

The On-Going Restoration of our Historic Carousel

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The following is from an article written by All Hallows Guild Board Member, Holly Larisch, for the National Carousel Association's quarterly publication.

caretakers of the historic carousel for fifty years.



For over half a century, children in the Washington DC area have been fortunate to have the experience of riding an historic traveling carousel the first Friday and Saturday in May at All Hallows Guild's Flower Mart. The Carousel is brought out every year and is an iconic symbol of Flower Mart – the Guild's major annual fundraiser for the gardens and grounds of Washington National Cathedral.

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The Carousel, built in the 1890s as a traveling carousel, was purchased by All Hallows Guild in 1963. It is one of the two surviving antique carousels made by the U.S. Merry-Go-Round Company and is typical of the County Fair style carousel, designed long and lean and lightly carved for constant travel and easy transport from town to town.

All Hallows Guild embraces its role as steward of the antique carousel, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, by refurbishing the carousel through several campaigns. In the 1990s, all the animals were “adopted” by donors and given names, colors, and decorative embellishments chosen by the donors as part of the repair process. Designers and artists of the Nation’s Capital Chapter of the National Society of Decorative Painters plus John Drew, Cathedral’s Master Carpenter, donated their time and talent for the restoration.



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Recent Carousel restoration Work

The Guild recently completed considerable repairs and renovations including replacing the canopy, repairing the struts, refurbishing the entire workings of the 1929 Wurlitzer caliola, repainting the caliola case, and purchasing newly recut rolls of traditional caliola music.

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Caliola case prior to restoration

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Case with base coat

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Front view of finished case with polished pipes

Mr. Durward Center, owner of **Historical Instrument Restorations**, is a restoration expert for antique tower-clocks and organs, and in 1986 repaired the pneumatics and the vacuum pump for the caliola. Bit by bit, however, components of the organ were wearing and leaking, meaning that the music became weaker and less true year by year.

Following Flower Mart 2019, the caliola and its case were moved to Baltimore for overhaul. The organ is played with a complex system of pumps, bellows, and pipes. Mr. Center completely dismantled the organ to re-leather the pressure pump, the pallet valves and gaskets of the windchest, and the loose stoppers of the brass pipes.

While the organ was disassembled, he checked the roll frame, crankshaft, brake wheel, and friction drive for the roll frame, and replaced parts where necessary. The wood of the case had given way in several places and had to be replaced.

All Hallows Guild decided to restore not only the organ but its case. From Baltimore, the brass pipes traveled to Elkhart, Indiana, where they were polished and lacquered. The case went to Graham, North Carolina, to be refinished. By carefully removing layers of paint down to the original, Ms. Rosa Patton determined the earliest paint was a green crackle finish. She removed all the old layers, preserving the two oval paintings from the 1980s, applied a black base coat, and repainted the green crackle and the gold accents.

The On-Going restoration of the Carousel Animals

It became apparent that the 22 animals that make up the carousel were in varying stages of disrepair and would need additional work. In April 2021, Carousels and Carvings in Marion, Ohio brought the zebra, a deer, and lion to their workshop to be restored. As the following photographs show, once the animals were in the shop, the restorers found the damage was significant and that it was necessary to take the animals back to bare wood, repairing structural joints and cracks, and in-filling damaged areas.

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Coco the Zebra mid-restoration



Coco with first coat of paint



Final painting!

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The restorers took photographs of all the animals prior to beginning the work to ensure the original paint and trim selected by the original “adopters” of the animals will be restored. To date, the Zebra and Blackberry, the deer, have been restored and returned to the Close. The lion and a horse are almost repaired and may be back in time for Flower Mart 2023. Carousels and Carvings recently carried the Elephant and one of the Horses to Ohio for repair. Grants and donations help defray the cost as repairing one of the animals is approximately \$6,000 - 8,000. The Guild is preserving an important part of American history as well as continuing to delight Washington DC families when the carousel appears on the Cathedral lawns every Spring. Only 16 animals to go!



Blackberry the Deer undergoing restoration

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Blackberry renewed!

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Horse restoration

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Spirit the Elephant

If you would like to contribute to our Carousel Restoration Fund, you may do so by clicking on the link below.

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