/568-1774, or visit www.charlottemuseum.org.