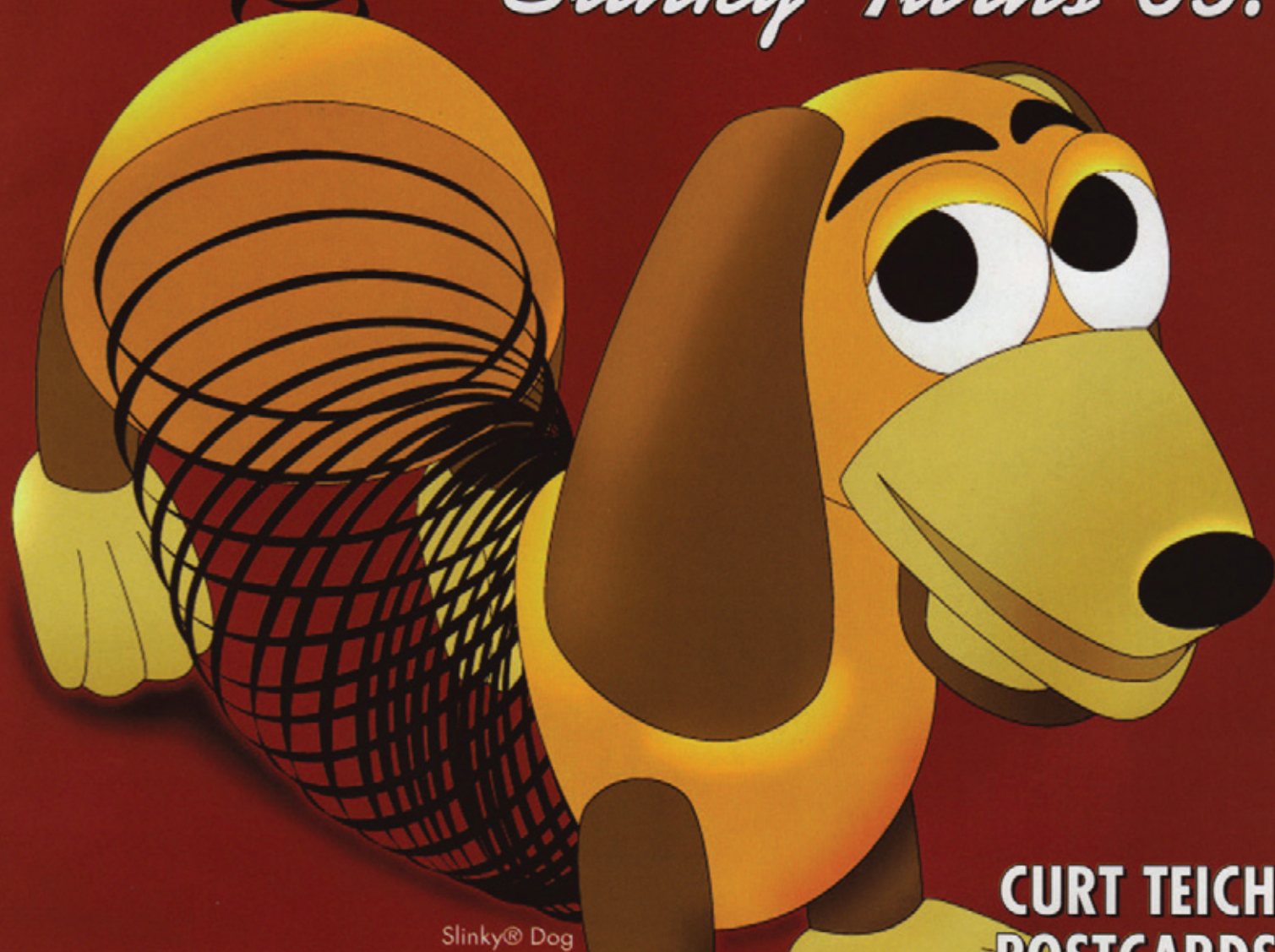


ANTIQUES

& Collecting Magazine

NOVEMBER 2009

Slinky Turns 65!



Slinky® Dog

**CURT TEICH
POSTCARDS**

OUIJA BOARDS

**RICHARD CARNEY:
TREASURE DIVER**





7729- SALT PALACE, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH.

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20

FEATURES

20 Curt Teich Postcard Archives: A Connection to the Past

By Megan Kelly

30 Happy Birthday Slinky!

By Michael W. Michelsen, Jr.

38 Richard Carney Treasure Diver

By Sherry Ballou Hanson

48 Ouija Boards Beware the Talking Board!

By Patricia A. Martinelli, M.A.



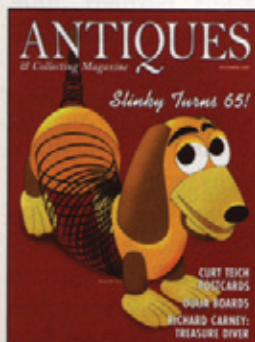
38



28



48



On the Cover:
Slinky® Dog.
Courtesy of
www.poof-slinky.com.

DEPARTMENTS

4 **The Editor's Desk**

5 **Table of Contents**

6 **Gavels 'n' Paddles**

10 **Collector's Update**

14 **Ken's Korner**

News and Views from the Collecting World
By Ken Hall

18 **The Bookshelf**

26 **Rinker on Collectibles**

Questions and Answers
By Harry L. Rinker

28 **Toy Box Treasures**

The Toys of the TV Buckaroo
By Kerra Davis

35 **Common Sense Antiques**

Hand Carved...Maybe
By Fred Taylor

36 **A Passionate Collector**

Dustin Raymond
By Michael W. Michelsen Jr.

45 **November Show Calendar**

54 **The Mart**

Miscellaneous Classified Advertisements

57 **Collector's Corner**

Automobilia
By Rosemary McKittrick

58 **Index of Advertisers**



OUIJA BOARDS

Beware the Talking Board!

By Patricia A. Martinelli M.A.

The year is 1965. My best friend and I, highly sophisticated in the way that all twelve-year-olds are, sit across from one another in the kitchen at my house. My mother is outside; between us, balanced on skinny knees, lays the yellow face of the Ouija Board that my friend had received as a birthday present from her doting parents. It is a time when many Americans are asking questions about the supernatural. We don't know that—we just want to try something new and a little bit daring. After placing our fingers on the planchette, we whisper, "Are there any spirits present?" and wait for a response. We never get an answer. At the same time that the planchette begins to move slowly across the face of the board, my eight-week-old kitten wanders in. As it reaches our feet, the kitten's back arches, its claws shoot out and it lets out a blood-curdling howl. With a scream, my friend and I both jump back and the Ouija Board falls to the floor. We look at one another, wide-eyed, then she wordlessly picks up the board and walks out. We never played with the Ouija Board again.

IN THE LATE 19th century, an interest in spiritualism was strong in both the United States and Europe as people wondered what happened to those who had died. Was there an afterlife? Could those who had crossed over describe what it was like to the living? Some photographers claimed to be able to take pictures of ghosts while famed American in-





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2

"OUIJA" Talking Board



Small size Board, 12 1/2 x 18 1/2 inches, packed
1 dozen and 3 dozen to case.
Large size Board, 15 x 22 inches, packed 1
dozen and 3 dozen to case.

The "OUIJA" is without doubt the most interesting, remarkable and mysterious production of the 19th century. Its operations are always interesting and frequently invaluable, answering, as it does, questions concerning the past, present and future, with marvelous accuracy. It furnishes never-fading amusement and recreation for all classes, while for the scientific or thoughtful its mysterious movements invite the most careful research and investigation—apparently forming the link which unites the known with the unknown, the material with the immaterial.

DIRECTIONS. Place the board upon the lap of two persons, lady and gentleman preferred, with the small table upon the board. Place the fingers tightly but firmly, without pressure, upon the table so as to move easily and freely. In from 1 to 5 minutes the table will commence to move, at first slowly, then faster, and will then be able to talk and answer questions, which it will do rapidly by touching the printed words or letters necessary to form words and sentences with the forefinger or pointer. Answers, etc., may also be readily observed through the glass opening.

This most interesting and mysterious Talking Board has awakened great curiosity wherever shown. It surpasses in its results second sight, mind reading or clairvoyance. Wonderful as this may seem, the "Ouija" was thoroughly tested and the above facts demonstrated at the United States Patent Office before the patent was allowed.

An amusing diversion for winter evenings.

3

OPPOSITE PAGE, top: Kennard Novelty Company Ouija Board, 220 South Charles Street, circa 1890-1891. Bottom: Ouija/Kennard Novelty Company Ouija Planchette, 220 South Charles Street, circa 1891-1892. Photos taken by Robert Murch. THIS PAGE: Elijah Jefferson Bond, circa 1880; William Fuld 1920s Trade Catalog. BELOW: William Fuld Ouija Display Circa 1919. Photos generously donated by the Fuld family.

ventor Thomas Edison declared that he was going to invent a machine to talk with those who had passed to the "other side." Mediums, not always honest, offered their services to anyone who wanted to communicate with the dead.

In the 1880s, some curiosity seekers used homemade "talking boards" to divine answers from friendly spirits. These boards were popular primarily because no special skills or occult powers were required to make them work. A form of

grammatomancy—fortune-telling through the use of letters—you simply placed your fingers on a triangular-shaped pointer which was later called the planchette, and watched as it traveled the board, spelling out answers to your spoken questions.

On February 10, 1891, Elijah Jefferson Bond of Baltimore, Maryland, patented his version of the talking board and promptly sold it to Charles Kennard and William H. A. Maupin. They, in turn, brought in Col. Washington Bowie, Harry

*To this day, no one is sure
how the unusual name
originated; it was officially
pronounced "weej-a" but was
often referred to as the
"wee-gee" board.*





Although the terms "Ouija" and "talking board" are often used interchangeably, Ouija was actually the trademark name given to the Fuld/Parker Brothers version.

ABOVE: William Fuld Dark Ouija Board. Harford, Lamont, and Federal Street, circa 1920-1930s.
BELOW: William Fuld. Photos generously donated by the Fuld family.

Welles Rusk and John Green to form the Kennard Novelty Company. They christened their new "invention" the "Ouija Board" and trademarked the name. To this day, no one is sure how the unusual name originated; it was officially pronounced "weej-a" but was often referred to as the "wee-gee" board. The yellow pressed wood

surface was inscribed with two rows of black letters, beginning with "A" in the upper left corner and finishing with "Z" in the lower right. The board also showed a row of numbers from one to zero, and some celestial designs as well as the words "yes," "no," and "goodbye." The following year, Bowie and Rusk bumped out the other founders. They reorganized the company and put former Kennard employee William Fuld in charge. Although Fuld said he was no spiritualist, he did admit that he had consulted the board once before building his three-story factory in 1917.

After Parker Brothers bought the rights to the Ouija Board from Fuld's children in 1966, the company moved its factory to Salem, Massachusetts, the home of America's most notorious witch trials in the 17th century. While company officials stated that there was no supernatural motive for the move, it seemed like an appropriate home for the Ouija Board maker.

Although the terms "Ouija" and "talking board" are often used interchangeably, Ouija was actually the trademark name given to the Fuld/Parker Brothers version. Other manufacturers, who produced their own version of the talking board, included Lee Industries, the Haskelite Manufacturing Corporation, the St. Louis Plywood Company and Drueke Games. Drueke's first board, called the "Mystic Soothsayer," was manufactured in 1944 but the company soon discontinued pro-

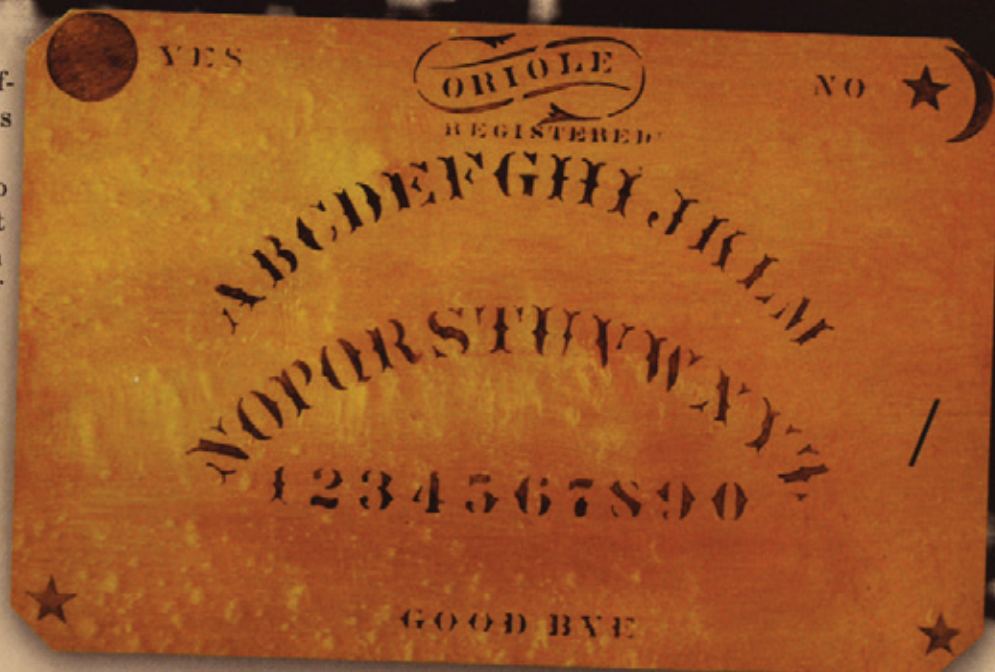


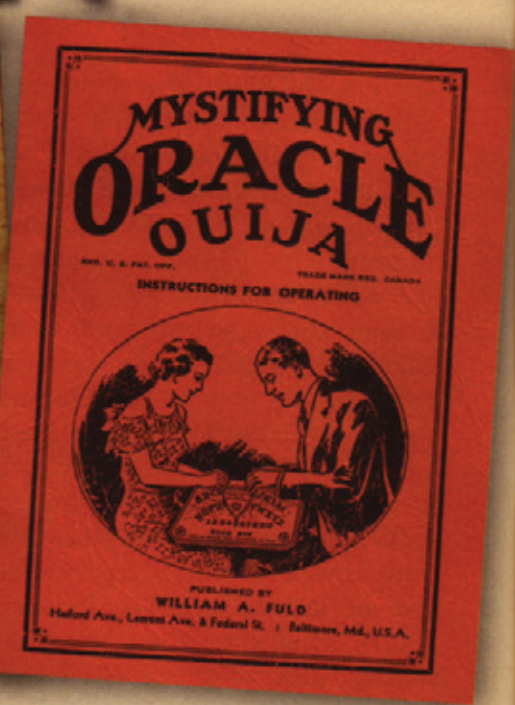
duction. In 2001, the company offered a limited run of the game as part of a Halloween promotion.

What would prompt someone to collect talking boards? In Robert Murch's case, it was an interest in the occult combined with a love of history that sparked what would become a life-long passion. Employed by day as an administrative assistant at Citizen's Bank in Boston, Massachusetts, Murch spends his free time researching, lecturing and sharing thoughts with anyone interested in the subject of talking boards. He currently owns more than 300 sets dating back to the early homemade boards that he displays throughout his home, and occasionally loans out for exhibits. He also maintains a database of books, music and movies that utilize talking boards in their stories, such as Alexandra Sokoloff's eerie tale titled *The Harrowing*.

Murch is happy to travel any distance in pursuit of a new addition to his collection. According to his web site, www.williamfuld.com, Murch has worked as a consultant for DreamWorks Studios on the movie "What Lies Beneath," and A&E's "Paranormal State." He has discussed Ouija Boards on the Travel Channel, MTV, the BBC, and American radio. Murch is currently working with Eugene Orlando, who runs the virtual museum, www.museumoftalkingboards.com, on a definitive history of the Ouija Board. He also serves as consultant to Baltimore city officials to preserve its talking board legacy and assist them in documenting Fuld's life, since the man-

TOP TO BOTTOM: Kennard/Ouija Novelty Company Ouija Board, 909 East Pratt Street, circa 1891-1893. Espirito Talking Board. Ouija Novelty Company, circa 1892-1893; William Fuld Mystifying Oracle on Square Masonite, 2511 North Charles Street and Warwick Avenue, circa 1950s. Photos courtesy of Robert Murch.





William Fuld's Oracle Board. 1208 Federal Street and 1226-1228-1306 North Central Avenue, circa 1915-1920. INSET: William Fuld's Mystifying Oracle Diamond Planchette. Harford, Lamont, and Federal Street, circa 1920s. Photos taken by Robert Murch; Mystifying Oracle Ouija Booklet, 1936 by William Andrew Fuld Cover. Photo generously donated by the Fuld family. BELOW: William Fuld's Mystifying Oracle Back of Board, Harford, Lamont, and Federal Street, circa 1920's. Photos courtesy of Robert Murch.

ufacturer was a Baltimore native. The Boston resident has spent the past fifteen years trying to unravel the history of the talking boards, and preserve not just the records but the manufacturing sites where they were produced. In 2009, he worked to have one of Fuld's Ouija factories designated a Baltimore City landmark. He said: "It always struck me as funny that I never met someone who didn't know what a Ouija Board was but no one could tell me the truth about what it was or where it came from."

To Murch, the Ouija Board—in its vari-

ous forms—is an integral part of American culture that reflects societal changes over more than the past 100 years. Murch noted: "It's the only 'toy' that's been sold in stores for more than a century. At the same time that it reflects the changes in society, what it's used for will never change."

For many people even today, he noted, it's their first experience with the occult, which makes it a piece of pop culture.

"You could think of it as the first wireless device and the first form of text messaging," Murch said, with a laugh.



For many people even today, he noted, it's their first experience with the occult, which makes it a piece of pop culture.

In addition to the boards themselves, Murch collects related items such as Ouija jewelry and books, as well as anything related to the life of William Fuld, who he considers a marketing genius. After he contacted Fuld's descendants during the course of his research, they were so impressed by his dedication that he soon became their official family historian. Murch grew so close to the family that he and Kathy Fuld, one of William Fuld's granddaughters, trademarked their own talking board in 1999. Called "Cryptique," it is marketed as "A Spirit Board from Salem, Massachusetts."

Ironically enough, Murch admitted that he has never really sat down to play with a talking board. He explained: "I try to stay objective because opinions are usually very strong on the side of those of believe and those who don't. I'm more interested in hearing other's stories about their experiences."

In the 1890s, the cost of a talking board usually ranged from \$1 to \$1.50. While that was a substantial sum at the time, many people saw it as a long-term investment in something that they would use for years. Today, like any collectible, the price of a board is determined by how rare it is and its condition. While some early boards were handcrafted out of solid wood with

the letters and illustrations carved into the surface, some companies mass-produced their's from pressed wood and finished them with applied lithographs.

Although they might not appear different to the casual observer, collectors are quick to point out the elaborate details and elegant calligraphy that grace some of the boards. While the most Murch has paid is \$1,500 for a 1933 Electric Mystifying Oracle board, he has seen them sell for as much as \$5,000. According to the Museum of Talking Boards web site, the Haskelite "Egyptian" Mystic Board, and the J.M. Simmons "swastika" Ouija often sell in the \$100 to \$250-plus range or more, especially if they are complete with the matching planchette and box. The wood-bordered Hasko Mystic Boards and their cheaper plywood cousins sell in the \$25 to \$85 neighborhood, while boards like the Swami, Rajah, and Magic Marvel can usually be purchased for anywhere from \$35 to \$75.

Over the years, Ouija Boards have been used by people with a legitimate interest in the unknown and those who scammed the unsuspecting out of large sums of money allegedly based on a spirit's advice. For collectors who enjoy something just a little bit different, they definitely spell out the words "good investment." ■



Cryptique A Spirit Board From Salem, Massachusetts. Courtesy of Robert Murch.

