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BY THOMAS HUNTER
In the early 20th century, Conde frequently advertised his used car for sale and engaged himself in automobile-related activities. Why he worked from selling and promoting autos to selling and promoting toys in 1919 is left to speculation. Conde founded the Conde Toy Shops in 1919 at 161 1st Onondaga St. in the Hotel Seymour building. Later that year, he moved his business to 436 South Warren St. Conde placed an advertisement in the Syracuse Herald newspapers, featuring Sammy Smiley, an Extractor Set type figure that became the iconic Conde Toy Shops logo for almost 40 years. Conde's long-standing tag line also appeared in the early ad: "Surprise the kiddies! Take Home a Toy!" In the 1919 ad, Conde promoted a phonograph, miniature organs, and the Keystone Moviemograph projector and films. This diminutive silent movie projection produced in Boston for home viewing, projected 35mm short-length versions of theatrical released films.

During the following year, 1920, the Conde Toy Shops advertised a Buster Brown doll, complete with its own wig. Created as a comic strip character in 1902, Buster Brown and his faithful dog, Tige, appeared in newspapers until the early 1930s. As successor of the Brown Shoe Company, the pair helped sell thousands of shoes to boys and girls, and the brand is still sold today.

In November 1925, Conde Toy Shops upgraded the store windows with toys for Christmas that had been made right at the shop. As far back as the previous February, store employees, William Parson and Fred Nason, began making handicraft toys that were more distinctive than those simply shipped to Syracuse from other manufacturing locations. Parsons and Nason took pride in creating complete sets of North American dishware with electric lights, rope swings, sandboxes, and children’s furniture. These men also made semaphore traffic signals complete with a lantern on top that allowed children to pretend that they controlled local traffic from the safety of their sidewalks.

During the Great Depression years, Conde Toy Shops managed to stay in business and sell toys, especially for Christmas gifts. Harry Conde promoted the toy store as a fairyland where children's fondest appetites for toys could be satisfied. By this time, Conde had moved his store to 480 South Salina St., where he stayed until 1936, when he moved it to 432 South Warren St.

With World War II raging in Europe, Conde Toy Shops played a vital role in assisting with war-related efforts by becoming one of two local headquarters for the charitable-relief organization known as Bundles for Britain, a division of the British War Relief Society. Founded in 1940 by Natalie Wallis Lathem of New York City, members bought hats, scarves, socks, and sweaters to send to war-torn British citizens. Within 16 months, Bundles for Britain had expanded to 975 local branches throughout the U.S. American citizens collected and shipped knitted items and used clothing. Syracuse formed its own branch that offered two types of tangible relief. Used clothing and recyclable material was collected at the Everybody’s Book Shop on East Fayette Street. New items bearing the logos of the British War Relief Society or ‘I am and shield emblem on silk kerchiefs, lapel pins, playing cards, even suet cake table covers, could be purchased at the Conde Toy Shops on South Warren Street. Money generated from these sales purchased clothing, medical equipment, and medicines for British citizens. Bundles for Britain became such a popular relief cause that by the end of World War II, the organization had shipped 51.5 million in goods and had raised another $1 million in cash.

In 1965, as World War II ended, Harry Conde retired as president of the toy store, selling his business to toy store employees Mr. and Mrs. Justin Jeffrey. After the war, Conde Toy Shops left behind war-related efforts and looked optimistically to the future of toy sales. By 1966, the store offered a broader action ten-hobby games distributed by D. Stewart Robinson in Syracuse, Store Tower Building. Also that same year, Conde Toy Shops had to secure its location at 432 South Warren St. to make way for the new WT Grant store. To accommodate the construction of the new men’s department store, Conde moved across the street to 149 South Warren St. This location would be the store’s last physical reincarnation in the 20th century.

Throughout most of the 1950s, Conde Toy Shops continued to sell a wide variety of toys. The store also

A Store that Provided Much More Than Fun

For several years prior to becoming a toy store owner, Harry L. Conde was president of the Syracuse Automobile Taxi Cab Company, reputed to be the first taxi cab company in Syracuse. Conde’s company also sold early 20th century vehicles, including the Brush and the Thomas. Conde was Syracuse’s exclusive sales agent for the Thomas automobile, made in Buffalo from 1900 to 1919.

SEEN CONDE TOY SHOP PAGE 14
CONDE TOY SHOP: Between 1919 & 1957, many Onondaga County children enjoyed playing with toys purchased at Conde Toy Shops.