



Pillow Lee at the Carousel during Flower Mart

About the Carousel History and Final Dedication Ceremony

By Peggy Pickard – written for the April 2000 All Hallows Herald

After more than 20 years in restoration, the All Hallows Guild carousel will highlight the last and final dedication ceremonies on Wednesday, May 3 for the newest completed horse, “Hoya Saxa”, honoring lawyer, Joseph A. Murphy, Jr. and given by his wife, AHG member Joanne Murphy. Painted in his Alma Mater’s traditional Georgetown University colors of blue and gray, but accented with brilliant colors from US and Irish flags reflecting Joe Murphy’s dual citizenship, the new “Hoya Saxa” will picture whimsical designs of shamrocks and thistles and include a small leprechaun. Of the 24 antique carousel figures, this will be the last adorned with rainbow shades, new manes, new tails and shiny bridles. From 2-4 pm the North Lawn will be the scene for the Dedication which has historically occurred two days prior to the festival Flower Mart. Each year, through the efforts of volunteers and financial donors, a different figure has been dedicated to honor or memorialize a special individual.

Tracing history brings forth the behind-the-scenes story of Pillow Lee, the All Hallows Guild member who determined that the Flower Mart would be much more festive for the children if a merry-go-round was available. In 1963, when the carousel’s owner retired, Pillow Lee saw to it that the carousel was purchased and the care and restoration became a priority. The indomitable Joyce Hanks took over the carousel committee chairmanship in 1983. She was so intrigued with the challenges of funding and restoration that she spent the next 15 years making the century-old carousel a sound, beautiful and living symbol. It was she who devised the dedication program which funded figure restoration through individual donors and it was she who coordinated the volunteer program with the designers and artists of the Nation’s Capital Chapter of the National Society of Decorative Painters. And it was during her watch that this antique carousel was placed by the National Park Service on the National List of Historic Places; that the National Carousel Association presented its annual Preservation Award to the Guild; and that both the DC Preservation League and the State (DC) Historic Preservation Review Board recognized the authenticity of the 1890’s wooden “traveling” carousel.

And no wonder. Just a few of the historical facts may startle the casual observer. The 1890’s carousel is one of only two remaining wooden carousels in the United States. All figures are hand carved by unknown artisans but attributed to Charles Dare, one of the first manufacturers of carousels in America. There are 13 horses, 2 goats, 1 lion, 1 zebra, 1 elephant, 2 camels, 2 deer and 2 sleighs. All have been professionally decorated by volunteers of the Nation’s Capital

Chapter of the National Society of Decorative Painters. John Drew, Master Carpenter on the Cathedral staff, performed major restoration techniques on all figures before decoration. The beautiful caliola supplying the carousel music was manufactured by Wurlitzer in 1937 and is one of only 7 band organs made with brass pipes. The whole carousel, from top to bottom, is what historians and preservationists dream about. Financial donors and volunteers made it possible. It has taken years. May 3 marks the last dedication of a figure; the other 23 figures are complete and finished.

Pat Cate, present Carousel Committee Chair, will introduce all those people who have contributed to the completed carousel when she speaks at the celebration on May 3. Even family members of Clifford Sandretzky, who formerly owned the carousel in its hey-day, may be present and will be joined by donors, volunteers, artists and cathedral family. To all of them let us say "thank you" for helping keep alive the joy of a bygone era. Come now....let's ride the carousel!