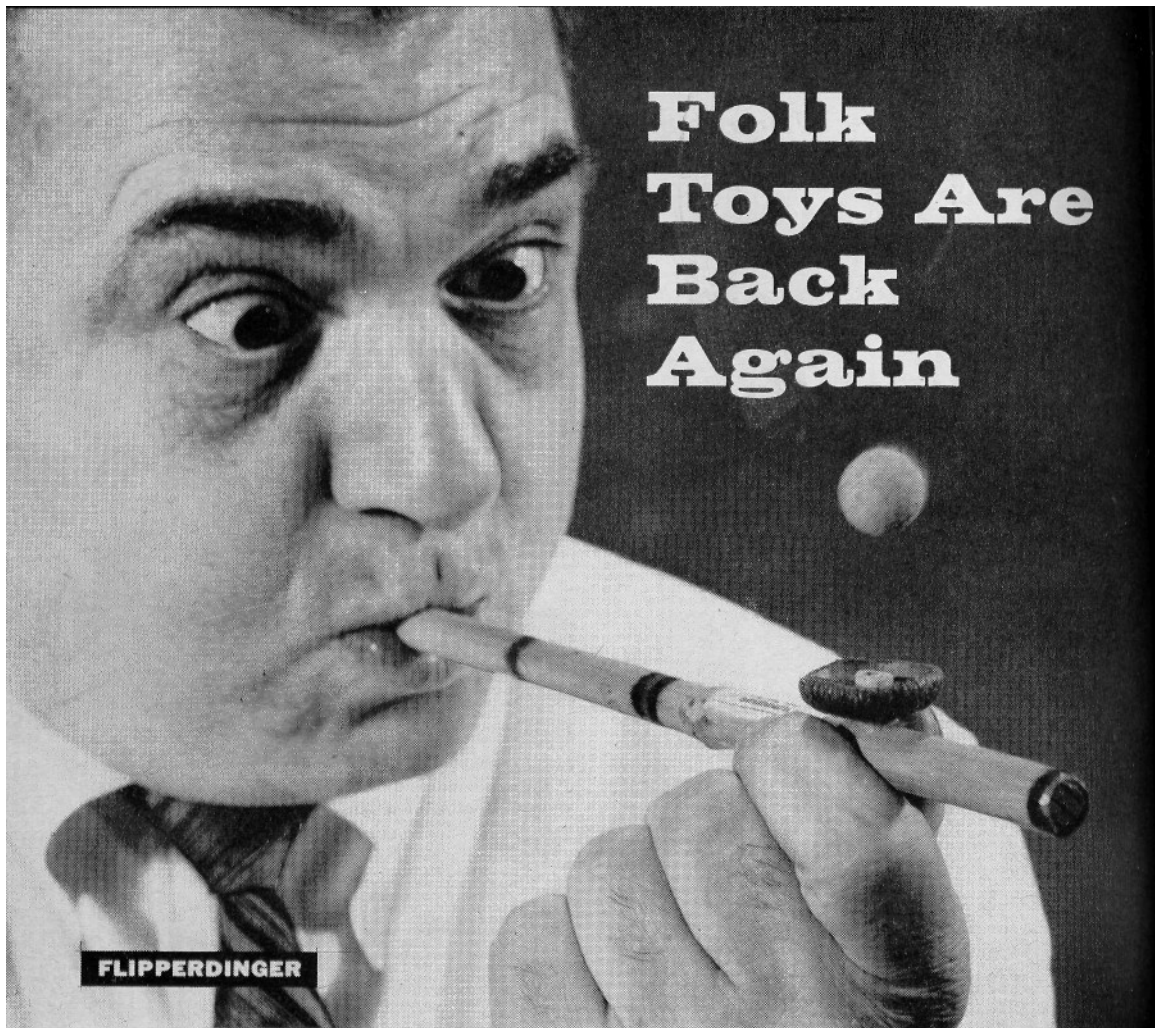
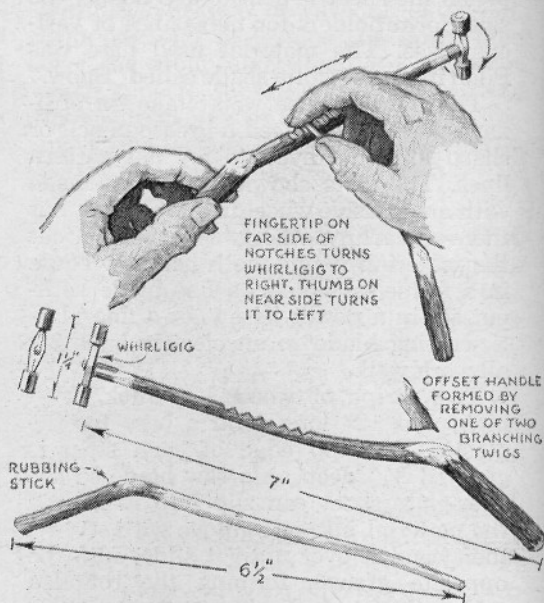
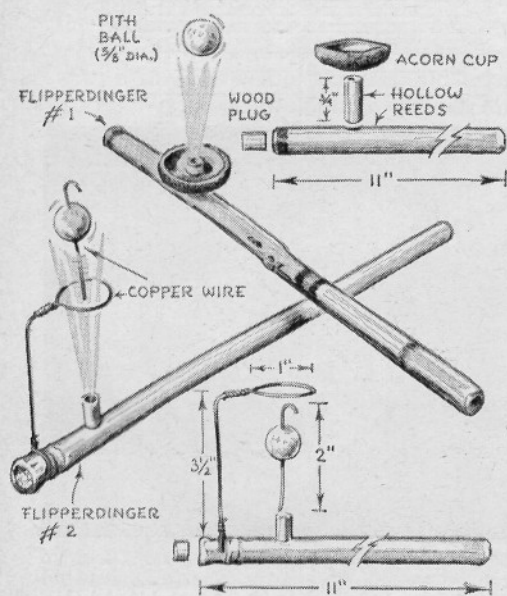


# Folk Toys Are Back Again



**FLIPPERDINGER**



*You'll love the old flipperdingers, whimmydiddles, and their country cousins now being made in the Southern mountains*

By Henry B. Comstock

**T**ODAY, a group of North Carolina mountain boys are busy carving a niche with their jackknives in the highly competitive toy industry. They all work in their homes around Beech Creek, a region just a whoop and a holler west of Boone, N. C. Their products are faithful copies of folk toys that have delighted children of the Southern Appalachians for two centuries or more. Wonderful gadgets are these, made of bits of laurel and rhododendron, seasoned hickory, red cedar, river cane, and acorn cups.

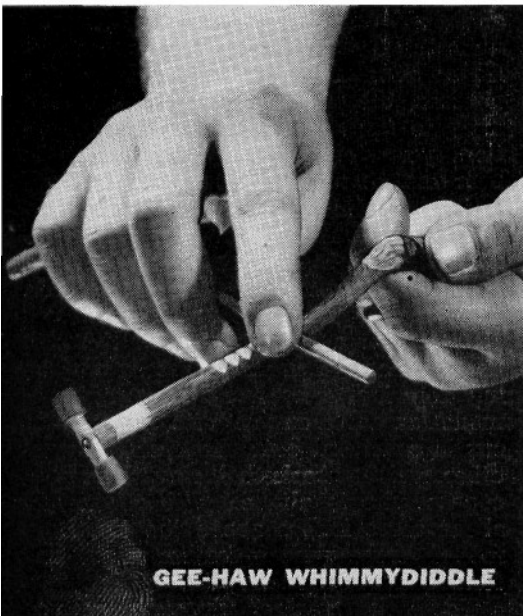
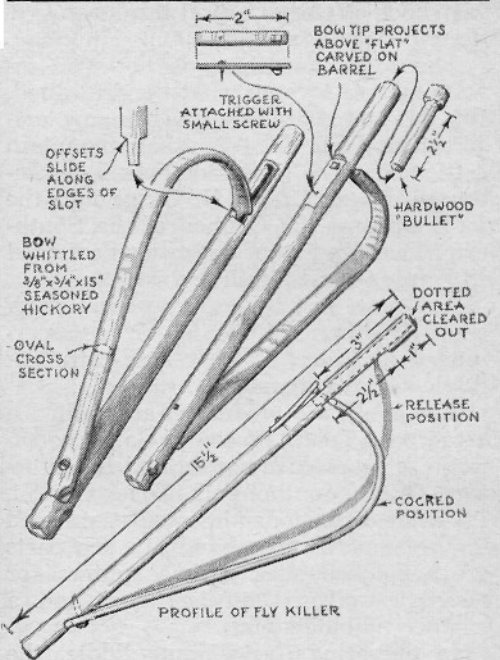
The idea of reviving interest in, and a market for, these folk toys came from Richard Chase, authority on the folk traditions of the Appalachian South. One day Chase wondered if there wasn't still a place for such old-time favorites as the gee-haw whimmydiddle, flipperdinger, fly killer, whizzer, and cornstalk fiddle.

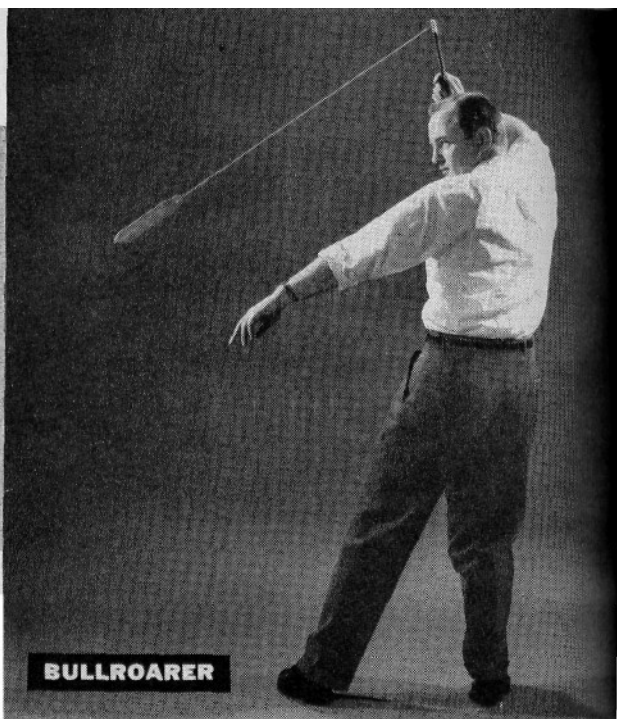
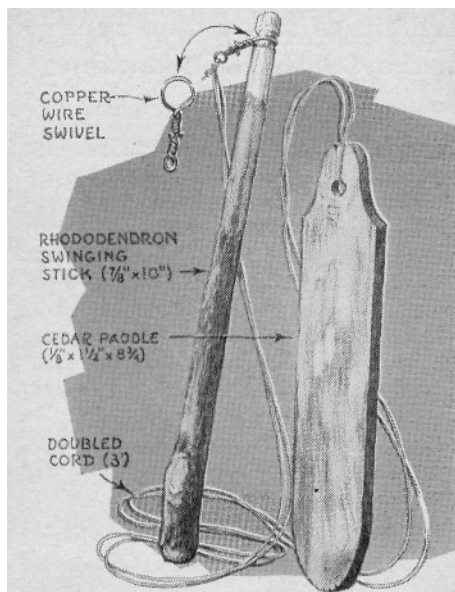
With encouragement from the Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, he talked over the idea with his nearest neighbors—Jack Guy, 31; Sam Ward, 70; Clint Harmon, 16; Dexter Stines, 16; Bill Stines, 14; Jerry Greene, 13; and the Guy and

Hicks families. Could they turn out these toys in quantity, he asked, if he helped with patterns and found the outlets?

Small initial orders, placed by gift shops throughout the Asheville-Great Smoky Mountains National Park area were followed quickly by big ones. Visiting youngsters from 50 states were going for the toys like corn pone. So were their fathers. Swinging a whizzer vigorously, one red-faced tourist puffed: "They've got the wrong name on this one. Back where I come from, we used to call it a bullroarer."

Chase knows better than to argue. A





thorough researcher, he's found that none of these playthings are peculiar to the Appalachian South. The whimmydiddle, for example, has been reported from Sweden and China. And a Czechoslovakian book on early Central European toys describes many such items.

The important thing is not who invented these toys, or what they're called. It's the fact that they are bringing employment to one small Southern mountain settlement. The profits of Folk Toys Industry, Beech Creek, N. C., go into the local work of the Council of the Southern Mountains, an organization dedicated to helping rural families.

And now, just in case you don't know what a whimmydiddle is—or a flipperdinger, fly killer, bullroarer, or cornstalk fiddle—here's a rundown:

*Gee-haw whimmydiddle*, also called a ziggerboo (Tenn.), geehaw (Ga.), hoodoo stick (Cherokee Indians), and lie detector (Ohio). In the Folk Toys' version, it's made of rhododendron twigs, stripped to the smooth inner bark. Its two parts are a notched stick with a spinner—or whirligig—pivoted on one end, and a smaller rubbing stick.

In operating the whimmydiddle, the

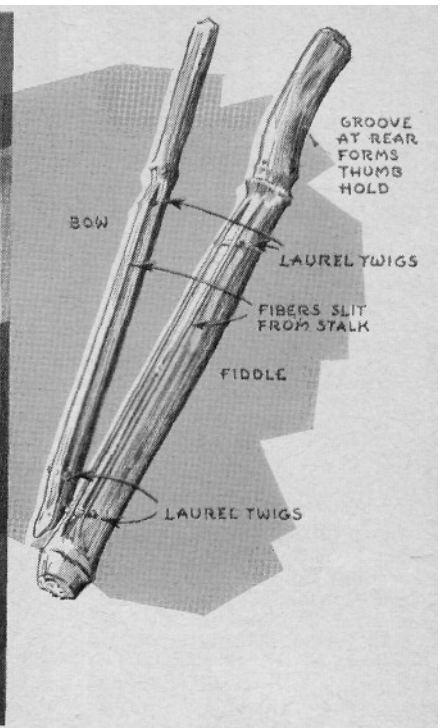
object is to make the whirligig spin smoothly to the right (*gee*), or to the left (*haw*), seemingly at your spoken command. To do this, you must hold both parts lightly to produce maximum vibration. This vibration is set up when you stroke the rubbing stick rapidly back and forth across the notches. If, at the same time, you let the tip of your index finger slide along the far side of the notches, the whirligig will twirl unflinchingly to the right. To reverse its direction, you simply bring your thumb to bear on the near side of the notches. With a little practice, you can switch contacts so inconspicuously that anyone who doesn't know the trick will have a hard time guessing why the whirligig responds.

*Flipperdinger*. This is a hollow-reed blower with a plug in one end, and a nozzle, made of a smaller reed, projecting from it just behind the plug. In one model, an acorn cup with its center bored out is cemented over the nozzle. In another, a little "basketball ring" bent from copper wire is aligned with the nozzle about three inches above the tip. Both models come with a featherweight ball formed from cornstalk pith.

To work the first flipperdinger, you



**CORNSTALK FIDDLE**



place the pith ball in the acorn cup and blow lightly but steadily into the open end of the larger reed. When done right, the ball rises slowly in a jet stream of air, hovers a few inches above the nozzle, and then as you ease off, settles back.

The other flipperdinger is harder to master. Here the pith ball has a wire thrust through it—one with a crook in one end. You hang the crook over the basketball ring. Then, with plenty of well-controlled lung power, you can unhook the ball, lower it through the ring, and, finally, blow it back up again and replace the crook on the wire.

*Fly killer.* This potent and fairly accurate little weapon could almost be called a one-armed crossbow. It has a barrel made of a short elderberry stick with its forward end hollowed out, and a long slot cut through its side wall and into this cavity. Near the back of the barrel a strip of seasoned hickory is fastened in an angled notch with a wood screw. The other end of the hickory strip is slimmed down and bent in a permanent bow by soaking. In cocked position, the pointed tip of the bow is placed in the slot and drawn back until it enters a hole in the opposite side of the barrel.

This depresses a trigger made from a sliver of springy wood.

To load the fly killer, you slip a flat-headed wood shaft into it. Pressing the trigger pops the bow tip out of the hole and sends it flying forward in the slot, snapping the missile out with enough force to shatter a window at 10 paces.

*Bullroarer.* Simplest of the toys, the bullroarer (whizzer) is a thin cedar paddle attached to a rhododendron handle with a doubled length of stout cord. When it's swung in circles through the air, it makes an awesome, buzzing sound. A copper-wire swivel on the handle prevents the cord from winding around the wood.

*Cornstalk fiddle.* Not even a tone-deaf Cherokee could confuse this with a Stradivarius. But for caterwauls that would make a mountain lion lift his eyebrows, you can't beat a two-string cornstalk fiddle. Instrument and bow have strips of their bark slit in such a way that, with "bridges" formed of twigs inserted beneath them, they become tensioned bow and fiddle strings. Properly rosined before it leaves the Folk Toys Industry workshop, a cornstalk fiddle is good for months of ear-piercing screeches.