Erector Sets Encyclopedia Article

Erector Sets

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Erector Sets

Sets of metal girders, nuts, bolts, gears, and electric motors that could be used to build numerous structures and vehicles, Erector sets were a popular construction toy for decades and spawned other lines of construction sets, including Legos.

A. C. Gilbert, founder of the Mysto Magic Company in 1909, which sold magic trick equipment, introduced the Erector set in 1913. Inspired by the girders he saw being installed along the New Haven railroad, he was influenced by similar toy construction sets already on the market, including the English Meccano, which was made up of strips of metal, bolts, and nuts that could be put together to build various small models. Gilbert's Erector set, however, could use gears and electric motors, a feature which made Erector a leader among construction toys.

The success of the Erector set was due to its versatility and response to new technological developments. Gilbert originally created pieces and designs for his sets which could be put together to create square girders that allowed for the construction of impressive buildings and bridges in imitation of the engineering feats of the burgeoning skyscraper architecture. In the 1920s, Erector sets could build models of trucks, Ferris wheels, and zeppelins. In the 1940s, Gilbert introduced the Parachute Jump. Gilbert and his company produced his toys until his death in 1961. In 1965 Gabriel Industries purchased the A.C. Gilbert company, but by the end of the twentieth century, Meccano S. A., who had purchased the Erector trademark around 1990, produced Meccano sets labeled with the Erector name. But the nostalgia surrounding the original Erector sets made them collectors items.

Further Reading:

Hertz, Louis H. *The Handbook of Old American Toys.* Wethersfield, Conn., Mark Haber & Co., 1947.

——. *The Toy Collector.* New York, Funk & Wagnalls, 1969.

McClintock, Inez, and Marshall McClintock. *Toys in America.* Washington, D.C., Public Affairs Press, 1961.