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Returned To Family-Owned Park

Stolen Quassy Carousel Figurine Recovered After 40 Years

MIDDLEBURY, Conn. - The elusive Lake Quassapaug sea monster has resurfaced after disappearing nearly 40 years ago.

The sea monster, also known as a hippocampus among carousel enthusiasts, was stolen from Quassy Amusement Park here on Nov. 16, 1985, and its whereabouts unknown until late December of last year.

Now the rare hand-carved figurine is back in the hands of the family-owned lakeside property thanks to a handful of collectors who have kept a watchful eye out for the missing artifact all these years.

"We have gotten a priceless piece of our history back," an ecstatic Quassy President Eric Anderson said of the saga.

"It was the lead figurine on the carousel - one everybody wanted to ride," added the park's George Frantzis II.

Red Flag Went Up

The stolen figurine was the largest and most ornate of three sea monsters on the antique E. Joy Morris carousel (circa 1902), which operated at the park for more than 70 years.

Roland "Rock" Hopkins, a historian and broker of antique carousel figurines, alerted Anderson and Frantzis just before Christmas that he had located the sea monster in Florida.

"I got a phone call from a guy who bought a collection of circus and carnival stuff in a Florida warehouse," Hopkins said during a telephone interview from his business in Pasadena, Calif. "He sent me a photo of the item he wanted to list with me and I said, 'that's an E. Joy Morris sea monster!'"

Hopkins posted a number of submitted photos online as well as an asking price of \$25,000 for the rare piece.

"Then I got an email from an old customer who said he thought it was the sea monster stolen from Quassy in '85," Hopkins reflected. "I pulled up the old photos I had in my files and said, 'that's it.'"

He authenticated the Quassy piece through the unique bat-winged saddle, detailed trappings and paint, then immediately called the amusement park to inform Anderson and Frantzis of the sea monster's whereabouts.

"He's a good guy and wanted to do the right thing," Hopkins said of the unsuspecting man who purchased the cache of memorabilia. "I coached everybody and got things rolling from there."

Back For Restoration

Since the theft occurred so long ago and authorities had no solid leads to pursue the case, Anderson and Frantzis moved quickly to forge a deal to get the relic back. They agreed to purchase the sea monster for an undisclosed amount, and in doing so avoided any litigation with the Florida owner, who did not want to be identified.

"He is a retired firefighter and had no idea he had bought our stolen hippocampus," Frantzis asserted. "We felt it was in the best interest of both parties to broker a fair agreement."

Quassy will turn the hippocampus over to William "Bill" Finkenstein at WRF Designs in nearby Plainville, Conn., for complete restoration. Finkenstein is an expert in carousel restoration, repair and production and made a replacement figurine when the original Quassy sea monster was taken.

"I've been watching for it all these years - hoping someday it would be found," Finkenstein said of the recovered piece. "Even though I made the replacement, you really don't capture what it really was. When I saw the glitter paint in the online photos, it was a giveaway that Quassy's missing hippocampus had been recovered."

Finkenstein also acquired a number of scenery pieces from Quassy's E. Joy Morris carousel when the ride was auctioned in October of 1989. He has kept one in his personal collection.

Quassy's owners have four of the original Morris menagerie figurines as well as the replacement hippocampus in their private collections.

All of the other carousel figurines, scenery and mechanical mechanism were sold separately during the 1989 auction. The lone lion on the ride fetched \$60,000 and the single tiger was bought for \$45,000. The two original hippocampuses sold for \$20,000 and \$15,000 respectively.

In summing up the sea monster's return, Frantzis said, "For me, it's more about getting back my dad's (late George Frantzis) favorite piece on the E. Joy Morris carousel. He frequently referred to that particular hippocampus as his most treasured."

And when Finkenstein's restoration is complete, the classic sea monster will likely find a prominent place to be displayed in the park, perhaps as a timely reminder that "what goes around, comes around," at least in this fascinating story.

About Quassy

Family-owned since 1937, Quassy Amusement & Waterpark in Middlebury, Conn., enters its 117th season in 2025.

The lakeside park, founded in 1908 as a "trolley park" (then owned and operated by an electrified rail line), features more than 20 mechanical rides, Splash Away Bay Waterpark and a beach on Lake Quassapaug.

New for 2025 are a Wave Swinger thrill ride and spinning family roller coaster.

The park hosts catered outings for churches, family reunions and corporate events as well as school educational programs.

For more information visit quassy.com or call 1-800-FOR-PARK.

with sidebar on E. Joy Morris/Quassy carousels
Photos and graphic

George Frantzis II (left) and George Frantzis III stand with the carousel figurine upon its return this week at Quassy Amusement Park in Middlebury, Conn. The relic was stolen from the family-owned park 40 years ago. (Quassy Amusement Park photo)

Quassy Amusement Park issued this poster after the theft of a rare hippocampus figurine from its E. Joy Morris carousel in 1985. Note the error saying the missing figurine was a PTC (Philadelphia Toboggan Company), perhaps in haste to get the word out. (From Quassy Amusement Park archive)

Photos show the sea monster (hippocampus) on the Quassy Amusement Park carousel prior to its theft in 1985. The stolen relic has been recovered and returned to the family-owned park. (From Quassy Amusement Park archive)

E. Joy Morris Carousel Was A Unique Amusement Ride

(Excerpt from Quassy Amusement Park, A History, Chapter 3, by Ron Gustafson)

Carousels designed by E. (Edward) Joy Morris of Philadelphia featured magnificent hand-carved figurines of wood and his rides usually consisted of 26 horses and 20 menagerie animals - all stationary - standing in rows of three.

The Morris carousel that operated at Quassy Amusement Park was built circa 1902, but park records do not indicate the exact date the ride arrived in Connecticut. However, it is believed the carousel operated at another property prior to coming to Quassy, which opened in 1908.

The Morris machine did replace a smaller ride that operated lakeside. A new Morris carousel cost \$8,000 in 1900, which was a substantial investment during that era, with the company producing around two dozen machines during its eight years of existence (1896-1903).

In 1903 Morris sold his manufacturing equipment and inventory of around 200 completed carousel animals to two men who formed Philadelphia Toboggan Company (PTC), a firm which up until then focused on building wooden roller coasters.

The new owners were able to complete four carousels using Morris' figurines, further establishing themselves in the amusement park industry. It is believed Morris sold the company due to health problems. He died in 1929.

The Philadelphia Toboggan Company ceased carousel production after The Great Depression of 1929. The company, still in existence today as Philadelphia Toboggan Coasters, Inc., Hatfield, Pa., is known worldwide for the design and construction of roller coaster trains.

The Morris carousel at Quassy Amusement Park consisted of a lion, tiger, three camels, three giraffes, three deer, two zebras, three goats, three hippocampuses, a burro, three chariots and 24 horses.

The carousel underwent an extreme overhaul sometime in the late 1920s, converting many of the stationary animals to "jumpers."

Following decades of operation at the property, Quassy's family ownership announced in 1989 that the ride would be retired and auctioned in October after the park closed. In the audience during the auction was Terri-Lee Morris, the granddaughter of the carousel's creator.

The 1927 roundhouse that last housed the classic machine didn't sit empty for long. A new 50-foot grand carousel from Chance Rides of Wichita, Kan., was delivered in time for the 1990 season.