

1 The History of the Carousel

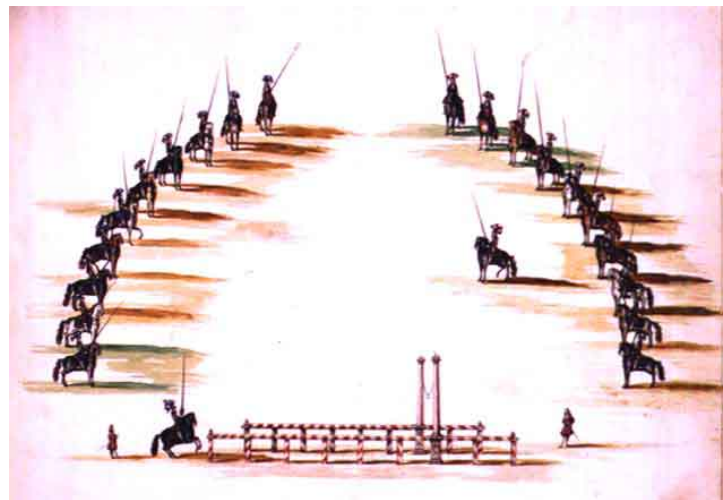
The Dentzel carousel at Glen Echo Park arrived in 1921, replacing a smaller carousel by the Wm. F. Mangels Co. At that time the park was an amusement park with rides, a dance pavilion, and other entertainment common to fairgrounds. Glen Echo, however, had not always been an amusement park. In 1890 Edward and Edwin Baltzley, owners of the land, made plans to develop a Chautauqua Assembly. They set about constructing magnificent stone buildings and cedar walkways. In 1891 the National Chautauqua of Glen Echo opened to a successful first season. Like the other Chautauquas around the country, its program included all areas of the liberal and practical arts, such as English literature, art, music, and physical training, with a focus on Bible studies for Sunday school teachers.

Success for the Chautauqua, however, was not to last. When the director of the Chautauqua business school died of pneumonia after the end of the first season, rumors spread that he had died of malaria. Fear of disease doomed prospects for a second Chautauqua season, and the Baltzley brothers had difficulty promoting other attractions. Glen Echo foundered until 1899, when new investors renamed the old Chautauqua grounds *Glen Echo Park* and advertised the park as “a resort for the refined.” The investors installed a merry-go-round and other rides, which wove in, around, and through the stone buildings. The amusement park was born. The park grew and new rides were added every year. In 1904 the Mangels carousel replaced the earlier merry-go-round. Then in 1921 the Dentzel Carousel Company took the Mangels carousel in trade for the larger Dentzel carousel, which quickly became the centerpiece of the park. By now the park had become the Washington area’s premier amusement park.

Today we enjoy the carousel ride as an integral part of our amusement park experience. But let’s step back in time to look at how this wonderful ride came to be.

The game of riders swinging around a center pole goes back many centuries. The name *carousel*, however, comes from a different activity, one in which Arabian and Turkish horsemen tossed little clay balls filled with scented water back and forth. Those who got hit with a ball instead of catching it smelled of perfume for days. Italian and Spanish crusaders saw this game in the 12th century and brought it back to their own countries, calling it *garosello* in Italy and *carosella* in Spain. Both words mean *little war*.

The game spread to France, where it was called *carrousel*. In the late 15th century the French transformed the game into a grand pageant. A highlight of the pageant was the ring-spearing tournament in which riders used their lances to spear small rings suspended between two posts while moving at full gallop.



The French carrousel pageant included a ring-spearing tournament.

Around 1680 someone created a machine for young princes to use to train for the tournaments. The machine had legless wooden horses that hung from beams attached to a center pole. The princes would ride the horses and try to spear small rings that dangled along the outer edge. The wooden horses were pushed round and round by a real horse, a mule, or a servant. The machine took on the name