

Pullen Park History



Richard Stanhope Pullen founded Pullen Park on March 22, 1887. Once farmland, Mr. Pullen donated the land as a gift to the City of Raleigh to be used as parkland. He characterized it as on old cow pasture, red and rocky. He intended this land to be used for the recreation use and pleasure of the inhabitants and the visitors to the City of Raleigh. Through his visions, Pullen Park became the first public park in North Carolina.

Mr. Pullen hired a Park Keeper in 1888, Wiley A. Howell. Mr. Pullen and Mr. Howell began the development of the park, as we know it today with the planting of trees, and shrubbery. Some of these trees are still around today. You will notice larger magnolias, cedars, and willow oaks, which are trees Mr. Pullen loved best. Mr. Pullen and Mr. Howell worked closely together in building bridges over the railroad track and Rocky Branch, building a circular pavilion, and circular concrete fountain. Mr. Pullen solely financed a lot of buildings and park features.

Mr. Pullen built the city's first swimming pool made out of wood in 1891, used exclusively by men. Later in 1895, Mr. Pullen had designated a second location for a swimming pool exclusively for women and girls. From 1899 to 1938, a small animal zoo occupied some of the grounds in Pullen Park. The first miniature train was purchased in 1950. Through years of development, the park has added a carousel, train, kid boats, pedal boats, concessions stand, picnic facilities, indoor aquatic center, community center, arts center, ball fields, tennis courts and a theatre to make it what it is today. According to the census of the National Amusement Park Historical Association, Pullen Park is the 14th oldest amusement park in the world.

By summer of 1915, Pullen Park had its first steam driven "merry-go-round." In the fall of 1920, the City Board voted to "replace the antiquated merry-go-round" by purchasing the current carousel and building from Bloomsbury Park. Repaired and repainted the carousel was ready to ride on Easter Monday in 1921. A severe storm delayed the opening until April 1, 1921.

The circa 1900, intricately hand carved machine, was made by master carver Salvatore Cernigliaro and his apprentices in Germantown, Pennsylvania for the Dentzel Carousel Company. According to the National Carousel Association Census, this is one of 23 remaining historic Dentzel carousels and one of 14 Dentzel menageries still operating in Northern America.

This Dentzel Carousel is three-abreast, stationary and galloping menagerie machine. The No. 106 carousel is 50 feet in diameter, with an 18-section platform. Fifty-two animals and two chariots make up the carousel of which 16 are stationary and 36 animals are galloping. The inside rim of the machine is comprised of 18 large gilded mirrors and 18 canvas panels. The outside rim, 18 large panels depicting animal portraits alternate with smaller panel paintings of landscape scenes. The Wurlitzer 125 Military Band Organ provides music. The band organ dates back from 1900 to 1924.

The carousel was accepted for the National Register of Historic Places in 1976. A major restoration was undertaken from 1977 - 1982. The Pullen project was the first restoration of a carousel where layers of park paint was entirely removed to expose and save the original. Twenty-eight of the animals are documented and preserved. From there the original color and design were reproduced as closely as possible.

Our miniature train is one-third size, near exact replica of the original unnamed locomotive, built in 1863 at the Danforth-Cooke Locomotive works in Patterson, New Jersey. The Civil War was raging and locomotives were hard to come by.

In 1864, the Central Pacific Railroad, now part of the Great Southern Pacific System, started the unbelievable task of building a railroad from the Pacific eastward over the mountains. Collis P. Huntington, the dynamic Vice-President of Central Pacific, located the little locomotive in New Jersey. It was too small for Federal use, bought it, dismantled it, and shipped it to San Francisco by the way of Cape Horn.

After arriving in San Francisco, the locomotive became reassembled and painted. It ran on April 9, 1864 and christened the "C.P Huntington C.P. #3." The Huntington was twenty nine feet long, weighed thirty nine thousand pounds, when loaded, had traction power of thirty one hundred and fifty pounds and developed two hundred thirty-five horsepower at fifty miles per hour. The locomotive assigned to construction work where it used to pull wooded flat cars on rails as new track was constructed.

In 1871, this locomotive pulled a private car of Leland Stanford, who was both President of Central Pacific Railroad and Governor of California. Because it could not compete with the heavier locomotives, in 1897 C.P. Huntington retired. Considered obsolete in 1900, C.P Huntington was set and ordered for demolition. In 1904, C.P. Huntington repaired and repainted by a shop man named Joel Osgood Wilder, who loved the little engine.