

Carousel

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may not be practical. One of only two carousels remaining on Staten Island (the other one being at South Beach Amusement Park), the details of its history are largely lost to the past.

According to members of the Benevolent Society for Retarded Children, a parents' advocacy group, the carousel is the second to be used on the site. And it's only a shadow of its predecessor, which members say was not protected by the state from the corroding

effects of weather and ended up in disrepair.

The original, a larger carousel with colorful wooden horses and music that played as it turned, was bought 35 years ago by the society for \$25,000 and donated to the state, according to Anthony Pinto, past president of the group. Unprotected from the elements for decades, it broke down in the 1970s.

A man from Virginia offered to replace it with a working one, said Pinto, and the state agreed. Genevieve Camen, now president of the society, recalls that she mentioned the swap to members in a meeting, and no one thought twice about it.

Little did they know that folk art collectors were just beginning

to "discover" carousel figures, especially the early wooden ones.

"We had a joke played on us," bemoans Mrs. Camen. "I never thought anybody would rob us. I understand that each horse that could be fixed up would be worth up to \$3,000 each, maybe more."

Although some wooden carousel figures are now considered pricey, the DDSO's present merry-go-round with its smaller, metal figures is not considered a collector's item, according to Fred Fried of the Museum of American Folk Art in Manhattan.

"It's a carnival-type machine. It's not what we call a valuable machine — it's a reproduction type of thing. If it were put up for sale as a single item, I don't think it would bring the price that a

wood horse figure might," he said.

Mrs. Camen said she is saddened that the state has let this carousel, like the earlier one, rust and deteriorate. "It was never covered, never babled like it should be."

To some who have seen it, however, the carousel holds great sentimental value.

"I love merry-go-rounds," said Nancy Burri, principal of PS 37, Great Kills. "As I travel up and down the East Coast, when I hear there is one, I go and look at it."

Several years ago, Mrs. Burri considered trying to move the carousel to PS 37 for use by the school's developmentally disabled and emotionally disturbed students. "We even paced off the fence around it to see if it would fit," she recalled.

Finally, she decided the carousel could not be protected from vandals even if it fit on school property and abandoned the idea. She has not forgotten about it, however, and is encouraged to hear it might be used again.

"Under the supervision of our licensed industrial arts instructor, our program might be able to undertake refurbishing the animals," she said.

If the DDSO does not use it, she hopes the carousel might be relocated elsewhere in the community, such as Snug Harbor Cultural Center.

Although Mrs. Camen is pessimistic it can be salvaged, she, too, would like to see the DDSO get the carousel going again. "If the kids can use it, great. Our hearts are on the kids," she said.

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