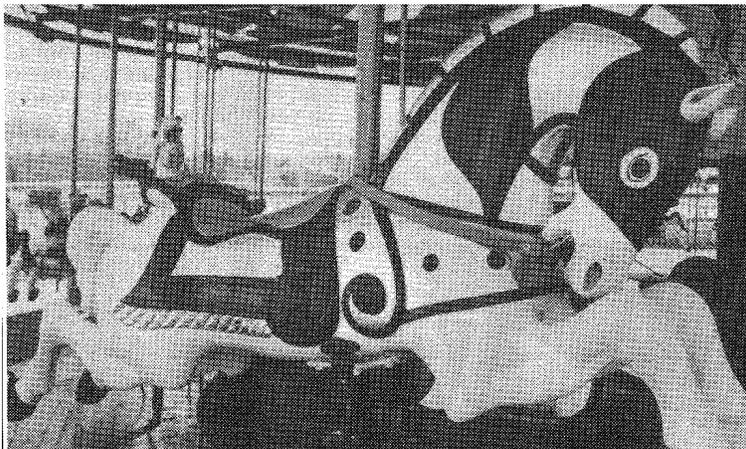


**Chippewa Park Carousel**  
**Chippewa Park**



**Year Built:** Between 1918 and 1920

**Architect:** C.W. Parker

**Style:** County Fair

**Notable Features:** hand-carved horses adorned with dog's heads, corn cobs and fish

**Date of Designation:** June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1991

**By-Law Number:** 129-1991

**Current Owner:** City of Thunder Bay

**Description:**

Luck has played a major role in the City of Fort William's acquisition of, and attention to, the magnificent and valuable Chippewa Park carousel. In 1934 the traveling carnival of Mrs. Maude King was brought to Fort William's Chippewa Park. Unfortunately for Mrs. King, her business went bankrupt while operating in the park and she was forced to sell the carousel to the City for a measly \$583.33. The carousel remained at the park, attracting amusement-seekers for decades, but it was not until the late 1980's that the merry-go-round began to spur a different sort of excitement.

The wooden horses of the carousel had been, by the mid 1980's, painted and repainted so many times their manes had lost their flowing craftsmanship and had taken on the appearance of an unmoving block of wood and paint. One City of Thunder Bay Parks employee was assigned to once again repaint the horses, but decided first to sand them. He found that the manes underneath the masses of paint were expertly crafted. He alerted the Parks Manager for the City of Thunder Bay to the discovery, who in turn showcased the carousel to some representatives from the Royal Ontario Museum who were visiting Thunder Bay in 1987.

Upon seeing the structure, the Royal Ontario Museum representatives urged the Department of Parks and Recreation for the City of Thunder Bay to evaluate the carousel.

Over time the American Carousel Association Conservation chairman, Mr. Charles Walker, was contacted. Mr. Fredrick Fried, known as the continent's foremost authority on American three-dimensional folk art, was also contacted. Mr. Fried visited Chippewa Park in 1988 to assess and evaluate the carousel. He praised the structure's authenticity, and informed members of the community that the Chippewa Park carousel was a C.W. Parker original; one of only three left in all of North America!

C.W. Parker, the self-proclaimed "Amusement King," had produced over 800 carousels from 1908 through to the 1920's. Many of these structures were lost to fire, weathering, or insect infestations. When mainstream interest for carousels was sparked in the 1960's, largely due to the publication of Mr. Fried's book *A Pictorial History of the Carousel*, a market was created for the sale of carousel parts. Dozens of carousels were taken apart and sold piece by piece at auctions, spurring Fried and others to create the American National Carousel Association, which advocated for the conservation of these historical amusement rides.

Thunder Bay is extremely fortunate to have in its' possession one of the few remaining Parker carousels. It seems that our Chippewa Park carousel is in excellent condition, due in part to the cold and dry weather of the area. Upon learning of the structure's enormous value and cultural importance, measures have been taken to ensure proper maintenance of the carousel. The wooden animals are stored over the winter in a building on sight at Chippewa Park and are protected from fire, vandalism and theft year-round. Truly, the Chippewa Park carousel has stood the test of time, amusing people for generations and now offering visitors a opportunity to appreciate its' unique history.



### **Architecture:**

A "prime example of three-dimensional folk art," the Chippewa Park carousel is designed in the 'Country Fair' style, which is characterized by simplicity and mobility. Carousels of the late 1800's and early 1900's were made to travel well and assemble easily as they were often featured in traveling carnival circuits. The horses could often be stacked on wooden frames for transportation via rail or cart. C.W. Parker worked within the 'County Fair' style, developing three distinct types of carousels throughout his illustrious career. The Chippewa Park carousel was manufactured during Parker's third (and many say, best) period of carousel production. Unlike other designers, who would include menagerie animals on their merry-go-rounds, Parker worked exclusively with

horses. The horses of Chippewa Park carousel, or “Carry-Us-All,” are two abreast and there are also two chariots with benches for four people.

The horses themselves are in an outstretched position, dramatically posed with forelegs curled for a lunge and hind legs kicked out. They have hollow heads and necks, with laminated bodies, solid tails and legs. The horses’ ears are close to their heads, tails were short and embellishments had few protruding edges. Traveling the Kansas countryside for inspiration, Parker would carve fish dangling from the cantle, dog’s head cantles and cobs of corn on the back of the saddle. Chippewa Park carousel has both dog’s heads and corn cobs. Many of the horses of Chippewa Park still wear their original factory shoes.



Carving a single horse could take upwards of forty hours, with the master carver, or ‘head man’ carving the head and mantle of the animal. The side of the horse which faced the audience would be more intricately carved than the side facing the interior of the carousel. ‘Crestings,’ or ‘rounding boards’ refer to the upper decorative outside parts of the carousel. The Chippewa Park carousel has carved frames surrounding mirrors, which are adorned with dragons and flowers. However, the rounding boards have been modified in the years since the carousel’s construction.

Contained behind decorated wood panels at the centre of the carousel is the rive mechanism. The panel boards of the Chippewa Park carousel frame stylized medieval lions, although it is unknown whether or not these panels are original. The Park is in possession of a Wulitzer band organ which was meant to accompany the amusement ride, although it is no longer in operation.

### **A Brief History of Carousels:**

The first reference to the notion of a carousel has been found in the form of a Byzantine bas-relief sculpture from 500 A.D., which depicts a group of people holding onto the ends of rope and rotating around a central turning pole. Little is known of this early form of the carousel.

During the 1100s, the Arabian and Turkish military had developed a training exercise for horsemen, which included wielding swords and attacking mock enemies. The objective of the drill was to catch small clay balls filled with scented oil. The unsuccessful contender would be “enveloped in the scent of defeat” for days. When the

European Crusaders arrived in these lands, they were witness to the exercise and dubbed it 'carosello,' or 'garosello,' which translates (from Spanish) to "little war."

The Crusaders eventually returned to Western Europe, along with their knowledge of the horseman training exercise, and the idea of 'carosello' spread. At first the practice was prevalent only within French castles, where it was used, as the Arabs and Turks had also done, as a training device. The French altered the procedure somewhat by attaching a dangling golden ring to a tree and having the horsemen attempt to spear it. This exercise, along with others, made up the European understanding of 'carrousel,' which became a catch-all phrase for all manners of extravagant displays of horsemanship in the French Royal Court.

The general public was first exposed to carousels in 1662 when Louis XIV staged a grand event in the streets of Paris. In an attempt to impress his teenaged mistress, madame Louise de la Vailliere, Louis held "Le Grand Carrousel," which consisted of displays of horsemanship, as well as an elaborate circular parade on horses where both the rider and the horse were clad in magnificent dress, the riders wearing wigs and jewellery while the horses donned ornamented saddles.

The idea of carousels remained popular with the masses, and new techniques were developed to enjoy the practice. The French developed a mechanical version of the ring-spearing exercise, where participants sat upon wooden carved horses suspended from beams attached to a central pole. The carousel rotated by force of man, mule or horse power and the riders attempted to reach for the golden centre ring while turning.

By the late 1700s, carousels were used solely for amusement purposes, and new types of carousels were constantly being developed. Early models had no platforms, so the carved horses would be suspended by chains. When the carousel turned, the horses would fly outward and thus became known as "flying horses."

The Industrial Revolution of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century affected carousels by introducing new technologies to the traditional game. The devices became steam-powered, allowing for the carved horses to be stationed on a pole where they could move not only in a circular direction, but also up and down. This innovation was brought to North America in 1860 when a German immigrant by the name of Gustav Dentzel built a bench-seat carousel. His product met with so much success that he was able to open a factory to manufacture the amusement ride.

The carousels produced in America from 1860 until the 1880s were stationary machines characterized by extravagance and flamboyance. Unlike their earlier European counterparts, the carousel animals on these merry-go-rounds were not limited to horses: frogs, cats, dogs, teddy bears and mythical creatures all made appearances upon the carousels of this era.

Nearing the turn of the century, the traveling fair became popular, and the carousel was altered to adapt to this trend. The 'county fair style' carousel was designed

to be mobile, it was necessary that the carved animals could easily be stacked and the machine simply dismantled and rebuilt. Traveling fairs were prevalent throughout North America until the onset of the Great Depression, when people were simply unable to afford the frivolous amusement.

Once the Depression began to subside some effort was made to revitalize interest in the carousel with new models which were constructed of aluminum. During this time, however, many new higher-adrenaline amusement rides were being produced and these attracted attention away from the tame seeming merry-go-round.

Carousels began to inspire excitement once again during the 1970s when historical conservationists began to realize the cultural significance of the amusement ride. Preservation of these historic relics was seen as necessary, as many carousels of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century had been damaged due to fires, weathering, wood-destroying insects and poor maintenance. Carousels gained importance as three-dimensional folk art and the National Carousel Association was created to ensure that the merry-go-rounds would be preserved for future generations.

For a more detailed description of the general history, contemporary styles and construction of carousels, as well as a biography of C.W. Parker, please visit:

< <http://www.thunderbay.ca/docs/chippewa/3129.pdf> >