

Determining the Facts Reading 3: The New York Experience

The Empire State Carousel is a modern day version of America's "golden age" carousels. It is made to represent the state of New York in a unique way. The carousel features twenty-four carved animals, all found in the state, twenty-three portraits of famous New Yorkers, and eight folk-life panels representing different regions and events in New York history. Despite first impressions, the Empire State Carousel is a complex representation of several ideas. At the most basic level, the Carousel is a fun and beautiful ride. Additionally, it represents the history of American carousels and the state of New York. Perhaps most importantly, the beliefs, ideals, and interpretations of the people that created the Carousel are shown. Master carver Gerry Holzman and his volunteers worked to bring the state of New York to life for every rider. This is done with each of the carved panels, animals, and chariots. Just like carvers earlier in America's history, they worked to reveal their skills and pride for their new home country through the carousels they created.

Reflected in the Empire State Carousel are basic ideas from master carousel builders like Charles Loof, Gustav Dentzel, and Allan Herschell. Charles Loof, who created the Coney Island style of carousels, mastered moving carousel figures. He matched the up-and-down motion of the figures with a new artistic carving style. Gerry Holzman and his team of carvers used Loof's ideas of motion in the Empire State figures. Gustav Dentzel, the Father of American Carousels, popularized different and exotic animals. Dentzel's figures were recognizable for their extreme realism. Like Dentzel's work, the Empire State Carousel features a wide variety of realistic animals.

Allan Herschell and the Herschell-Spillman Company made beautiful Country Fair style carousels. These carousels represented the ideas of newly American craftsmen while still being portable to rural communities. The Empire State Carousel represents New York in the same way the Herschell-Spillman carousels represented Americanism, with symbols of New

York prominently and proudly displayed. The placement of the Carousel in the Country Fair exhibit at The Farmers' Museum shows the Country Fair style carousels that traveled to rural areas across the United States. The Empire State Carousel was inspired by the "golden age" of American carousels and makes each style distinctly its own.

As immigration spiked in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century, immigrant carvers utilized their skills, rising to prominent positions as carousel artists. The twilight of the "golden age of carousels" witnessed the use of a multitude of patriotic symbols by these carvers including cowboys, Indians, eagles, Lincoln, Uncle Sam, and the Stars and Stripes. These symbols reflected not only the immigrant's inclusion in American culture but also their individuality as American artists. Symbols like these are also depicted on the Empire State Carousel. Stars and Stripes bunting can be seen draped around Sam Bear, and nearly every folk-life panel has patriotic symbolism reflecting the shared American and New York experience. Just as nineteenth-century immigrants utilized symbols to reflect their sense of American identity, Gerry Holzman and his team made use of symbols to invoke the New York experience.