

The Carousels Of Santa Monica Bay, Part II

By Barbara Williams, NCA Archivist

Right: In the 1960s, the Santa Monica Pier and beachfront area were featured in a report on urban blight, contributing ammunition to the plan to tear down the deteriorated pier and construct a luxury island in its place. In 1973, a citizen-based committee squelched the whole plan. Photo courtesy of Barbara Williams.

While putting together the material for the Santa Monica Bay's carousels feature for *Merry-Go-Roundup*, I found myself wishing I was older. I would have enjoyed being around during the heyday of the bay's amusement piers. As it is, I remember the waning days of these places.

In the 1950s, country music dominated the daytime scene at Santa Monica Pier's La Monica Ballroom (torn down in 1962) and at Ocean Park's Aragon Ballroom. Spike Jones and Spade Cooley were big attractions. The entrance to the Aragon was pretty scary; it was littered with trash, all of the light sockets were empty, and everything appeared to be painted a garish red.

By the late 1960s, the Aragon had been converted to "The Cheetah," a rock-and-roll nightclub, which featured well-known groups such as The Doors. Strobe lighting, incense, and dancers in bell bottoms packed the club on weekends. Backstage, in the damp and musty darkness of the unused portion of the ballroom, you could hear the old building shudder and creak as the tide rose and fell beneath it.

Pacific Ocean Park was never anything like Disneyland. It deteriorated quickly, so quickly that it went from being the hot spot for local high school students to the place to go against parental wishes.

After Pacific Ocean Park closed, the boardwalk in front of its facade was lined with "vendors," souls brave enough to search the ruins for souvenirs, usually at night and with easily bribed security guards. Today a sign warning swimmers to avoid underwater pilings is all that remains of Ocean Park's amusement piers.

What I remember most about Venice was the takeover of the beachfront by oil wells and the unpleasant chore of scraping huge gobs of tar off the bottoms of my feet upon returning from the beach. Controversial beatnik coffeehouses opened in the abandoned buildings. The canals became stagnant, and floating trash replaced the gondolas.

The boardwalk, however, slowly revived and now is a myriad of eclectic attractions: sword



swallowers, blues bands, masseuses, and displays of cheap sunglasses and three-for-\$10 Venice Beach t-shirts (which it is widely known for). A fishing pier now stands where Venice Pier once was, as a modest reminder of the late, great, amusement pier.

The Santa Monica Bay's carousels project was a six-month collaborative effort involving contributors and processors, all committed to producing a quality depiction and a factual account of pertinent history.

Many thanks to those who spent a great deal of time and energy on this project.

The Beverly Park Parker

Introduction by Barbara Williams, with excerpt from an article by David Bradley



Left: The reverse of this 1950s postcard reads, "Beverly Park—The Children's Amusement Center; Merry-Go-Round, Ferris Wheels, Airplanes, Autos, Trains, Miniature Roller Coaster, Horse and Carts. Real Thrills and Excitement for Children. Clean, Safe, Supervised. Credit: Barbara Williams.

Clarification: The caption on page 7 of the Summer 1997 Roundup states that Dave Bradley's Parker sat outside and also operated in a building while on Venice Pier. Please note that in the 1933 Little Rascals film Fish Hooky, Bradley's Parker is outside; the carousel inside the building is J. A. Ellis' Parker. The Racing Derby also is in the film. Fish Hooky is no longer available for purchase, but it may be rented from most Blockbuster video stores.

Dave Bradley bought the Parker carousel from Santa Monica Pier and brought it to his Beverly Park in 1947.

After the park closed in 1974 to make way for The Beverly Center, Dave took the carousel to his shop in Long Beach, where he produced fiberglass copies of the horses. In 1980, hoping it would go to a good home, he sold the carousel to Calaway Park, a new amusement park in Calgary, Canada. The park failed a few years later, and the horses were sold. In the 1960s, Dave wrote the following about his beloved carousel:

The Beverly Park merry-go-round began its history shortly after World War I in a small factory in Leavenworth, Kansas. Under the supervision of C. W. Parker, the merry-go-round was constructed with the aid of German prisoners, once the war began.

Pressing times, however, created the need for further employment in America other than only that of prisoners, and so it came to be that C. W. Parker hired men and teens to hasten the completion of his machine.

Now, story has it, that at the time during which the merry-go-round was undergoing construction, the young Dwight D. Eisenhower was one of those men employed at the C. W. Parker Merry-Go-Round factory. Then, presumably, Eisenhower shared an actual part in the building of this merry-go-round.

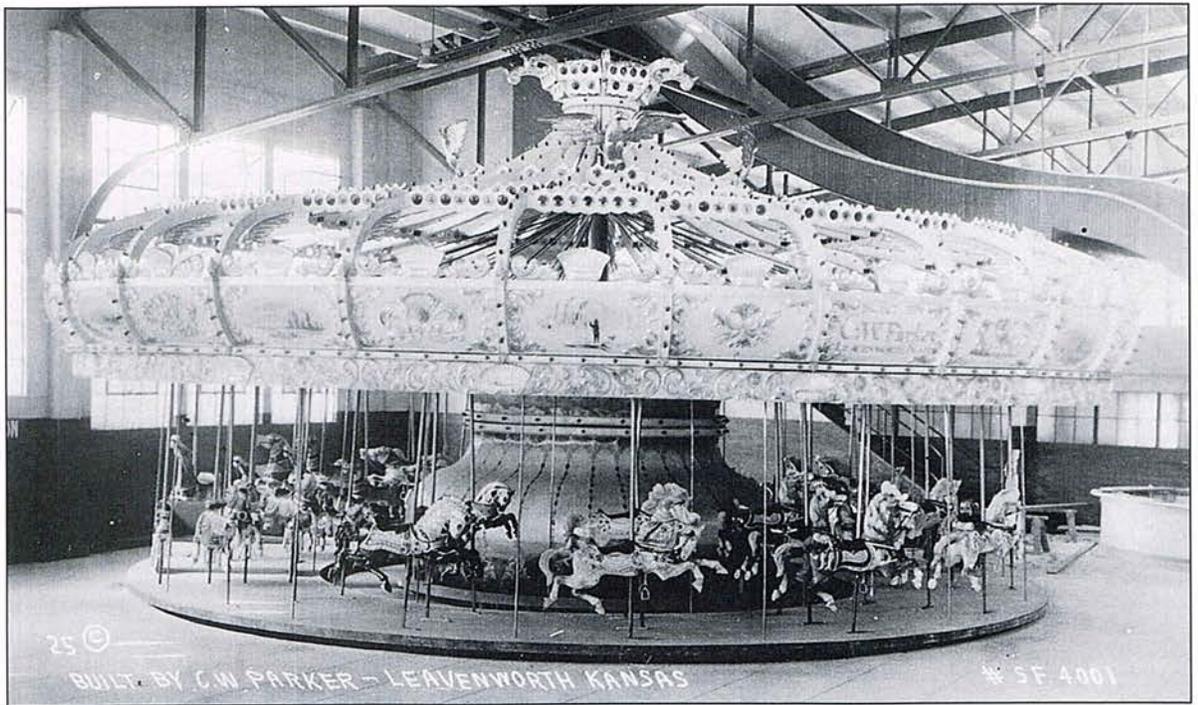
The merry-go-round neared completion sometime during World War I. The original plan called for the merry-go-round to set as the center attraction in a large dance-beer-hall. The ride was designed to appear similar to an oversized goblet containing beer, with foam at the top.

Upon inspection, the center of the merry-go-round indeed appears as an oversized goblet, and if one could see the top, he might notice the illusion of foam. The eagles in the center of the ride, which were originally positioned on the outer crown, probably indicate that the merry-go-round was designed for use by the Anheuser Beer Company.

Surrounding the ride on all sides with about 15 feet in between were to be tables, at which one could sit down and relax while drinking beer. There were to be balconies, also housing such tables, approximately level with the top of the merry-go-round. The

Right: This vintage postcard shows Dave Bradley's Parker carousel in the Fun House on the Ocean Park pier.

Below: The letters spelling out "Beverly Park" each had an aluminum Parker horse. The horses were salvaged by a local antique dealer when the park closed in 1974, but the letters were not. Photo and postcard courtesy of Barbara Williams.



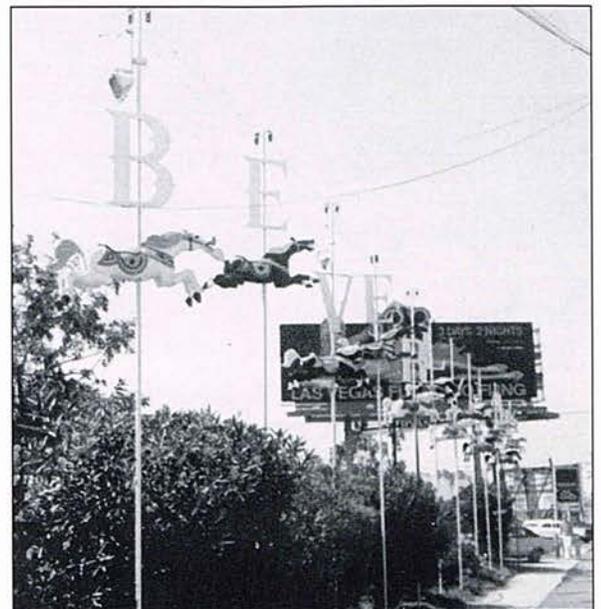
area immediately surrounding the ride was to be utilized by couples wishing to dance to the music emanating from a huge military band organ similar to those we have here.

Indeed, the purpose for which the merry-go-round was designed seemed quite plausible. The initiation of the Volstead Act, however, abruptly halted this plan. The act forbade the use, sale, or manufacture of any alcoholic beverages, and hence there could be no beer hall in which to install the ride.

So, the machine was built, but it had no immediate place to go. Finally, on July 2, 1925, C. W. Parker's merry-go-round was installed in Ocean Park, California. After 22 more years, in 1947, the machine was brought to Beverly Park, where it now stands almost identical to the way it was originally built. In Ocean Park, the machine had a canvas roof over it to protect the delicate wood carvings and oil paintings. Rain, however, made its way through the canvas, and partially damaged the woodwork and paintings. Upon its arrival at Beverly Park, again the ride had no permanent roof. During the time a roof was being built for it, further damage occurred to the fine, hand-created woodwork and oil paintings.

The damage necessitated some changes in the outer crown of the merry-go-round, all of which are evident in comparison with the original picture.

Today, thousands of customers ride the merry-go-round each day. Thanks to their observance of rules and regulations, and their regard for priceless antique property, this merry-go-round has main-



tained an outstanding condition, in both appearance and safety.

With the future cooperation of our customers, we hope to keep the merry-go-round in its presently maintained condition for many years to come.



Dave Bradley

By Barbara Williams, NCA Archivist



Those fortunate to have known and worked with the late Dave Bradley know what a marvelous person he was. Bradley was admired for his integrity, his knowledge of and long years of working with rides, and his great sense of humor. It was he who pioneered the business of reproducing carousel animals in fiberglass.

Shortly after World War II, Bradley bought several rides from a broke and stranded traveling carnival and formed a company, Bradley & Kaye Amusement rides, with musician friend Don Kaye. They established Beverly Park in Los Angeles.

Although the partnership was short lived, Bradley liked the company's name and kept it. An engineer and a Dartmouth graduate, he was fascinated with the rides and began making improvements to them. In the early 1950s, when Disneyland was in the concept stage, he was invited to join in the planning. His ideas were incorporated into a number of the rides.

Thereafter, Bradley began designing his own rides, which were attractive, safe, and well made. The Red Baron Bi-Plane ride was his favorite; it can still be found in many amusement park kid-

die ride sections.

When Beverly Park closed in 1974 to make way for The Beverly Center mega-mall, Bradley opened a shop in Long Beach, where he experimented with a practical approach to amusement rides, the making of fiberglass carousel animals.

He began by casting his carousel's Parker horses. Few shared his vision, and it was years before he gained the approval of carousel enthusiasts. But the amusement industry saw the potential, and Chance Rides, Inc. worked with him to learn the process. Ultimately, the company acquired manufacturing rights from Bradley & Kaye.

Bradley died in 1988 at 77. In 1991, Chance honored him by donating its 1,000th fiberglass horse to the International Association of Amusement Parks and Attractions in his memory.

As manager of carousel operations at the Santa Monica Pier Carousel from 1981 to 1984, I was present during the renovation of the Loeff Hippodrome. Improvements included a new oak floor, which was laid over the existing floor and underlayment. But the city engineers failed to consider that the underside of the carousel platform would sit precariously close to the new floor.

I called Bradley to remedy the situation. He and his crew arrived the next day, and within a few hours had raised the center pole and its supports three inches, leaving adequate space between the platform and the new floor.

Bradley loved to reminisce about his experience in the amusement business. He told of the joys and horrors of running a ride and of dealing with the public, of the most difficult years of operating his beloved carousel (the 1950s, when Hopalong Cassidy, the Lone Ranger, and Roy Rogers were superheros), of how children came to ride it in Beverly Park, all decked out in Western garb, including spurs, and how difficult it was to hold down the children's boots and spurs, as they tried to make their jumpers go faster by kicking them.

Bradley was relieved that the new trend of the 1960s was bare feet. However, he stuck to his own rules for Beverly Park, which required carousel riders to wear shoes.

Left: Dave Bradley checks the alignment of PTC #62's center pole as the overhead guy wires are being adjusted. Photo courtesy of Barbara Williams.

Note: Alan MacInnes wrote to inform us of a Paramount "short," Shorty At Coney Island (1936), in which a chimpanzee rides many of the amusements at Steeplechase Park, including the Chanticleer; it is not available on videotape. Robert Varga also wrote to report his discovery of a 1917 Coney Island map, which shows the Chanticleer situated in the north garden of Steeplechase Park. It was still there in 1938. Thus, we now know the Chanticleer was installed in Luna Park prior to 1917.

Venice, Summer Of 1915

Excerpts from Arvederci, Venice, by Helen Hosmer.

Right: During the summers, Venice by day was a fun-filled place, packed with visitors from near and far.

Below: Venice by night was a dazzling display of electric lights and exotic entertainment.

Photos: Ken Strickfaden Collection, courtesy of Barbara Williams.



In the years before World War I, my mother usually rented a beach cottage at Venice for a few weeks each summer, in order to escape the stunning heat of Los Angeles.

It was a place of memorable sights. The central section of the resort was a collection of gorgeous excesses; potted palms and pennants lined the streets in continual celebration (of what, we were never sure). The architecture was grand, an intricate blend of Italianate columns and porticos, its splendor only slightly marred by the presence of guess-your-weight machines and cigar stores.

In the shops, one could find a wide selection of glorious picture postcards and objets d'art—mother-of-pearl rings, brooches, and cigar shears, plaster-of-paris statues of wood nymphs and angels, and even busts of Beethoven and Dante.

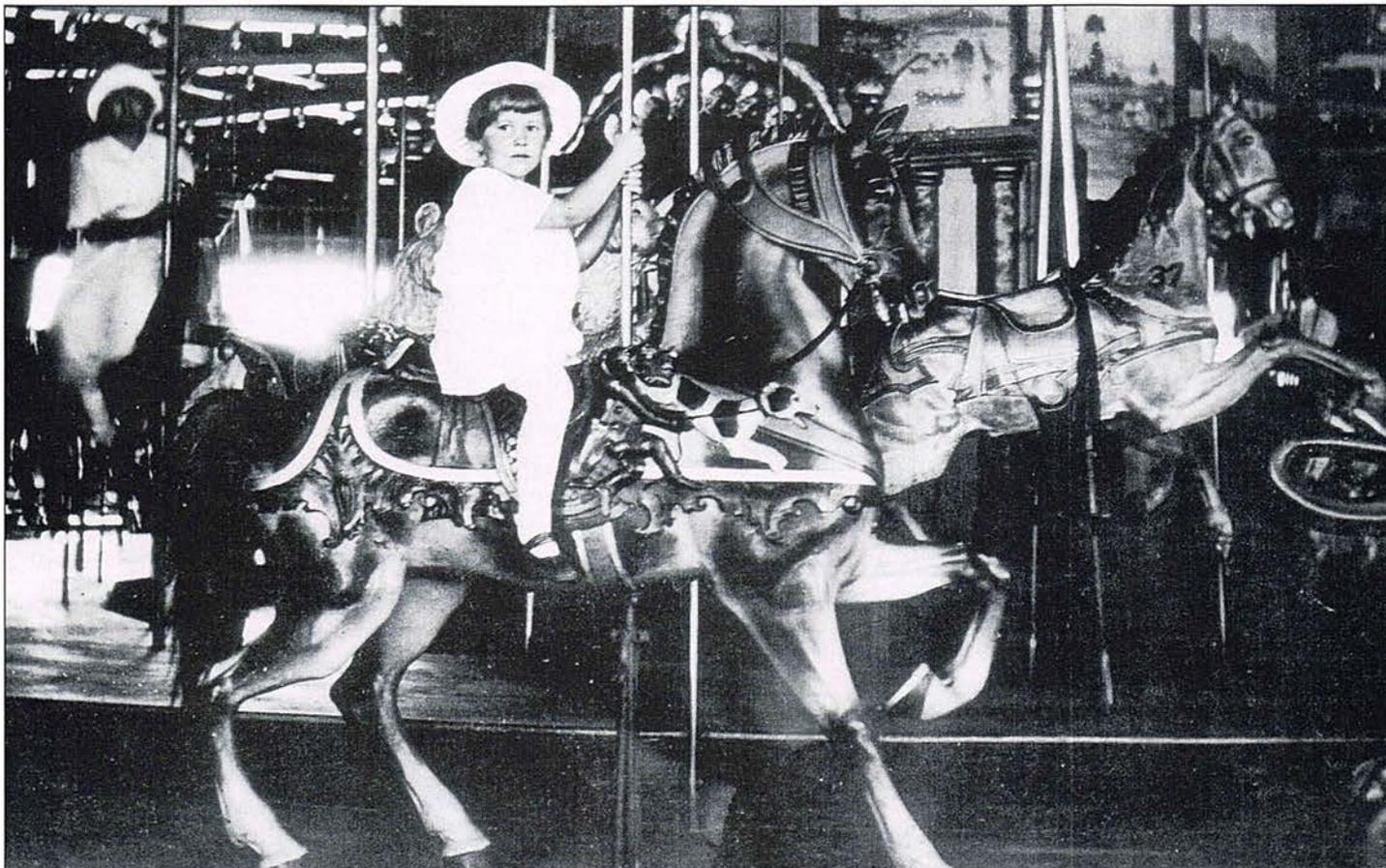
It also was a place of sounds, smells, and tastes. The most persistent sounds were the clamoring of the vendors and hawkers on the amusement pier and along the boardwalk, the popping guns in the pier's shooting galleries, and clattering roller coaster wheels. A stupefying variety of smells included lavender water and Havana cigar smoke, salty sea wind, cooking sausages, candied apples, strawberry phosphates, lemonade, dill



pickles, and what emanated from great clouds of cotton candy.

My sister and I on one occasion were on our usual scouting expedition, looking for our lost brother. When we wandered onto the amusement pier, the music at the pavilion drew us like a magnet. It was the domain of adults, but no one stopped us as we ducked under the rope and joined those on the dance floor, to the strains of the Hesitation Waltz.

We knew how to dance, as we had practiced with each other; we whirled with our voile dresses fluttering and curls bobbing. When the music



stopped, we heard applause. We were stunned to learn it was for us, and even more stunned to learn we had inadvertently entered a competition and won first prize. A man stepped forward and handed us each a monstrous kewpie doll. How could we admit we had entered the "forbidden" dance hall? In the end, we said that a man had given us the dolls (but not at the dance contest!)

I remember auto races, gondola excursions, 10-cent camel rides, the thrills of the amusement pier, and Sunday afternoon band concerts, for which everyone dressed in their finest. Venice was a great fantasy, but there was nothing unique in its simple pleasures. It was the dream of genteel, good fun come to life.

Excerpts from *Arrivederci, Venice* by Helen Hosmer, *American West*, March 1968.

NCA Technical Conferences

Mar. 27-29, 1998
Kennywood, Pa.

1999
Missoula, Mont.

NCA Conventions

Sept. 9-13, 1998
Shelby/ Burlington/Raleigh, N.C.

1999
N. Tonawanda/Rochester, N.Y.

Above: "June on the Merry-Go-Round at Venice," reads the inscription on this postcard, discovered at Santa Barbara's Summer 1997 Postcard Show. It is J. A. Ellis' Dentzel, installed on the Venice Pier, c. 1915. It also is pictured on page 9 of the previous issue of Roundup. Photo courtesy of Barbara Williams.

250 Santa Monica Pier

Excerpts from "Reflections," Santa Monica College Yearbook, 1972. Photos courtesy of Barbara



Above: Aerial view of Santa Monica Pier in 1926. The coaster, The Blue Streak, was replaced with the Whirlwind Dipper in 1924. Looff's Hippodrome still has its original roof adornments. Photo: Historical Collections, Security National Bank, courtesy of Barbara Fahs Charles.

Right: The carousel's ticket booth was less than inviting in the early 1970s. A coin-operated token machine replaced the ticket seller as the carousel's downward spiral continued.

What's it like to live above a merry-go-round? Santa Monica College student Anis Salloom Jr. knows, and he considers his unusual residence noisy and shaky, but always interesting.

Anis lives with his father in one of the nine apartments in Santa Monica Pier's merry-go-round building. The apartments are located in the building's second story, which also features alcoves overlooking the merry-go-round, from which the apartment dwellers can survey the lively scene below. The apartments rent for about \$125 per month and are always filled.

In glorifying the merry-go-round building's features, signs on it proclaim that "In the morning the guests awaken to the tunes of the organ and all day they go about their duties with tunes in their ears. . . ." But Anis, who has lived above the merry-go-round since 1970, adds that the music can sometimes ring in his ears until midnight.

The bone-jarring clangs and beats of the organ provide lively renditions of "Auld Lang Syne," "Turkey in the Straw," "Old Kentucky Home," and others.

Esthetic enjoyments derived from residence in the merry-go-round building are constantly shrouded by the creaks and groans of the old wooden building. Somewhat inclined to sway and

rattle at any disturbance, such as a passing truck, the building must also bear the effects of the cars and roaring motorcycles that frequent the pier.

Anis says he has grown somewhat accustomed to the continuous bombardment, and it comes as little surprise that on the morning of February 9, 1971, Anis simply rolled over to continue sleeping when the earthquake began.

"I just assumed it was a truck," he said, "until it really started shaking [6.5 magnitude, epicenter located 20 miles north east of Santa Monica]."

During the summer and on holidays the swarming crowds invade the pier, and incessant traffic becomes a daily occurrence. Along with the noise of the endless pier traffic, vehicle pollutants and disturbed dust ultimately come to rest in the apartments. Anis says that if the bathroom floor isn't cleaned every few days, one can draw pictures in the settled carbon and dust particles.

The warm weather also has its effect on the merry-go-round building inhabitants. Without



Williams, unless otherwise noted.

air conditioning, the rising heat from the melting asphalt below can virtually roast the apartment dweller.

With the passing of the summer heat, the crowds grow smaller and traffic declines, allowing Anis some peaceful moments to enjoy the deep blue water and the sparkling coastline that accompany the crisp, cool air of winter. With the merry-go-round's operation reserved primarily for the weekends in winter, the apartments become ideal retreats for those seeking a refreshing tranquility.

Excerpted from "Reflections," Santa Monica College Yearbook, 1972.

Editor's note: An article in a past Roundup (Vol. 10, No. 4) reports, "Down through the years, celebrities have come and gone from the famous pier, and the list of famous visitors continues to grow. One of the best regulars on the pier from the past was Marilyn Monroe." According to Barbara Williams, Monroe came frequently to listen to the carousel's band organ shortly before her death in 1962.

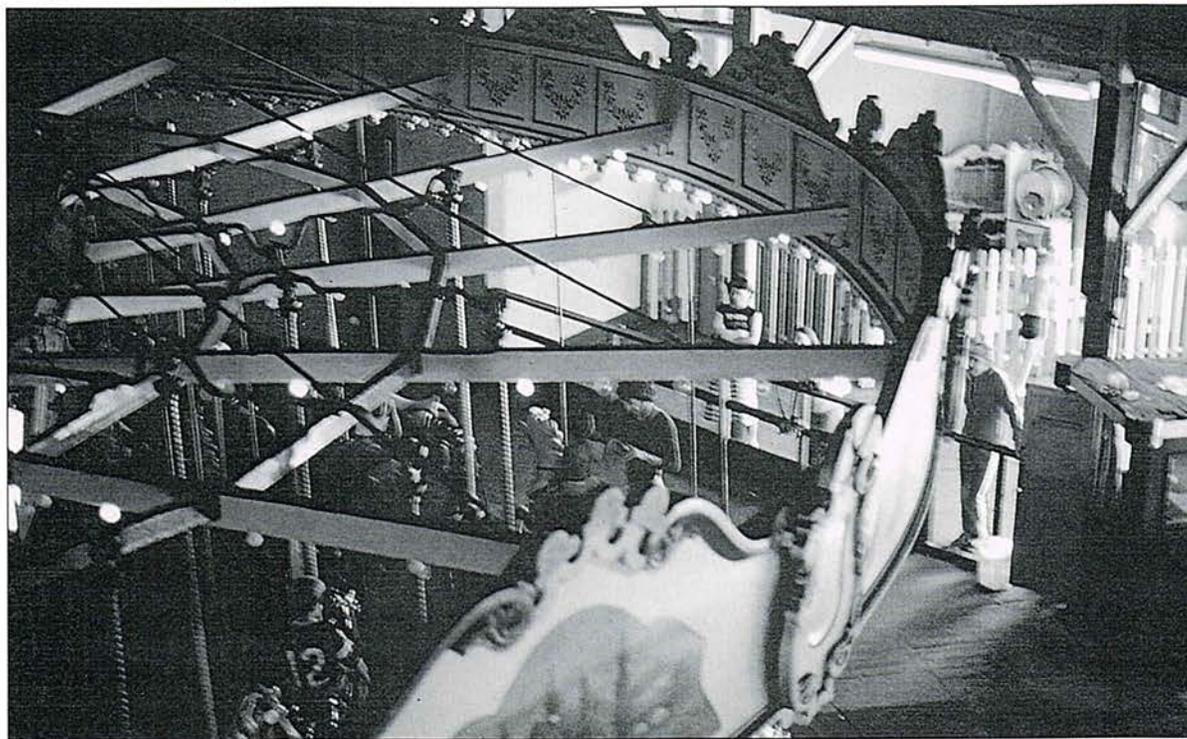
Although Joan Baez, in fact, did not live in the apartments in the merry-go-round building, she visited friends upstairs from time to time.



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Above: The Hippodrome's upstairs apartments sat vacant following the fire in 1974 until 1982, when the city moved in and set up offices. The building is 16,000 square feet, 11,000 on the ground floor and 5,000 on the second floor.



Left: The interior view from the upstairs apartments. The disassembled and inoperable Wurlitzer band organ sits in a corner, behind a picket fence painted red, white, and blue for the country's bicentennial.

Right: On March 5, 1974, an arson-set fire damaged portions of the carousel building on both floors, but the carousel was not damaged. The fire forced permanent closure of the upstairs apartments. Firemen rescued a dog belonging to one of the tenants, who awaits its safe delivery. Photo: Santa Monica Evening Outlook.



NCA Bookshelf

NCA member Alan MacInnes sent the following e-mail message:

“For some time I hoped to find a book about the history of Canobie Lake Park in Salem, N.H. Finally one is available, but it sure would be easy to miss, especially since it seems to be offered only at bookstores in Salem and the surrounding towns as a local history publication.

Part of the “Images of America” series published by Arcadia Publishing (1 Washington Center, Dover, NH 03820, list price \$16.99), *Salem, N.H., Volume II—Trolleys, Canobie Lake, and Rockingham Park* was written by Douglas Seed and Katherine Khalife.

It includes over 50 pages of old photographs (black and white) and detailed text describing the history of the amusement park, and includes photographs of dark rides, wooden coasters, and the carousel, and even a 1910 map of the park. Five photographs are of the 1903 Loeff/Dentzel/Stein

and Goldstein carousel, which originally operated as a separate concession. A third row (of standers) was added in the 1920s. Its 1917 Wurlitzer band organ was installed in the 1920s or 1930s and still operates to this day.

A unique feature of this book is its separate chapters on the ballroom at Canobie Lake (which still exists but is not currently used) and the trolley system that originally provided transportation to the park (including a map of the trolley lines).

I was just at Canobie Lake and the carousel is kept in wonderful shape!”

“The carousel first appeared at Canobie Lake Park in 1906. It is rather unusual, due to its outer step and a third row of horses. Research indicates that it used to be steam operated, and we currently believe it to be one of only two carousels in the world driven by a rubber tire!” says a Canobie Lake Park Corporation Web page devoted to the carousel.