

Merry-Go-Roundup

Volume 48, Number 2 Official Publication of the National Carousel Association Summer 2021



Photo - Steve Grooms

Como Park
Cafesjian's Carousel, PTC #33
St. Paul, Minnesota

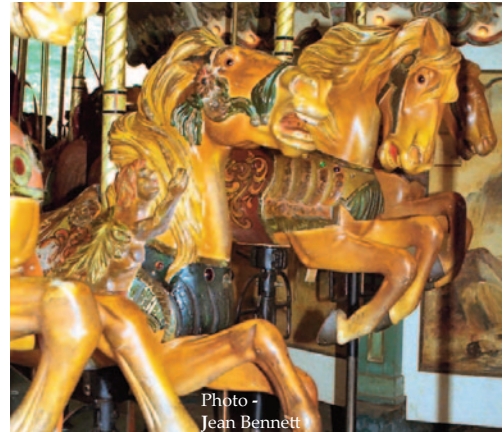


Photo -
Jean Bennett

Griffith Park
Spillman Eng./Looff/Carmel
Los Angeles, California



Photo -
Jean Bennett

Davis Mercantile
Dentzel frame/new carvings
Shipshewana, Indiana



Photo - Chris Benson

Columbus Zoo
W. F. Mangels/M. C. Illions
Powell, Ohio

NCA Grant Update: Restoring the Carousel of Smiles' Shields

Clay Hutchison

The rounding board shields...every carousel has them, and depending on the make, model and age of the carousel they adorn, these shields can be extremely simple or highly decorative and elaborate. Though adding a colorful and often whimsical feature for all to enjoy, the shields are an integral, functioning part of the frame as they are the last piece when assembled, locking the whole frame together.

Our carousel last operated, we believe, at the Kansas State Fair in 1952, then was packed into its two trailers and left in a farmer's field where it remained until my wife Reno and I purchased it in 2000. We moved both trailers to a storage barn in Upstate New York, then in 2016 transported the still-loaded trailers to Sandpoint, Idaho, to launch the Carousel of Smiles restoration project with our unloading event that December (see our short videos at thecarouselofsmiles.org/videos).

With all the pieces finally out of the trailers we were able to positively identify our carousel, with the help of the NCA, as a circa 1920s Allan Herschell machine. This was definitively

confirmed by pictures from an early Allan Herschell catalog that a follower from Pennsylvania (connected to us via our previous *Merry-Go-Roundup* articles) sent our way a couple of summers ago. The Carousel of Smiles is an Allan Herschell "No. 2 Special Three Abreast" carousel, intended "for permanent locations where an elaborate machine is required. Again, for carnivals that desire a more than ordinary outfit."

With grant assistance from the NCA, we tackled the restoration of our 14 rounding board shields this past year. On a traveling carousel, the shields and rounding boards are outside the tent canopy, thus subject to the full force of mother nature and resulting degradation. Add to that the yellowing of 75-plus-year-old varnish and dulling from decades of dirt and grime, and our shields had lost their colorful exuberance. But, they clearly held the promise of an extraordinary rebirth.

After our first article in the *Merry-Go-Roundup* (44, No. 2, 2017) we received information about these shields from the great-grandson of their

Catalog image of
Allan Herschell
No. 2 Special
Three Abreast.

—*Carousel Society of
the Niagara Frontier*





creator. The four faces were created by Ward Olver, inspired by his passion for Greek mythology and the American West. These shield faces are Ward's interpretation of the Four Winds, "gods who were each ascribed a cardinal direction from which their respective winds came."

Several surviving Allan Herschell carousels are graced by the Four Winds—above, left to right, the Northern Viking, the Southern Belle, the Eastern Prince and the Western Indian.

The faces are cast metal, as are the top and bottom scroll pieces, all set on a one-inch thick wooden plaque. There is a 1919 casting date on the inside of some of the faces, along with evidence of various repairs made.

The first step of our restoration was for our art conservator, Christina Krumrine, to carefully strip away the layers of varnish to determine and document the original color palette used. (Christina is also restoring our inside scenery panels painted by Lotteva Wagner Davis; see *Merry-Go-Roundup* 46, No. 1, 2019.)

With the color information documented, we made the decision to strip, repair and repaint all the elements of the shields, a task taken on by multiple members of our various volunteer groups.

Over the years, the wooden backing plaques had split, causing most of the metal scroll pieces to break as well. These all had to be stripped of the old paint and repaired. The backing boards, each with six lights, needed to be refurbished, including the old-style, porcelain and copper light sockets which are no longer available.

With the backing boards repaired, attention was then focused on the 28 cast decorative scroll elements and the 14 faces. Stripped, repaired and primed, they were ready for our painters to bring back the life of the Four Winds.

Repainting of the 28 scroll castings is a team effort, requiring multiple layers, many with a rub/wash, accented with gold. Each face is being painted by a different artist, each adding his/her own interpretation to Ward Olver's art.

Above, shields in as-found condition. Below, the Carousel of Smiles, assembled for a pre-restoration unveiling, 2017.

—Photos:
Clay Hutchison





Above, left to right, Northern Viking, Southern Belle, Eastern Prince, Western Indian, sandblasted to bare metal. Right, side view of Northern Viking shield. Far right, year 1919 stamped on back side. Below left, scrolls being repainted in original colors. Below right, Eastern Prince during uncovering of original colors.



—Photos:
Clay Hutchison

See the biographical sketch of Ward Olver, creator of these shields, on page 12.

Facing page, four restored shields ready to lead the Carousel of Smiles (clockwise from top left, Northern Viking, Southern Belle, Western Indian, Eastern Prince).

—Photos:
Clay Hutchison





Ward R. Olver

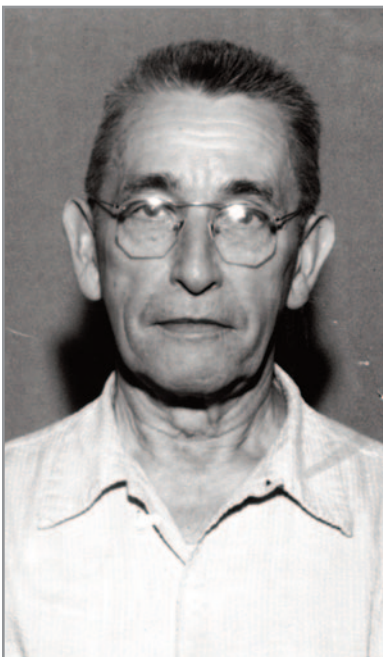
Information and photos courtesy of grandson Ward R. Bray and the Olver family



Above, close-up of Ward Olver from photo of Herschell-Spillman employee outing, 1902.

For more on Ward Olver, see *Merry-Go-Roundup* 39, No. 4, 2012.

Below, Ward's retirement photo from Bell Aircraft, 1956.



Early Years in Buffalo

Ward Rolland Olver, born in 1882, son of artist Wallace Olver, was a lifelong Western New Yorker. He was an accomplished sculptor and painter both by inclination and by trade. He resided in Buffalo until age 21.

Education

Ward was inspired by the arts from a young age. In 1900 he followed his father's path and was enrolled in the Art Students League of Buffalo, where he was instructed in drawing, modeling, painting and design.

Herschell-Spillman Years

In 1902 Ward went to work as a carousel carver and painter at the Herschell-Spillman Company in North Tonawanda. Ward's father Wallace was also a carver and painter there. In 1915 Ward went with Allan Herschell to his new company, and Ward's father remained with the Herschell-Spillman Company.

Fascination with the Wild West

Art was Ward's work but it was also a way of life. Much of his free time was spent painting, drawing and carving (when he was not hunting, canoeing, or riding his motorcycle). His great interest in the Wild West was evident in his paintings, many of which involved open landscapes, horses, Native Americans and cowboys.

Ward married Minnie Brandt of Tonawanda in 1915 and built a house next to his father's on Ward Road in the Wheatfield neighborhood of North Tonawanda.

Allan Herschell Years

At the Allan Herschell Company, Ward was an artist and designer, carver, then foreman of the carving and paint shops. His designs were often inspired by his own muses. The "Four Winds" exemplify his intrigue with Greek mythology and art. The western-style horse design was oft-used during Ward's tenure.

By the time the company went to all-aluminum horses, Ward's services were no longer needed. The era of hand-carved horses had ended.

Superintendent of Whitney School

Ward's was a life guided by the arts. He served as Superintendent of the Whitney School in Niagara Falls, New York, a National Youth Administration program and an art school for young adults.

Curtiss Wright and Bell Aircraft

In 1942 Ward became foreman of the Experimental Design Department at Curtiss Wright Corporation in Buffalo, whose designs made major contributions to the Allies.

After World War II, Ward worked for Bell Aircraft in North Tonawanda. He built wood forms and models in the Experimental Department and helped design and build the first supersonic aircraft, the X-1A.

Retirement

Upon retirement from Bell in 1956, Ward painted, carved, and tutored art students at his Tonawanda home and did projects for the Allan Herschell Company. He died in 1967.