The Empire State Carousel

The Farmer’s Museum
Cooperstown, NY
What is a Carousel?

• Carousels began in the Middle Ages in Europe as part of festivals. As they became more popular, they got bigger and more elaborate.

• In America, carousels were very popular from 1890-1920. Many woodcarvers came to America from Europe and helped build the carousels.

• At The Farmers’ Museum, our Empire State Carousel has 24 unique animals, each telling a different story.
Gerry Holzman

• Head carver and director Gerry Holzman started with an idea in 1983.
• Gerry Holzman is a professional wood carver.
• He has restored over 100 pieces of carousel art.
• He has worked for many companies, including Disney World.
• He was also a teacher and dreamed of creating a piece of folk art that taught kids about New York State history in a different and exciting way.
The Empire State Carousel

- A unique living history museum dedicated to the animals, people, and places of New York
- All 24 animals were hand carved and represent different regions of New York State.
- The rounding boards, picture boards, and portrait panels also depict different historical facts and persons.
- The Carousel was completed in Long Island in 2003 and came to live at The Farmers’ Museum in 2006.
- “We came to the realization that the most sensible and appropriate thing to do was to place his tribute to the New York State historical experience in the hands of the New York State Historical Association in Cooperstown” –Gerry Holzman
Many Hands

Over 1000 people and 10,000 man hours were involved in the project: wood carvers, designers, carpenters, electricians, artists, painters, mechanics
Regions of New York

Our different carousel animals and carvings represent different regions of New York State.

What landforms and towns are in each region?
Bucky Beaver

- The official mammal of New York State
- First animal to be carved
- The teeth and tools show that he is nature’s best wood worker
- The lead animal on the carousel
- Represents the Capital-Saratoga Region where Fort Lee was a major beaver fur trade fort
Erie Canal Boat

- The Erie Canal opened in 1825
- 365 mile hand made waterway connecting Buffalo to Albany. Looking at your map, what regions do you think the Erie Canal crosses?
- Connected The Hudson River to the Great Lakes
- The Canal was called the “Big Ditch”
- Who was Dewitt Clinton?
Sal the Mule

- Mules pulled the Canal boats on the Erie Canal, inspiring a song about the canal.
- Image was carved after a mule pulling a plow on Long Island
Erie Canal Song

- I’ve got a mule, her name is Sal,
- 15 miles on the Erie Canal
- She’s a good old worker and a good old pal,
- 15 miles on the Erie Canal.

- We’ve hauled some barges in our day
- Filled with lumber, coal and hay
- And we know every inch of the way
- From Al-ban-ay to Buffalo

Chorus: Low Bridge everybody down
- Low bridge for we’re coming to a town
- And you’ll always know your neighbor,
- You’ll always know your pal
- If you’ve ever navigated on the Erie Canal.
Sam the Bear

- Named after Samuel Bear who founded the town of Waterloo, New York in 1792
- What is he carrying? How is it different than our flag today?
- The side blanket on his back shows the Finger Lakes
- The town supported the carving, and when it was finished, there was a parade in Waterloo led by Sam to celebrate.
Benny Brook Trout

- The official freshwater fish of New York State
- Saddle is made of scallop shells—the official shellfish of New York
- Carved while looking at a trout bought from a fish market in Long Island
- The only animal on the Carousel to be unpainted, allowing the visitor to see the carving marks and design by Master Carver Bruno Speiser
Daphne Duck

• Long Island Duck
• Has a map of Long Island on her with a jewel representing Islip, where she was carved
• Has a carving of the Montauk Lighthouse on her side.
• What is in her basket? Why would she be carrying this basket?
Louie Loon

- Created by North Country artists to represent their region
- Adirondacks is the favorite nesting area for the loon.
Clarissa Cow

- Represents New York’s Dairy industry
- Clarissa is a Holstein Friesian
- She is too heavy to go up and down on the carousel, so Clarissa is stationary
- Several people worked on the carving, including Master Carver Bruno Speiser, painter Jill Irving, and dairy farmer Floyd Armlin
- Do you live on a farm? Where can you find farms in New York?
Merry Dog

• Gerry Holzman’s dog

• Merry modeled for the carving

• Her tongue is upwards, why do you think?

• Is Merry a New York State animal?
Monty Moose

- Monty’s antlers had to be cut down so he could pass the safety inspection

- Monty is too heavy to go up and down on the carousel, so he is one of the stationary animals

- If you are lucky, in what part of New York might you see a moose?
Scallop Shell Chariot

- One of the four bench rides on the carousel
- Official Shell of New York State
- Represents the shellfish industry in Long Island
- Decorated with sea creatures
The New York State Seal

- Banner below shows the New York State Motto (Excelsior, Latin for “Ever Upward”)

- What else do you see in this state seal?

- What parts of the state does it represent?
There are 8 folk art panels that offer a mix of real and fictional characters from different regions of the state and different time periods.

**Sam Patch** was a daredevil who made a living doing crazy stunts.

- He traveled with a pet bear. Can you find the bear in the panel?

- This panel shows his jump in 1829 at Genesee Falls. Do you think he made it?
Captain William Kidd

• Long Island’s most famous pirate

• Shown supervising the burial of treasure on Gardiner’s Island, some of which has never been found
John Darling

- Real life Paul Bunyan
- Woodsman and storyteller
- What is a tall tale?
- What do you see in this picture?
Portrait Panels

• 25 hand carved portraits located along the carousel’s upper canopy

• Represent famous people throughout New York history

• Carved and chosen by Gerry Holtzman “because they used their extraordinary natural gifts to question the conventional wisdom of their era...they enriched the lives of New Yorkers and the lives of the greater American community.”

• This portrait panel shows Harriet Tubman, who settled in Auburn in the Finger Lakes Region. What is Harriet Tubman famous for?
Portrait Panels

Jackie Robinson

Played for the Brooklyn Dodgers. Why was this important?

First black baseball player elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown

John Burroughs

America’s First Professional Naturalist

Lived in the Catskills

“I go to nature as a bee goes to a flower—for a nectar that I can make into my own honey.”
11 Historical Murals painted on the inside of the Rounding Boards depicting important events or milestones in New York State History. This one shows immigrants arriving to Ellis Island around 1900.
Rounding Boards

- The murals represent events and time periods ranging from Henry Hudson’s voyage of discovery in 1609 to the Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Conference in 1818 to the opening of the United Nations Building in 1951.
Come Ride the Empire State Carousel at The Farmer’s Museum, Cooperstown, NY