



A Walk Through History

The Westerville Public Library
Local History Resource Center Newsletter
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J.W. Hance Foundry Co.

Local man invents popular toy

Harry T. Hance joined the Westerville business community in 1907 when he purchased the Westerville Foundry and Machine Company. Harry moved his Plain City foundry business to Westerville loading his equipment on railroad cars for the journey to the new J. W. Hance Foundry Co. The company was a family business, pooling the efforts of Harry and his father, J.W. Hance.

Initially, the company made parts for other manufacturing businesses. But then Harry invented a novel toy that became popular with young people – the Hance gocycle. In 1912 he began to build the two-wheeled, wooden scooters (similar to the razor scooters of today) at his Westerville plant. In the beginning Harry devoted only a small area of his foundry to the new product, unsure of its success. A few gocycles were shipped weekly to different parts of the country. Two men were assigned to make the toys.

The Hance gocycle caught on and young people around the country were asking their parents for one of the scooters. Suddenly, with this increased demand, the two men making scooters in the corner of the foundry could not keep up. More workers were hired and an addition had to be built on to the foundry.

By 1914, Harry Hance estimated that 250,000 gocycles had been built in Westerville and shipped to eager boys and girls across the country and around the world.



Hance gocycles

Harry T. Hance, Community Leader



In 1906, Harry T. Hance married Dorothy Schilling at her parents' home which was adjacent to Schiller Park in Columbus. She was a Columbus school teacher. Together they raised three sons and two daughters. They were married for 55 years before Harry's death in 1961 and hers in 1963. Harry worked to leave a better community for his five children and the other children of Westerville.

Harry T. Hance was an individual who gave to the Westerville community in many ways. Many citizens appreciated his efforts to bring other businesses including Kilgore Manufacturing to the town. He leased a building to Kilgore and later sold them his old foundry building.

Harry not only ran a successful business, but he worked to make Westerville a good place to live. He served on the city council from 1915 to 1923 and was the chair 1919-1920. Harry was one of the leaders in the movement to bring the city manager form of government to Westerville in 1916. Westerville was one of the first communities in Ohio to take this step.

Serving as president of the Chamber of Commerce from 1923 to 1926, Harry was instrumental in bringing the 3-C Highway celebration to Westerville. Residents of communities from Columbus to Cleveland flocked to Westerville for a huge parade and many other events in the day-long celebration of the completion of the 3-C Highway between Columbus and Cleveland. The celebration was advertised in small communities between the two anchor cities and brought much attention to Westerville.

Other civic organizations benefited from the involvement of Harry Hance. He was a founding member and first president of the Lions Club which continues today to provide many services to those with impaired vision. The Blendon Lodge of the Masons counted him as one of their active members.

Vending Machines

Hance manufactured vending machines which were placed in businesses all over the country. Peanuts, gum balls, candy, and even breath perfume pellets were sold in the coin operated machines. Not only could you purchase something to eat or chew you also could purchase postage stamps and postcards from some vending machines. The most unusual machine was the one that sold electricity for one cent.



Seed-cleaning Machines

Realizing the need for agricultural products for the many small farmers around the country, Hance produced seed and grain cleaning machinery. Sold at Sears and Roebuck stores and through their catalogue, the products were displayed at county and state fairs around the country. Eventually the company began to export them and even sent some to Iran to assist farmers in that country. As the small farms began to disappear in the United States the markets for these products began to change and Hance eventually stopped producing them.

Products manufactured by Hance

Once the gocycle became popular, Hance began to built other games and toys for young people.

War hoop games – a hoop is used to knock down toy soldiers.

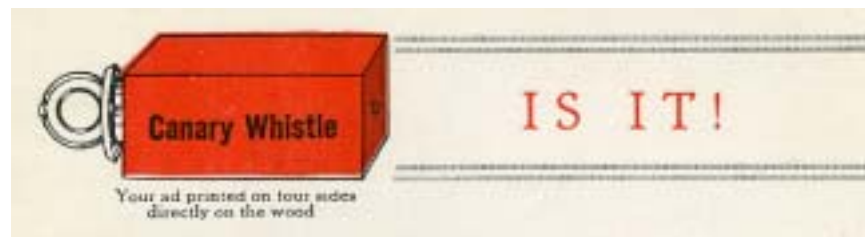
Bing! — a tabletop bowling game with a ball on a stick in the center which can be swung around to knock over pins.



Joy-skip jumping rope – a stick with a jumping rope attached. The user skips over the rope while twirling the stick.



Hoop revolver – a boomerang contraption which shoots a hoop that travels away from its base and then returns.



Canary whistle – Allows the user to sound like the popular song bird.

Activities



Language Arts:

Salesmen traveled all over the United States promoting the gocycles and other items which J.W. Hance Foundry made. You read about the items they made on pages 1, 3 and 4. The salesmen would write home about the towns they visited. Write about a town or city you recently visited. What was special about the place you visited? Write about what you did while you were there.



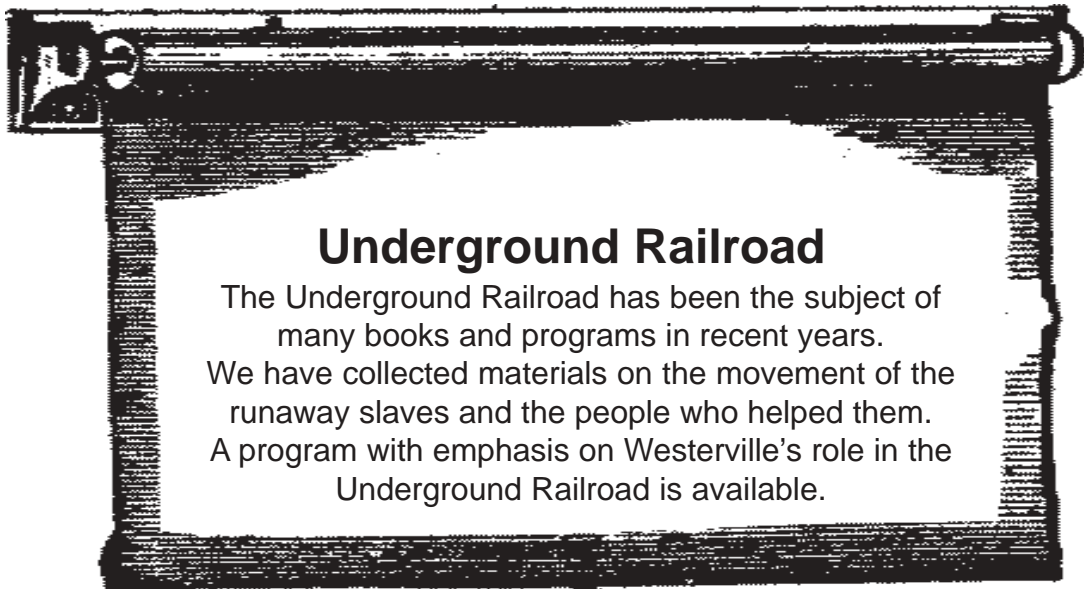
playing video games



playing yu gi oh

Art:

On page four you saw pictures of toys and games which were enjoyed by young people. Draw a picture of you playing with one of your favorite toys or games.



Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad has been the subject of many books and programs in recent years. We have collected materials on the movement of the runaway slaves and the people who helped them. A program with emphasis on Westerville's role in the Underground Railroad is available.



Schedule a local history program for your classroom

We will share the early history of Westerville with stories of the first settlers and Native Americans in the area. Your students will hear about the milestones of transportation in our community and see old photographs from our collection.



Schedule a spring walking tour

Bring your class to the library and take a guided walk through uptown Westerville. Stories of the people of Westerville and the places they lived and worked will be shared with your students. The walking tour lasts slightly more than an hour and makes a loop through old Westerville.



Any of the above programs can be scheduled by contacting Beth Weinhardt, coordinator of local history, at the Westerville Public Library at 882-7277 ext. 160 or by e-mail at bweinhar@westervillelibrary.org.