

Merry-Go-Roundup

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Tidbits from *The Carousel of Smiles: The Glass Eye*

Clay Hutchison (article and photos)



Top, glass eye out of socket. Bottom, prior to plaster or other mixture holding eye in place (note hole above eye socket for pouring in mixture).



Since meeting my wife Reno in 1997, we have toured many carousels in pursuit of her dream of finding and restoring a forgotten Golden Age Carousel—a dream sparked by the loss of the Columbia Gardens Carousel in Butte, Montana, when it mysteriously burned in 1973.

One thing that always piqued my (layman's) curiosity were the glass eyes. How did the master carvers perfectly fit a hard glass eye into a smaller, hard wood eye socket?

In December 2016, we finally unloaded for the first time the circa 1920 Allan Herschell carousel we had fortuitously found in 2000, and discovered that two of our thirty-six horses had glass eyes. (This carousel had been abandoned in 1952, and we found it languishing in two trailers on a farmer's field. Once purchased, we stored it in the trailers for another 16 years before unloading it and launching *The Carousel of Smiles* project in Sandpoint, Idaho. For more, see *Merry-Go-Roundup*, 44, No. 2, 2017.)

Finding these two ponies, distinct from the rest of the herd, rekindled my curiosity about the eyes. First off, why did only these two have glass eyes? Clearly this is a more complicated feature than just carved wood eyes, and though this might make sense if these were the most elaborate figures of our ride, they are not—one is even a middle-row horse.

In asking members of the NCA with much greater knowledge than mine, it seems that the Allan Herschell Company phased out the use of glass eyes around the same time that our carousel was likely made. Maybe some of you have greater knowledge about this (if so, please share!) but it is possible that, as this carousel was put together (the company had a variety of different sizes and packages one could order), it might very well have included two of the last glass-eyed ponies made by the Allan Herschell Company—if true, a fun distinction for our machine.

This past summer, our middle-row glass-eyed horse was adopted by Sandpoint's own Jack and Michelle Parnell, who raise

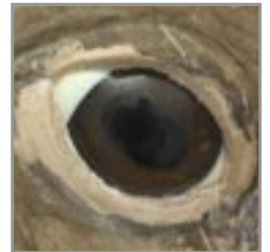
Clydesdale horses (some have been part of the famous Budweiser teams). They had been smitten by this wooden pony upon first seeing him emerge from storage at our event in 2016, as he reminded them of their beloved stallion Protegé.

Upon commencing the restoration of the now-named Protegé, Mike Boeck, one of our talented volunteer restorationists, uncovered the answers to my nagging question about the glass eyes. The glass eye itself is not a round, marble-like piece, but is actually fairly thin. The wood socket, however, is deeply carved, thus the glass eye slides in at an angle, then is brought forward and correctly positioned. To keep the eye firmly and correctly in place, there is a hole drilled from above the eye into the eye socket, which allows plaster or some other mixture to be poured in behind the eye. Once this sets up firmly, it holds the eye in place. The hole is then plugged with a dowell and is undetectable after painting.

While quite simple and straightforward, this was a fascinating process to finally see and understand. Protegé is now ready for paint, and the finished result will be shown in a future issue of the *Merry-Go-Roundup*.



Protegé with glass eye reinstalled.



Jack Parnell with his Clydesdale Stallion Protegé, and with his adopted pony in memory.