

BARNSTORMERS AND PRIZEFIGHTERS

The Schenley Park carousel was on the flat area near the intersection of Greenfield Road and Overlook and Panther Hollow drives, where the traffic light is now.

It was as big as the merry-go-round in Kennywood, and it was free. They had all the painted horses and the ones that went up and down, and you got to ride and ride and ride. You never wanted to get off a horse, because you move your feet and you lose your seat.

Mayor Billy Magee hired the Philadelphia Toboggan Company to build three carousels for Pittsburgh. Of course, one went to Schenley Park, just a short walk from the mayor's house. The brand-new merry-go-round was an incredible menagerie of 46 horses, deer, goats, giraffes, ostriches, kangaroos, lions and tigers flanked by four hand-carved chariots upholstered in leather. The animals paraded around the huge organ in the center of a 50-foot platform. This lavish carousel stood inside a structure nearly twice its size that held a lunch counter, picnic tables, and even men's and women's toilet rooms. Each and every painted scene and mirror on the carousel had its own hand-carved frame, gilded in silver. The three city merry-go-rounds—in Grandview, Riverview and Schenley parks—had over 200,000 riders that first year, opening on July Fourth and running clear through Halloween. They ran at 14 miles per hour that first year but afterward were slowed to a less dangerous eight.

Any summer night, you might find 200 people crowded around Schenley Park's merry-go-round. Folks from "down The Run" would walk up Saline Street to stroll across the beautiful new bridge. Giggling girls would congregate after school waiting for the boys to finish caddying their last round at the park's golf course. A caddy with tips in his pocket could score a few points by treating the girls to penny candy or soda pop from the stands surrounding the carousel.

Schenley Park became a center of social life for the community. Family picnics and Sunday school picnics were held there during the summer.

My mother and dad used to take us, and the next-door neighbor would take their three girls, and we'd walk over and have a picnic lunch and ride the merry-go-round all day. That was what you did on a Sunday. Then when it got dark, we'd all walk home again.

