THE AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE NEWSLETTER

August 1982

VOL 1 No 3

This third issue of the Australian Children's Folklore Newsletter has been produced somewhat earlier than might otherwise have been the case in order to be ready for the Second National Child Development Conference, August 18 - 21, which is being held at I.E.C.D. in Melbourne. For the first time in Australia, a major conference has allocated a session to children's folklore, and abstracts of the three papers to be presented are included in this newsletter.

A collective thanks also to Newsletter's well-wishers and correspondents, both local and overseas.

Gwenda Davey
June Factor
(Editors)
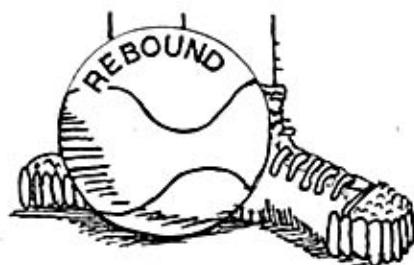
Greek counting rhymes

Mrs Camelia Thomas sends the following rhyme which she heard 'quite often sung in the Greek parks by little children in 1976 - 1977':

Ena, Dio, Tria, Tessera
Olla ta pedia
Pende, Exi, Epta, Okhto
Trilla, Lila, La ....

One, Two, Three, Four
All the Children
Five, Six, Seven, Eight
Trilla, lila, la .....

Apologies for lack of Greek script; future Newsletters, perhaps?

More on 'Elastics'

Wendy Lowenstein advises us that during her field collecting of children's folklore in the late 1960's, elastics was often referred to as 'Chinese skippy'. (Some American references to elastics call it 'Chinese jump-rope'.) This particular children's game seems to have appeared in Australia only during the 1960's and any information on the subject would be welcome. The game is also played, currently, by children in China.

Media response

Media interest in children's folklore continues: both editors of the Newsletter were recently interviewed (separately) by the national magazine Woman's Day and by Channel 0/28 (multicultural television) on the subject of children's games.

NOTES

New addition to Multicultural Cassette Series

The full text of the four Italian cassettes in the series has been transcribed and is now available in booklet form, price $2.50.
Enquiries c/o I.E.C.D.

Visit of Professor Kenneth Goldstein

The noted American Folklorist Kenneth Goldstein (University of Philadelphia) will be visiting Sydney (and possibly Melbourne) between December 6th and January 9th. For details of Kenneth Goldstein's visit, contact the Oral History Association in Sydney (Dr. Alan Roberts, (02) 467 2346) or the Editors of this Newsletter in Melbourne (03) 861 9798.

SECOND NATIONAL
CHILD DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

As part of this conference, there will be a special session on CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE, chaired by Gwenda Davey. Here are summaries of the three papers to be offered on FRIDAY, AUGUST 20TH at 2.00 pm at the Abbotsford Campus of the Institute of Early Childhood Development:

Children's Folklore in Australia
June Factor, Dept of English, I.E.C.D.

'In this paper I wish to examine the history of research and writing on children's folklore in Australia. Such an account must necessarily include some questioning of past and current assumptions concerning child development, education and socialization. The focus will be on two areas of particular interest: children's language development, and co-operation, competition and control among groups of children. Much of my resource material will come from the extensive holdings in the Institute of Early Childhood Development's Folklore Collection.'

Child Musical Structures in West Javanese Children's Play Songs
Cheryl Romet, School of Education,
Deakin University, Geelong, Vic.

'This paper will present the results of musicological research into West Javanese children's play songs. These results have revealed a qualitative difference between the melodic and rhythmic organization of these children's songs and adult songs. Furthermore although these children's song texts use rhetorical devices that are similar to those used in adult sisindiran tests, nevertheless the melodic and rhythmic patterns of these play songs do not contain stylistic musical characteristics of the adult song repertoire, but instead, are consistent stylistically with patterns of child music organization evident from other cross cultural analyses of children's songs.'

Indo-Chinese Folklore in Melbourne Schools
Morag Loh, Indo-China Refugee Association of Victoria (VICRA)

'In response to the concern of Indo-Chinese parents that aspects of their traditional cultures would be lost to their children, VICRA collected folk-tales from the Indo-Chinese communities of Melbourne and presented them in multi-lingual form (English, Chinese, Hmong, Khmer, Lao, Vietnamese) for use in schools - in participatory children's theatre, in a book and on cassette. This has enabled Indo-Chinese children to know, be proud of and share aspects of their traditional cultures; encouraged Indo-Chinese parents to participate in classes as transmitters of folklore; and given teachers an opportunity to point out the similarities and common appeal of folk-tales of all cultures.'

Those interested in copies of these papers should address their inquiries to the Secretariat, Second National Child Development Conference, PO Box 29, Parkville, Victoria, 3052.

Toodlembuck

In 1954-55, the American folklorist Dr Dorothy Howard visited Australia as a Fulbright scholar, and travelled all over the country collecting children's games. Many Australians wrote to her about their childhood play, and a number of correspondents referred to a TOODLEMBUCK. This was a gambling device used by children at Melbourne Cup time (the first Tuesday in November). We reprint here, with Dr Howard's permission, an article she wrote on the TOODLEMBUCK in the Journal of American Folklore, January-March, 1960.

Below that, we have added some descriptions of the games from other correspondents. If any reader of this Newsletter can remember these games, the editors would be very pleased to hear from them.

* * * * *

The 'Toodlembuck'— Australian Children's Gambling Device and Game. Melbourne Cup Race week, 1 - 8 November has been the most important annual horse-racing event in Australia for seventy-five years and more. From early days, according to accounts and memoirs,[1] both adults and children have gambled on the Melbourne Cup horses.

In November 1954, when I was in Melbourne, I collected some odds and ends of Melbourne Cup gambling practices, present and past, of adults and of children. Children of 1954, I was told, surreptitiously organize their own playground sweepstakes, patterned after their elders' office sweepstakes or club sweepstakes, and bet with pennies. But children of the early 1900's had a gambling custom—extinct now, as far as I could learn— claiming the picturesque name of 'Toodlembuck' and employing a unique handmade gambling wheel and 'cherry bobs' (cherry stones — cherries are in season at Melbourne Cup time) for money.

Lillian Kelly, a schoolmistress in Melbourne, constructed a 'Toodlembuck' (see diagram) like the ones she had made and used as a child (about 1910), then made me a gift of the wheel together with the following description of the device and the game:

> One wooden skewer from the butcher (used to curl the tail piece of a roast of beef around the T-bone). One cotton reel (called sewing spool in the United States), three tacks, one pin, an exercise cover (cardboard notebook cover). A piece of string with a button tied to the end to put between the fingers when pulling the string. Names of horses in Melbourne Cup of the year. Cherry stones used for betting. The owner of the Toodlembuck ran the game. He cried 'Who'll go on my Toodlembuck?' Those with cherry bobs picked their horses and gave so many stones to the Toodlembuck owner; and we watched her spin. The winner took all.
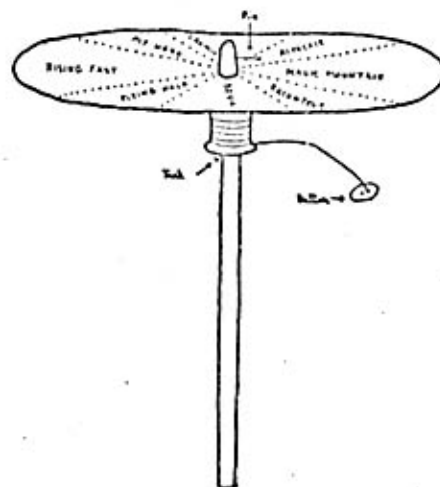
R. J. Murphy of Lyonville, Victoria reported a similar device in use among children from 1924-1930. When the wheel was spun, the owner sang out: 'One, two, three and your old girl back.'

Another type of gambling device called a (or 'the') 'Toodlembuck' was described as follows by T. H. Coates, Melbourne University, whose childhood was spent in East Ballarat, Victoria:

> Two four-inch lengths of one-inch diameter broom stick; one trousers button. (Sometimes the word 'Toodlembuck' was applied specifically to one piece of broomstick with the button placed on the end.) A circle was drawn on the ground, usually by putting the thumb down as center and using the little finger to describe the circumference. In the center of this circle one stick was placed upright with the button sitting on top. Three yards from the circle a line was drawn and from this line the player had to bowl the second stick trying to knock the first stick over in such a way as to make the button fall into the ring (or outside the ring—I forget which). Marbles (which we always called 'alleys') were staked on the result. The entrepeneur would sing or rather chant: 'Try your luck on the Toodlembuck An alley a shot and two if you win.'

G. S. Browne of Melbourne University and Brigadier Langley, played Coates's kind of Toodlembuck in their youth but called it 'Scone on Stick.'

NOTES

[1] George Robertson, The Vagabond Papers: Sketches of Melbourne Life in Light and Shade, II, 2nd Ser. (Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide, 1877), p.136, describes Melbourne Cup Day, 1876—'Everyone, too, from the Governor to children at school, appears to have some interest in the race in respect of bets or sweepstakes. This is really a gambling community; men, women, and children seem to be affected alike, all wishing to back a horse or take a chance in a 'sweep.'

DOROTHY HOWARD

* * * * *

'The good old Australian 'corruption' went into full swing in the thirties because when I was attending Francis St, Yarraville (now famous) primary school in grade 5 & 6 we played the game exactly as you describe, especially around Melbourne Cup time.

The year was 1939
But! we called out
'Two and your old girl back'

We gave odds of 2 to 1 as I remember and this said quickly is very like 'Toodlembuck'.

(W. Meddings, Swan Hill, Vic.)

* * * * *

Toodlembucks flourished at Coburg West S.S. in the 1940s and in the 1950s (early 1950s at least). Strangely, I've not met anyone else who knows about toodlembucks, and if my childhood culture was somewhat old-fashioned, perhaps it is because Coburg West was not an area that developed after the war. Young families were able to rent or build near where their grandparents lived, and as a result there were many classical 'extended' families in the district. A few notes on toodlembucks:

1. The cardboard top was brightly coloured, a different colour for each horse.

2. Horses had differing odds, depending on the size of the wedge, eg.
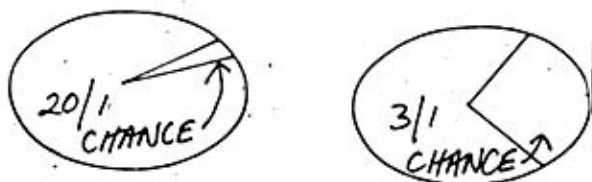
3. The 'bookie' was in a favorable position as it was easy to cheat:

(a) the bookie could stop the wheel with thumb or finger of the bottom hand. Children would crouch down to make sure that there was no 'fenannywackin' as 'cheating' was called, i.e. some children would crouch down to check that there was no illegal stopping of the race.

(b) a slight flick of the wrist could turn the result into a 'liner' or from a 'liner' to a low odds win. Great arguments ensued, but they were always settled, whether by weight of numbers or force of argument, I'm not sure. This issue of settling of arguments is doubtless one that interests you, as children settle arguments in a different way from adults, I think.

4. Some parents saw toodlembucks as immoral. It was a strange time, and the fifties saw a resurgence of fundamentalist/Billy Graham religion and morality. Toodlembucks were, I think, banned at one stage.

(G. Willcox, Melbourne)

* * * * *

THE MULTICULTURAL PLAYGROUND

Melbourne is often popularly described as the 'second Greek city in the world'. It is also one of the largest immigrant cities per se; according to the Monash Atlas, the 1976 Census showed that 48.2% of Melbourne's population of about 2½ million had at least one parent who had been born overseas.

It will be of great interest to note the influence on traditional children's play of this multicultural influx. For a long time Anglo dominance in the playground seems to have been the norm; newcomers quickly learned the local 'rules of the game' in terms of both activities and relationships.

Yet some evidence is beginning to appear which indicates non-Anglo influences in the school playground. Some children are learning games, rhymes and songs from peers of different nationalities, as exemplified in the two entries which follow. The first refers to Melbourne, the second to Geelong (Victoria).

Just a Little Bit Different

by Ronis Chapman.

(Ronis and two other students taking the Diploma of Child Development in 1981 observed the play activities of a number of children recently arrived in Melbourne.)

We set out to record the play of some Asian children and to see if the games they played changed as they spent more time with Australian children. But what did we find? That their games were only 'a little bit different'. The small differences are fascinating, but they are only small.

The children we met at Eastbridge Language Centre in Blackburn South, Melbourne, were mainly Vietnamese and Cambodian. We watched them play marbles, elastics, skippy, oranges and lemons and chasey. Every game we saw began with the same ritual in order to find out who 'holds the ends', who goes first or who is 'it'. This ritual is the hand game we know as 'Rock, Paper, Scissors'. (Paper wraps around rock, scissors cuts paper, rock sharpens scissors.)

Elastics seems to have some similarity to the game Australian children play, the biggest difference being the 'elastic' itself. The children tie rubber bands together to make a long chain. They tie them in a very complicated way, using their fingers and toes. It looks very much like watching someone use a Knitting Nancy, but they call it 'butterflies'.

Skippy is as we know it, except that we found the children using only one skipping song. It sounds very much like 'Sea shell, cockle shells/ Evy, Ivy, Over' with the accompanying actions that are familiar to us. We tried many times to have the words translated by the players, but some said it was Vietnamese, others Cambodian, and yet others said it was a strange Chinese dialect. After discussions between many of the children and their Vietnamese and Cambodian teacher-aides at Eastbridge, they decided it was not translatable - it was simply a nonsense rhyme.

The most interesting difference about the marbles games we saw was the way the marbles were 'shot'. It's hard to describe, but the children use two fingers and no thumbs.
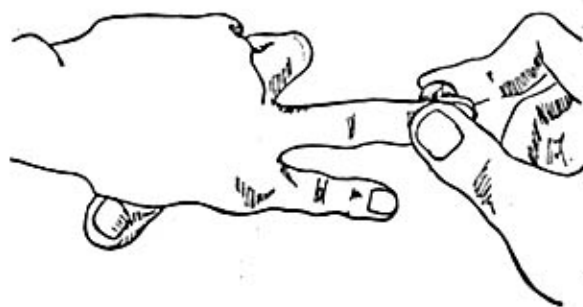
Perhaps one of the most interesting observations overall was that Anglo-Australian children were joining in and learning some of the Asian children's games, particularly their version of elastics.

Many thanks to the children we visited at talked to.
(Ronis Chapman, Anita Carmody and Sally Wishart have completed a short video on some aspects of the play of recently arrived Vietnamese and Cambodian children in Melbourne. This video is housed at I.E.C.D. as part of the Australian Children's Folklore Collection. Copies may be obtained by enquiry to this Newsletter.)
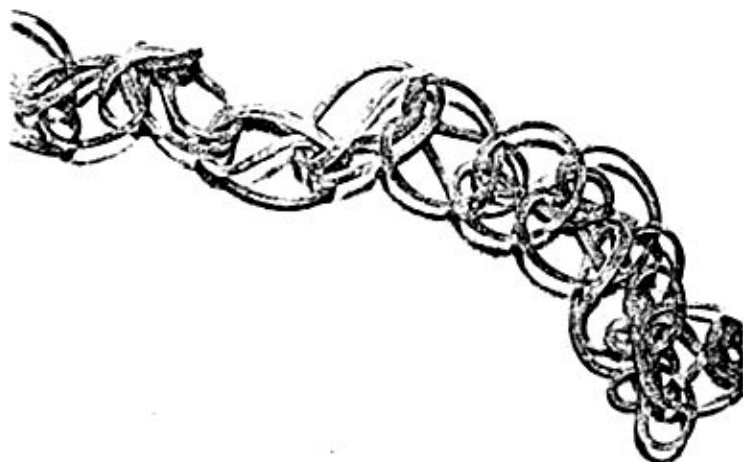
Extract from Ethnic Play Rhymes as a Source of Natural Cross Cultural Learning Materials for a Multicultural Curriculum (pp 23,24,58)

Margaret Clark, Deakin University (B.Ed. (Hons) dissertation, 1981)

..... at South Geelong Primary School there was a dominant and cohesive group of Greek girls in the upper grade, who were proud of their Greek heritage, and attended ethnic school. It should be stressed at this point that the children do not learn play rhymes at their ethnic school, as very little opportunity arises for informal communication: the program is extremely structured to the imparting of that particular culture's heritage through folklore, and the spoken and written word.

Of particular importance was the fact that eight of the Greek girls had taught Greek versions of English play rhymes to their non-Greek friends within the school community. These play rhymes were mostly of the hand-clapping variety. All of the children participating in the activity were expected to sing the English and Greek versions. Some of the chants recorded in both Greek and English were 'My Father was Born in Germany', 'When Susie was a Baby', Dimietri, Do You Love Me?', 'A.B.C....Out the Door', 'One Potato', 'Cool it', and 'A Friend Lost a Kangaroo'. Most of these play rhymes appeared to be the exclusive property of the upper grade girls at this particular school. It was extremely interesting to note that the children from Dutch, Macedonian, Turkish and Italian backgrounds, as well as Anglo-Saxon backgrounds, were happily chanting in Greek!

Further substantial evidence to support this finding was witnessed at Bell Post Hill Primary school, when a group of grade six boys and girls chanted:

> Mala bele place
> Ist jubula garce
> Nesme idci kuci
> Mumu ceu tuci
> Isna uci vuci.

Translation:
> A little baby's crying
> She doesn't want to go home
> She lost her pants
> Her mother gives her a smack.

When translated by the ethnic aide, the first two lines were found to be Serbo-Croatian, the third line an impure 'slang' mixture of Croatian, and the last two lines Croatian. The ethnic backgrounds of the children who chanted this play rhyme (Serbian, Macedonian, Croatian, White Russian and Hungarian) were certainly diverse.

Babies moves	1,2,3,4
Scatters	1,2,3,4
Babies non moves	1,2,3,4
Blind babies moves	1,2,3,4
Blind scatters	1,2,3,4
Blind non moves	1,2,3,4
Tight ups and downs	1,2,3,4
Loose ups and downs	1,2,3,4
Skimming the milk	1,2,3,4
Pigsties in	1,2,3,4
Pigsties out	1,2,3,4
Low hurdles	1,2,3,4
High hurdles	1,2,3,4
Grandmother's teeth	1,2,3,4
Enemies (scats)	1,2,3,4
Low candles	1,2,3,4
High candles	1,2,3,4
Clicks	1,2,3,4
Non clicks	1,2,3,4
Tidying	1,2,3,4

Rules:

Cannot have touches in non moves

Cannot have tips in enemies

In low candles you must not throw the knuckle bone higher than your nose, and in high candles you must not throw it lower than your nose

If in low hurdles, the knuckle bone lands on the back of your hand it is out
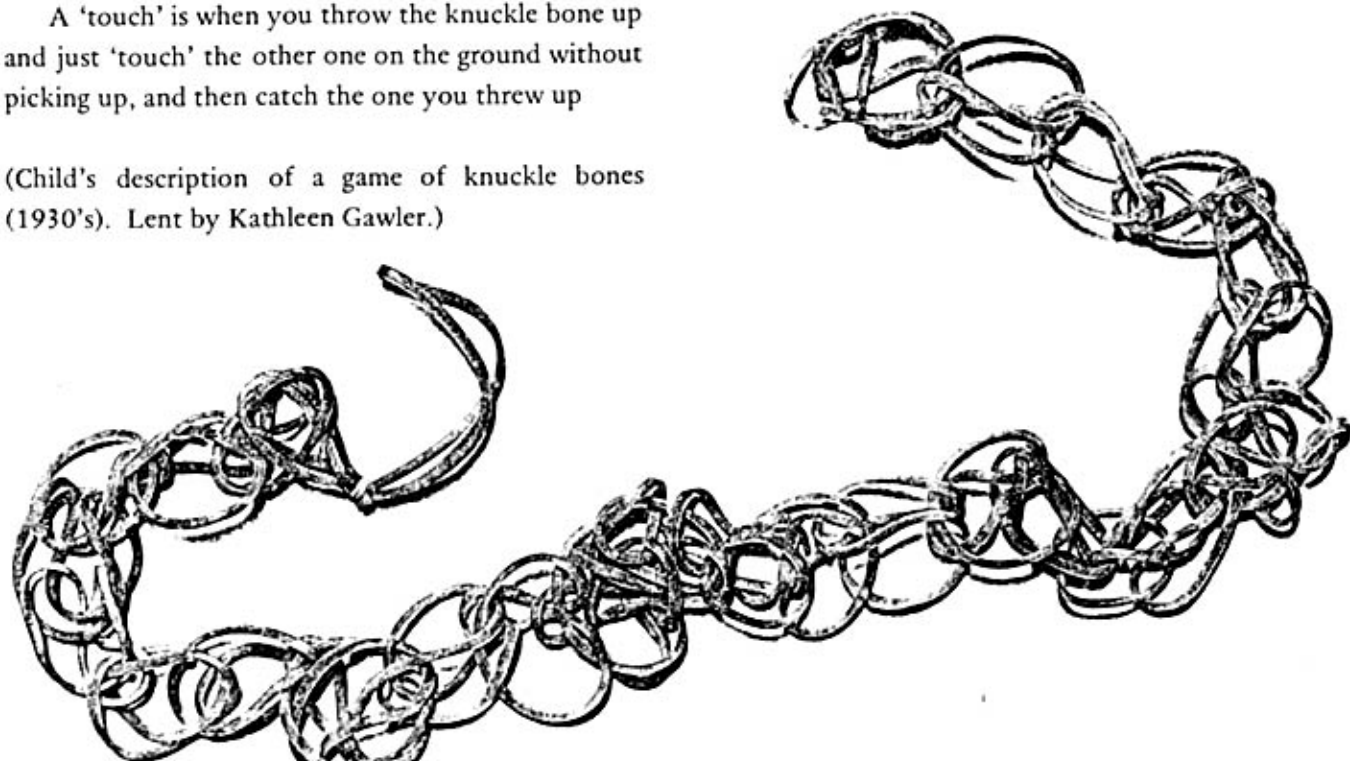
A 'touch' is when you throw the knuckle bone up and just 'touch' the other one on the ground without picking up, and then catch the one you threw up

(Child's description of a game of knuckle bones (1930's). Lent by Kathleen Gawler.)

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