

CURATOR'S CORNER

By Emily Ruby, Assistant Curator

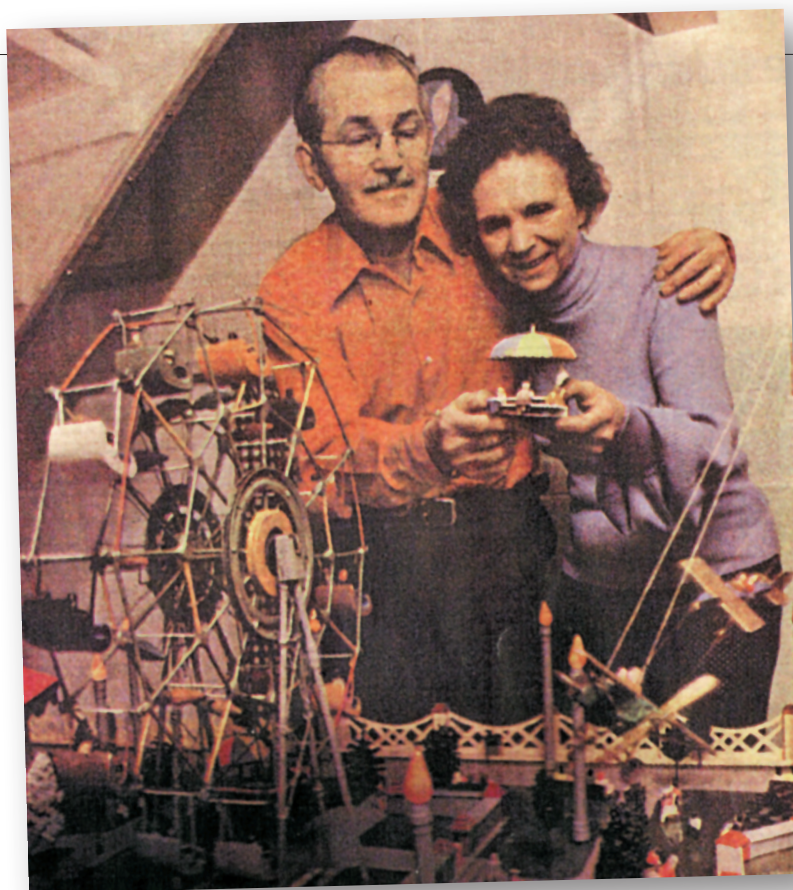
Miniature Amusement Park

The thrills of the amusement park have delighted Americans for generations. Parks were popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s as destination points on trolley car lines to expand weekend business. The 1920s financial boom was the heyday for these parks, when middle-class Americans looked for ways to spend their leisure time and money. With the onset of the Depression, many parks closed, but after World War II and during the 1950s baby boom, there was a resurgence of amusement parks, especially kiddielands. Few of these “trolley parks” remain, though Western Pennsylvania boasts three: Lakemont in Altoona, Waldameer in Erie, and of course Kennywood in West Mifflin. There was a time

when the region boasted many more: West View, White Swan, Cascade, Burke Glen, Eldora, Calhoun, and Luna Park, to name a few.

In hard times, however, not everyone could afford the pleasures of wooden roller

coasters and funnel cakes. The Salisbury family of the North Hills lacked money to go, but luckily for Frank Salisbury’s children, he was resourceful. Using a penknife, wooden fruit crates, and materials from discarded machinery, Frank began constructing an amusement park in the 1930s for his son Walter. Inspired by West View Park, he started with the twin-track roller coaster, but it took months of trial and error before he could keep the cars on their track.



Walter and Caroline Salisbury with the amusement park model.

HHC L&A, Gift of Vicky and David Johnson, 2009.0031.



The Ferris wheel and roller coaster at West View Park, c. 1930.

HHC L&A, GPC, Gift of Larry Ward.



Amusement Park model.
Museum Collection, Gift of Vicky and David Johnson, 2008.62.

Over the years he expanded his miniature world to include an airplane ride, Ferris wheel, dance pavilion, carousal, bumper cars, whip, bandstand, and thousands of tiny figurines. Every ride was operational; even the figures on the dance floor glided to the music. Finishing touches included a fiberboard fence that surrounded the park's perimeter and red corrugated cardboard roofs for the concession stands and buildings.

As America emerged from the Great Depression, Frank found work as a maintenance man for Hubbard and Company,

but he continued to add to the park for the next 18 years. After Walter grew up, the amusement park went into storage, and there it sat for many years before being rediscovered by Walter's wife Caroline in 1955. From that year on, "Caroline's Park" was exhibited for the public in Walter's basement or at North Hills department stores. The magic of the amusement park was displayed in parallel four-foot-by-eight-foot sections.

In 2008 the Salisburys' descendants sought a more permanent home for this family treasure and this wonderful piece of handcraft

came to the History Center. The Ferris wheel is on display in the Discovery Center on the third floor. If anyone remembers viewing the amusement park at the local Kaufmann's or in the Salisburys' basement, we would love to hear your memories.

