

**Sandwiching in History  
Herschell-Spillman Carousel  
Little Rock Zoo  
December 3, 2010  
By: Rachel Silva**



## **Intro**

Hi, my name is Rachel Silva, and I work for the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. Welcome to the Sandwiching in History tour of the Herschell-Spillman Carousel, also known as “Over the Jumps!” I’d like to thank the Little Rock Zoo for waiving our entrance fees and for allowing us to ride the carousel at no charge. Also, I’d like to thank Terri Branson with the zoo for providing free copies of *The Carousel News and Trader* from Dec. 2007, which features a lengthy story about the restoration of the carousel. In a few minutes, you’ll also get to hear from Becky Witsell about the beautiful work she did to restore the horses, and then Tony Dawson with the LR Zoo will show us how the carousel’s track mechanism works.

## **Fair Park**

I’ve read conflicting information as to the location of the state fair in its early years, and this is closely related to the history of Fair Park. Story number one: The Arkansas State Agricultural & Mechanical Association, which was formed in 1867, purchased the land now known as War Memorial Park or Fair Park in 1868 from prominent LR businessman and banker William B. Wait for use as the state fairgrounds. The state fair was held here in Fair Park until 1924, when the City of LR purchased the land for use as a municipal park. [This version is questionable because it would have been difficult to access this land in the late 1860s. Pulaski Heights didn’t develop until the 1890s, and even then, the development didn’t

really take off until the streetcar line was completed in 1903. This land would have been really far out of town.]

Story number two (most likely version): Then I read that the first state fair was held in Little Rock on Nov. 17-20, 1868, near the intersection of Center and 17<sup>th</sup> streets on what would have been the grounds of the School for the Blind (on the current site of the Governor's Mansion). According to the Encyclopedia of AR History, the state fair was held on that site until 1876, when it moved a few blocks west to Arch Street. From 1881 until World War I, the fair was held on 110 acres off of East 9<sup>th</sup> Street. There are also records of a "state fair" at Oaklawn Park in Hot Springs in 1906 and 1907, and the state fair was held here in Fair Park in 1922. The state fair was irregular at best during the 1930s and early 1940s because of the Great Depression and World War II, but in 1944, the City of LR offered to provide a permanent site for the state fair in Fair Park. However, the fair association rejected the proposal. Instead, they accepted an offer from the LR Chamber of Commerce in 1945 to permanently locate the state fair on several acres off Roosevelt Road. And as you know, the state fair remains there to this day.

But there is a good chance that the state fair was held here sporadically throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and because of that association, this area became known as Fair Park. And a permanent amusement park midway was established here in 1929, and this could also explain why the area was called Fair Park...in addition to its association with the AR State Fair.

Fair Park had been acquired by the City of LR by the mid-1920s, and the landscape architectural firm of Pearse and Robinson of Chicago, IL, was commissioned to design a master plan for initial park development. The basic layout suggested in their plan still exists today. According to Sanborn maps, by 1939 there was a golf course, clubhouse, swimming pool and bathhouse, 3 multi-purpose buildings, tennis courts, the Traveler's Field ball park, the zoo, a dance hall, and a small midway area with a merry-go-round.

LR Zoo started in 1926 with 2 animals--a timber wolf and a circus-trained bear. The zoo's first buildings were made of native Arkansas stone and constructed by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) between 1933 and 1936. These buildings housed primates, reptiles, birds, and big cats. The buildings are still in use today, with the cat house recently converted into a restaurant (Café Africa).

Ray Winder Field was built in 1931 as Traveler Field. It was renamed in 1966 after longtime baseball enthusiast and Arkansas Travelers manager Ray Winder.

Last Travs game played at Ray Winder in 2006, and the team started the 2007 season at its new home, Dickey-Stephens Park in NLR.

War Memorial Stadium was built in 1948 and designed by architect Bruce R. Anderson. President Harry Truman presided over the ceremonies in 1949 when the whole area was renamed War Memorial Park (stadium expanded in 1968).

A permanent amusement park midway was created in 1929, and carnivals often visited as well. The War Memorial Park Swimming & Fitness Complex was built in 1991 on the site of an earlier swimming pool and bathhouse. During this project, the War Memorial Amusement Park was phased out, and the former midway area is now a parking lot across the street from the zoo entrance.

### **Arkansas's Herschell-Spillman Carousel or "Over the Jumps"**

#### ***Herschell-Spillman Companies***

The "Over the Jumps" Arkansas Carousel was manufactured about 1924 by the Spillman Engineering Corporation of North Tonawanda, NY. The Spillman Engineering Corp. was one of several incarnations of Allan Herschell's carousel manufacturing business.

Allan Herschell was born in Scotland in 1851 and came to the United States in 1870 with his parents. Carousel amusement rides were already popular in Europe, and Herschell brought this knowledge with him to the U.S., helping to initiate the "golden age of the carousel" from 1905 to 1935.

He partnered with James Armitage in 1873, and they built their first factory later that year in North Tonawanda, NY. Their business, the Tonawanda Engine and Machine Company, produced its first steam-powered carousel in 1883. Herschell also married Ida Spillman later that year.

The Tonawanda Engine & Machine Co. was reorganized in 1890 as the Armitage-Herschell Company.

In 1903 Herschell partnered with his Spillman in-laws to buy out Armitage-Herschell and form the Herschell-Spillman Company, which became the largest manufacturer of carousels in the U.S.

In 1915 Herschell left the Herschell-Spillman Company and created a competing entity, the Allan Herschell Company. He specialized in portable carousel machines that could be packed and transported easily.

In 1920 Herschell-Spillman reorganized as the Spillman Engineering Corporation. Spillman Engineering was bought out by Allan Herschell Co. in 1945, and in 1970 Chance Ride Manufacturing Co. of Wichita, KS, bought the assets of the Allan Herschell Co. The Chance Manufacturing Co. is still in operation today and is one of the largest amusement park ride manufacturers in the world.

It is important to note these organizational changes within the Allan Herschell enterprise because each phase of the corporation manufactured its own unique style of carousel horses. The distinct appearance of each company's horses helps to identify the specific time periods in which historic Herschell-Spillman carousel horses were produced. For instance, based on the different trademark designs of each company, it was determined that 38 of the 40 horses on Arkansas's Over the Jumps carousel were made circa 1924 by the Spillman Engineering Corporation. Two of the original horses were removed in 1973 and replaced with 1930s-era Trojan, or Roman, horses made by the Allan Herschell Company. These horses remain on Over the Jumps today. They are easy to spot because of their cropped manes, and their heads are tucked in tightly.

### *Arkansas's Over the Jumps Carousel*

The Spillman Engineering Corporation's "Over the Jumps" model made its debut on August 15, 1924, at the Aurora Exposition and Fair in Aurora, Illinois, as part of C. A. Worthem's World's Best Shows (a traveling entertainment company in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century). Research indicates that only 5 "Over the Jumps" models were ever produced, and the Little Rock carousel is the only surviving example of the rare "Jumps" model.

Over the Jumps was designed to be a traveling, or transportable, model—built to be taken from place to place and set up temporarily at small carnivals and fairs (as opposed to larger carousel models designed to be a permanent fixture in a park). Over the Jumps has a diameter of 40' with a center pole and 24 sweep arms, each connected to a wheel with a cast-iron hub and rim. The wheels run along an undulating track, giving carousel riders the sensation of going over hilly terrain on a jumping or flying horse. Each wheel segment carries two horses or one chariot, with one chariot situated between each set of 10 horses (4 chariots in all). Each wheel is covered by a wood well on the riding platform to "protect the ladies"

dresses from any grease that is frequently collected by wheels from the track.” The riding platform moves with the horses, while the walking platform remains stationary along the outside.

### ***Characteristics of Spillman & Allan Herschell horses, respectively***

Horses produced by the Spillman Engineering Corp. (1920-1945) were generally more elaborate than their predecessors. Typical features include: long heads; small, high-set eyes; full, wavy manes; intricate ornamentation; large nostrils; jewels; and figures carved in relief. And the “romance” sides of the horses, facing outward, were elaborately carved, whereas the interior side had mostly painted decoration.

On “Over the Jumps,” you’ll notice the horses’ wavy manes, legs tucked in tightly for easier transport, jewels, elaborately carved saddles, saddle blankets, and breast bands, and each horse is shod with real horseshoes. Each horse has a unique appearance—in addition to their color schemes, you’ll notice a variety of carved embellishments, such as shields, swords, flowers, eagle heads, tassels, and cords.

Horses produced by the Allan Herschell Co. (1915-1955) were almost exclusively made to be portable, so their legs and heads were tucked in tightly for easy transport. They usually do not have a breast band, and sometimes their saddle blankets are folded back slightly. The most obvious Allan Herschell horse design is his Trojan, or Roman, horse with a cropped mane and tail. See two of these from the 1930s on “Over the Jumps.”

### ***“Over the Jumps” comes to Arkansas***

“Over the Jumps” was on a traveling circuit and visited state fairs in the region, including the AR State Fair.

In the early 1940s, Little Rock resident Tom Fuzzell and his wife, Belle, purchased “Over the Jumps” in Florida and returned it to Arkansas. The carousel was placed in Fair Park in 1943 as part of Fuzzell’s Fair Park Amusement Rides company, which he later renamed War Memorial Amusement Rides. The carousel was placed under an existing dome shelter on the Fair Park midway. Fuzzell retired in 1973 and sold the carousel to Doyle “Doc” O’Kelley and Lloyd “Mokie” Choate. At this time, two 1930s Trojan horses replaced two original Spillman horses. The carousel remained in the War Memorial Amusement Park until 1991, when it was in danger of being sold out of state (likely would have been “pieced out” with the

parts sold separately because they are worth more individually than the intact carousel). This was during the construction of the new War Memorial Swimming Pool & Fitness Complex, and the midway was being replaced by a parking lot.

In 1991 a nonprofit group called Friends of the Carousel, Inc., formed to save the carousel and keep it in Arkansas. The group was able to purchase the carousel and dismantled it for restoration. In addition to the restoration of the horses and chariots, the mechanical elements had to be restored and/or replaced. In short, there was an enormous amount of work done to restore the carousel!!

In addition to grants from the AR Historic Preservation Program and other organizations, as well as donations and in-kind contributions, Friends of the Carousel started a pony adoption program, where people could pay a minimum of \$5,000 to adopt and name a pony or chariot. Many of the “pony parents” and their adopted horses are discussed in the magazine article if you’re interested.

### ***Restoration process (Rick Parker & Bob Pennick; Becky Witsell)***

Many individuals were involved in the restoration process, but the bulk of the work was done by Rick Parker, Bob Pennick, and Becky Witsell. Parker & Pennick carefully removed the layers of park paint from the horses to reveal the historic paint colors and patterns. This was an essential step in the restoration process because it allowed the original colors to be documented. However, the historic paint no longer had elasticity and wouldn’t protect the wood from the elements. So Becky Witsell completed the next phase of the restoration—documenting the historic paint colors and then repainting each horse with outdoor paint.

In 2001 Friends of the Carousel approached the LR Zoo with a proposal to put the “Over the Jumps” Carousel inside the zoo. Zoo officials loved the idea, and quickly convinced the City Board of Directors to include funds for “Over the Jumps” in a bond issue for zoo improvements. Voters approved the bond issue in 2003, and the carousel’s new pavilion was completed in 2007. [Friends of the Carousel and the Zoo signed a 99-year lease for the zoo to operate the carousel and the two groups to share the profits.]

After 16 years of fundraising and hard work, the carousel was officially reopened in its new home at the LR Zoo on October 22, 2007.

You'll notice that one horse is missing from the carousel—it is currently in storage at the zoo until an appropriate exhibit space can be constructed. It is the only horse with its original paint and cannot be exposed to the elements.

The “Over the Jumps” Arkansas Carousel is one of fewer than 180 intact wooden carousels out of at least 5,000 carousels that once operated in the U.S. It was listed on the NR in 1989 with statewide significance and upgraded to national significance in 2004 when it was discovered that it was the only remaining example of the “Over the Jumps” model. The carousel is also unique because it still operates on an undulating track...as opposed to a large rotating platform where the horses move up and down on poles.

**Turn it over to Becky Witsell and Tony Dawson!!**