



The Brass Ring News Letter

WINTER 2008



Chasing MerryGoRounds

Perhaps it's a bit pretentious of me to use that particular picture on the front cover of our esteemed publication. Besides, the carousel in the background isn't even in Colorado. Nevertheless, it is the best winter-related picture I could find in my archives.

So, if you have a great winter shot that is related to one of our home-based carousels, I would love to use it in next year's winter edition.

PS: I took that picture of myself in 2003, at Krape Park, in Freeport, IL while chasing across the country in search of merry-go-rounds.

As many of you know, our society is graced by not only great Coloradoans, but wonderful out-of-state folks as well. Ed Angster is one of those very people. In fact, he even joined us on our Chicago trip a couple years ago.

It's with great sadness that I must share the following news about Ed's wife, Monica.

MONICA M. ANGSTER

Monica M. Angster, 72, of Toms River, NJ, died June 6 at Van Dyke Hospice, in New Jersey. Ed and Monica were married 52 years, had three sons, seven daughters and 26 grandchildren.

Many of us wondered about Ed's absence this last year in Seattle. There were concerns then of Monica's health. Ed seems to never miss an NCA event, but often attended without Monica (her fear of flying usually precluded her from being there). However, she did join us at the Minneapolis Convention in 2006. It was a real treat to finally meet the woman we had heard so much about.

2008 Calendar of Events

Don't Miss Out On The Fun!

* **Saturday, January 19, 2008 AT 11:30 am** - "Pot Luck" luncheon, Business Meeting, and Auction at Dave and Audrey's Red Barn

In addition to the usual Lunch, Business Meeting and Auction we will take a few minutes to brainstorm about the possibility of a 2008 Carousel Trip. Please be thinking about this subject and come prepared to share your thoughts.

For the Pot Luck

**Please bring the following per your Last Name:
A–H Main Dish; I–Q Fruit or Vegetable Salad; Q–Z Dessert**

*If you have any questions, please call Billie Noren at 303 779-1090
OR*

Dennis Towndrow at 303 427-8023

* **May 2-4, 2008** - NCA Technical Conference in Story City, Iowa
For more information go to: www.nca-usa.org/2008tech.html

* **September 22-28, 2008** - NCA Convention in TN, MO, MS, & AR
For more information go to: www.nca-usa.org/2008convention.html

A Nostalgic Ride Through North Denver's Historic Amusement Parks

By Kathy McKoy

NORTH DENVER - It was their first visit to an American amusement park with their two young children. The young Bosnian refugee family was half a world away from their place of birth, friends and families. Memories of surviving a violent war were still painfully etched into the parents' minds and the struggle to learn a new language and different customs seemed at times overwhelming. But for one beautiful summer evening at historic Lakeside Amusement Park, all the troubles of the Kajtazovic family were forgotten. The faces of three-year-old Kenan and five-year-old Elma lit up with amazement and wonder in Kiddie Land, as they excitedly explored the thrilling delights of a vanishing American institution, the old-fashioned amusement park. In this regard, this immigrant family was just like waves of others who came to this country a century ago, sometimes with little more than a hope and a prayer for a better future.

Amusement parks have long been the country's "melting pot," for the language of fun is universal. The zenith of immigration to the U.S. took place between 1890-1917 when over 16 million people arrived, most from Eastern and Southern Europe. Amusement parks fostered assimilation and participation in the new mass culture spawned by an increasingly industrialized society. They helped knit a heterogeneous population into a more cohesive whole and to nurture a sense of national identity. Three such parks existed in Northwest Denver at the dawn of the 20th century: Elitch Gardens, Manhattan Beach (later Luna Pak) and Lakeside Amusement Park ("The White City").

Mayor Robert W. Speer was instrumental in promoting the parks of Northwest Denver as public playgrounds. One of his first acts after being elected in 1904 was to remove all "Keep Off The Grass" signs from park ground. "Spooning" between young couples was not discouraged, for that often led to marriages which led to babies, and Denver politicians wanted more people! Between 1904 and 1912, Speer more than doubled park

acreage, adding Inspiration Point, Rocky Mountain Lake, Berkeley Lake, and Sloan's Lake to the city's park system. In summertime people swam, fished, sailed, and boated on North Denver's lakes, in winter they ice-skated on them.

Denver's very first amusement park, however, was not in North Denver. River Front Park, begun by John Brisbane Walker in 1887, was located along the Platte River, between 15th and 19th Streets. It flourished for only a few years, partly because Walker shifted his business interests to New York, selling the property to Union Pacific Railroad in 1891. Elitch Gardens, on the other hand, lasted over a century at its Tennyson and 38th Avenue location. John and Mary Elitch opened their park to throngs of people on May 1, 1890, with Phineas T. Barnum and Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb as guests. While John took ill and died soon after, Mary continued to run Elitch's for three decades. Billed as "a family resort," the park featured Denver's first zoo, a theater, formal gardens, rides, and after 1922, the Trocadero dance hall. No liquor was served at Elitch's until the 1940s. When it first opened, visitors could come to the gardens via a steam motor line railway that passed Elitch's entrance en route to Berkeley Lake, or after 1891, they could take West End Electric trolleys which also transported people to the new Manhattan Beach resort at Sloan's Lake. Old Elitch Gardens closed in 1994, relocating to downtown Denver.

In 1890 the city of Highlands expanded westward, when the area between Lowell and Sheridan was annexed. That winter, German immigrant Adam Graff opened a family resort on the north shore of Sloan's Lake, offering a fresh air pavilion and boating. After a fire destroyed his buildings in April 1891, he sold the land to an eastern syndicate who named the resort Manhattan Beach. Thousands of trees were planted and three thousand loads of California sand were imported to create a bathing beach. An electric fountain from Paris spewed water 75 feet high, lit in rainbow colors at night. Ten thousand people attended opening day festivities on June 27, 1891. The park featured a huge theater, a 100-foot tall electric observation tower, large menagerie of exotic animals, formal gardens, mechanical rides, sideshow attractions, boating, and more. Alcohol was not served at the

resort, but patrons could always cross Sheridan and quench their thirst in one of Edgewater's many saloons. The park thrived until a disastrous fire on December 26, 1908, destroyed the theater. The property was then sold to local developers, who reopened it in 1909 as Luna Park. Attendance dwindled however, as the resort competed not only with Elitch's but also with a new amusement park two miles to the north by Berkeley Lake. It appears to have "gone under" as an enterprise only a few years later.

Billing itself as "the Coney Island West," Lakeside Amusement Park opened at 46th and Sheridan on May 30, 1908. Mayor Speer pressed a button in his downtown office to illuminate the park's 100,000 light bulbs as fifty thousand people witnessed the lavish opening night display. The owner and promoter of the park was the wealthy Denver brewer, Adolph Zang. That night his daughter Gertrude smashed a bottle of champagne against the park's 150-foot Tower of Jewels. The original park featured a 37-acre lake and 57 acres of beautiful grounds. In addition to its ballroom, theater, casino and indoor pool, visitors enjoyed water fountains, a picnic grove, a roller rink, and rides like "shoot-the-chute." Unlike Elitch's and Luna Park, beer was served in Lakeside's German Rathskellar. Two miniature steam-powered trains that came from the 1904 St. Louis Exposition took guests around the park. (Both are still in use today. A third train is a miniature of the streamlined California Zephyr.) Lakeside's most impressive feature when it opened, however, was its electric lights. Every building was outlined, crisscrossed or encrusted with incandescent bulbs. Zang promoted the Lakeside's early nickname, "The White City," conjuring up images of Chicago's 1893 World Columbian Exposition. Lakeside was an instant success.

In 1933 Benjamin Krasner, a Lakeside concessionaire since 1917, purchased the park. A few years later, he hired West Coast architect Richard Crowther to upgrade the look of the park with streamlined art moderne buildings and neon lights, many of which remain to this day. (The Cyclone Coaster has been designated a "Classic Coaster" by the American

Coaster Enthusiasts.) Krasner didn't want the original entrance tower changed however, and it is still a North Denver landmark. He died in 1965, and soon after his daughter Rhoda became general manager, a title she has held ever since. Krasner's goal today, she says, is "to be able to intrigue the 10 year old and to make as many wonderful memories for people as we did in the past."

In 1920 there were an estimated 2,000 amusement parks like those of North Denver but by 1940 only 250 survived. A number of factors contributed to the decline of the old style park, in particular the popularity of the automobile after World War I and of television after World War II. By the late 1920s anyone who could afford one had an auto. Judith A. Adams noted in *The American Amusement Park Industry*, "Suddenly the American people had the means to travel beyond the limits of their local attractions and to choose their vacation destinations." New national parks were established and auto-touring became a national pastime. During the 1950s the television set became a part of the American household, bringing entertainment into the home. The lure of the amusement park soon paled in comparison to the delights emanating from the tiny TV screen.

Finally, the opening of Disneyland in 1955 in Anaheim, California, ushered in a new era in the amusement park industry, that of the "theme park." The trend toward corporate ownership of entertainment complexes emerged as the new parks required massive capital. The first Six Flags park opened in Texas in 1961, founded by oil baron Angus Wynne. Reached today by car or airplane, many theme parks are located beyond the reach of urban transportation systems, catering to a predominantly middle and upper class clientele. It is notable that while suburban locations were considered, Elitch's was relocated in lower downtown Denver in 1995, virtually ensuring that future visitors continue to be a diverse population. Today it is one of 38 amusement parks owned by Six Flags, Inc. Whether you opt for the nostalgia of historic Lakeside or the glitz of the new Six Flags Elitch Gardens, you will be participating in a century-old pastime that continues to delight, distract, and deliciously titillate the senses.

Article originally appeared in the June 12, 2002 issue of the "North Denver Tribune." Copied in its entirety, with written permission from the author, Kathy McKoy.

NORTHWEST CAROUSEL ADVENTURE (Part 2)

by Lyn Brown (photos by Editor)



Next, we headed for the Multnomah Falls, on the Columbia River, east of Portland. It is the second-highest falls in the United States. We rested our eyes and exercised our legs before proceeding to Parkdale and the International Museum of Carousel Art. The wild bus ride through pastures and across streambeds made us realize we were in cowboy country.



The depth and breadth of this collection, owned and managed by Duane and Carol Perron, is hard to imagine until you see it. The large warehouse-type barn is chock full of carousel animals and objects, on two levels (an upstairs loft runs the length of the barn on each side). Animals in all conditions -- the restored and the injured -- rest against each other and beside each other, waiting their turn to go round and round once again.

Duane explained his plans for an international carousel center and for expanded membership in the museum. The Perrons own and operate eight restored carousels, which they lease to public places. And while all the separate pieces probably can't be counted, they number in the several hundreds. Much of the restoration, fundraising, and general nitty-gritty work is done by volunteers, including Colorado Carousel Society members Earl and Shirl Vitus of Grand Junction, who spend summers working in the Museum. During lunch in the park-like setting, real live horses came begging for a handout.

A long ride through mountainous southwestern Washington brought us to the town

of Bickleton, population 113, forty miles from nowhere and perhaps our most memorable stop. We were warmly welcomed by the entire town at Cleveland Park, the site of the Bickleton Rodeo and home of a c.1900 Armitage Herschell/Herschell-Spillman track machine which runs once a year, during the annual rodeo in June and is then stored in an old bank vault in town -- except for this year, when Bickleton set up the machine again just for the NCA visit.



The 24-horse track machine originally ran at Oaks Park, in Portland and was powered by steam. There is no overhead mechanism; the carousel is belt-driven and runs on tires on a track beneath the deck. It is a special experience to have a whole town turn out to greet you and feed you a steak dinner with homemade ice cream. We felt as if we'd experienced "Brigadoon," and were reluctant to board the buses for the long dark drive back to Seattle.

Saturday morning's stop was at Enchanted Village in Federal Way, a Seattle suburb.



In this cleanly-kept amusement park, the 1906 Parker portable carousel sits on a slight hill overlooking the rest of the rides. The mechanism is in need of repair, and only a few lucky riders got to finish their ride.

In 1999, Linda and Tom Allen, Seattle residents (Tom also serves on the NCA Board), purchased PTC#45 from Great America Corporation. It had run at Santa Clara, California, until the owners chose to put the great old machine into storage. Dedicating huge blocks of time and resources to the project, Tom and Linda labored to bring back to prime condition the Zalar-carved carousel, which was built in 1918.



Bette Largent, NCA President and a noted restorer, along with other artists, put the horses back in shape. The Allens then donated the antique machine to Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo, where it is housed in a state-of-the-art octagonal building.

The generosity of all involved in restoring and placing this great carousel is much appreciated by Seattle residents and the staff of the zoo, as well as the NCA. We enjoyed the dedication ceremony and the ride. A box lunch on the grounds, and time for touring the zoo, rounded out the day.

At Saturday evening's banquet, Round-About Fair and annual auction, it was announced that \$7,922 was raised during the convention to add to the NCA's preservation fund.

After the annual meeting on Sunday morning, NCA members were invited to open houses at three collectors' homes. The Hoelscher collection in Redmond delighted us by featuring not only ten carousel animals and many carousel-related items, but also other collections of all kinds. At Tom and Linda Allen's home, we saw 26 animals including a hippocampus, camel, rabbit and goat as well as beautiful horses. After a ferry ride across Puget Sound, we visited the Murphy residence on Bainbridge Island, where a stable-full of beautifully restored figures waited for us.

Thanks to the owners of all three collections for making us welcome.

Special thanks to Linda and Tom Allen and their hard-working group for providing a well-organized and memorable convention.

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: We need other great carousel stories, so PLEASE don't hesitate share yours today! :
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