

The HERSHEY PARK Carrousel and Its Band Organ

Bill Black

Most folks who are really “crazy” about carousels and band organs got that way because of a “hands on” experience working in a park. Anyway, that’s what happened to me. Back in the 1950s I had the good fortune to be employed as a summer employee while going to school in the winters. Having had experience running a cash register in a supermarket, I was hired as cashier in a food stand. In the evenings when things quieted down a bit, you could hear the sound of the band organ on the carousel drifting through the park. I was enchanted! I spent a lot of my “break time” at the carousel watching and listening. The following summer I asked to work on the carousel. Ever had a job that you just couldn’t wait to go to work? I had one!

Hershey Park opened in 1907 as a baseball field and band shell where the Hershey Band performed. Picnic groves allowed local residents a place to gather and relax.



Figure 1. HERSHEY PARK as it appears today, located at Hershey, PA.

As time went on, rides were added and visitors to the park were greeted by a beautiful garden area at the park entrance. They could walk to the amusement ride areas or they could take a ride on a wonderful electric miniature railway down to the center of the park.

The carousel (they called theirs “carrousel”) was located along Spring Creek which ran through the park. This area of the park was known as the “hollow” (a low area by the creek). The carousel was housed in the usual round building which also included a small refreshment stand. I worked in the park from 1955 to 1964. In those days the park was in the “traditional amusement park” configuration. The park was not fenced in and there was no charge to enter the park. Patrons paid for each ride according to what they wanted to ride. Each ride had its own ticket booth, cashier and ride operators. Since I lived close by the park and was available to work right from the start of the park season till the end, I was fortunate to have the chance to operate many of the different rider until the regular summer operators arrived. My principal place to work was on the carousel.

The Hershey Park Carrousel was manufactured by the Philadelphia Toboggan Company in 1917. Assigned the number “47” by the PTC, the ride was one of their larger machines. It was a four abreast machine. There is one larger PTC machine in existence today, a five abreast machine owned by Disney. No. “47” was originally purchased by Liberty Heights Park in

Baltimore, MD and later moved to Auburn, NY. In 1944, this magnificent carousel was brought to Hershey Park and installed in the “hollow” by Spring Creek. The carousel features 42 jumpers, 24 stationary horses, two chariots and 1,788 light bulbs. The ride diameter is 50 feet and it revolves at six rpm.

The carousel building had a porch on the front and the refreshment stand on one side as mentioned above. The usual crew was composed of an operator, two ticket takers and a cashier. Sometimes on busy holiday weekends we had additional ticket takers. Generally, we swept the ride and floor the night before. The building had large folding doors which opened up to expose the complete circumference of the ride. Before running, the oil cup for the top bearing would be checked for oil for the day’s operation and the horse cranks were wiped down to prevent excess grease from dropping down on the riders.

Tickets were sold in a booth on the porch of the building. The cost of a ride was five cents in those days. Upon entering the building, the public had access to the carousel on all sides. We had no control as to the number of persons boarding the ride. The carousel was a popular ride and on a busy day there was a real scramble to get a horse. In fact, you would need to have two tickets to get a horse. One ticket to “stand by” the horse of your choice in hopes the rider would get off after their ride and you could then get on your horse. All riders required a ticket, riding or standing. The ride had a seating capacity of about 74 persons. Since many riders were small children, they were often accompanied by an adult to make sure they didn’t fall off. This of course increased the number of riders also. On a busy day, this often produced a load of close to 200 people on the ride. It was even worse when it rained as our ride was one of the few which had a roof over it and people flocked in to get out of the rain.

In those days the carousel used a friction drive known as an “Auchy Drive” patented by the inventor Henry B. Auchy. This



(Figure 2). The “Wild Mouse” roller Coaster had a good view of the main portion of the park.

consisted of a belt drive from an electric motor to transmit the power to the “Auchy Drive” clutch and brake mechanism. A lever arm served to raise a large disc against brake pads to stop the ride or lower the disc onto rollers to start and run it. This arrangement allowed for some slippage and served as a clutch. It worked very well as long as you were dealing with the intended normal number of riders. Now if you had 200 people on board, the resultant weight was more than this arrangement could stand and the ride would not start due to slippage of the motor belts to the drive. So, the maintenance crew would arrive and apply belt dressing to the belts for extra grip. Still on occasion, the carousel crew would have to “put our shoulders to it” to get her going. Great fun and this usually produced a cheer from the riders awaiting their ride.



Figure 3. The rebuilt “carrousel” with its restored animals and the Wurlitzer 153 band organ.

For the purpose of collecting tickets, we divided the ride into two halves with either one or two people working each half, depending on the number of crew members. The ride ran under power for three minutes. We used an egg timer. An electric bell served to warn riders that the ride was about to start. The lever to apply the brake required some experience so as not to apply the brake too fast which would cause the drive gear to “slip a tooth” on the ring gear. This produced a sound like a clap of thunder so we were always very careful to avoid this. If the ride was very busy and the crowd large, we would shorten the running time to accommodate more rides per hour.

The carousel was also equipped with a ring machine. The park office would decide when the ring machine would be operated and gave us a brass ring with instructions not to let it get away. The arm was loaded with steel rings with the brass ring as the last one. After the tickets were collected, the arm would be swung out for riders to grab a ring. One of us would stand by the machine to watch who got the brass ring. We would then immediately hop on the ride to retrieve the ring. The person who got the ring was given a special ticket which they could keep or use for a free ride. The

steel rings were collected by means of a large box with a clown face. The idea was for the rider to see if they could throw the ring into the clown’s mouth. This also required our close attention as sometimes riders couldn’t resist the urge to throw the steel ring at someone. This problem eventually led to the demise of this fine tradition due to the possibility of injury to spectators.

Closing time was strictly under the control of the park manager. The “Comet” roller coaster loading platform was high off the ground and afforded a good view of the main portion of the park. The park manager would arrive at this perch and survey the amount of people present and the number of those folks who were still riding the amusements. When he judged that it was no longer profitable to stay open, the ride lights on the coaster were turned off. That was the signal to close. The coaster ride light could be seen all over the park. For those who couldn’t see the lights, the word spread to them quickly. Time to clean up and lock up. The money collected from the ticket sales and the ticket cans were returned to the park office. Our day was done and we looked forward to tomorrow. An exciting place to work. Always something new happening . . .

In 1970, Hershey Estates changed Hershey Park from the traditional amusement park configuration to the new concept of amusement parks—the theme park. **HERSHEYPARK** was born. The park became totally enclosed; an admission price was charged and the carousel was relocated to a new location, called the Carrousel Circle, which also included a cluster of other rides.

When the carousel was moved to the new location, this presented an opportunity to completely restore the machine (**Figure 3**). A new hardwood floor was constructed; the horses were stripped, repaired and repainted. The Wurlitzer 153 band organ was completely restored by Mike Kitner.

HERSHEYPARK’s Wurlitzer Style 153 Band Organ

When I first began working in the park in 1955, the 153 band organ was in playing condition and used daily during the park season (**Figures 4 - 6**). It was being maintained by a fellow named William Buckley. He was located in the Philadelphia area as I was told. Now and then I would observe him working on the organ if I happened to arrive at work early. His custom was to work on the organ in the mornings before the park opened. I believe he was called on an as-needed basis. All his work was done on the site. I never saw him take any parts with him although he may have done this in the years before I worked there. All the organ music rolls were Tussing rolls.



Figure 4. The Wurlitzer 153 band organ near the center of the “carrousel.”

Around 1960, the organ was no longer in playing condition. Back then, I didn’t know much about how it worked so I now don’t recall what the specific problem was. To provide music for the ride, a sound system was installed which used a reel to reel tape machine for playback. There

was no actual band organ music on these tapes. One was a tape of hand-played organ music which didn't have the flavor of the band organ.

I quit working in the park after 1964 and was out of touch with the organ till about mid 1970s. One of the fellows who worked on the carousel with me in the 1960s was now employed by the park in a management position. He was aware that I had acquired a band organ. About that time, a major expansion of the park was underway which included moving the carousel from its location by the creek to a new location.



Figure 5. Enclosed in the back of the Wurlitzer 153 are the twin roll frames.

This included a new building to house the ride and a restoration of the carousel. Attention was again turned to the organ. I was contacted by the park and asked if I knew anyone who could restore the organ. I sure did . . . Mike Kitner!

The organ was moved to Mike's shop and underwent a complete restoration. This was accomplished over the winter months. In the spring, Mike and I installed the organ on the ride. I no longer remember the year. From then on, the carousel had an operating band organ. Mike took care of the maintenance from then until his death. We usually went to the park together for service calls. Every couple of weeks during the park seasons, I would visit the park, touch up the tuning and give Mike a report on its condition. At the end of each season, Mike would decide what needed to be done for the next season. We would remove the parts to be worked on and take them to his shop. In the spring we would return the parts and get the organ ready for

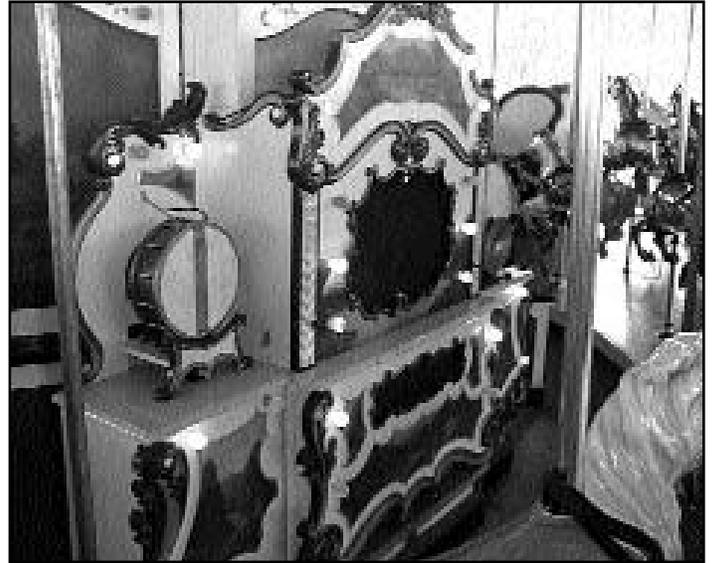


Figure 6. Another view of the Wurlitzer 153 band organ reveals the colorful lights and painted facade.

the season. During this period from the 70s to the present time, the organ had been in his shop twice for restoration.

When Mike passed away last December, the repairs for the coming season had not been done. I knew what was planned and was able to complete it and prepare the organ for the 2001 season.

The organ's serial number is 3839 and was built in 1926.

All photos were taken by the author.

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On Tuesday morning I call Memphis and learn they found the original paperwork and it's in Minneapolis. Good! I call the broker and tell her that. She responded by saying that they had already sent the paperwork over to Customs, but now they can't find it either. Must be "airhead work" again. By now I could have carried this thing on my back and swam over here. I go back home again. At 1:15 in the afternoon a fax comes through to come and get the organ, it's all cleared. Hooray! Back to the cities, load the organ, and drive back home. Then I uncrated the organ, unloaded it and placed it into the shed.

That evening we're ready to hear the first tune. Wrong again—no belt. I look at the pulley and there's a place to put a crank handle. Yes! I have a bolt that will fit as a crank. I hand cranked for the first half song and thought I would have a heart attack. The next

day I went to my old work place to see if I could borrow a V-belt. We found one, and that put me in business. But the motor was noisy—I've had troubles before with Dayton motors, they are electricaly out of balance. I took it back and exchanged it for a different brand—one that is smmmoooth. I finally got the original belt, the motor located, and all the other idiosyncrasies ironed out. Now I am in heaven playing up a storm.

Yes, my middle name has always been "Wait" but the wait is sure worth it. Anyone wanting to see and hear our new Prinsen organ is always welcome.

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Since high school Ralph Schultz has always dreamed of having a repair shop. With 27 years as a tool and die maker as background he has worked for 12 years restoring musical boxes.