



Still Spinning 'Round

BY CATHELENE N. BUCHHOLZ

In its heyday, Excelsior Amusement Park was known for its main attraction — a wooden roller coaster called the Cyclone. Yet it is the beautifully carved 48-horse carousel that still prevails and offers a spin to riders of all ages. After the park closed in 1973, the carousel was relocated to Valleyfair in Shakopee. The carousel is the oldest ride in this modern day amusement park.

Looking back to its creation, this antique merry-go-round was manufactured by the Philadelphia Toboggan Company. The company was founded on January 21, 1904, by Henry B. Auchy, a former general manager and amusement park owner, and Chester E. Albright, an engineer and surveyor. Although the company produced both toboggan slides (roller coasters) and carousels, its primary focus was the roller coasters. Due to the financial woes of the toboggan industry in 1907, the company refocused its attention to building carousels.

According to its archives, the Philadelphia

Toboggan Company manufactured 90 carousels, many of which were hand-carved by German and Italian immigrants. The horses of this carousel, however, were made by carving machines due to an era of new technology. Based on the Philadelphia Style, the machines produced realistic-looking animals with life-like poses and expressions.

Built in 1925, this merry-go-round (known as Carousel PTC #76) has 28 jumping horses — many with tucked heads — 20 standing horses, and 2 chariots. The bodies of the horses were painted either black or white with the decorative features coated in primary colors. According to Noreene Sweeney, National Carousel Association member and writer for *The Carousel News & Trader*, "The scenery panels, sweeps and the rounding boards are original and untouched, as is the canopy that forms the roof over the carousel." The band organ, often referred to as the soul of a carousel, is an Artizan that was converted to a mid-size style Wurlitzer. Band organs were

built to produce loud music to attract would-be riders and to disguise noises from the mechanical workings.

Although the Great Depression brought a halt to carousel production, the Philadelphia Toboggan Company was renowned for its excellence in workmanship and is still known today as the world's leader in building wooden roller coaster cars. Out of its original 90 carousels, 35 are either in the process of restoration or, as in the case of the Valleyfair carousel, are still offering rides to both young and old. Each year, from Memorial Day through Labor Day, Valleyfair amusement park visitors enjoy a spin from the past on this antique merry-go-round.

To research carousels across the U.S. go to the National Carousel Association's website at www.nationalcarousel.org or to see this historic carousel visit Valleyfair.