

## Finding Aid to the Anne H. Lewis Tinker Toy Collection, 1914-2014

### Summary Information

**Title:** Anne H. Lewis Tinker Toy collection

**Creator:** Anne H. Lewis (primary)

**ID:** 114.6115

**Date:** 1914-2014 (inclusive); 1914-1953 (bulk)

**Extent:** 1 linear foot

**Language:** The materials in this collection are in English.

**Abstract:** This collection contains both original and photocopied instruction sheets and booklets, photocopied patents, photocopied catalogs and advertisements, and original photographs of Tinkertoy building sets and other Tinker Toy products developed by the Toy Tinkers; these materials were compiled by Anne H. Lewis. The bulk of the materials are dated between 1914 and 1953.

**Repository:**

Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong  
One Manhattan Square  
Rochester, New York 14607  
585.263.2700  
library@museumofplay.org

### Administrative Information

**Conditions Governing Use:** This collection is open for research use by staff of The Strong and by users of its library and archives. Though the donors have not transferred intellectual property rights (including, but not limited to any copyright, trademark, and associated rights therein) to The Strong, they have given permission for The Strong to make copies in all media for museum, educational, and research purposes.

**Custodial History:** The Anne H. Lewis Tinker Toy collection was donated to The Strong in July 2014 as a gift from Anne Heuer Lewis. The papers were accessioned by The Strong under Object ID 114.6115. The papers were received from David Lewis in an accession of 15 boxes, which included Tinkertoy construction sets and other toys made by the Toy Tinkers.

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**Processed by:** Julia Novakovic, June 2015

### Controlled Access Terms

#### Corporate Names

- Tinkertoy, Inc.
- Toy Tinkers, Inc.

#### Subjects

- Construction sets
- Construction toys

- Tinkertoys (Trademark)
- Tinkertoys (Trademark)--Catalogs
- Tinkertoys (Trademark)--Handbooks, manuals, etc.
- Tinkertoys (Trademark)--Marketing
- Wooden toys

**Historical Note**

The Tinkertoy construction play set, branded as the “Thousand Wonder Toy,” has been entertaining children and adults alike since 1914. Charles Pajeau of Evanston, Illinois was reportedly inspired by seeing a child playing with wooden sticks and empty thread spools. In Patent No. 1,113,371 for “Toy Construction Blocks,” Pajeau wrote, “More specific objects of my invention are to provide rods and connecting members adapted to be adjoined with the rods disposed in various angular formations...” Pajeau calculated the ratio of rod lengths which would enable construction of 45° and 90° angles. The Toy Tinkers company packaged its original wooden construction set of wheels and rods in a metal canister and advertised by building displays in department store windows. By 1916, more than a million sets of Tinkertoy had been sold in America.

The Toy Tinkers also produced wooden pull toys, beaded dolls, and games during the 1920s, but these toys were phased out in the 1930s in favor of the overwhelmingly popular original Tinkertoy. The construction sets soon added electric motors, cranks, and pulleys for budding engineers. During WWII, when other American toy companies faced restrictions on raw materials due to the war effort, Tinkertoy thrived.

Though the Toy Tinkers’ company was sold several times, Tinkertoy remained relatively unchanged for almost 80 years until Playskool added production of Tinkertoy sets in colorful plastic instead of the traditional wood. Tinkertoy was inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame in 1998.

The term “Tinkertoy” refers specifically to construction sets; “Tinker Toy” covers a range of toys produced by the Toy Tinkers.

**Collection Scope and Content Note**

The Anne H. Lewis Tinker Toy collection contains both original and photocopied instruction sheets and booklets, photocopied patents, photocopied catalogs, photocopied advertisements and articles, and original photographs of Tinkertoy and other products developed by the Toy Tinkers. These paper materials accompanied a donation of Tinkertoy play sets from the collection of Anne Lewis. The bulk of these materials are dated between 1914 and 1953. Additional scope and content information can be found under the “Contents List” section of this finding aid.

The Anne H. Lewis Tinker Toy collection is arranged into five series, one of which has been further divided into subseries. The collection is housed in two archival document boxes.

**Related Materials**

The Strong museum holds more than 300 Toy Tinkers products and Tinkertoy construction sets (many of which were donated by Anne Lewis) within its toy and game collections.

**System of Arrangement**

Series I: Instruction sheets, 1914-1972

    Subseries A: Original instruction sheets

    Subseries B: Photocopied instruction sheets

Series II: Patents (photocopies), 1914-1943

Series III: Catalogs (photocopies), 1918-1967

Series IV: Advertisements and articles (photocopies), 1914-2001

Series V: Photographs and miscellaneous, 1917-2014

## Contents List

### Series I: Instruction sheets, 1914-1972

#### Subseries A: Original instruction sheets

**Scope and Content Note:** This subseries holds original instruction sheets collected by Anne Lewis; these particular instruction sheets were not attached to specific Tinkertoy play sets included in their donation. These original instruction sheets date from 1915 through 1972, with some undated sheets.

#### Box 1

- Folder 1 “Tinkertoy: The Wonder Builder” instruction sheet, Toy Tinkers, © 1915
- Folder 2 “Book ‘B’ Models Made with Two or More Sets of Tinkertoy” instruction booklet, The Toy Tinkers, © 1916
- Folder 3 “Tinkertoy: ‘The Wonder Builder’” instruction sheet, The Toy Tinkers, © 1916
- Folder 4 “Tinkertoy: The Thousand Wonder Builder” instruction booklet, The Toy Tinkers, © 1923
- Folder 5 “Directions” instruction booklet, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., © 1933 [3 copies]
- Folder 6 “Directions” instruction booklet, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., © 1938
- Folder 7 “Easy Tinkertoy: The Many Motion Model Maker” instruction sheet, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., © 1942
- Folder 8 “Junior Tinkertoy” instruction sheet, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., © 1942
- Folder 9 “Tinkertoy Tricks” instruction sheet, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., © 1942 [2 copies]
- Folder 10 “Senior Tinkertoy Instruction Book for Building Models Operated by Windlass Drive or Motor” instruction booklets, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., © 1944 and n.d. [2 copies]
- Folder 11 “Tinkertoy Tricks” instruction sheet, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., © 1948
- Folder 12 “Direction Sheet for Special Tinkertoy” instruction sheet, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., © 1952
- Folder 13 “Deluxe Tinkertoy Instruction Book,” The Toy Tinkers, Inc., © 1952
- Folder 14 “Tinkertoy Tricks” instruction sheet, Toy Tinkers, division of A.G. Spalding & Bros., Inc., © 1953
- Folder 15 “Tinkertoy Direction and Idea Book: What to Do and How to Do It!” The Toy Tinkers, division of A.G. Spalding & Bros., Inc., © 1959
- Folder 16 “Idea Book for Tinker-Zoo by Tinkertoy” instruction booklet, The Toy Tinkers, division of A.G. Spalding & Bros., Inc., © 1961
- Folder 17 “Design Blocks by Tinkertoy” instruction sheet, Toy Tinkers, division of A.G. Spalding & Bros., Inc., © 1967
- Folder 18 “Tinkertoy Instruction and Idea Book” instruction book, Tinkertoy div. Questor Education Products Co., © 1972 [2 copies]
- Folder 19 “Direction Sheet for Wonder Tinkertoy” instruction sheet, The Toy Tinkers, division of A.G. Spalding & Bros., Inc., n.d.
- Folder 20 “Miss Tilly Tinker Direction Sheet,” Toy Tinkers, n.d.
- Folder 21 “Models on this page can be built with...” Tinkertoy instruction sheets, Toy Tinkers, Inc., n.d.
- Folder 22 “Tinkertoy” instruction sheet, The Toy Tinkers, division of A.G. Spalding & Bros., Inc. © 19\_\_ [torn page]
- Folder 23 “Tinkertoy: The Wonder Builder” instruction booklet, The Toy Tinkers, n.d.

**Subseries B: Photocopied instruction sheets**

**Scope and Content Note:** This subseries contains photocopied instruction sheets collected by Anne Lewis; these particular instruction sheets were not attached to specific Tinkertoy play sets included in their donation. These photocopied instruction sheets date from 1916 through 1923, with some undated sheets.

**Box 1**

- Folder 24 "Tinkertoy: 'The Wonder Builder'" instruction sheet, The Toy Tinkers, © 1916 [photocopy]
- Folder 25 "Tinkerblox/Tinker Tales for Tiny Tots" instruction booklet, The Toy Tinkers, © 1917 [photocopy; 2 copies]
- Folder 26 "Bendy Tinkers Directions" instruction sheet, The Toy Tinkers, © 1922 [photocopy]
- Folder 27 "Tinkertoy - The Thousand Wonder Builder" instruction booklet, The Toy Tinkers, © 1923 [photocopy]
- Folder 28 "Casino Golf" instruction sheet, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., n.d. [photocopy]
- Folder 29 "Junior Tinkertoy: The Wonder Builder" instruction sheet, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., n.d. [photocopy]
- Folder 30 "Senior Tinkertoy Directions," Toy Tinkers, Inc., n.d. [photocopy]
- Folder 31 "Senior Tinkertoy Instruction Book for Building Models Operated by Windlass Drive or Motor," The Toy Tinkers, Inc., n.d. [photocopy]
- Folder 32 "Tinkerpins" instruction sheet, The Toy Tinkers, n.d. [photocopy; 2 copies]
- Folder 33 "Tinkertoy: The Thousand Wonder Builder Direction Book," The Toy Tinkers, n.d. [photocopy]
- Folder 34 "Tinkertoy the Wonder Builder" instruction sheet, Toy Tinkers, n.d. [photocopy; 2 copies]

**Series II: Patents (photocopies), 1914-1943**

**Scope and Content Note:** This series houses photocopies of patents (and designs) collected by Anne Lewis. The official title of each patent or design is listed within quotation marks in the box and folder listing; product names appear in parentheses, as indicated by Lewis. These patents range in date from 1914 through 1943.

**Box 1**

- Folder 35 Patent no. 1,092,591 - "Mechanical Construction Blocks," April 7, 1914
- Folder 36 Patent no. 1,113,371 - "Toy Construction Blocks," October 13, 1914
- Folder 37 Patent no. 1,187,923 - "Game Apparatus" (Tinkerpins), June 20, 1916
- Folder 38 Patent no. 1,198,263 - "Toy Construction Block," September 12, 1916
- Folder 39 Patent no. 1,235,050 - "Balanced Toy" (Tilly Tinker), July 31, 1917
- Folder 40 Patent no. 1,241,009 - "Alphabetical Construction" (Tinkerblox), September 25, 1917
- Folder 41 Patent no. 1,319,432 - "Screw Cap Container," October 21, 1919
- Folder 42 Patent no. 1,325,651 - "Toy" (Tom Tinker), December 23, 1919
- Folder 43 Patent no. 1,333,216 - "Wheeled Toy" (Follow-Me Tinker), March 9, 1920
- Folder 44 Patent no. 1,407,165 - "Doll Bag" (Bag Doll Tinker), February 21, 1922

- Folder 45 Des. no. 62,409 - "Toy Doll" (Tom Tinker), May 22, 1923  
 Folder 46 Des. no. 65,667 - "Cane" (Tinker Cane), September 23, 1924  
 Folder 47 Des. no. 65,826 - "Wheeled Toy" (Choo Choo Tinker), October 21, 1924  
 Folder 48 Des. no. 65,974 - "Wheeled Toy" (Dragon Tinker), November 24, 1924  
 Folder 49 Patent no. 1,521,573 - "Wheeled Toy" (Dragon Tinker), December 30, 1924  
 Folder 50 Des. no. 66,433 - "Toy Surf Boat" (Surf Boat Tinker), January 13, 1925  
 Folder 51 Des. no. 66,808 - "Pony & Rider Toy" (Pony Tinker), March 17, 1925  
 Folder 52 Patent no. 1,545,971 - "Racer Toy" (Marathon Tinker), July 14, 1925  
 Folder 53 Patent no. 1,579,884 - "Wheeled Toy" (Seven In One Tinker), April 6, 1926  
 Folder 54 Patent no. 1,619,630 - "Toy" (Spinning Jack Tinker), March 1, 1927  
 Folder 55 Des. no. 72,497 - "Wheeled Toy" (Bunny Tinker), April 19, 1927  
 Folder 56 Patent no. 1,625,676 - "Bowling Game Apparatus" (Tinkerpins), April 19, 1927  
 Folder 57 Des. no. 72,778 - "Wheeled Toy" (Tinker Dogs), May 31, 1927  
 Folder 58 Des. no. 72,964 - "Jointed Figure Toy" (Spinning Jack Tinker), June 28, 1927  
 Folder 59 Patent no. 1,691,123 - "Necktie Rack" (Tinker Necktie Holder), November 13, 1928  
 Folder 60 Patent no. 1,763,815 - "Flash Light" (Tinker Flash Light), June 17, 1930  
 Folder 61 Patent no. 1,782,792 - "Rotary Blotter" (Tinker Rotary Blotter), November 25, 1930  
 Folder 62 Patent no. 1,915,835 - "Toy Construction Block," June 27, 1933  
 Folder 63 Patent no. 1,915,840 - "Toy Supported Motor" (Tinker Spring Motor), June 27, 1933  
 Folder 64 Patent no. 1,916,634 - "Toy Construction Block," July 4, 1933  
 Folder 65 Patent no. 1,920,021 - "End expander for structural toy rods," July 25, 1933  
 Folder 66 Patent no. 1,937,911 - "Collapsible Necktie Holder" (Tinker Tie Tree), December 5, 1933  
 Folder 67 Patent no. 2,208,049 - "Toy Construction Block," July 16, 1940  
 Folder 68 Patent no. 2,313,357 - "Toy Construction Block," March 9, 1943  
 Folder 69 "Official Gazette" photocopies of entries, 1914-1927

### Series III: Catalogs (photocopies), 1918-1967

**Scope and Content Note:** This series includes photocopies of Toy Tinker catalogs featuring Tinkertoy products. The companies listed are The Toy Tinkers, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., and Tinkertoy division of A.G. Spalding & Bros., Inc.

#### Box 2

- Folder 1 "Toys of Character from the Shops of the Toy Tinkers" brochure, The Toy Tinkers, n.d. [c. 1918?]  
 Folder 2 "The Story of the Little Tinker Men" brochure, The Toy Tinkers, n.d. [early 1920s?]  
 Folder 3 "Tom Tinker and His Tinker Toys" accordion-style brochure, Toy Tinkers, n.d. [mid-1920s?]  
 Folder 4 "Toys from Tinker Town" accordion-style brochure, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., n.d. [mid-1920s?]  
 Folder 5 "Retail List Prices ... Tinker Toys for 1924" brochure, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., 1924 [printout of online auction listing photos]

- Folder 6 “Tinker Toys for 1924” catalog, The Toy Tinkers, 1924
- Folder 7 “Tinkertoys 1926” catalog, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., 1926
- Folder 8 “Toys from Tinkertown” brochure, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., 1926
- Folder 9 “Tinkertoys 1927” catalog, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., 1927
- Folder 10 “Tinker Toys for 1931” catalog, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., 1931
- Folder 11 “Tinker Toys 1932” catalog, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., 1932
- Folder 12 “Tinker Toys 1935” catalog, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., 1935
- Folder 13 “Tinker Toys 1936” catalog, The Toy Tinkers, Inc., 1936
- Folder 14 “Tinkertoy - The Original and World’s Leading All Wood Construction Toy 1959” catalog, Tinker Toy, a division of A.G. Spalding & Bros., Inc., 1959
- Folder 15 “Tinkertoy: The world’s most popular construction toy” catalog, Tinker Toy, division of A.G. Spalding & Bros., Inc., 1967

**Series IV: Advertisements and articles (photocopies), 1914-2001**

**Scope and Content Note:** This series holds photocopies of Tinker Toy advertisements, as well as larger company catalogs (such as Sears) showing Tinker Toy products. A folder of photocopied articles on the history of Tinker Toy is also included in this series.

**Box 2**

- Folder 16 Advertisements, 1915-1974 and n.d.
- Folder 17 Advertisements from multi-toy catalogs, 1914-1953
- Folder 18 Published articles on Toy Tinkers/Tinkertoy, 1915-2001

**Series V: Photographs and miscellaneous, 1917-2014**

**Scope and Content Note:** This series contains photographs, sheet music, and documentation on the Lewis collection. The photographs include various Tinkertoy and Toy Tinkers products, the majority of which are from the collection of Anne Lewis.

**Box 2**

- Folder 19 Photographs, 1917-1993 [historic, toys, canisters, display]
- Folder 20 “Parade of the Tinkertoys for Piano” sheet music, Stanford King, 1944 [photocopy]
- Folder 21 Lewis collection documentation and comparison information, c. 2014