

1981

# Santa Cruz Tradition For Kids Of All Ages



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Back when William Howard Taft was president of the United States—in 1911, to be exact—there opened at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk an ornate recreational contrivance destined to be remembered fondly by millions of men, women and children as “the Santa Cruz Merry-Go-Round.”

The merry-go-round featured two outstanding attractions: a 342-pipe Ruth Band organ, built in Germany in 1894, and a herd of gold and white horses carved by a Dane named Charles I.D. Loeff.

Some 70 years later the merry-go-round is deemed to be a museum piece because it still features the German organ and the Loeff horses.

It was built by Loeff at Riverside, Rhode Island, during the “Golden Age of Carousels” (1910 to 1918). A woodcarver, he had sailed for New York in the 1870s to win fame and fortune in the New World.

Loeff, who had worked in a furniture factory and had practiced carving horses in his spare time, made his first merry-go-round in 1875 for installation at Coney Island, N.Y.

He achieved lasting fame by imbuing each of his carved horses with lifelike verve. Even when standing still at the brass poles they seem almost to be prancing to music heard by their ears alone.

The characteristics of a Loeff horse are elegance, flared nostrils, veining, leg musculature—and spirit, spirit, spirit.

These characteristics have won for the Loeff horse a very high place in the esteem of merry-go-round buffs who collect and restore carousel horses both for their own pleasure and the marketplace.

The original cost of the Santa Cruz Merry-Go-Round was \$18,000. But the value of its 72 Loeff horses is estimated at \$350,000, if sold separately.

In olden days there were not 72 horses. Back in 1965, for instance, The Sentinel

reported that the merry-go-round was originally designed for 70 horses but carried only 62 plus two Roman chariots.

According to information obtained at that time from the Seaside Company, Loeff carved all the horses for the Santa Cruz Merry-Go-Round out of Japanese white pine, with all the tails made of real horse-hair.

But if artistic treasures are used joyously by 21 million persons over a 70-year period they are apt to reflect that usage in ways distressing to many.

So back in 1979 the Seaside Company undertook two projects that have endeared it to merry-go-round buffs everywhere. One project was to find Loeff horses to replace some of the original horses which had been lost to the ravages of time and wear. The other was to restore all the horses by the artistic equivalent of a good grooming.

The first project was accomplished by the purchase of two Loeff horses from Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, and eight from Belmont Park, San Diego. Just a half dozen of these cost more than the original merry-go-round.

The second project still is still going on at the “Seaside Stables” at the Beach-Boardwalk, as the maintenance shop has been dubbed. Estimated cost to restore each horse is from \$1,200 to \$1,800 and estimated time for each—50 hours. The project is expected to continue beyond 1981.

The restoration is under supervision of Carl Henn, the buildings and maintenance supervisor. Artists and craftsmen doing the restoration are Kimberly MacLoud, Jason Mundstuck, Paul Sherrill, Kaye Hoxter, John Buse, Bob Thomas, Micky Jarman, Ellen Maruska, Alan Speidel and Michael McCracken (Kimberly’s husband.)

There are three primary steps, according to Michael. “First, the horses are stripped of all paint. A chemical solvent is used and great care is taken not to damage the wood.

“Then the wood is inspected for cracked

or broken knees and legs, surface holes, cracks and other effects of wear and tear.”

Cracks and breaks are fastened together with dowels and the holes filled. In addition, the seats and knees, areas subject to rough wear, are fiberglassed for added protection. Detailing that has worn down is built up again, such as saddles. Then the entire horse is sanded.

Says Michael, “Next comes the painting. There is a primer coat, which is a base coat of industrial spray. This is sanded. Then comes another coat of primer and more sanding, and then the final coat. When this is dry the artists paint the saddle and other details by hand.”

All work is done at the Seaside Stables except the stripping, and Glenn LaFrank, company publicist, reports that this work is done in Mountain View.

Michael says the horses are not dipped for stripping because that could lead them to fall apart.

He adds that Loeff plied his art in the days when there was not the high-color, glossy competition that exists now. Hence the horses were gold and white.

Now the bodies are given the more realistic appearance of bays, sorrels, pintos and palominos, complete with appropriate stockings or blazes.

Much red, bright blue and yellow are used for the saddles and other details and to color the secondary carvings on the horses, which may be a lamb behind the saddle or a gun in a holster. And there are “jewels” in the bridles.

Michael and Kimberly are true buffs in that they also buy and restore merry-go-round horses for themselves and others, as well as other animals salvaged from the Golden Age of Carousels.

Today, as in yesteryear, the Loeff horses are ready, willing and able to prance you off to rare fun just as they did for the first funseekers back in 1911... with the organ playing a Rossini overture and the test of the Brass Ring to challenge you... Up, up and away!

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# New Luster

## For Loeff's

### Classic Steeds



They're Loeff horses . . . forever young and spirited . . . tireless carriers of imaginative humanity from Reality to Make-Believe in a whirling Merry-Go-Round world lively with music and bright color . . .

Their gaits easy, their risings and fallings as rhythmic as the nearby waves, the steeds have carried an estimated 21 million riders over the Great Circle route to high adventure since the merry-go-round they grace was installed at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk in 1911.

So now, four by four by four, the 72 Loeff horses, hand-carved by the great Charles I.D. Loeff in 1910-1911, are being renovated at "Seaside Stables," as the Beach-Boardwalk maintenance shop is called these days.

Under direction of Carl Henn, craftsmen and artists are renovating each horse in a project that began in 1979 and will continue beyond 1981.

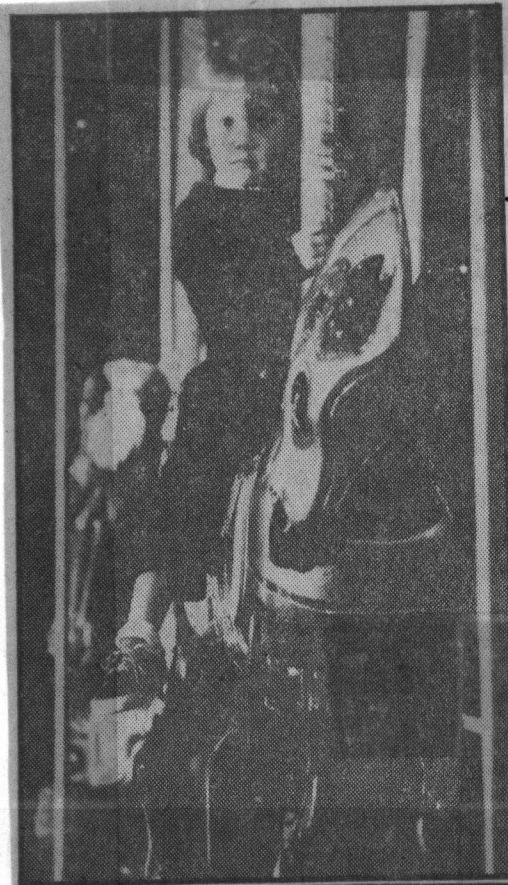
It will take about 50 hours of work and cost from \$1,200 to \$1,800 to restore each horse.

But don't be alarmed . . . There will always be Loeff horses galore to carry you to Never-Never Land when the great organ sounds and the Merry-Go-Round twirls by Monterey Bay.

SEE PAGE 20







Photos by Bill Lovejoy



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REFERENCE



