Educational Toys

Educational toys were first designed for the two WPA nursery schools in Milwaukee (one located at the Milwaukee Urban League). Project staff worked closely with the director of the nursery schools, who was a graduate of Milwaukee State Teachers College, to determine what products could help the children.

All of the WPA nurseries in Wisconsin, Iowa and Kansas were equipped with Milwaukee toys, and sample sets of toys were sent to Michigan, Illinois and Missouri. Kindergarten teachers from all over the country ordered toys from the project.
The wooden toys, forerunners of the modern educational toy, were streamlined to eliminate breakable parts.
Toys were tested in local kindergartens and WPA nurseries before they were mass produced.
Project workers made thousands of wooden toys for schools, nurseries and orphanages.
As word of the project spread, the number of orders and requests for the loan of examples of project articles increased rapidly.
The project’s “Catalogue Number 10” listed a stock of 43 different educational toys available for order. The most popular wood animal in 1939 was the duck, followed closely by the rooster.
See Mary Kellogg Rice, *Useful Work for Unskilled Women: A Unique Milwaukee WPA Project* (Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2003) for references and photo credits.