

# THE RESEARCHER

NEWSLETTER OF THE  
SHEBOYGAN COUNTY HISTORICAL RESEARCH CENTER

Volume XXXIV Number 2 December 2023

The Researcher is sponsored by Jay Christopher of Christopher Farm & Gardens.



## Did You Know?

The book, Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, was published by Montgomery Ward in 1939. Rudolph was very close to not having his signature red nose. Author Robert L. May contemplated whether a drunkard-style red nose was suitable for a Christmas children's story!

Gene Autry first recorded the well-known Rudolph hit in 1949; the song sold over 2 million copies that year.

A stop-motion TV special was created in 1964 and first shown on NBC. It was recorded in Japan apart from the soundtrack and voices which came from Canada.

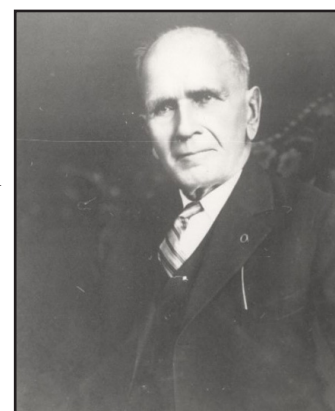


## Fun with Toys

By Richard Stoelb

In 1887 Sheboygan's most important and well-known manufacturer of toys for children, The Garton Toy Company, was formed. Toys produced by Garton Toy were rugged and dependable of good design and quality with grown-up realism. The result was a line of wheeled products unrivaled for superior performance, durability, and safety.

Eusebius Bassingdale (E.B.) Garton was born August 16, 1841, to English parents on a farm north of Toronto, Canada. As a young man of 23, he came to Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin. His first job was driving an ox team for the sawmill of Joseph Richardson (later Richardson Brothers). He then worked for J.J. Zufelt manufacturing hubs on a contract basis until 1873, when he accepted the job of foreman in a department of the Sheboygan Mfg., Company. In July of 1878, E.B. left the company taking a similar position at the Sheboygan Carriage Factory.



Eusebius Bassingdale (E.B.)  
Garton (1841-1931)

In 1873, Messrs. Timler, Geisler, Venneberg and Kreger opened a planing mill. They put up a two-story, 30x50-foot building on the north bank of the Sheboygan River near the 8th Street Bridge. J. Dengel bought out the

*continued on page 5*



SHEBOYGAN COUNTY  
HISTORICAL  
RESEARCH  
CENTER

518 Water Street  
Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085  
Open Tuesday through Friday  
9 am to 4 pm  
(920) 467-4667  
schrc.org • research@schrc.org



The Researcher is the official newsletter of the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls, WI 53085.

It is published six times per year in August, October, December, February, April and June.

The Research Center is the local history archive for Sheboygan County and areas surrounding the county. It is a repository for paper records of all kinds.

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## **Welcome New Members**

Rodney & Cynthia Scott — St. Paul, MN  
Ed Evanoff (Evan's of Falls) — Sheboygan Falls  
Stan & Sharon Sixel — Sheboygan  
Brian Bruggink — Oostburg  
American Association of University Women — Sheboygan

## **Program Schedule**

### **Genealogy Classes**

*at the Research Center, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls – 1 to 3 pm*

\$15 for members, \$20 for non-members

Monday, January 8 – Ancestry.com (for beginners and advanced users)

Monday, February 12 – Organizing Your Research

Monday, March 11 – Online Resources for Research

Monday, April 8 – Getting to Know the SCHRC Library and its Resources

Monday, May 13 – Photos: Scanning, Archiving, and Analyzing

### **Second Saturdays**

*at Plymouth Arts Center, 520 East Mill Street, Plymouth – 9:30 to 11:30 am*

Saturday, February 10 – S.S. Christopher Columbus, with Todd Gordon

Saturday, March 9 – The Shipwrecks Abiah & the I.A. Johnson, with Steve Radovan

Saturday, April 13 – Small-Town Wisconsin: Fun, Surprising, and Exceptional Road Trips, with Mary Bergin

Saturday, May 11 – Theodore Caspar Lutz: His Role as Contractor in the Building of the Key Maritime Settings for the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, with Tom Lutz

### **Book Club**

*at the Research Center, 518 Water Street, Sheboygan Falls – 1 to 2:30 pm*

Thursday, January 25 – FDR's Funeral Train. Call the Research Center to register.

### **Saloon Stories**

*at Chris & Sue's, W3820 County Rd C, Plymouth – 6:30 pm*

Thursday, February 15 – Speaker and topic to be determined

Thursday, March 21 – Speaker and topic to be determined

Thursday, April 18 – Speaker and topic to be determined

Thursday, May 16 – Speaker and topic to be determined

### **Taproom History – Presidential Disability and Mortality**

*Location to be determined – 6:30 pm*

Thursday, June 20 – James Garfield's Slow and Cruel Death

Thursday, July 18 – Grover Cleveland's Secret Surgery

Thursday, August 15 – Woodrow Wilson's Paralytic Stroke

### **Annual Meeting**

*at Amore, 18 W Mill St., Plymouth – 11 am to 1 pm*

Friday, October 11 – Speaker and topic to be determined

### **Lincoln Seminar – Lincoln and the Occult**

*at Generations, 1500 Douglas Drive, Plymouth, WI – 6:30 to 8:30 pm*

Tuesday, October 8 – Abraham and Mary Lincoln's Psychologies of Death

Tuesday, October 15 – Spiritualism and Seances in the White House

Tuesday, October 22 – Dreams, Omens, Portents, and Ghosts

Tuesday, October 29 – The Plot to Steal Lincoln's Corpse

# Let's Develop Our Center

The beginning of 2024 will see the Center launch some new events that will engage persons and bring more public awareness to the organization. These activities will further identify the value the SCHRC continually offers to the persons of Sheboygan County and beyond by being a source of constant education.

While the mission remains to preserve the written and photographic history of the region, it is important that the Center also engage persons of all types and position historic studies in proper historical perspectives associated with local, regional, state and national developments. To that end, we must be mindful that what has happened in this area of the state has not happened in a vacuum, but is the result of what has also happened on larger national and midwestern scale. Realizing that allows us to grasp a better understanding and appreciation of history in general.



Starting January 25, 1:00–2:30 pm, we are hosting a book club that will examine educational and entertaining books on a variety of historic topics. We are starting by discussing Robert Klara's fascinating study, *FDR's Funeral Train: A Betrayed Widow, A Soviet Spy, and a Presidency in the Balance*. A very readable book, we anticipate lively discussion. We will be meeting at the Center. Participants are responsible for obtaining their own books. Join us for a fun and educational afternoon! I hope to see you there! To register for the book club, call Mary at 920-467-4667 or visit our website.

This past August we began offering workshops for cleaning gravestones. The first two sessions attracted nearly 20 people. All 13 markers contained in the Cole family plot at Sheboygan Falls Cemetery were restored, while 24 others were cleaned at the Waldo Cemetery. The workshops will resume next spring.

A new Volunteer Committee met for the first time this past September. It will be engaged in recruiting new volunteers and taking advantage of opportunities to promote the organization. We recently obtained two new volunteers, who are excited to work with the collections. Do you have a few hours to help us out?

Volunteers can choose when they prefer giving their time. We have collections to process, images to scan, documents to examine, filing that needs constant attention, and photographs that need to be sorted out. Do you have a few hours to help? We need you...and we train you! Are you, or someone you know, looking for volunteer opportunities? We have them! Pay us a visit and see what is going on in the library.

Finally, the holidays are upon us and I encourage you to visit the Center's wonderful bookstore to find titles you can give as gifts this year. You can also visit [www.schrc.org](http://www.schrc.org) and click on "Shop" to see available titles that are in stock. Publications may be purchased in person or online.

Enjoy the holidays!

As always, thank you for all you do to support and help develop our Research Center!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Steven Rogstad". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'S' and 'R'.

Steven K. Rogstad  
Executive Director  
[steverogstad@schrc.org](mailto:steverogstad@schrc.org)





### Giving Tuesday Campaign

The SCHRC reached its goal of raising \$3,000 on this year's Giving Tuesday! The amount raised was generously matched by additional gifts totaling \$3,000 from SCHRC board Vice President Scott Peschke and another SCHRC board member. The \$6,000 raised will be used for industrial shelving to store collections. Thanks to all who financially supported us for Giving Tuesday in 2023.

*Books*  
make the  
*Best Gifts*

Shop online at [schrc.org/shop](https://schrc.org/shop)  
or visit our bookstore  
Tuesday through Friday  
9 am to 4 pm



Over 100 persons attended the 2023 Annual Meeting at Amore Banquet Hall in Plymouth on October 13 to hear Dr. Patrick J. Jung give a riveting presentation on "Bondage in the Land of the Free: Slavery in Wisconsin Before the Civil War."

firm in 1875 and began making cigar boxes in addition to custom work that included washboards and fish boxes.

E.B. left the carriage factory and partnered with James Logan. They bought Dengel's planing mill and cigar box factory in 1879. In 1880, Logan sold his interest to Griffith & Walters. Walters sold his interest in the business in 1881. In July 1887, a stock company was formed by E.B. Garton (Senior Partner), Mrs. A.C. Griffith, James Shufflebotham, Jr., John Mogenson, William Zimmermann, and C.C. Landenberger under the name of Garton Toy Company. E.B. acted as the firm's president until his death in 1931. The company manufactured sleds, tricycles, wheelbarrows, coaster wagons, scooters, doll buggies and strollers, croquet sets, and peddle cars for children. In the 1920s, the Garton one-piece metal coaster wagon was added to the Garton line. The red paint used on the wagon was simply known within the trade as "Garton Red."

At 4:30 am on December 5, 1891, fire was discovered in the Garton Toy Factory. It was suspected that sparks from the neighboring Halsted Furniture Factory smokestack had started the blaze. Garton Toy Company burned to the ground, a total loss. However, after the fire, E.B. built a larger factory on North Water Street and Niagara Avenue.



*American Hide & Leather and Garton Toy Company Fire, May 31, 1929*

In 1929, a fire once again destroyed the Garton Toy Company. Following this fire, the 87-year-old E.B. Garton moved operations across the street into vacant buildings formerly occupied by American Hide and

Leather. The company operated from this location until 1962 when it built a new facility on County Road LS, four miles north of Sheboygan. Eusebius Garton died in 1931, leaving control of the company to his son, Clarence E. Garton.

Pedal cars began to appear in the 1890s at about the same time as the first automobiles. No definite inventor has been identified, but it is thought that Garton Toy Company was the first American pedal car maker. Garton Toy continued to make pedal cars, aka "Kiddie Kars," into the 1930s, and the company became known as "the largest juvenile



*Garton Hot Rod*



*Garton Jeep*

vehicle plant in the world." The pedal car's popularity sharply increased between the World Wars and reached its peak in the 1920s and 1930s. The production of

pedal cars and other wheeled goods was totally suspended in the 1940s due to World War II. After the war, pedal cars experienced a massive post war boom. Families became wealthier, and goods became cheaper, so more people could afford them. Pedal cars became a regular item in the Sears Catalog as well as being advertised in magazines such as *Life* and *Look*, and sold in toy stores worldwide. The company introduced several new toy products in the 1960s that included the Casey Jones Locomotive, the Air Force Jeep, the Tin Lizzy, and the Spin-A-Roo to their inventory. Garton expanded its line in

1969 introducing injection molded plastic body autos mounted on a sturdy steel chassis such as the Sprite and GT models.



Without a doubt the largest, sleekest, shiniest, most popular, and distinctive toy in company history was the 1950 Garton Kidillac. Its design was based on the 1950 General Motors Cadillac. William L. Mitchell came up with a design for the Kidillac. Mitchell was an industrial designer and artist. At the age of 24, he was recruited by Harley Earl, the head of the General Motors' Art and Color Section, to lead the Cadillac Studio. He built a full-sized plaster model of his design and presented it to the Gartons' at their summer homes in Elkhart Lake, that they fondly called "Toyland." Mitchell had already done some styling for General Motors before he came up with the Kidillac design. He eventually became a vice president at GM. General Motors, the Cadillac parent, approved Garton



**Garton Kidillac**

Toy's production of the Kidillac. The cars became promotional components in Cadillac showrooms throughout the country. Schools used pedal cars to teach children driving skills. Mitchell's inspiration, guidance and talent were responsible for the design of automotive legends such as the Corvette Sting Ray, Buick Riviera, Oldsmobile Toronado, Chevrolet Camaro, and the Pontiac Firebird.

The Kidillac's catchy name and showy two-tone paint scheme added to its appeal. It was advertised

as having "a streamlined design, built low for ease of propulsion . . . made of one-piece steel, no seams or joints to come apart." Deluxe Kidillac models had electric horns, working headlights and taillights, and a highly desirable continental spare tire kit. Garton Kidillac's are highly prized and sought out by collectors today. In 1953, Garton Toy introduced the "Space Cruiser," and in 1956 they introduced the



**Garton Toy Company ad**



**Garton Space Cruiser**

Official Jack Webb "Dragnet Radio Car" based upon the popular police crime and drama series starring Jack Webb. It featured a working microphone and loudspeaker. Kidillac prices in 1953 ranged from \$30 to \$60. In 2023 dollars that comes to \$375 to \$750. Production of the basic and deluxe Kidillac line continued until 1963.

The Garton Family owned and operated the business for four generations. However, in 1973 due to decreasing profit margins, a declining market,



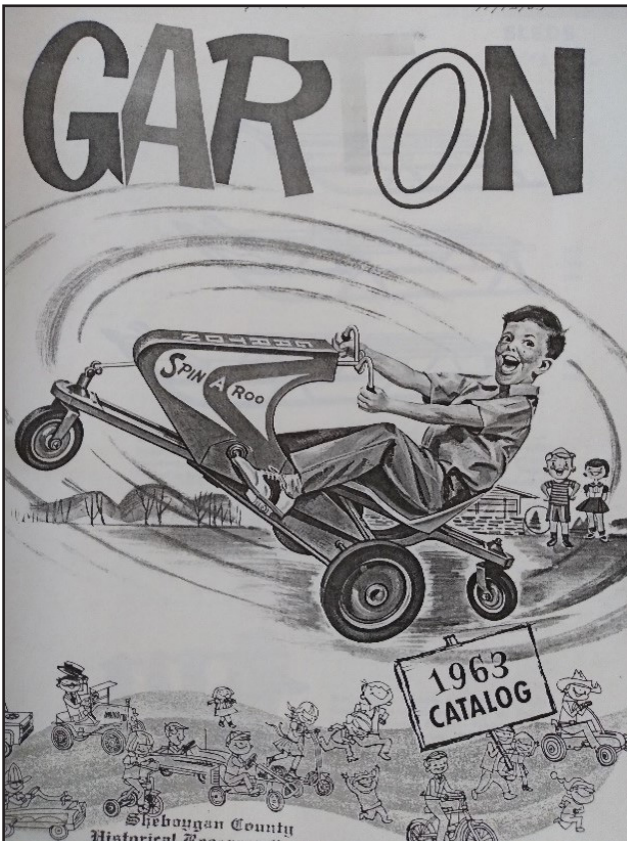
increased governmental and stricter consumer protection regulations, the Garton Toy Company was sold to the Monitor Corporation. The Garton Riverside Toy Factory on Water Street in Sheboygan changed owners several times. Gorman & Company, Inc., finally purchased the property in 1999. They renovated the old factory, converting it into the Garton Toy Factory Apartments. The building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2000. Today

the former Garton Toy plant north of Sheboygan on County Road LS is home of the Kohler Generator Plant.

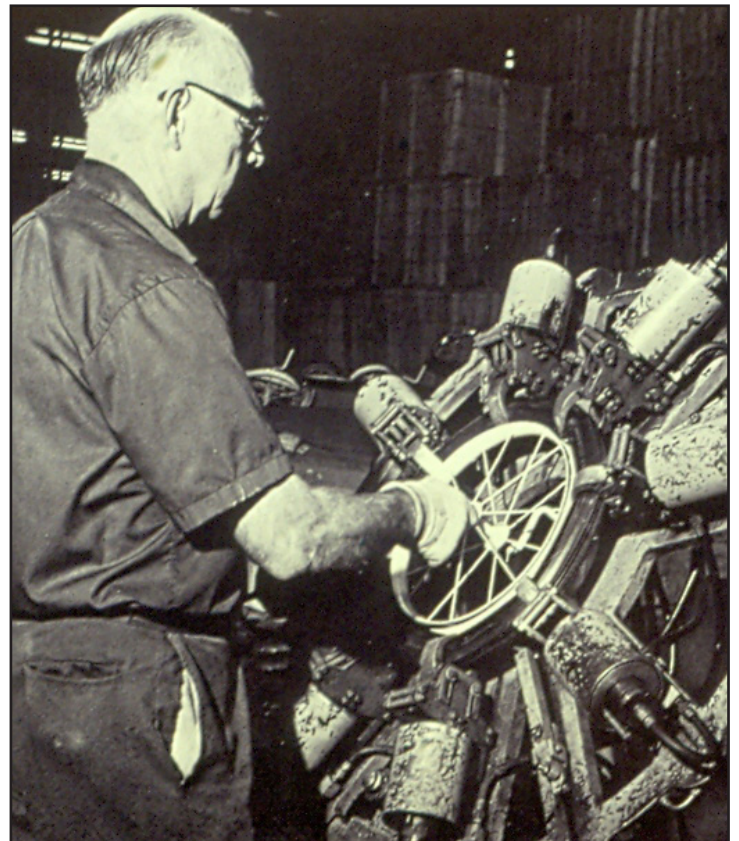
The Garton Toy Company made toys that stirred the imagination of children and excited their minds. At Christmas every kid hoped that something from the Garton Toy Company with their name on it would be found under the tree. 🍀



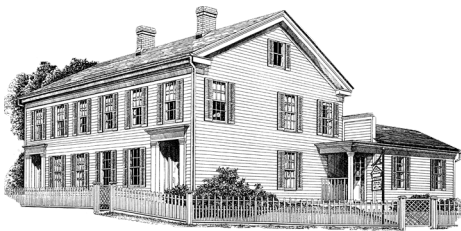
*Garton Riverside Factory*



*Garton Spin-A-Roo*



*Garton Toy Company production worker*



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Historical Research Center  
518 Water Street  
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## SCHRC Book Club

January 25, 2024

1 to 2:30 pm

To register, call (920) 467-4667  
or scan the code!



### FDR'S FUNERAL TRAIN

A BETRAYED WIDOW,  
A SOVIET SPY, AND  
A PRESIDENCY IN  
THE BALANCE

ROBERT KLARA

The SCHRC is launching a new book club that will have a historical theme. The first meeting will be on Thursday, January 25, 2024, from 1:00 to 2:30 pm. The group will start by examining Robert Klara's *FDR's Funeral Train: A Betrayed Widow, a Soviet Spy, and a Presidency in the Balance* (2010). Participants are responsible for obtaining their own book and reading it before the meeting. Be prepared to discuss the book!