Shelburne Museum’s 1902 Dentzel Carousel is extraordinary in that all 40 animals, 4 chariots, 17 painted canvas panels, 16 rounding boards, and the 1926 Artizan Carousel Organ facade are in original paint. Although it was in active use at two different amusement parks in New York State from 1902 through 1947, the animals were not overpainted with “park paint” when they were worn, but either repainted at the Dentzel factory or exchanged for new animals. A project to remove discolored linseed oil exposing colorful original paint is in its 25th year and the adopt-an-animal effort to support the conservation work has raised over $60,000.

This historic photograph shows the carousel during disassembly at Piseco Lake after it was purchased by Shelburne Museum founder Electra Havemeyer Webb in 1951. The Artizan organ was originally powered by the small steam engine to the left of the organ in this photograph. The larger steam engine powered the carousel.

This is a typical example of a restored carousel organ. Since restorers are commissioned to make the instruments operable to play for ten hours a day for a full season, they often disassemble historic organs and rebuild bellows using new leather, rebuild the wind chest, pallet box, and all the valve boxes using modern materials, strip and refresh the organ case, and sometimes repaint the facade. This restored organ shows no history of its many years of use.

Nancie Ravenel disassembles the pallet box for removal and restoration by carousel organ restorer Tim Westman. The original zephyr skin diaphragms were no longer flexible enough to fully inflate and activate the keys. All 46 diaphragms had to be replaced and properly “dished” for the organ to operate.

Conservators Richard Kerschner and Nancie Ravenel reassembling pipe ranks. Note the retained grease stains from the steam engine and drive mechanism on the side of the organ cabinet.

The organ’s decorative facade in original paint required only a light surface cleaning and application of a protective varnish.

This project was supported by a US Government grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

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