

Carousels

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The first Merry—Go—Round, or carousel was made in France in the late 1700s. The idea came from a game that was played in Arabia. Men would ride their horses in a circle and toss a ball to each other. The Europeans saw this game during the crusades and took it back with them. In the 1600's, the game was changed so that men carrying spears tried to catch a ring hanging from a pole by a ribbon. The pole was turned so that the rings swing out

The first carousel was really a tool to teach princes to play this game. There were two wooden horses on the *same* pole. When this pole was moved, the princes tried to catch the ring.

This idea caught on. The first carousels were turned by horses or mules. Some were turned by people. In the 1800's, pedals were put on the horses. You had to ride the horse like a bicycle! The Steam engine allowed the carousels to become larger and larger. They also allowed the owners to add music. The organ ran off the steam tool. Nowadays, most of them run on electricity.

The animals on carousels have changed. They were once hand carved with very intricate details. The painting of these animals was very beautiful. Although most of the carousel animals are horses, there are other animals also. Swan boats are used for people who don't want to ride on a horse. Circus animals were also very popular. In the US, there were different companies whose animals had distinct styles. Solomon Stein and Harry Goldstein (Brooklyn) carved their animals to look like knight's horses from the Middle Ages. Charles Loeffler (New York) had very gentle looking animals that had real hair on their tails. Now, the animals are mass produced.

At one time, there were over 2000 carousels in the US. People eventually grew tired of carousels and they found other things to do on their holidays. Most of the carousel parks in the country closed down. There has been a renewed interest in carousels in the past 30 twenty years or so. People in Spokane Washington restored an old Loeffler carousel by selling "Save our Carousel buttons. It has been restored, complete with the original pipe organ. Currently, there are 120 carousels left.

The largest carousel in the US is the "Columbia" at Marriott's Great American in Santa Clara, CA. It stands 100 feet high and is a double Decker. It can carry 115 passengers at once. There are 61 jumping horses, 6 standing horses, one each camel, giraffe, tiger, dragon, deer, and seahorse, two pigs, 2 ostriches, 2 cats, and 2 rabbits. It also has 2 chariots. This carousel cost \$1.8 million to build.

Collecting carousel art has a past time for many people. The highest price ever paid for a piece of carousel art was \$35,200 for a large tiger by Looff. It is 47 inches high and 89 inches long. It has a snarling expression and wears jeweled straps. He is exhibited at the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art in Florida.

The longest ride on a Merry—go—round ride was set on Aug.20—Sept 2, 1976. Three people rode on one for 312 hours and 43 minutes in Portland Oregon;

Bibliography

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