



Carousel History

COME RIDE

With Us!

Operated and maintained by volunteer
members of

**Perkasie Anniversary &
Historical Society**

MENLO PARK
3rd Street & Park Avenue
PERKASIE, PA

THE ORIGINAL CAROUSEL

In 1891, Samuel R. Kramer, Grier Scheetz, and Isaac Groff organized the Menlo Park Association. The association purchased five acres of land at Fifth Street and Park Avenue and leased water rights on the stream from there to the Sellersville dam.

A carousel with hand-carved wooden horses was purchased in November of 1891 to be delivered in May of 1892. The purchase price was \$5,500. The manufacturer is unknown.

In 1892, 1893, and 1894 the carousel operated under its canvas canopy from Decoration Day to Labor Day and then was dismantled and stored away for the winter.

On September 18-19, 1893, the carousel was taken apart and loaded onto two freight cars at the railroad siding at Park Avenue and shipped to Allentown, where it would run during the time of the Allentown Fair. On October 2 and 3, 1893, the carousel was returned to the railroad siding, removed from the freight cars to Menlo, and stored away for the winter.

In 1895 an open-sided building with a dirt floor was erected to house the carousel. In 1896 shutters and a wooden floor were added. That original building still stands today, although it has undergone many minor renovations, and ultimately the major renovations of 1995-1996.

Abandoned pipes beneath the floor suggest that the carousel was at one time powered by steam. It is believed that a single steam plant supplied steam to power both the carousel and the former toboggan ride nearby.

The toboggan cars were stored and repaired in a shed attached to the back of the present carousel building, accounting for the unusual construction of the back wall.

The park became the property of Henry S. Wilson in 1926, but the original carousel continued to operate until 1951, when it was replaced by the current machine. The original machine is believed to have been sold off piecemeal. None of the original animals have been positively located and identified.

The entire park including the carousel was purchased by the Borough of Perkasio in 1955. The purchase was approved by the voters in a general referendum by a vote of 5 to 1. The purchase price was \$115,000, and of this Maurice Neinkin, Perkasio clothing manufacturer, donated \$25,000 "to enable the children of Perkasio to have cheap



Thelma Baringer design

swimming. "The borough continued to operate the rides until the early 1960s after which the Whip, Dodgem, and kiddie rides were sold. The roller rink, bowling alley, and original bath house were subsequently demolished, leaving the carousel as the only remnant of days gone by.

THE PRESENT CAROUSEL

Park owner, Henry S. Wilson, purchased the present carousel new from the Allan Herschell Company of North Tonawanda, NY in April 1951. However, it is actually a Spillman Engineering design. The carousel is of a portable design, and can be dismantled and moved in a single day. It is 40 feet in diameter across the outer trim and carries 36 cast aluminum horses and two wooden chariots.

All horses on the carousel are "jumpers". Their original factory paint scheme was much plainer than the present scheme, and was well-suited to a portable machine. In spite of the unique and colorful finishes, there are only four distinct horse bodies. Twelve identical small horses occupy the inside circle. Twelve medium sized animals occupy the middle circle. Six each of two different styles of large horses prance around the outer circle.

The carousel is equipped with a 7-1/2-horsepower three-phase 240-volt electric motor connected to a gearbox through a fluid coupling and a set of v-belts. The motor and fluid drive were supplied by Link-Belt of Lansdale. At full speed, the drive can turn the carousel at a speed of approximately 5-1/2 revolutions per minute which results in the outer horses moving at about 7-1/2 miles per hour at full speed. In practice, it usually operates at about 85% of full speed.

Just in time for the 2013 season, an electronic frequency drive was installed to provide for computer-controlled soft starting and stopping and also allow adjustment of the carousel's top speed to reduce strain on the gear train. In 2017 a pushbutton control panel and a pair of emergency stop buttons were added for safety and ease of operation. Design and labor for this system were generously provided by Schoeller's Electric.

The carousel has over 75 bearings and 15 gears, all of which require regular lubrication. The largest gear is about 9 feet in diameter and is made of 7 segments bolted together. The most inaccessible bearing is at the top of the center pole, 17 feet above the floor. It supports most of the moving weight of the carousel by means of 28 truss rods. The canopy is supported by a 3" gin pole which extends another 8' above the top bearing.

The Allan Herschell Company is now a part of Chance Rides, Inc. of Wichita, KS, which continues to manufacture carousels and replacement parts. The original horse designs are still being used, but are now rendered in fiberglass. Fiberglass reproductions of authentic hand-carved horses are also available.

MUSIC

The music used on the original carousel was supplied by a band organ playing punched cards, fan-folded to resemble a book, rather than the punched paper rolls used by the current one. The organ drew power from the same steam source as the carousel itself.

The present carousel was originally supplied with a music cabinet containing three speakers, an amplifier, and a 78 rpm record player. Twelve records were included in the original purchase, but the titles are unknown. A cassette tape player was eventually substituted for the record player by the Historical Society. Additional speakers, a new amplifier, a new cassette player, and a microphone for announcements were added in 1986.

Tapes continued to be used until 1996 when a new custom-made model 1060 band organ was purchased from the Stinson Company of Bellefontaine, OH.

The organ plays Wurlitzer-150-style punched paper music rolls. It has a bass drum, snare drum, cymbal, and 16 steel bells, as well as bass, flute, and violin pipes. A custom canopy and clear side curtains protect the organ from water damage in the event of sprinkler operation. In 2007 the band organ was equipped with a digital MIDI interface and a pocket-sized computer to play digital MIDI files in addition to the original paper rolls.

OPERATIONS

The Perkasio Historical Society took over operation of the carousel under a \$1 per year lease agreement executed in 1968. The carousel and building underwent a thorough cleaning, refurbishing, and roof replacement in 1969. Then in 1970 the Historical Society resumed operation of the carousel on special days throughout the summer, charging 15¢ apiece or 7 rides for \$1. Over the next 50 years, the ticket price was gradually raised to the current 50¢. For the first 9 years, average annual ridership was slightly over 4,000. Since then the regular schedule has expanded to nine days per year with a total of 46 hours of operation. Current annual ridership is approximately 15,000.

ADDITIONS, REPAIRS & RENOVATIONS

In 1983, the ring arm machine was found under the porch of Henry Wilson's former home on the park grounds. It was covered with rust, but was still functional. It was painstakingly cleaned and refinished by Historical Society member, Mark Frederick, who also fabricated a brass ring for it. A quantity of the original steel rings has been found around the property where they were used for a variety of purposes

During the 1989 season, riders began to experience a bucking sensation due to increasing unevenness in the motion of the horses. This was traced to two broken projections on the center gear casting that were supposed to secure the gear to the center hub. Temporary repairs held the broken pieces in place until a new gear could be installed at the end of the season. In order to slide the 200 lb. gear over the top of the pole, a crew from Universal Millwright of Perkasio had to remove all of the horses and the decking and prop up the 14 wooden sweep arms with timbers so the top support bearing could be removed.

The following spring a bent crankshaft and a crankshaft gear with a missing tooth were also replaced. A bent bearing support on the same crankshaft had been replaced several years earlier. It was surmised that all of the defective components had been damaged in a single catastrophic impact at some unknown earlier time. However, it was not until the 1995-96 refurbishing project that the probable nature of the accident was revealed. A bent horsepipe provided the confirming evidence that one horse had shifted out of position and collided violently with one next to it, thus jamming the mechanism.

In 1991, a major overhaul of the building exterior was undertaken. The original wooden tongue & groove siding was covered with vinyl siding of a similar design. The window sills were replaced and the columns were sheathed in aluminum. Aluminum soffits were added and new aluminum-sheathed plywood shutters were installed. Finally, a full-size entrance was installed in the rear of the building, replacing a small trapdoor previously used.

Just one year short of the building's centennial, heavy snows in early 1994 put the finishing touches on the deteriorating roof structure. A shoulder beam cracked and the building was declared unfit for occupancy. Temporary scaffolding was erected to support the sagging roof and braces were placed against the outside of the bowed walls. Two seasons would pass before the carousel would run again. There was considerable debate over the feasibility of preserving the building. It had been deteriorating over nearly a 100-year period and much more than the roof structure needed repair. Ultimately a plan was developed to salvage and renovate it at a cost of about \$300,000. First, reinforced concrete foundations had to be placed under each of the 20 support columns in the outer wall and reinforcing steel channels were bolted along the tops of the walls. Next the walls were pulled back into alignment with jacks and winches. When the walls would not move far enough, they were left to settle overnight and could usually be moved farther in the morning. The roof was raised into position and supported on steel scaffolding while four new custom-designed wooden trusses were assembled and installed. About 1/3 of the wooden floor was removed and replaced and the roof was over-sheathed and re-shingled.

All interior and exterior wiring and electrical fixtures were replaced and overhead lighting was added. A year-round sprinkler system was added for fire protection. A remote alarm system for fire and intrusion detection was installed. A new kitchen and food service area with preparation and service counters, cupboards, and hot and cold running water was constructed and a new larger hot dog machine was purchased. A heated utility room was constructed to house the electrical, plumbing and protection systems and provide storage space.

To facilitate the building renovations, the carousel, except for the center pole, motor, and gearbox, was dismantled and removed to storage facilities across town. The horses were repainted and meticulously detailed by various local artists. All horses were uniquely painted, and no attempt was made to reproduce the much plainer factory paint scheme. The rest of the components were completely cleaned and repainted in the original factory paint scheme by a dedicated team of volunteers. The lighting fixtures (all 84 of them) were re-painted and re-wired. The horse pipes were re-plated and the platform support rods were cleaned and polished. When the building was ready, the carousel was trucked back to its home and reassembled over a period of about two weeks. When the moment finally came to turn on the power and test the newly assembled mechanism, it was found that a wiring error caused it to run backwards. This is the only time in the carousel's history that it is known to have turned clockwise. When the horses were put back in place, new cast aluminum stirrups were added for improved safety. A new electrical slip ring assembly was installed to replace the original wooden device that carries power to the moving parts of the machine.



Thelma Baringer design

Finally a new green and yellow canopy replaced the original canvas that had succumbed to dry rot.

Planning and fundraising for the renovations were handled by the Menlo Carousel Preservation Committee, an ad hoc group of local business owners and community leaders.

The refurbished carousel made its official debut at a reception for the volunteers on May 11, 1996, and resumed its regular schedule the following day, with free rides for mothers on Mother's Day.

Over the years, several additional gear failures have occurred. Both the pinion gear, segments of the nine-foot ring gear, and wooden sweep arms have been damaged at various times. Components have been either repaired or replaced as necessary, and the cast iron pinion gear has been replaced by a steel gear. Invaluable assistance has been provided over the years by Draper Cabinet works, V&M Tool Co., Wimmer Machine Co. and Universal Millwright.

Over the years, multiple gear failures occurred when starting the machine. It was decided at the end of 2012 season that some changes to the drivetrain were needed to reduce the stress on the gears at startup – the point at which all the failures occurred. This led to the installation of the variable frequency drive mentioned above. Due to multiple controller failures in in 2018, the original frequency drive was replaced the following year.

In 2018 the entire sprinkler system was replaced due to deterioration of the piping. Later that year, a short section of pipe froze and burst, partially flooding the building.

TIMELINE

- 1891 - Menlo Park Association formed.
- 1892 - Original carousel installed.
- 1895 - Building erected.
- 1926 - Henry S. Wilson became sole owner.
- 1951 - Present carousel replaced original.
- 1955 - Borough of Perkasio purchased Menlo Park.
- 1968 - Perkasio Historical Society leased carousel.
- 1969 - Initial Renovation and roof replacement.
- 1970 - Carousel reopened by Historical Society.
- 1981 - T-Shirts and Buttons first sold.
- 1981 - Broken drive pinion replaced.
- 1983 - Running water installed (cold only).
- 1983 - Wooden fence installed around carousel.
- 1983 - Souvenir caps first sold.
- 1983 - Ring arm found and refurbished.
- 1985 - 100,000th ticket sold - July 28.
- 1986 - Telephone installed.
- 1988 - New leather reins installed.
- 1989 - Center gear replaced.
- 1990 - Crankshaft and pinion gear replaced.
- 1991 - New shutters, soffits, & vinyl siding.
- 1992 - 200,000th ticket sold - July 5.
- 1994 - Roof beam broken by snow load.
- 1994-1995 - Carousel building closed for repairs.
- 1995-1996 - Carousel refurbished.
- 1996 - Major building renovations completed.
- 1998 - Stinson Band Organ acquired
- 1997 - 250,000th ticket sold - October 5.
- 1999 - Gears and sweep arms broken.
- 2000 - Gear and sweep arm replacement completed.
- 2001 - Pinion & gear sections broken & repaired.
- 2003 - Plywood grease shield added to ring gear.
- 2004 - Hand-carved horse donated by P. Jamann.
- 2004 - Refurbished outdoor sign and post installed.
- 2007 - Cast iron pinion gear replaced with steel.
- 2007 - Band organ equipped for digital operation.
- 2009 - Colored sleeves installed on fluorescent lights.
- 2011 - Ring gear section broken on last run of year.
- 2012 - Clown figure added to display height limit.
- 2012 - Two Ring gear sections broken and replaced.
- 2013 - Electronic frequency drive installed on motor.
- 2013 - Concrete carousel horse donated for display
- 2018 - Original sprinkler system replaced
- 2018 - Building partially flooded by frozen pipe
- 2019 - Electronic frequency drive replaced

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Website Information



<http://www.perkasiecarousel.org>
<https://perkasiehistory.org/Carousel.html>

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