
His Mission to Save Carousels Began in 1964 and Never Stopped

Remembering Fred Fried, The Historic Carousel's Best Friend



Fred photographing the Loeff carousel at Long Beach, CA, in 1979. Photo courtesy of Barbara Williams.

By Barbara Williams

Special to The Carousel News & Trader

In 1964, a visionary named Frederick Fried published a book entitled *A Pictorial History of the Carousel*. In the 1960's post-Disneyland era, the old amusement parks and aged wooden carousels faced extinction. Mom and pop-type parks became obsolete, unable to compete with a new concept, the theme park. Much of the land on which the old parks sat became too valuable for the failing business of has-been rides, and they began to disappear.





Dinner at the first annual National Carousel Roundtable (later to become the NCA) conference held in Sandwich, MA, in 1973. From the bottom left, (moving around the table left); Bill Dentzel, Mary Fried, Marna Haff, Marianne Stevens, Bradley Smith (Smithsonian Institution), Julia Helms and Fred Fried. In the foreground, Bob Staples reaching out and Jo Summit talking with Bill.

Fred saw beyond the chipped paint and broken legs and soulfully addressed the importance of keeping carousels in our lives, "Long after the band organ music stops and the carousel unloads its passengers, flights of fantasy will continue, taking children to far-away story book places, fighting dragons on fiery steeds to the sound of heroic music. Many adult reflects upon his youth remembering dreams long-forgotten. And though the world may be full of new ideas, new inventions, and great devices for making a better existence - no one will ever devise a greater or better object to give joy than the merry-go-round."

After publishing his carousel book, Fred went on to co-found the National Carousel Association in 1973. The organization united a diverse group of individuals from around the country who shared Fred's appreciation of merry-go-rounds. The goal of the NCA was to save the remaining old, wooden carousels. Fred organized and joined gallant campaigns to educate people about carousels and gather support for them. There were two critical perspectives. The first was to educate the public about the dwindling number of carousels, about their long, colorful histories and to spotlight the people who actually made them. Of equal importance was the enlightenment of the owners. Carousels, whose proprietors didn't want to commit to saving them, were at risk. These were times when a carousel was a twenty five cent ride, yet the animals were becoming highly prized collectibles.

The budding, early days of saving carousels were encouraging, but marred. Tragically, the unification of individuals interested in carousels also created a market for them, accelerating the dismantling of whole operating carousels. Fred was devastated. Ever more determined, he forged on, devoting the rest of his life to carousel preservation until



Fred Fried in Sandwich, MA, in 1973. NCR Conference photos courtesy of Rol Summit.



Fred's children, Bobby and Rachel, on his Dentzel carousel's signature Muller horse. Fred would be happy to know his carousel is being restored, but he would also be sad. The horse is no longer part of the carousel. Photo courtesy of the Frederick Fried Archives.



This circa 1890 Swiss carousel was set up in a courtyard during the second annual NCR Convention, held in Flint, MI, in 1974. In the back row are Fred, Mary, Marianne Stevens and Barbara Charles. In the foreground: Bill Denzel and his wife Marion. Photo by Rol Summit.

declining health forced his retirement from activism. Never without an opinion, especially when it opposed his, he was both admired and mocked. He feared no one and never wavered in his conviction that carousels should be saved as whole units. He often said, "The value of a whole carousel is greater than the sum of all of its parts."

Fred Fried was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY, which he dearly loved. When a child, he was fascinated by the wooden carousel horses that came out of the shop of Charles Carmel that was near his father's clock shop. They obviously made an indelible impression. Professionally, Fred served as the art director at Bonwit Teller and acted as the chief consultant on American Folk Art for the Smithsonian. He was a recognized authority on carousels, coin-operated machines, and cigar store figures. He authored five books and had vast collections pertaining to his fields of expertise. Fred collected from the standpoint of preservation rather than possession. His most treasured relics were what he was able to salvage from the ruins of Coney Island. Whether recognized or from the uncelebrated arts, as he called them, Fred viewed his collections as more than objects. They represented times, lifestyles, artistries, and persons no longer available to us.

Fred met Mary McKenzie Hill, an academically trained artist, at a fashion studio where they both worked after World War II. They married and became an inseparable team. Fred and Mary and their two children spent their summers in Vermont on their 40-acre farm. Mary loved to garden, Fred loved the solitude and did much of his writing there. Mary devoted herself to Fred and the drive that fueled his passions. Mary passed away in 1988 at age 74. Shortly

"I've been overwhelmed, full-time, with carousel restoration and preservation, with critical situations all focusing on me. Asbury Park's Palace Carousel to auction, Roger Williams Park in Providence and two others perhaps the same route. The cry of the day is - A Horse, A Horse, My Fortune for a Horse!"

Letter from Frederick Fried to Anne Hinds, February 1, 1989

before Fred's death in July 1994 at age 86, he described a fond memory from when researching for his carousel book, "Each new discovery kept me awake, fitting the new finds into the larger work. Mary was most tolerant. At four in the morning, she'd come in barefoot on cold floors and beg me, 'Come to sleep. It's 4 a.m. and tomorrow, which is now, is another day.'"

In retrospect, not even Fred knew of the prophecy - just how many carousels would cease to exist over the next 30 years, when, in 1964, in *A Pictorial History of the Carousel*, he wrote, "...many huge carousels have been dismantled,

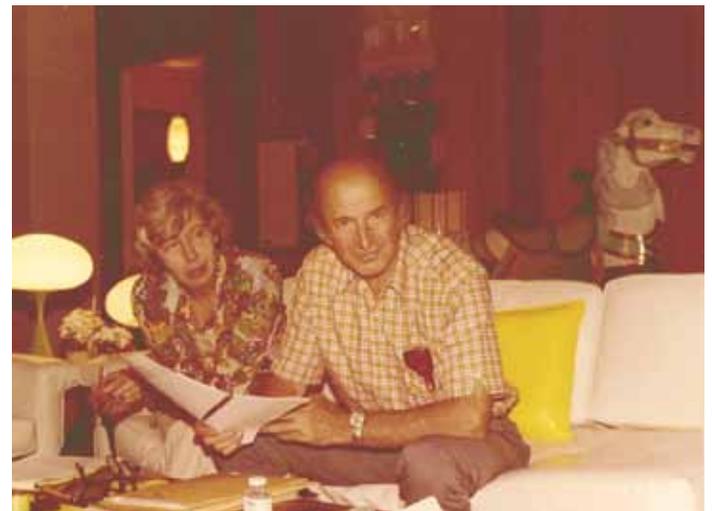


Photo by Rol Summit

Mary and Fred Fried at the home of Rol and Jo Summit on Sept. 14, 1973. Also present that night were Marianne Stevens and Bill and Marion Dentzel as plans were being made for the first annual National Carousel Roundtable Conference to be held in Sandwich, MA. The historic conference would take place on Oct. 20 - 22, 1973. At the fifth NRC conference in Atlantic City in 1977, the group would become the National Carousel Association (NCA) to avoid confusion with National Cash Register.

“After looking at the carousel, we headed over to the main thoroughfare, hailed in its heyday as ‘The Walk of 1,000 Lights.’ It was now a two-sided row of boarded up, abandoned stalls. Gone were the toss games, arcades, fortune-tellers, shooting galleries, hamburger stands, cotton candy and the 1,000 lights.

Barbara Williams on her visit to Long Beach with Fred Fried in 1979



Above, a postcard shows the Long Beach Pike “Walk of 1,000 Lights,” circa 1940s. Below, the same walkway boarded up in 1981.

and broken up; their parts have found their way into antique shops, ended as lawn ornaments to rot away, become part of the current fad of bar stools. At this alarming rate, it will be just a matter of a few years before one of our greatest heritages will have disappeared from the American scene, except for those museums which have acquired whole carousels. The time has arrived when an organization, federally sponsored, should be created to record, preserve, and perpetuate this great phase of American life.”

I’d like to take this opportunity to re-tell a story. My favorite visit with Fred was our jaunt to the Long Beach Pike in 1979 to see the old tattoo parlors. He and Mary were on the west coast gathering material for their forthcoming book, *America’s Forgotten Folk Art*. Fred had long considered body art, tattooing, one of the under-appreciated folk arts and he wanted to include the topic in the book. The Pike was then in its final days. A few of the newer rides were still there, as was the old Looff carousel, but it, along with everything else, was in pitiful condition. After look-



Photo by Barbara Williams



Detail of a Dare stag in the Fried collection. Photographed here in 1980 by Barbara Williams.

ing at the carousel and taking pictures, we headed over to the main thoroughfare, hailed in its heyday as “The Walk of 1,000 Lights”. It was now a two-sided row of boarded up, abandoned stalls. Gone were the toss games, arcades, fortune-tellers, shooting galleries, hamburger stands, cotton candy and the 1,000 lights. To get to the tattoo parlors at the far end, we had to walk through this ghostly corridor. It was scary and I was not so sure we should be doing this. But, Fred was undaunted.

The remaining three tattoo parlors were pretty much what I expected. They were in ancient buildings on the verge of collapse. They were dark and musty. Even the air in them felt unclean. I was careful not to touch anything. What Fred experienced was much different. He admired the tattoo samples that covered the walls. He engaged in animated conversations with the proprietors, exchanging names of known tattoo artists as if they were talking about old friends. Lots of the design choices were military-themed, reflective



Fred Fried and Bill Dentzel.

Photo by Rol Summit

of the period when Long Beach was a thriving Naval port. Fred expected that, but he was excited to see how many designs reflected another time - the 1960s - hippie art. He was fascinated by it. He explained to the proprietors that the artwork was extremely important, that it was worthy of being in museums. It was obvious that the days of the tattoo parlors were numbered and he feared that it all might be discarded.

A few years later, I went back to the Pike and walked down "The Walk of 1,000 Lights" to see if the tattoo parlors were still there. They were all boarded up. I peered inside. The walls were bare. One year later, the carousel was gone because the horses had been at auction. Fred was right, it all did need to be preserved and if he'd had his way, it would have been.

Special thanks to Anne Hinds for her assistance with this article and much appreciation to Fred for his words of wisdom from "A Pictorial History of the Carousel."



Fred Fried with long-time NCA member and officer Jerry Betts at the NCA Conference in 1975. CNT Archive photo.



A page from the program of the second annual NCR convention held in Flint, MI, from Oct. 25 - 28 in 1974. Fred is in the center aboard a carousel horse. Courtesy of Rol Summit.

Books by Frederick Fried:

- **A Pictorial History of the Carousel**, 1964, A.S. Barnes and Company, Inc., NY
- **Artists in Wood**, 1970, Bramhall House, NY
- **New York Civic Sculpture**, 1976, Dover Press, MA
- **America's Forgotten Folk Art**, 1978, Mary Fried, co-author, Pantheon Books, NY
- **Built to Amuse: Views from America's Past, Past Age Postcard Series**, 1990, Wiley, John & Sons, Inc.

Essay: Fragmentary Landmarks – The Frieda Schiff Warburg Memorial Sculpture Garden, 1966, Frederick Fried/Brooklyn Museum, co-authors: Smithsonian Library.

Unpublished Books by Frederick Fried:

- *The Once and Wonderful Coney Island*
- *The History of the Peep Show*
- *James Fulton Pringle, Maritime Artist*
- *The Great American Carousel*
- *Topic: W.F. Mangels*

For more Information about the Please Touch Museum Carousel Project see *The Carousel News & Tradder*, June 2006 and July/August 2006 issues.



Fred and Mary in front of their West End Avenue home, NYC, in 1980. Photo by Barbara Williams.

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