

Small Categories Series

Carousels

There were carousels before, but when the power of steam was applied to carousels, the elaborate machines we think of became possible. Gustav Dentzel was the man who pioneered the modern carousel in America ... in the 1860's. Many talented men followed his lead and their creations became the centerpiece of hundreds of amusement parks that sprung up in the cities and resorts of the United States.

None of the old carousels of Europe could match the product of this group of American craftsmen. Ingenious men all, they set their own precedents. Their carousels were bigger and more elaborately housed. Their animals and chariots were more beautifully carved and in a richer variety of styles. There were war horses, parade horses, Indian ponies, and horses straight out of a child's dream. There were animals of the jungle, the plains, the farm and the forest. There were even dogs, cats, teddy bears, and mythical beasts. Any creature remotely rideable could be found on carousels.

The golden age of the American carousel lasted until the Great Depression of the 1930's. With the decline of amusement parks and the economy in general, used carousels satisfied the small market. The few remaining companies closed or moved on to other products. Many carousels were abandoned or destroyed.

As the economy improved, so did the technology for producing carousels. No longer would the labor-intensive carving be done. Now, cast aluminum and later fiberglass would produce the animals. Technology also was creating larger and more exciting amusement rides. The carousel was no longer the centerpiece, but now a "children's ride". [<http://www.carouselmuseum.com/index.html>]

