

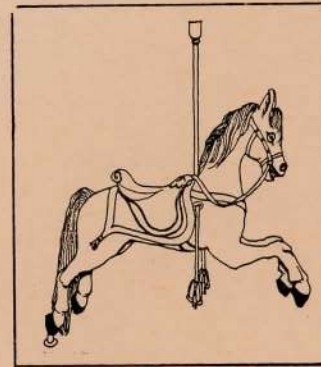
Journal of History of Martha's Vineyard and the Elizabeth Islands



THE DUKES COUNTY INTELLIGENCER

VOL. 47, No. 3

FEBRUARY 2006



A Cherished Artifact: The Flying Horses

by CLYDE L. MACKENZIE JR.

Widow Rocker, Part Indian, Struggles To Break the Chains of Poverty

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

Flying Horses in Postcards Through the Years

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Student	\$25
Individual	\$45
(Does not include spouse)	
Family	\$60
Sustaining	\$100
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Patron	\$250
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*Cover sketch courtesy Martha's Vineyard Preservation Trust.
Artist unknown.*

CORRECTION

In the November 2005 *Intelligencer* on page 62 it states that Dr. Winthrop Butler was born in Vineyard Haven "about where the fire station is today, across from the Tisbury Inn."

Susan and Sherm Goldstein, owners of the inn, point out that it is no longer the "Tisbury Inn," but is now, as it was originally, the "Mansion House."

We thank them for the correction.

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Widow Rocker, Part Indian, Struggles To Break the Chains of Poverty

by ARTHUR R. RAILTON

IT WASN'T EASY to be a woman in the 1800s, especially if you were a widow, 36 years old, poor and black, with nine children. Mrs. Eunice C. Rocker of Cottage City proved that.

In 1883 she and her children, the oldest was then 16, were taken forcibly to the Tewksbury Alms House, after being declared by the state to be "chronic paupers." Cottage City, their home town, was glad to see them leave.

Eunice was a descendant of Wampanoags. Her great grandparents, Samuel and Patience Peters, were Wampanoags on Chappaquiddick. When the Indian Lands on that island (the northern part) were divided among the Wampanoags in 1854, Samuel Peters was given 25 acres, plus a long narrow lot apparently for access to Cape Poge Pond.

The Peters had a daughter named Charlotte, who married William Madison. It is unclear whether he was an Indian or a Negro, probably some of each.

Love, the daughter of Charlotte and William, married Lawrence Prince. We believe he also was a mixture of black and Indian, although we are not sure. We know that he and his family were, like Peters, given land in the 1854 division, but that could have been because of Love's Indian descent, rather than his.

Love and Lawrence Prince were the grandparents of Eunice. Their daughter, Margaret, married William H. Matthews, a free mulatto from Maryland, who, it is believed, had come to the Vineyard to work in the lightship service. He bought land on Chappaquiddick from Love Prince with the consent of Bernard C. Marchant, Guardian of the Indians,

ARTHUR R. RAILTON is editor of this journal. He is grateful to Judith Lund of Fairhaven for her research into the Rocker family in several New Bedford sources.

approval that had to be given before an Indian could sell land. After they married, he built a house on the land and it was in that house that Eunice was born in 1849.

Eunice was 17 in 1866 when she married Antone Rocker, a sailor on the U. S. Revenue Cutter *J. C. Dobbin* stationed in Holmes Hole (Vineyard Haven). He was black and at 30 was 13 years older than his bride. Eunice must have known she was taking a risk. Only a month before they were married, Antone had been arrested for desertion, as we learn from the Dukes County Jail Records:

April 9, 1866. Anton Rocca, born in Valparaiso, Chile, aged 30, was committed for desertion from U. S. Revenue Cutter *J. B. Dobson* [*J. C. Dobbin*] by Jeremiah Pease, Dep. Collector.

As was often the case, Sheriff Samuel Keniston had misspelled a few names when he wrote in the record book. Antone's sentence must have been short or else the cutter's captain did not press charges as he was out of jail a little over a month later when they were married on May 20, 1866.

Four years after that, the 1870 Census listed the Rocker family, now with two small children, as living in New Bedford. Antone was described as a citizen of the United States, born in Valparaiso, Chile. (He probably had gained U. S. citizenship when he enlisted in the Revenue Service.) The 1870 Federal Census entry:

Antone Rocker, ae 39 male, black, seaman, b Valparaiso, father and mother of foreign birth, is U.S. citizen over the age of 21. Wife Eunice, ae 20, female, black, b Ma. [Children:] Lena, ae 3, female, black, b Ma. George, ae 2, male, black, b Ma.

They apparently moved back to the Vineyard before June 21, 1872, as on that day Antone was arrested in Cottage City for selling liquor illegally. He was taken to the House of Correction in New Bedford by Deputy Sheriff Jason L. Dexter to serve an unspecified sentence. As with the desertion sentence, this one couldn't have been very long, as the couple had nine children between 1866 and 1881, one every two

years without fail. Their last child, Nellie, was born several months after Antone died. Dr. Winthrop Butler, who took care of the Rockers (usually paid by the town), recorded the birth of Nellie in his Obstetrics account book (see *Intelligencer*, November 2005). He gave few details (not unusual when the mother was black and a pauper). It was his 190th delivery:

No. 190. Widow of Anton Rocker, July 30, 1881,
Colored, pauper, of Cottage City.

Cottage City had just become a separate town; it was no longer part of Edgartown. Eunice, now a widow, and her nine children were living in a rented house on the campground, residents of the new village. The town was not happy to have them. They were expensive to maintain.

In 1881, the first year of its separate existence, Cottage City paid more than \$115 for the support of the Rocker family. Included were \$25 rent, \$10 went to Dr. Winthrop Butler for delivering the baby mentioned above and \$17 was paid Job H. Gorham, Cottage City undertaker, for burying Antone, plus \$7.13 for lumber, presumably for a casket. There is no cemetery record of his burial. Nor is there any tombstone marking his grave. It is likely he was buried as an indigent in an unmarked grave in potters' field.

Cottage City claimed that the Rockers were Edgartown's responsibility. Eunice had "gained a settlement" (as the law called it) in Edgartown before the division, making her a pauper of that town. A hearing was held in Superior Court in May 1882 to resolve the dispute, but no decision was reached. A little more than a year later, in July 1883, the three commissioners who had been appointed to settle the matter rendered their decision. The *Cottage City Star* reported their action:

After a lengthy consideration, these Commissioners decided that Cottage City had failed to prove its case. This left the Rockers in Cottage City still, a town which all parties admitted was not liable for their support. But nevertheless they were here, at her cost all the time. . . A way has been found out of the dilemma. The Cottage City Overseers of the

Poor have determined to deliver them over to the State and carry them to the Alms House at Tewksbury, thus leaving the State the burden of ascertaining who shall support them hereafter. . . [relieving] Cottage City of the burden of maintenance of a long line of present and future paupers.

Cottage City selectmen had taken that position based on an order it had received from W. B. Wheelwright, the Massachusetts agent for the "Support of the Out-Door Poor" (an interesting and unexplained title):

You are hereby directed . . . to remove Eunice Rocker and her children to the State Almshouse at Tewksbury. . . as I deemed them to be chronic paupers and therefore not proper persons to be relieved under the Act granting "Temporary Aid."

That solution may have seemed correct to agent Wheelwright and to the editor of the *Star*, but the *Vineyard Gazette* was not so certain (the two papers rarely agreed on anything). The editor of the *Gazette* wrote:

Cottage City is still in a pickle over the Rocker family . . . The agent for the care of the State's poor is said to have consented to receive these people into the State Alms House pending the settlement of the question of the State's obligation. . . the misguided children of want refuse to go there – and who shall compel them?

The notion that paupers can be carted about from place to place until the lawyers find a locality where they can be made to stick is certainly a novel one. . . It strikes us that their status must first be determined before they can be made to budge. And then again, these interesting people are only alleged paupers, after all. They may have received a trifle of assistance in the remote past, but they claim now to be self-supporting, and there is certainly no law condemning a person to perpetual pauperism because of a temporary lapse from the highest affluence.

The *Vineyard Gazette* was right as it turned out, although it exaggerated the "temporary lapse" into town relief. Eunice and her children were receiving no money from Cottage City as town paupers at the time. They had moved in with her mother, Mrs. Margaret Matthews, on Lake Avenue at the fringe of the campground, but they had received considerable

help earlier. Both women, it was claimed in a later hearing, were working (although it didn't say where) when the family was moved to Tewksbury under duress and were no longer living on the town.

Removing the family became very violent ("war," the *Star* called it). It began Friday morning, February 2, 1883, while Mrs. Matthews was preparing breakfast. She heard a knock on the door. When she opened it, she found two men standing there, Constable Charles Bates and Cottage City Selectman Otis Foss, the latter being also one of the Overseers of the Poor. She invited them in. Constable Bates read her the warrant ordering him to take Eunice and her children to the Tewksbury Alms House. He asked if Eunice was at home. Her mother called for her to come down from upstairs.

When Eunice came into the kitchen, she asked for some explanation. The warrant was once again read. She refused to leave. Two more selectmen, William Davis and Frederick U. Ripley, had by then joined the group and explained what was going to take place, urging her to leave peacefully.

The three selectmen, satisfied that they had settled the matter, left to arrange for a wagon and a carriage to take the Rocker family to the ferry to begin their trip to Tewksbury. Constable Bates was now alone in the house with Eunice and three other black women who had arrived to see what was happening. Besides Mrs. Matthews (Eunice's mother, in whose house this was happening), there were Margaret Etta Matthews, sister of Eunice, and Eliza Ann Simpson, a neighbor, described by the *Cottage City Star* as a "termagant," pockmarked by small pox.

The women were angry. They announced that they would not let the Rockers be taken to Tewksbury. The *Star* described what happened next:

In a short time the war began in earnest and officer Bates was put to his mettle. . . No man with his hands, plain and simple, can stand the combined deliberate onset of at least six strong able-bodied working colored women; and with the use of a profuse supply of sad irons, hot water and hot fat, officer Bates sullenly retired, receiving a severe scald on his wrist and arm

but otherwise in tolerably good order. After an immediate unsuccessful attempt to break in the door, officer Bates sent for aid, while he remained at his post of duty.

Mrs. Matthews later testified about what she had seen happening:

I called her [Eunice] and then went upstairs to dress the children and keep them quiet as they were very much frightened. . . When I came downstairs Eunice came into the kitchen and commenced crying and groaning, picking up things and throwing them against the side of the room. . . I asked Mr. Bates to go out for a while as Eunice was so excited I did not know what she might do. Mr. Bates was just going out when Eunice went at him with some weapon. I rushed between them and told Mr. Bates to go out. Eunice took a kettle of hot water and Mr. Bates. . . grabbed the kettle and threw it outdoors. Someone threw a can of hot water at Mr. Bates when he went out. . . I heard them breaking open the other door. I met Capt. Dias with an axe and said to him: "Capt. Dias, you will not strike me." I cried out, "God save us! God protect us!" [Capt. Joseph Dias was Town Treasurer and a member of the fire department who had come to help officer Bates.]

Eunice's daughter Cathelena, 16, and son George, 14, began throwing sad irons and pans at the men. During the attack, one of the men was able to wrest the axe away from Mrs. Matthews and in the struggle, Eunice, going to her mother's aid, was knocked down by the swinging axe handle.

After a few minutes, Constable Bates and the other men had the situation under control. There were no serious injuries despite all the violence, only a few bruises and cuts. Dr. Winthrop Butler soon arrived to treat the injured.

Eunice and the eight children were taken to the steamboat to be escorted to Tewksbury by two constables. The three women who had been so opposed to the action were arrested and placed in the Dukes County Jail in Edgartown.

The *Cottage City Star* seemed to see nothing wrong with what had happened:

Cottage City sent nine of her population to Tewksbury and three to jail on Friday.

The nine were: Eunice and eight of her nine children: Cathelena (Lena), 16; George, 14; Frank, 12; Antone Jr., 8; William, 6; Henry (Harry), 4; Lottie May, 3; and Nellie, 1½. Not included was Lawrence, 10, who apparently was not at home when all this was going on. He may have been an apprentice or an indentured servant, staying with another family. He remains a mystery. The only mention we have found of him is many years later in 1912 when, after his mother, Eunice, died, the Probate Court listed him as one of her surviving children.

Cottage City may have been relieved to rid itself of the Rockers, but the case wasn't closed. Some sympathetic souls in New Bedford took up their cause and were able to get them released from the Tewksbury Alms House within two weeks. They were taken to New Bedford where they lived at 47 Second Street, apparently under the auspices of those New Bedford sympathizers, names unknown. They continued to live there for several years, being listed in several New Bedford Directories during the period.

Getting rid of them had not been inexpensive for Cottage City. It had cost \$79.80 to transport them to Tewksbury, including \$15.70 for their fares on the steamboat and railroad and \$3 for a hack and a team of horses. The two constables who went along as guards were each paid for three days' service at \$2.50 a day, plus expenses.

Before the violence took place, the Rockers had cost the town in aid payments a total of \$155.48, including \$4.74 for school books. Another \$8.49 was paid as assistance to Eunice's mother, Margaret. These expenses totaled more than half of the \$300 the town had appropriated for its "Support of the Poor" for the year. The selectmen were upset and sent a resolution to the state, asking that the town be reimbursed for some of these costs.

It took a while for the state to act on the town's resolution. Finally, the *Cottage City Star* was able to report on June 24, 1885:

The resolve in favor of Cottage City for the maintenance of

the Rocker tribe of paupers finally passed both branches in spite of adverse reports and hostility of two committees and the antagonism of Mr. Beard of the House. Mr. Davis fought hard for it in the House and was ably seconded by Mr. Lord of Plymouth.

During the years they lived in New Bedford, Eunice had problems with two of the boys. One of her younger sons, Willie, had been sent to reform school as a truant. He didn't seem to be getting much reform there, as the following news item suggests:

Joseph Carpenter and Willie Rocker, two boys attending the Farm School, escaped from the building through a window in the second story. They entered a saloon, the keeper of which notified Officer Howland, and he arrested the boys and took them to South [Police] Station. The boys were returned to the school on Thursday morning. [*New Bedford Republican Standard*, Feb. 12, 1885.]

Eunice's problems continued. Later that year, Willie and one of his brothers got into more trouble:

THE JUVENILE THIEVES. Willie and Harry Rocker were examined by Judge Borden Thursday, when it was developed that they have been inmates of the Truant School, having been committed for 2 years for truancy. They ran away once, and were released last spring. One night [last week], they broke into the store of Mrs. A. E. Bates. They broke a pane of glass in one of the front windows of S. P. Richmond & Co.'s bakery, Union Street, but the inside shade rolled up from the bottom, and so they did not get into the shop. After the examination, they were remanded to a cell, but Harry was afterwards released and turned over to his grandmother, while Willie will probably be sent back to Truant School. [*New Bedford Republican Standard*, August 25, 1885.]

The *Cottage City Star*, never sympathetic with Eunice and her children, reported the incident with a touch of "we told you so" by reprinting an article from an unnamed New Bedford newspaper:

The Rockers in Trouble

The Rocker family has come out again. It is some two years ago that Cottage City had some great trouble and a law

suit with them. They belong to a Chappaquiddick tribe of Indians and there is some Negro blood in their veins. Cottage City regarded them as paupers and attempted to send them to the State Alms House at Tewksbury, but when the officers undertook to carry this into effect, they were met with axes, knives, hot water, etc., and the order was never executed. An expensive law suit sprung up and never resulted in anything, and the family still held the fort wherever it happened to be.

They are mostly a lazy, shiftless set and there are a good many children, in and out of wedlock. Some of the children are in this city [New Bedford]. For some time it has been known that they are stealing, but nothing has been done. Tuesday night, however, at midnight or after, Willie and Harry, aged 8 and 7, respectively were observed smashing the show-window of the toy store of Mrs. A. E. Bates on Cheapside. They were captured and taken to police headquarters.

Wednesday morning a lot of plunder that they had stolen was found.

The *Cottage City Star* editor added this correction to the New Bedford story:

The writer is in error. The Rockers were sent to Tewksbury, but New Bedford sympathizers got them out and took them there.

In the same issue, the *Star* ran two separate paragraphs aimed at those persons in New Bedford who had been helping the Rockers and also the *Vineyard Gazette* that the *Star* assumed would again be sympathetic to the family:

(1) The arrest of two of the famous Rocker tribe in New Bedford for burglary recalls public attention to this famous tribe. It also gives the *Vineyard Gazette* an opportunity to renew its weeping on their behalf. Lawyer Cobb of New Bedford will also have another chance to aid them.. Meanwhile, we of Cottage City smile.

(2) New Bedford now has an opportunity to again enlist its sympathies on behalf of the Rockers.

It had been with the help of those New Bedford sympathizers that Eunice had brought suit earlier against the Overseers of the Poor and Constable Bates of Cottage City for

damages occurring in the assault that had taken place at her mother's house when she and the children were taken to the Tewksbury Alms House. During the trial, two questions were submitted to the jury:

1. Did the defendants use improper and unreasonable force in removing the family?
2. Did the defendants break open the outer door of Mrs. Matthews's house . . . for the purpose of committing acts of unlawful and unnecessary violence on Mrs. Matthews or members of her family?

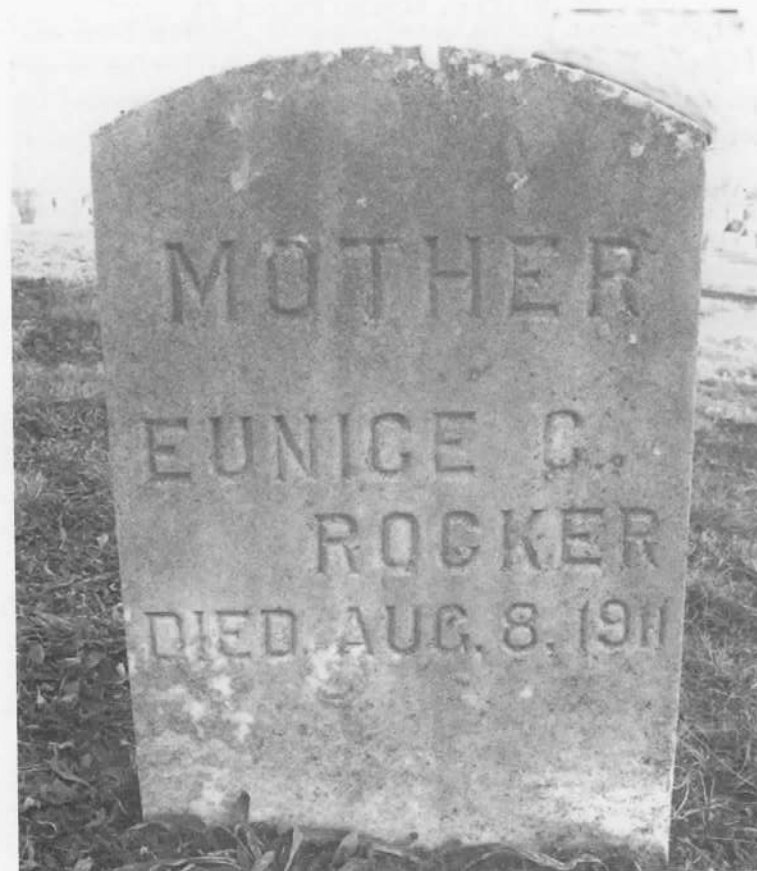
The jury ruled Yes to the first question; No to the second and ordered Cottage City to pay Eunice \$450 in damages for using "improper and unreasonable force in removing the family." The Cottage City Annual Report for the year ending February 1886, under the heading "Account of Rocker Suits," recorded the settlement:

[To] I. N. Luce, in full for expenses of settlement of suits brought by the Rocker family, as per settlement signed by Wendell H. Cobb, counsel for Rocker family, \$450.

Some time later, the state of Massachusetts reimbursed Cottage City the sum of \$482 (including costs), admitting that the removal of the Rockers had been illegally ordered by its commissioner. (This sum was about two years' pay for a female school teacher at the time.)

How much of the \$450 settlement Eunice received we don't know, but whatever the amount it certainly was the most money she had ever been given in her life. She used it wisely. In 1888, she bought a lot and built on it the house in which she lived for the rest of her life. The deed shows that she bought from George P. Briggs, a lot on the corner of Dukes County Avenue and Warwick Avenue on Sept. 19, 1888 [near today's Tony's Market]. That same year, the Cottage City School Report listed among the "scholars" in grammar school Lottie M. Rocker and her siblings, Nellie J., Harry W., Willie, and Antone. The children's names were listed in the reports of the next few years while they continued to attend school.

They were no longer "town paupers," no longer listed in



A well-deserved tribute.

the town report under "Support of Poor." Eunice had broken the pauper's chains.

With two exceptions, both for medical care:

Cottage City Town Report, 1890: Under "Support of Poor." Paid Dr. Leach for services rendered Rocker, \$15.00.

Cottage City Town Report, 1891: One visit to Eunice. Dr. Leach. July. \$1.50.

The 1890 payment is a large amount for ordinary medical service. It was the fee usually charged for obstetrics, not the smaller fee, \$1.50, for attending someone who is ill. No details were given. The report only says, "services rendered Rocker,"

not which Roker. Eunice was 41 years old, daughter Lena was 23. Could one of them have had a child? Eunice never remarried. Lena married a man named Warren and moved to Providence, but we don't know when. Perhaps she had had a baby.

In 1911, Eunice C. Roker died in the house she had built in Oak Bluffs. She left an estate of \$450: \$25 in personal property; one lot of land valued at \$75; two buildings with a total value of \$350. Her son, Antone Roker Jr., of Oak Bluffs was appointed administrator of her estate. He was the only one of her children still living on the Island. The others all lived in Rhode Island.

Eunice was buried in the Oak Bluffs Cemetery. A stone was placed on the grave by her children. It reads simply:

MOTHER
EUNICE C.
ROCKER
DIED AUG. 8, 1911

Not buried like Antone in an unmarked grave in potter's field, Eunice had thrown off the chains of the pauper and even left an "estate." She must have been proud.



A Cherished Artifact: The Flying Horses

by CLYDE L. MACKENZIE JR.

CHILDREN CAN HARDLY wait. Munching on handfuls of buttered popcorn or sticky strands of cotton candy, they jump up and down, impatiently waiting for the merry-go-round to stop. They're eager to climb onto one of the horses for a try at the brass ring.

It's the oldest continuous entertainment center on the Island, dating back more than a century: the Oak Bluffs Flying Horses. The name's an exaggeration. They don't fly, don't even go up and down. They don't have to. Generations have enjoyed them just as they are and always have been.

In a world of space ships, violent car chases and machine guns shooting up the town on television screens and video games, it is amazing that this old-fashioned, slow-moving carousel with its hurdy-gurdy music still attracts the young of all ages.

Among those "young" are grandparents who rode it as children, watched their children grab the rings and now are introducing grandchildren to the ritual. According to one historian of carousels, the Oak Bluffs Flying Horses are

... the only surviving example of the platform carousel dating from the beginning of the last quarter of the 19th century. (*Frederick Fried. See References at end of article.*)

The Vineyard carousel has been on the Island since 1884. In 1979 it was listed in the National Register of Historic Places, its place in history assured.

The word "carousel" comes from Spanish and Italian words that mean "little war." It didn't describe a carnival ride at first. A carousel was a small device developed for training cavalry men and their horses. They would ride past the revolving carousel at full speed, trying to spear one of the rings

"Bird's Eye View" of Cottage City in about 1890



A glass-plate photograph by Richard Shute, showing the Toboggan Slide, the Flying Horses and the Skating Rink, upper right. The Highland House and bath houses are at the foot of the wharf, top center. It probably was taken from the Bathing Tower near the Sea View House.

hanging from the wheel, like marksmen trying to hit a moving bull's eye.

Those early carousels were small enough to be cranked by hand. When they were enlarged to carry people, more power was needed. At first, horses did the job, walking in circles around a capstan. In 1868, Frederick Savage of King's Lynn, England, designed a set of gears that used a steam engine to rotate the heavy platform. He also developed an overhead crankshaft that made some of the horses go up and down as the platform rotated. Quickly, the amusement ride spread across Europe, becoming a standard feature of traveling carnivals which required that it be easily dismantled and moved (Manns, *et al.*).

In the late 1800s, when amusement parks such as Coney Island in New York were starting to blossom, not the least of their appeal were the carousels.

Strange as it may seem, the electric trolley car was a factor in the growing popularity of the carousel. Street railway companies, eager to keep ridership up on Sundays and holidays when few were riding to work, built amusement parks in the outlying areas they served. (Manns). Crowds of city folk, eager to get out of town on a summer Sunday, headed for the amusement park to ride the roller coaster, the merry-go-round, and to throw a baseball at a man's head, sticking through a hole in a canvas.

Those early American carousels were simple and the one in Oak Bluffs still is with its two rows of stationary horses. The large horses are on the outer row. Smaller horses, designed for small children, are on the inside row. In both rows, the side of the animals that faces inward is plain. There is no need to ornament that side; nobody can see it. A metal post from the platform floor runs vertically through the body of each horse just ahead of its saddle and is attached to the platform below and to the frame above to support the horse and rider. It also provides something for the riders to hold onto when they stretch out to grab the rings as they ride past. In addition to the horses, there are several "chariots" on the platform for those (the elderly and very small children mostly) not eager to mount a horse.

Carousels rotate counter-clockwise to allow riders, who are mostly right-handed, to reach for the rings with their right hands while holding on to the post with their left. Their goal is to snatch from the dispensing arm the brass ring that comes down the chute once during every ride, having been loaded along with 200 or so ordinary steel rings. Early in the ride the challenge is to extract as many of the steel rings as possible as a demonstration of the rider's dexterity. More skilled riders pull several rings during each pass, not infrequently dropping one or more on the floor in the process. They are supposed to stack them on the short metal rod projecting upward from the head of each horse so the ring man can collect them. But in their exuberance many of the rings end up on the floor.

It isn't recorded when the brass ring became of such importance to the merry-go-round. But today it is essential, even though its reward is not great: one free ride. But to enthusiastic young riders, getting the brass ring means much more than a free ride: "I got the brass ring!" they proclaim.

In the 1870s, summer recreation in America began expanding. Baseball fields, bathing pavilions, roller-skating rinks and amusement parks were built at resorts almost everywhere. Soon, there were 5000 carousels around the country revolving to the sound of the hand organ. (Manns). At its peak, Coney Island, the most famous of the country's amusement parks, had 25 carousels in operation and one of the 25 ended up at Oak Bluffs.

An Internet listing of the carousels of Coney Island compiled by Jeffrey Stanton, states that the Oak Bluffs carousel is the second oldest of the 25 once at Coney Island and is the only one with horses carved by Charles Dare who from the mid-1870s until his death in 1901. was famous as a builder of small, simple carousels. Stanton gives details the Oak Bluffs merry-go-round when it was at Coney Island:

Builder – New York Carousal [sic] Manufacturing

Carver – Charles Dare

Years operated – 1876 - 1884

Type – Horses stationary, 2 rows

This carousel was sold in 1884 and was moved to Martha's Vineyard. It currently operates at Oak Bluffs.

Chris Stoddard, in an article in the *Vineyard Gazette* in 1975, tells us who brought the carousel to the Vineyard:

... a five-year lease [was] taken in 1884 by F. O. Gordon, a lawyer from New York City for a site "in that part of Cottage City known as Oak Bluffs. . . for the purpose of a carousel. . . The location which is approximately the intersection of Saco Avenue and the extension of Sea View Avenue. . . [near] the huge Cottage City Casino, which housed a skating rink. . . The carousel was at the rear of the rink in a structure diminutive by comparison to the casino, but large bright banners along the peak of the roof . . . caught the visitor's eye.

The carousel did not prosper there. It may have had too much competition, being next to the popular roller-skating rink and an 800-foot-long toboggan slide. (The toboggan slide didn't prosper either, lasting only a few years.) The carousel had trouble paying its bills and when William H. Davis, a Cottage City house painter, took it over for money owed him in 1889, he dismantled it and moved it to its present location at the foot of Circuit Avenue. A few years later, he switched from the steam power it originally had to electric.

It was a time of depression throughout the nation and the carousel continued to lose money. For a brief period, it was owned by William B. Hanes of Philadelphia who sold it in 1896 to Joseph and Hannah Turnell of Providence for \$4700. Hanes had bought it for \$2000 a few years earlier so he did make money on the deal. The Turnells owned it for more than 50 years. Writer Stoddard credited them with giving the carousel its present name:

The Turnell family ran the carousel for 54 years, through three generations. They changed the name from The Carousel to The Flying Horses, probably because they were familiar with the Flying Horses carousel in Watch Hill, R. I. . . where the steeds are suspended from the canopy by a length of chain and "fly" outwards when the carousel is in motion. . . the Oak Bluffs carousel is of the platform type, with stationary horses.

Stoddard was wrong: a photograph shows that right from the start, when it was still located behind the skating rink, the

Courtesy M. V. Preservation Trust.



The name "Flying Horses" is gone. The flag, top right, says "Carousel."

name "Flying Horses" can be seen painted on one side and the end (see page 93).

Nobody seemed to be disturbed that the beloved carousel carried such a misnomer as "Flying Horses." To all who rode them, the stationary Oak Bluffs horses really did fly!

But there remains a mystery about the name. Although the photograph shows it was the "Flying Horses" in 1890, some time before it was moved to Circuit Avenue, the name was painted out and the flag atop the building carried only the word "Carousel," at least that is what another photograph shows. It is undated but it appears to be before it was moved to Circuit Avenue (see photo above). There certainly was some tinkering with the name during those years (see back cover).

When Mary and Robert Lucas of Sandwich bought the Flying Horses from the Turnells in 1971, they made extensive repairs, much needed after long neglect. Under many layers of paint, they uncovered some of the original scenes drawn on the decorative panels in the center of the platform.

The original scenes prompted historian Frederick Fried to do more research. He discovered that they were totally

unrelated to the Vineyard. On the back of one of the panels he found the notation, "Coney Island #4," confirming the carousel's original location. The panels depict scenes suitable to New York, including a steamboat on the Hudson River, a trotting race horse with jockey, a young boy riding a velocipede, plus several rural scenes, none characteristic of Cottage City or the Island.

Mr. Fried also learned that the horses and chariots on the Flying Horses were virtual duplicates of those shown in the catalogues of the Charles W. F. Dare Co., in 1876 and 1878. He concluded that the catalog illustrations probably had been done by the artist who had painted the scenes the new owners had uncovered.

The horses, he decided, had been hand carved by Dare in about 1876 for the Coney Island location and according to the catalog were originally priced at between \$25 and \$35 each, depending on the detailing.

The Oak Bluffs Historic Survey of 1978 points out other interesting facts about the horses' hair and their eyes with tiny animals etched inside them:

The horses came with real horse-hair manes and tails and had eyes (Union Carbide marbles) with small animals set into them. The eyes are still intact, although the horse-hair manes have been lost.

The first American horse carvers were probably part-timers, artisans who created various wooden animals (including rocking horses) in their spare time. As the market for carousels increased, professional woodworkers engaged in the manufacture of wagons and furniture turned to carving horses. Other animals, including giraffes, lions, tigers and even oversize turtles, are found on some carousels, but the major demand has always been for horses.

Capturing the illusion of motion was important. The tilt of the head, the position of the legs, were critical:

The wooden horses were mirrors of the snorting, pawing, genuine animal with genuine horse hair tails, saddles, bridle and reins. The horses, with manes flying, charged through the

M. V. Preservation Trust.



Horse up on its hind legs gives illusion of motion. Photo may be in 1930s.

imagination of eager riders, stirring up fond dreams and thrilling visions of galloping Indian ponies and fiery military steeds (*Anderson*).

The appeal of the Oak Bluffs Flying Horses was more than the thrill of catching the brass ring. Many Vineyarders remember the friendly atmosphere provided through the years by the senior Chester Turnell. One who has fond memories of Mr. Turnell is Bob Hughes, the unofficial historian of Oak Bluffs. Bob produces occasional hand-written memoirs and mails them to friends. In one of them, he described the ambience of the Flying Horses and other little-known facts about them:

- As a youngster growing up in the early 1920s, it was always fun to go to the Flying Horses and see the friendly owner, Mr. Chester Turnell Sr. He loved kids and if you looked forlorn and poor, you were sure to get a free ride from him.
- Rides were five cents each, six for a quarter.
- It has 20 horses (10 large outside horses and 10 smaller inside horses) and four chariots on the platform.
- The Flying Horses currently provide about 250,000 rides a

year. A ride makes 15 revolutions and lasts 4½ minutes.

- Some grammar school romances started here when the boy giving out the rings would try to synchronize the time the brass ring came down so the girl he liked would be able to catch it. [Bob: *That sounds like a bit of personal history: Editor.*]
- In those days there was hurdy-gurdy music. The old electric motor that turned the Flying Horses usually needed a little push by Mr. Turnell and his friends to start the rotation of the platform.
- Some teenagers could catch as many as six rings at a pass with many falling to the floor, much to the unhappiness of the boy who had to fill the ring dispenser.

When each ride ended, it was up to that young man to scurry around the building, picking up the scattered rings. Then he climbed on the carousel to collect the rings that the less exuberant riders had dutifully placed on the spikes on the head of each horse. Back on his perch, he slid the rings into the arm and swing it out ready for the next ride. In recent years, a second arm was added on the inside so the smaller children who ride on the inner horses can grab rings.

Despite its long-time appeal, the Flying Horses were never a great money maker for the owners. Several times in the 1940s and 1950s, Mr. Turnell and Mr. Hastings, who bought it from Turnell, offered to sell it to Anna M. Cohan, owner of the Old Variety Store, for \$1000. (The Old Variety Store has been next to the Flying Horses since at least 1917.) In the 1960s, Mr. Hastings sometimes shut down the Flying Horses on sunny summer afternoons as he would not run the horses for fewer than five riders. The busiest days are the rainy ones.

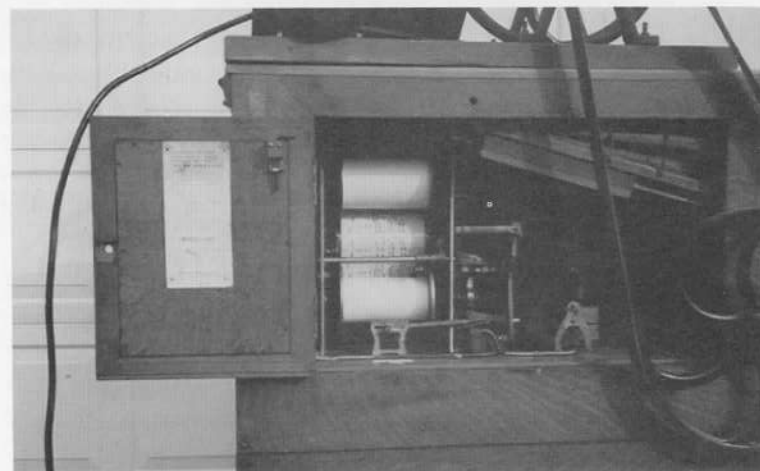
When the Martha's Vineyard Preservation Trust bought the Flying Horses in 1986, it raised money to replace the tape deck that had been providing music since the old calliope was removed in the 1960s.

Donald Stimson, owner of the Stimson Organ Company in Ohio, that specializes in building automatic pipe organs, was hired to bring back the original sound. *Gazette* reporter Elaine Lembo interviewed Stimson at the time:

M. V. Preservation Trust.



Stimson organ before installation.



"Organ grinder" music for the Flying Horses is "played" by seven rolls of perforated waxed paper, three of them visible here inside the cabinet.

Because the Flying Horses is smaller than most merry-go-rounds, the organ had to be smaller. Mr. Stimson came and took measurements and checked the acoustics.

"I had to get it small enough and quiet enough," he said. "This is the first organ I've built with this sound – the street organ sound. When I turned it on the first time, it backed me

Photo by the author.



In fine form, rider has just snatched the last of several rings on one pass. It seems to have ended up on the floor, as many do with multiple grabs.

up against the wall. I had to remove two ranks of violin pipes."

The organ weighs 700 pounds, while most others he has made weigh between 1500 and 2000 pounds. It is painted in shades of ivory with gold and red trim and a lavender strip along the bottom. The wooden pipework that he alone knows how to craft is exposed on the front. Artist Connie Hall of Huntsville, Ohio, helped Mr. Stimson with the painting.

The automatic organ plays twelve songs over and over during the 12 hours the carousel operates each summer day. The new organ, Lembo wrote, "works like a player piano and uses seven rolls of music punched out of waxed paper. Each hole passes the tracker bar and makes the note play at the right time. A blower supplies the wind for the pipes."

Anxious to make the Flying Horses strong enough to survive rough riding by thousands of children of all ages, the Preservation Trust after buying the carousel in 1990 removed the horses and chariots and sent them to Rosa Ragan in North Carolina to be renovated. She carefully removed some of the layers of paint that had been applied through the years. Gerald R. Kelly described, in the *Martha's Vineyard Times* of May 2, 1991, the renovation:

M. V. Preservation Trust.



Flying Horses around the 1940s. Photo is undated, but the signs give a hint of the time. All are cowboy-movie oriented: "Hi Yo, Silver!" etc.

Reborn in the North Carolina workshop of Rosa Ragan, the horses are transformed from the dark and somewhat mysterious steeds they were into a slightly toned down version of what they originally were. . .

Ms Ragan and Jane Tomassian, [then] executive director of the Martha's Vineyard Historical Preservation Society, talked endlessly by phone about the horses' paint job and decided that shading and mottling should be added to give the horses a bit more realist look. . .

[After she finished, Ms Ragan said:] "I love them. I think they're beautiful. We had a little going-away party for them and Tom Sayers, whose family lives on the Vineyard, came. He rode them as a child and his father rode them when he was a child. . .

Ms. Ragan is particularly happy about the chariots. "They are very, very special. I found quite a bit of design in the original and in some areas I left some of the original paint. There are beautiful, spectacular designs painted on these chariots. We had them all re-upholstered. The whole thing is

special, but to have the original paint showing is extraordinary."

The Flying Horses traditionally open on Easter, operating on weekends until Memorial Day after which they run every day from 10 a. m., to 10 p. m. until Labor Day

The maintenance man of the Flying Horses is Mike Fuss. He checks the carousel machinery once a week and is always on call in case something breaks. Because of its antiquity, when a part breaks Mike often has to make the replacement himself. Thanks to his loving care and to the supervision by the Preservation Trust, the historic Flying Horses will continue to bring pleasure to kids, young and old, for years to come. But there are some who have other plans. As Bob Hughes has written:

Since the Flying Horses are very valuable historical antiques, there are some that think they should be preserved like a glass-enclosed museum piece.

If that happens, we would only be able to stand there and admire them; no riding and no grabbing the brass ring.

Please, don't do that to us.

I thank the following for providing information: Bob Hughes, Oak Bluffs historian; Jane Peters, co-manager of The Old Variety Store; Eulalie Regan, *Vineyard Gazette* librarian; and my friends, Carolyn Tilton Medgesy, John Worth Osborn Jr., and Janice MacKenzie Teller. I also thank the editor for his exceptional help with the manuscript. The Martha's Vineyard Preservation Trust and Chris Scott, its director, the present owners and preservers of the Flying Horses, provided photographs and advice.

References

- Anderson, S. S., *Carousel Horses, a Photographic Celebration*, Courage Books, London, 2000.
 Fried, F., *A Pictorial History of the Carousel*, Bonanza Books, New York, 1964.
 Manns, W., P. Shank and M. Stevens, *Painted Ponies*, Zon International Publishing, 1986.

FLYING HORSES ON POSTCARDS THROUGH THE YEARS

When the popularity of the postcard spread to the Vineyard, the Oak Bluffs Flying Horses became one of the standard items. Determining the date when the photograph on the card was taken is not easy, as there was so much "recycling" involved. A basic card would be updated by drawing in automobiles or steamboats on an existing card scene. People were added or removed to suit the merchandiser. Dating becomes a guessing game, an approximation.

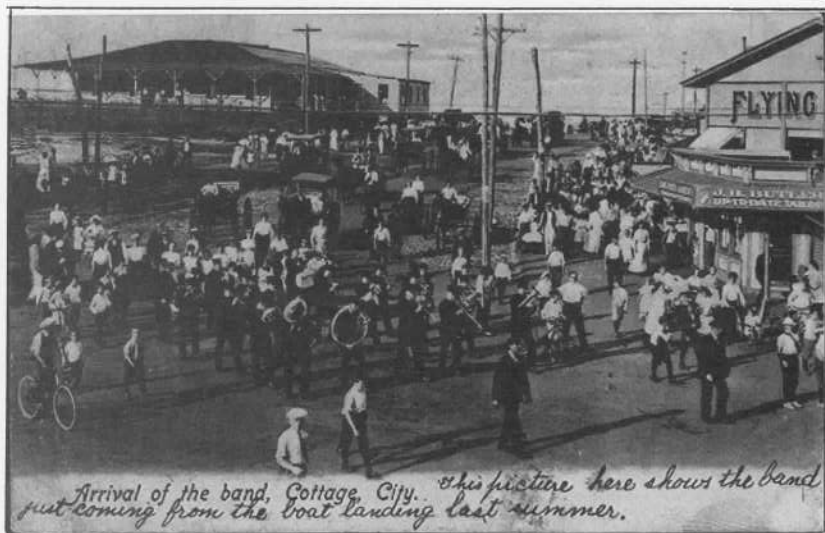
The Society's postcards of the Flying Horses go back to the early 1900s (we think), after they were moved to Circuit Avenue.



A 7242 The Flying Horses, Cottage City, Mass.

Our oldest card was made before the Tivoli Ballroom was built in about 1910. We are not sure what was in the several buildings to the left of the Flying Horses on space where later the Tivoli was built. In front of the carousel is a tailor shop: "J. B. Butler, Up-to-Date Tailor. Ladies and Gents Garments Cleaned, Pressed and Repaired." The first floor of addition on the right is a shooting gallery. "Ladies and Gents Target Practice," the sign on it says.

For more postcards, please turn the pages.

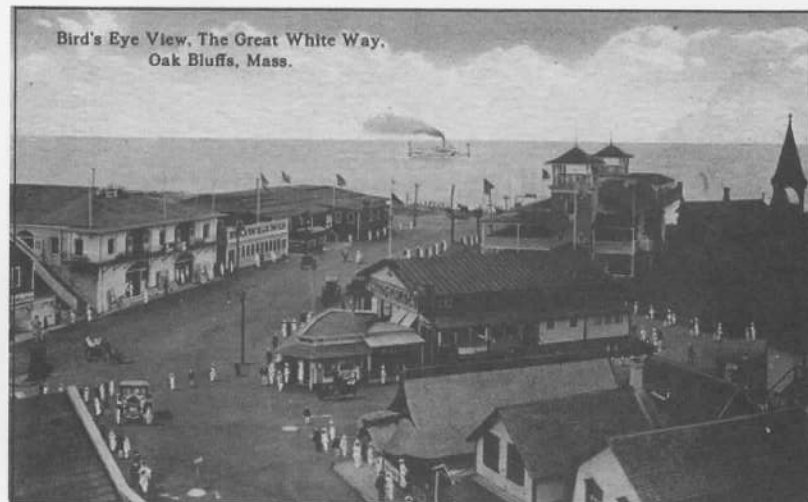


Next oldest card shows an off-Island band just off the ferry, starting the July 4th parade. Telephone poles and absence of motor cars date it soon after 1910.

FLYING HORSES ON POSTCARDS THROUGH THE YEARS



Probably 1912, fewer poles, more bicycles and people. Again, a band has arrived to parade. Lunch room above shooting gallery; tailor shop still in front.

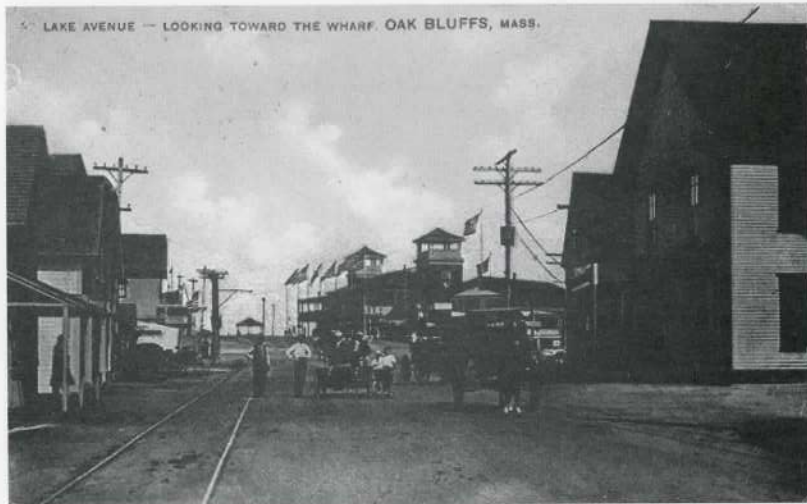


Two cards illustrate "recycling." Above, artist added two cars to earlier card. Horses and buggies are real; cars and smoky steamboat have been drawn in.

FLYING HORSES ON POSTCARDS THROUGH THE YEARS

Below, more cars and people added. Scene was slightly cropped when card (top) with its real horses and buggies, fake cars and steamer was "recycled."



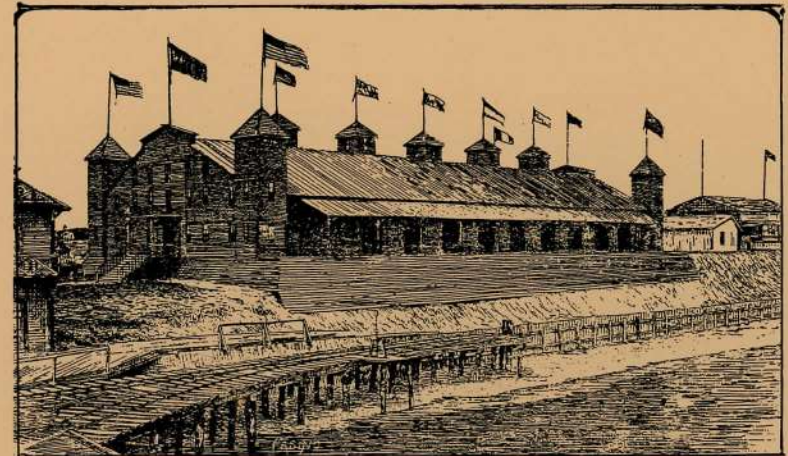


First card with photo of an automobile, about 1915. Excited boys stand alongside. Trolley tracks still in place; Flying Horses visible behind carriage.

FLYING HORSES ON POSTCARDS THROUGH THE YEARS



Postmarked 1914, this card is neater, a new photo cleaned up by retouching. In 1930, Civil War statue was moved to waterfront where it is now (2006).



To Every Resident and Visitor to Cottage City.

Do not fail to visit the

CAROUSEL!

SITUATED ON OAK BLUFFS,

Forty feet above the level of the sea, where cool air can be had at all times in the day and evening, besides health-giving, innocent amusement and enjoyment. A piazza twelve feet wide runs the whole length of the building, ~~offering~~ the sea, affording a splendid view of Vineyard Sound, where hundreds of vessels of every description are to be seen every day. The platform circle of the Carousel is 32 feet in diameter, on which stand

20 Horses and 8 Chariots,

Seating 36 people; it is run by steam power. Musical attachment. Excellent well of cool water. Last and not least the price of admission is

The Reasonable Sum of 5 Cents.

In 1886, the Flying Horses were located at the far right, above, behind huge skating rink on bluff facing the ocean.

In ad, at left, they are the Carousel, not Flying Horses. It is before they were moved. Text boasts of the sea breezes and health-giving, innocent amusement.

They were moved in 1889 to the open area, below left, at the start of Circuit Ave.



L. E. DAME,

Fine Millinery

130 Circuit Ave., OAK BLUFFS, MASS.

The Oak Bluffs Merry-Go-Round

JOS. TURNELL, Prop.

Circuit Ave., cor. Lake Ave.,

OAK BLUFFS, - MASS.

GEORGE H. STRATTON

(Successor to William H. Davis)

Practical House and Decorative Painter

HARDWOOD FINISHER

168 Circuit Ave., P. O. Address, Box 195
OAK BLUFFS, MASS.

HIGHLAND GREEN HOUSE

MRS. LOUISE ROBINSON, Prop.

*BEDDING PLANTS. WINDOW BOXES and VASES
A SPECIALTY.*

Plants Cared for in the Winter.

2 Commercial Ave., Vineyard Highlands, OAK BLUFFS, MASS.

COOPER A. GILKES

Wholesale and Retail Dealer in

Cigars, Tobacco, Etc., Etc.

BILLIARD AND POOL PARLORS

Island House Annex, OAK BLUFFS, MASS.