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Jacob’s Ladder

Although Jacob’s Ladder is sometimes called a “Sabbath” toy or a toy that could be played with only on Sunday but no primary source documentation could be found to substantiate the statement.

There was a reference to “Sabbath toys” in the October 4, 1888, issue of the *Christian Union* but the quote was:

“ There should be careful distinction between week-day toys and Sunday toys. . . .
The Sunday toys should be the *best* toys. They should be toys that are the most highly prized and the rarity of their use will enhance their value even when they are themselves no nicer.”

In the collection of the Winterthur Museum there is a Jacob’s ladder that was made in the late eighteenth century. This version has paper figures pasted on the tumbling blocks.

In the August 17, 1844, issue of *The New Mirror* in an article titled, “A Nearer View of Some of the Shops.” Jacob’s ladders were described as “flapping down one over another their tintinnabulary shutters.”

Charles Dickens wrote about a Jacob’s Ladder in his short story, “A Christmas Tree,” which was published in *Household Words* in 1850. He described Jacob’s Ladder as, “ made of little squares of red wood, that went flapping and clattering over one another, each developing a different picture, and the whole enlivened by small bells, was a mighty marvel and a great delight.” Unfortunately, there was no picture, but Dickens’ narrative is very descriptive.

The Jacob’s Ladder that we carry is a simpler version of the one Dickens described, not having pictures or bells on it. Nonetheless, it is a toy that continues to fascinate people.