

Children's Museum of Memphis

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STORY OF THE CAROUSEL

The Story of a Grand Carousel

Unfortunately, Memphis has allowed many of its treasures to fall by the wayside. Many historic items have been forgotten or lost to make way for progress or because of lack of funds or interest. Fortunately, The Children's Museum, along with generous donors like FedEx, the Plough Foundation, the Nineteenth Century Club, and over 50 other individuals, are out to show that Memphis' historic treasures are worthy of being saved and brought back for future generations to enjoy! By bringing the Grand Carousel back, we can provide experiences that will allow millions of children to create memories for their lifetimes, as well as give the museum the opportunity to teach children about historic preservation and tell them the story of our National Treasure.

Memphians can be proud knowing they own one of the nation's finest, original, hand-carved Dentzel carousels and one of only four or five all-horse Dentzel carousels left in existence. The Carousel started its life at Forest Park Amusement Park outside Chicago in 1909. After a park fire in 1921, the Carousel left Chicago and went back to the Dentzel factory in Philadelphia for repairs. It was then leased by the Memphis Park Commission (through their third party park manager, the Tri-State Fair) in 1923 for inclusion in the city amusement park on the Memphis Fairgrounds. It stayed there until it was dismantled in 1974, moved 60 feet east, partially restored and reopened as a centerpiece ride for the Libertyland Amusement Park in 1976. When Libertyland closed in 2005, after much community discussion, local supporters were successful in saving the Grand Carousel from being sold as a park asset. In October 2009, the Carousel was packed up for safe keeping and stored in the Mid-South Coliseum. In 2014, The Children's Museum signed a lease with the City of Memphis, and it was finally sent off for a \$1 million restoration in June 2015. It has been restored and reopened to the public on December 2, 2017.

The Grand Carousel features 32 jumpers, 16 standers and two chariots. The rounding boards feature jester carvings with collars and hats. These alternate with mirrors that have small angels carved under them. The main column has mirrors that reflect down onto the ride and above the mirrors there are ornate carvings. The machine has over 1,300 lights that provide an elegant illumination of the fabulous hand-carvings. The horses' saddles are quite decorative and the carvings often extend the length of the horses' bodies.

Of the many carousels produced by the Dentzel family from 1837 to 1928, only about two dozen are in operation today. Many ceased to exist due to the ravages of use, weather and time, without adequate support systems. Because of their unique style and high value, others have been put out of operation because of the removal of their hand carved figures by avid collectors.

Of the eight nationally accredited children's museums, of which Memphis is one, only two have operating carousels - ironically both Denzel's. The Children's Museum of Indianapolis has a 1917 Dentzel Carousel and the Please Touch Museum in Philadelphia has a 1908 Dentzel Carousel, a sister carousel to ours. The horses, cherubs and smiling jesters of this historic treasure is again going round and round, waltzing to the distinctive carousel music right here in Memphis. The history of this Grand Carousel is in Memphis. Its history is YOU!