

Brother-in-Law of Charles I. D. Looff, Dolle Left His Mark on Many Carousels

Mr. Frederick Dolle: A Look at a “Carousel King” in his Heyday



Silver Beach Carousel rounding board. Ray Simmons, Charles Looff's great-grandson, donated the unrestored rounding board to the Silver Beach Carousel Society for their museum, where it is now displayed. Photograph provided by Ray Simmons

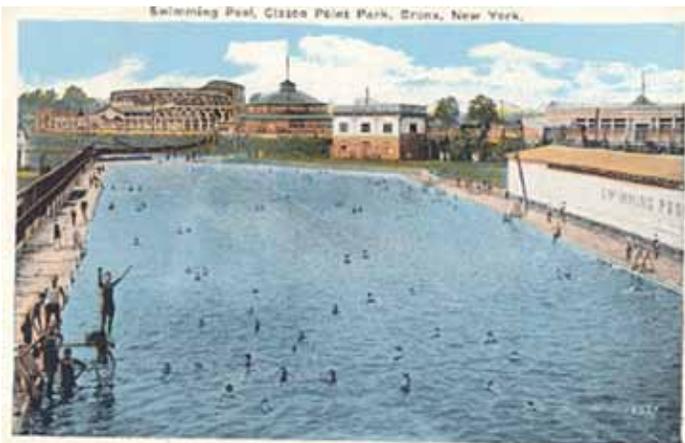
By William Benjamin, Ph.D.,
and Barbara Williams

Special to *The Carousel News & Trader*

Each reader, for a different reason, may know the name Frederick Dolle. Some may know of him as the brother-in-law of Charles Looff, others as the manufacturer of a specific park carousel. The most extensive description of him in carousel history books, a total of eight lines, can be found in Frederick Fried's "Pictorial History of the Carousel". During the course of researching turn-of-the-century newspaper archives for information about Henry Kolb's carousel at Sulzer's Park, (see our previous article in *The Carousel News and Trader*, June 2009), we occasionally came upon mention of Frederick Dolle and felt that there must be much more to his role in the early carousel trade than generally appreciated. This, indeed, proved to be the case.



View of the lion on the carousel at Luna Park, Sydney, Australia.
Photo courtesy of Bonhams and Butterfields.



Postcard highlighting the salt water swimming pool at Clason Point.

Tracing Dolle's Carousel Manufacturing History

It hasn't been possible to determine how, or precisely when, Frederick Dolle became involved in amusement parks and the manufacture of carousels. It is interesting to speculate that his brother-in-law Charles Loeff was an influence. However, we have found no evidence of professional connections between Dolle and Loeff. The earliest mention of Dolle in relation to an amusement business was found in the July 3, 1906 edition of *The New York Times* in an article entitled "Little Coney" A Nuisance" "Vice Chancellor Pitney plainly expressed the opinion in Jersey City yesterday afternoon that the pleasure resort known as "Little Coney Island" ought to be closed not only Sundays but weekdays, as a nuisance." Dolle operated a merry-go-round and a saloon business there.

A number of "For Sale" advertisements by Dolle, representing a series of ventures, in issues of New York's *The Evening Telegram* between 1907 and 1910 illustrate the extent of his evolving business and include the sale of a thirty-two foot stationary carousel, a small Ferris wheel, a skating rink track with an organ and three hundred pairs of Union Hardware skates. Dolle also advertised a Razzle Dazzle, a Gee Whizz, direct current motors, various gas and steam engines, a Frati orchestrion and organs for skating rinks and amusement parlors. In these advertisements, Dolle's businesses were referred to as F. Dolle's Carrousel Works (1907), Dolle's Carousel Works (1909), Dolle's Carrouseles (1910).

Dolle's role in the manufacture of carousels is best detailed in a letter from M.D. Borrelli to Frederick Fried, dated May 23, 1963 (the Borrelli letter) that was obtained from the Frederick and Mary Fried Folk Art Archives, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian. Borrelli, who subsequently became a business partner with Dolle, relates that he immigrated to the United States in 1907 at the age of 13 and became a "ring boy" for Dolle at his carousel at Little Coney Island. Shortly thereafter,



Dolle band organ façade of a 46-key Gavioli organ. The top cornice piece of the lionfish man is not original to the organ. Photograph courtesy of the Montana Heritage Commission, Virginia City and Nevada City Collections, Virginia City, Montana.

he became involved in the manufacture of carousels with Dolle and indicates that they would build three to four carousels per year during the winters when the parks were closed. "We manufactured everything on the construction of the Carousel except the Horses, they were carved by a man named Charles Carmel..." wrote Borrelli. (Previously, Borrelli has been most known for installing profusions of jewels on certain carousels.)

Dolle even placed his name on the facades for band organs as seen in the photograph of a late 19th or early 20th century organ manufactured by Gavioli et Cie, Paris, that used an early version of the cardboard-played key frame system. Charles Bovey purchased this organ in the 1950's from the B.A.B. Organ Company shop, located in Brooklyn. The site at which this organ was originally placed is not known.



Close up view of the man identified as Vincent Borrelli from the Park Island carousel.

Frederick Dolle's Family History

Frederick Dolle (1858-1912) came from a family with six children. His father Henry, a shoemaker, was born in Hanover, Germany and his mother Anna (nee Schneider) was born in Baden, Germany. His oldest sister Anna married Charles Loeff in 1874. His other siblings were Henry, Rudolph, Lena and Emma. U.S. census records from 1880, 1900 and 1910 show Frederick's occupations to be a "cigar marker," "retired," and "proprietor carousels," respectively. Frederick married Elizabeth (Lizzie was used in census records) in 1885. Frederick and Elizabeth had no children.

Dolle Carousels and Amusement Parks

We have been able to identify six parks that were either owned by Dolle or had carousels owned by him. Each of these parks is described in chronological order of the placement of the carousels (provided in heading parentheses), to our best determination.



Post card of the Dolle carousel at Clason Point. Postmarked 1913. Barbara Williams collection

Little Coney Island/Dolle's Pleasure Grounds, North Bergen, New Jersey (circa 1906)

As previously mentioned, there were problems at Dolle's Little Coney that led to the filing of an injunction in 1906. The newspaper coverage is the first evidence we have found concerning his involvement in a carousel or amusement business. This site appears to have had a history of "ill repute". In *The New York Times*, June 24, 1906, the headline read, "North Bergen Resorts will be Raided Today" A 2:00 PM raid was scheduled for the "Little Coney Island" section of North Bergen, New Jersey. The main issues were the sale of intoxicating liquors to young girls and boys on Sundays and weekdays; minors being admitted to indecent moving picture shows on Sundays and improper dances being held on Sundays.

Despite the "non-family oriented" activities that took place at the park, Dolle continued to manage Little Coney Island. An advertisement in the April 24, 1908 issue of *The New York Clipper* states, "The Dolle Brothers of Union Hill will manage Little Coney Island this Summer. Four additional acres have been purchased to enlarge the grounds." It isn't known if one or both of Frederick Dolle's brothers were involved in managing the park with him although both were found to be involved in the amusement business. Rudolph Dolle owned and managed a carousel in Ocean City,

Maryland beginning in about 1910. According to Rudolph Dolle, Jr. in a letter to Fred Fried dated March 17, 1987, (Frederick Fried Archive, Smithsonian) Fred's older brother Henry's death certificate from 1917 has "amusement devices" as the occupation listed. It is likely that Dolle renamed the North Bergen Park as Dolle's Pleasure Grounds for the 1909 season. In a June 5, 1909 *The New York Clipper* advertisement Dolle says, "Money has been spent in a lavish manner, and everything about the grounds is new and of the most improved and up-to-date designs."

Fairyland Park at Clason Point, Bronx, Westchester County, New York (1910)

In his letter to Fred Fried, M.D. Borrelli indicates that Dolle managed a carousel in Fairyland Park in Westchester County, NY. Fairyland Park was located in the Clason Point section of the Bronx. This section of the Bronx also hosted Clason Point Park, often referred to as "The Coney Island of the Bronx". Both parks appear to have fronted Clason Point Road, renamed to Soundview Avenue in 1916, and were likely in competition for amusement park patrons. Clason Point Park was a large recreation area with rides, entertainment, baseball fields, picnic grounds and a huge saltwater swimming pool filled with water from the East River. The latter was often called "The Inkwell" in reference to the nature



Dolle carousel originally from Fairyland Park, Clason Point, Bronx, New York. Postcard shows the carousel at Wildwood circa 1950s.

Barbara Williams collection

of the water from the river. Clason Point Park is also well known as the site of Philadelphia Toboggan Company #14.

A number of advertisements for the leasing or sale of amusement devices in Fairyland Park were found in local newspapers published between 1910 and 1915. Indeed, one such advertisement in the March 18, 1910 edition of *The New York Times*, listing plans filed for new structures in the Bronx, describes a 75 x 75 foot one-story frame carousel house built for \$4,000, on Clason Point Road. A similar announcement regarding the same site was published in *The New York Tribune* on the same date and indicates that the new carousel house was leased to Fred Dolle of Hudson Heights. According to Borrelli, the Dolle carousel at Fairyland Park was subsequently sold to the Ragamosa Brothers and moved to Savin Rock, Connecticut. It was then moved to Casino Arcade Park and Playland at Wildwood-by-the-Sea, New Jersey. Fred Dahlinger indicates that the lights of the band organ at Wildwood define it to be a Wurlitzer 153 facade.

Documentation places a Dolle carousel at Fairyland Park at Clason Point, New York. However, the Dolle carousel shown in the earlier photograph indicates its location at "Clason Point Park". This could be explained by Dolle having two carousels at Clason Point; one in Fairyland Park and one in Clason Point Park, or the caption in the postcard was more generally referring to the greater Clason Point Park area.

In the postcard photograph, (on page 15), the lady on the image seated on the stander horse and the man standing to her left may be the same individuals that are in the Park Island photograph, (shown on page 14).

The man is identified as Vincent Borelli in the cropped close-up. This family connection, the apparent ages of the individuals, and their positioning in the photo leads us to hypothesize that the man and woman standing on the platform in the center might be Frederick Dolle and his wife Elizabeth. Standing to her left could be M.D. Borrelli and then his wife, seated on the sea monster. Future research will

hopefully uncover additional photographs that may confirm the identification of these individuals.

Silver Beach, St. Joseph, Michigan (1910)

An excellent summary of the history of the Dolle Carousel at Silver Beach is provided at the Silver Beach carousel website. This history is corroborated in the Borrelli letter that also provides additional information.

The carousel was sold to Silver Beach owners Louis Wallace and Logan Drake in 1910. Interestingly, according to Borrelli, the carousel was initially to be placed in Columbia Park, New Jersey, but due to a "mix-up with the management" it wasn't located there.

Fred Dolle and M.D. Borrelli operated the carousel at Silver Beach until Dolle's death in 1912. Mrs. Dolle, who partnered with Borrelli after her husband's passing, continued to operate the carousel until the Silver Beach Amusement Company bought it from them in 1930. During this latter period, in about 1920, the carousel was modified to include jumpers. Sixteen jumpers replaced 16 inner-row standers.



Postcard showing view of Silver Beach. Carousel building is shown at the bottom center of the picture.

Barbara Williams collection



Silver Beach Carousel

***Photograph from the
Frederick and Mary
Fried Folk Art Archives,
Archives Center,
National Museum of
American History,
Smithsonian***

In 1924, Borrelli and his wife further updated the carousel by adding their characteristic jewels to the figures. According to Marianne Stevens (*Carousel News & Trader*, January, 1996), some outside row standers had up to 400

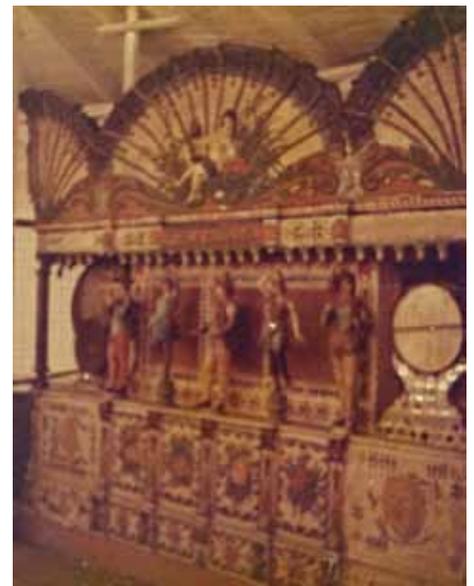
jewels on their romance side. The carousel continued to be operated by the Silver Beach Amusement Company until 1971. Marianne Stevens purchased the carousel in 1973.

The now Three Rivers carousel is a Tri-City community project benefitting Pasco, Kennewick and Richmond in Washington state, ([http:// www.threeriverscarousel.com](http://www.threeriverscarousel.com)).

The original Silver Beach carousel had one band organ. It subsequently was fitted with two additional instruments. One is shown in the accompanying photograph, a modified de Kleist with Dolle's name on it. There was a second smaller de Kleist and the third was a Style 188 North Tonawanda Musical Instrument Works organ from 1911, serial number 877 converted to the Wurlitzer duplex tracker system (information from Fred Dahlinger; *Mechanical Music Digest Archives*; and G. W. MacKinnon's Fall 1972 catalog).



***One of the
outside-row
Silver Beach
jeweled
horses, (left),
and the
original Dolle
Silver Beach
band organ
(right).***



**Photographs from the Frederick and Mary Fried Folk Art Archives,
Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian**



Postcard (above left), showing the Hippodrome stage and the earlier carousel building in the back right circa 1910. Photograph of Dolle carousel building (above right). Reprinted with permission of George Farrall

Dolle's Park located at Rexford, New York (circa 1911)

The amusement park located at Rexford, New York was known by several different names over the years. It was built by the Lloyd Walsh Amusement Company with an initial \$110,000 investment and opened in the summer of 1906 under the name Luna Park. A selling point for the park was the area's cool breezes that provided relief from stifling summer heat in the big cities. Early advertisements in local newspapers beginning in 1906 mention the presence of 20 attractions including a merry-go-round.

Dolle purchased the park in either late 1910 or early 1911. George Farrall, who, with his wife Edith, has a residence on the former site of the park, published a book entitled *The Amusement Park at Rexford* in the early 1980s that contains extensive documentation of the history of the park as well as over 100 period photographs and diagrams.

Lou Lansing, who worked at the park from 1912 to 1917, provided a first-hand account of his park experiences to Mr. Farrall. He indicated that Dolle replaced the vaudeville hippodrome stage at the center of the park with his own carousel in 1911.

Lansing worked at the carousel beginning the following year. Postcard photographs from 1910 show the hippodrome stage and the building that likely housed the former carousel.

An advertisement from the July 11, 1911 issue of the *Schenectady Gazette* for Dolle's Park includes "THE GIANT

CAROUSEL", likely referring to Dolle's newly placed carousel. A photograph of the Dolle carousel building is also shown. Unfortunately, Dolle is reported to have lost ownership of the park to creditors in 1912. The park continued to use the name Dolle's Park until 1916 after which it was known as New Rexford Park and Colonnade Park until it closed in 1933.

An article in the April 3, 1935 issue of the *Evening Recorder*, Amsterdam, New York, entitled "Rexford Park Taken Over by Wrecking Crew" describes the carousel. "The merry-go-round, for example, was a thing of beauty in those days and boasted two fine organs which bravely blared out such old favorites as "Put on Your Old Grey Bonnet" and "Little Annie Rooney" ". The article further suggests that the carousel may have been destroyed intact "... and shortly the roller coaster, the carousel and the whip will feel the blow of the sledge and the bite of the crow bar".

George Farrall states "We have found many pieces of broken window glass along the foundation lines of the former carousel building in colors of maroon, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple. In addition, there were pieces of otherwise clear glass with frosted geometric patterns as well as some molded clear glass."

"On a summer's night, the gentle breezes which blow in from the river through the lofty pines in the old Rexford Park area often create strange far-off sounds...as though in the distance, if

An advertisement for Dolle's Park in the July 11, 1911 issue of the "Schenectady Gazette" (above), and an enlargement of the description of the carousel (below), kindly provided by Kathy Van Flue of the Schenectady County Public Library.

***Dolle's Park Island
Amusements Carousel,
Lake Orion, Michigan.***

Photo circa 1915.
Reprinted with permission from
Images of America – Lake Orion
by James E. Ingram and Lori Grove.

one listens real hard, can be heard the downward rush of a roller coaster, shrieks of excitement, the laughter of a happy crowd.” From *The Park on the Palisades* by Larry Hart, from Schenectady's Golden Era 1880-1930. *Old Dorp Books, Scotia, New York. 1974*



Park Island Amusement Park, Lake Orion, Michigan (circa 1911)

The book *Images of America – Lake Orion* by James E. Ingram and Lori Grove, Arcadia Publishing, 2006, provides an extensive history of Lake Orion and features its former amusement park on Park Island. According to Ingram and Grove, resort developer John Winter bought Park Island and established an amusement center there in 1911. Park Island drew summer-folk by the thousands who arrived by train at Lake Orion's Main Landing where passenger boats transported them to the Island to fill the cottages for summers of leisure, fishing and fun. According to the Borrelli letter, Dolle owned and operated a carousel at the park at the time of his death in 1912; thus, his carousel was likely placed there in either 1911 or 1912. A photograph of the carousel dating to about 1915 from the Lake Orion book is shown. The caption from the book indicates that the man standing in the center of the carousel is Vincent Borelli, perhaps a relative of M.D. Borrelli. According to Ingram and Grove, Vincent would allow “only Italian opera music to be played for the carousel's operation”.

Virginia Beach, Virginia (ca. 1912)

Virginia Beach was a well-known area for tourists at the turn-of-the-century. According to Borrelli, Virginia Beach was the site of the second carousel owned and operated by Dolle at the time of his death. We have not been able to determine the location of this carousel.

Other Carousels Constructed by Dolle

Before compiling information about Frederick Dolle for this article, there was only a vague time frame for the period during which he manufactured carousels. We now know it began circa 1906 and ended with his death in 1912. In the Borrelli letter it is said that three or four carousels were made by the Dolle/Borrelli partnership during the off-seasons. If that was the case, between 1906 and 1912, a maximum of between twenty-one and twenty-eight carousels would have been constructed. In addition to the six identified above, the Borrelli letter mentions a carousel being built that was shipped to Manila, Philippines. This carousel is shown in the accompanying photograph.

A carousel with Carmel figures at Luna Park, Sydney, Australia has generally been thought to be the Carmel that was at Manila in the Philippines. Given the part of the world in which they were located, this conclusion seemed logical. However, Fred Dahlinger cautioned us against

At the Park Island landing, passengers disembarked beneath its arches for “amusements and dancing”. The building above the landing on the right housed the carousel.

Reprinted with permission from
Images of America – Lake Orion
by James E. Ingram and Lori Grove. Available from the publisher online at www.arcadiapublishing.com.





A Dolle manufactured carousel located in Manila, Philippines circa 1916.

John Caruso collection

making such an assumption. We examined the available photographs in more detail and found distinct differences between the two suggesting they are likely different carousels.

The manes of the sea monsters on the two carousels are not the same. This is a feature that apparently differs on Carmel sea monsters. (An additional sea monster can be seen on page 166 in *Painted Ponies*). While the details of the chariot on the Manila carousel are not evident in the photograph, the basic shape is. The shape does not match that of the chariots on the Sydney carousel. Enough can be seen of the second chariot in the picture with the lion at Sydney to indicate both are alike. At Sydney, the central housing mirror frames have lights. Above the large mirrors, there are small rectangular mirrors with single light bulbs above and below. The Manila carousel does not have that feature and the mirror frames do not have any lights. There is an overhang of what looks to be scenery panels at Manila. The Sydney carousel does not have this.

There are ten light bulbs between the rim panels at Sydney. At Manila, there are only six. The rim panels at Manila are like those at Clason Point and Park Island. At Sydney, the rim panels are very different and are even different from one another in the photograph with the lion. It is not difficult to imagine that they could be replacements. The poles' spiraling at Sydney is the European style. It's hard to tell if the spiraling at Manila is the same or what is seen on American-made carousels.

There is confirmation in the Borrelli letter of one of Fred Dolle's carousels going to Manila. There is no mention of a carousel going to Australia. Early Australian census data by Parker Anderson, National Carousel Association's *Merry Go Roundup*, Volume 3 #3, dates the Sydney carousel to 1910. If this is accurate, it falls within the period when Dolle was making carousels. With the exception of the rim panels and lighted central housing mirror frames, the features of the Sydney carousel seem to be consistent with the other Dolle carousels featured in this article. For that reason, we

have chosen to include it, without proof-positive that it is a Dolle carousel.

Some of the figures from the Sydney carousel were sold from the Freels collection at an auction hosted by Bonhams and Butterfields in 1998. The park locations of additional Dolle-manufactured carousels beyond those described have not been determined.

Features of Dolle Carousels

What might be considered to be some of the "trademark characteristics" of Dolle's carousels?

Borrelli stated in his letter to Fried that Dolle's carousels had animals carved by Charles Carmel. There are classic Carmel horses on all six carousels pictured here.

The Manila and Clason Point Dolle's had Carmel sea monsters. There was a Carmel lion on the Sydney carousel and a lion on the Park Island carousel. However, these two lions are distinctly different. The Sydney Carmel lion has a forward-flowing mane and exposed shoulders. The belly is flat, the body quite thin at that point. The Park Island lion has a protruding belly, a mane with a different texture that extends amply over the shoulders and has more defined muscles. Marianne Stevens is of the opinion that the Park Island lion might be a Loeff figure. Carmel lions can be seen in *Painted Ponies*, page 172 and in *The Art of the Carousel*, page 166. Loeff lions similar to Park Island's are seen on page 72 in *Painted Ponies* and on page 114 in *The Art of the Carousel*. The goat on the Wildwood carousel is an E. Joy Morris, according to Marianne Stevens.

Of the Dolle carousels seen here, the original rims are without decorative bas-relief artwork. Clason Point's and Park Island's rims originally had borderless painted scenery. It's difficult to determine if the Sydney carousel's scenery is original. Manila's, Clason Point's and Park Island's rim panels are very similarly shaped. The protruding panel heads at Park Island and Clason Point look to be different from one another. The Wildwood and Silver Beach Dolle rims were modified at some point.



View of the carousel at Luna Park, Sydney, Australia. Photo courtesy of Bonhams and Butterfields

The sweeps at Park Island and Clason Point have decorative scrollwork. Silver Beach's sweeps have fluorescent lighting, a modern change. It is not known if the Silver Beach, Manila and Sydney carousels originally had scrollwork on the sweeps. Wildwood's sweeps are unable to be seen in the accompanying photograph.

The type of lighting along the bottom edge of the rims is the same in all of the photographs. There are ten light bulbs per section on the Sydney, Clason Point, Silver Beach and Wildwood Dolle's. Park Island's has eleven, Manila's has six.

The central housing that can be seen on the Dolle carousels pictured here looks to be the same or very similar. The lower sections have bold, straight frames with large mirrors. Above are scenery paintings in the same types of frames. Silver Beach's upper frames have decorative lower edges. The only ornamentation on the frames at Clason Point and Park Island is the jewellery done by Borrelli. At Park Island and

Clason Point, decorative panels can be seen in the area above the central housing scenery panels.

The Borrelli letter indicates that the use of Carmel animals was consistent, but it is not known if all of Dolle's carousels had all of the original features seen the photographs shown in this article.



Close-up of the Dolle merry-go-round at Manila.

A.50 - Philippine Carnival, Main entrance, Manila, Philippines.



The entrance to the amusement park in Manila where Dolle's carousel was installed. Barbara Williams collection

“The Carousel King”

Frederick Dolle died on November 2, 1912. His obituaries were found in the November 6, 1912 issue of *The New York Times* and the November 23, 1912 issue of *The New York Clipper*. A composite of these obituaries is as follows:

Frederick Dolle of Union Hill, New Jersey, who was known as the “Carousel King” because of his connection

with carousels at amusement parks in many large cities, died after short a illness at Virginia Beach, Virginia.

After Dolle's death, M.D. Borrelli continued to be a business partner with Dolle's wife Elizabeth to operate and manage the Lake Orion, Silver Beach, and Virginia Beach carousels.

According to Borrelli, the partnership continued until Elizabeth's death in 1935 at which time he purchased a controlling interest in the business. Thus, Frederick Dolle's impact on the carousel industry continued on through Elizabeth Dolle and M.D. Borrelli for many years after his death.

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Contributors:

1. Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian. Assistance with Frederick and Mary Fried Folk Art Archive documents.
2. Ray Simmons. Photograph of the Silver Beach carousel rounding board.
3. John Caruso. Postcard image of the Dolle Manila, Philippines carousel.
4. Bonhams and Butterfields. Permission to use photographic images of the Sydney carousel.
5. George and Edith Farrall for information about Dolle's Park at Rexford and permission to use photographic images from George Farrall's book *The Amusement Park at Rexford*.
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10. Marianne Stevens for identification of carousel figures.
11. Montana Heritage Commission for permission to use the image of the Gavioli organ with the Dolle façade.