

Information Sheet No. 17



City of
Greater Geraldton
Regional Library



Heritage Services

Geraldton Regional Library

GERALDTON'S MERRY-GO-ROUND *BY THE SEA*

The First Merry-Go-Round

Erected: 1921 **Removed: Date unknown**

The first swings on the foreshore were known as 'ocean wave swings' and were constructed from recycled gas lamp posts by local foundry operator Daniel Marsh. The Geraldton Guardian, 17 December 1921, reported that "*At the meeting of the Municipal Council on Wednesday night, permission was granted to Mr. D. Marsh to place the 'ocean waves' he is constructing either near the men's bathing shed or alongside the Esplanade.*"¹ Further to this, it was stated that Mr Marsh proposed to make a small admission charge, and devote the proceeds from this to a memorial for fallen soldiers. Two swings were installed.

The Second Merry-Go-Round

Erected: 1929 **Removed: 1929**

Some 8 years later, on 26 January 1929, and as part of the "Beach attractions for kiddies" during Geraldton Week, another ocean wave swing was erected on the Esplanade. Unfortunately, the structure collapsed and several children were reported as injured on this day, one seriously.²

Minutes record that the Geraldton Municipal Council discussed the collapse of the swing on two occasions:

Wednesday 13 February 1929

Re: Accident resulting from collapse of "ocean wave swing" erected on Esplanade, 26 January.

In this connection two notices of intention to claim against the Council for injuries received by 2 different children as a result of the collapse of the swing, were received. After a long



Geraldton Regional Library T 08 9956 6659 F 08 9923 9348
A 37 Marine Terrace Geraldton

Mullewa Public Library T 08 9961 1007 F 08 9961 1206
A Thomas Street Mullewa (Council District Office)

E library@cgg.wa.gov.au W library.cgg.wa.gov.au

*discussion concerning the erection of the swing it was recommended "that the Engineer be asked to attend a special meeting, to fully explain and report on the erection of this swing."*³

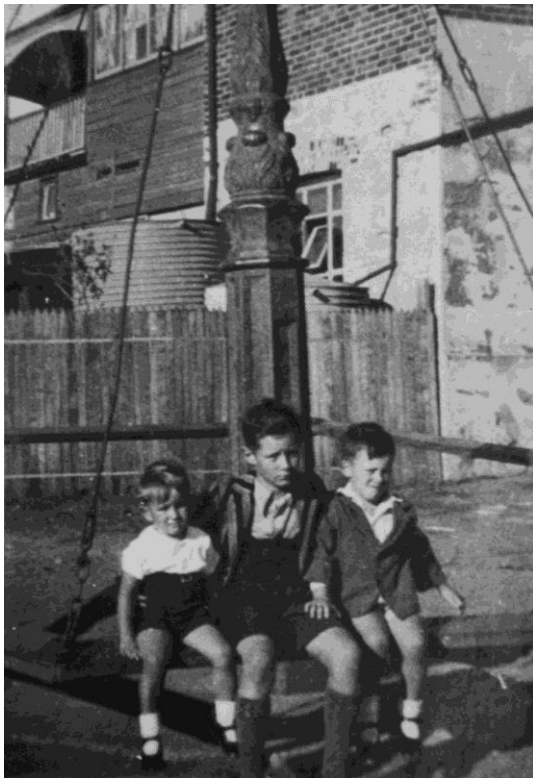
Wednesday 20 March 1929

Re: Ocean Wave erected on the beach during Geraldton Week.

*His Worship the Mayor questioned Mr McCulloch with reference to the ocean wave and the inspections which were carried out in connection with same. Other questions were asked by various Councillors and replied to by the Engineer.*⁴

The minutes do not detail the questions asked or the answers given. Mr McCulloch, the Engineer, resigned at this meeting.

The Third Merry-Go-Round



Erected: c1929/30

Removed: 1950s

Interviews conducted by Mr Ron Bertelsen in 1998 indicated that the swing was rebuilt in a new position, adjacent to the Library (Original Geraldton Railway Station), following the 1929 incident⁵. A 1931 photograph of the foreshore shows a merry-go-round in a playground near the Esplanade Jetty⁶. Photographs taken in 1935 and 1937 of groups sitting on the swing show the Library in the background. Anecdotal evidence indicated that the swing's condition had deteriorated over time. According to local historian Mr Stan Gratte, it was removed in the 1950s.⁷

Three boys on the swing, 1937.

Photo donated to the Geraldton Regional Library by Max Cramer, P 1833.

The Fourth Merry-Go-Round

Erected: 1988

In 1986, Geraldton local, Max Cramer, initiated a project which involved the construction of a replica ocean wave swing. The project received support from the Geraldton-Greenough Bicentennial Committee and was once again to be constructed from an old gas light pole which was sourced from Perth. The swing was fabricated with the assistance of former Geraldton Mayor, Mr Victor Askew at his engineering firm, V.S. Askew and Co., on Chapman Road, and installed in the park adjacent to Geraldton's Original Railway Station Building in 1988. This site was believed to be within 20 feet of where the original once



stood. In recognition of the popularity of swing, as immortalized in Randolph Stow's novel *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea*, the swing, also affectionately known as the 'Fifty Cent Swing', was unveiled by the author's mother, Mrs Mary Stow, in a ceremony on 20 June 1988.



Max Cramer at the opening of the fourth Merry-Go-Round, 20 June 1988. Photo courtesy of the Geraldton Regional Library, P 4766.

However, ongoing safety concerns with the structure led the City engage the Risk Assessor from Local Government Insurance Services to examine the swing and provide a report on its safety. The advice received was that it was very dangerous and needed to be decommissioned. On the receipt of that information the swing was affixed to the ground in 2010 to prevent it from oscillating and turning.

The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea – Literary Links

The merry-go-round's status has been enhanced by its association with renowned author Randolph Stow. Stow's autobiographical novel *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* was set in post WWII Geraldton and was published in 1965.

Geraldton born and raised, Stow opens the novel with a description of the merry-go-round as seen through the eyes of his boy-narrator, Rob:

The merry-go-round had a centre post of cast iron, reddened a little by the salt air, and of a certain ornateness: not striking enough to attract a casual eye, but still, to an eye concentrated upon it (to the eye, say, of a lover of the merry-go-round, a child) intriguing in its transitions. The post began as a square pillar, formed rings,



*continued as a fluted column, suddenly bulged like a diseased tree with an excrescence of iron leaves, narrowed to a peak like the top of a pepper pot, and at last ended, very high in the sky, with an iron ball. In the bulge where the leaves were, was an iron collar. From this collar eight iron stays hung down, supporting the narrow wooden octagonal seat of the merry-go-round, which circled the knees of the centre post rather after the style of a crinoline. The planks were polished by the bottoms of children, and on every one of the stays was a small unruined section where the hands of adults had grasped and pulled and sending the merry-go-round spinning.*⁸

Notes on the novel provided by the author's mother Mrs Mary Stow explain further:

*The merry-go-round was a composite of the hand-pushed one on the Esplanade near the old Library and the wreck of a fishing boat [guano barge] on the breakwater. Steel ropes dangled from the mast and swung out over the water and, to the boy, resembled the only kind of merry-go-round that he had ever seen – the one on the Esplanade...*⁹

In 1988, Randolph Stow composed a poem to be read at the opening of the replica:

MERRY-GO-ROUND

*This is the playground circumnavigation:
The leap in space and safe return to land,
Past sea and hills, boats, trees, familiar buildings,
Back to the port of one assisting hand.*

*Adventurers lean here, but do not venture
Yet from their circular continuous sweep
From start to start. Where going is home-turning
Nothing is lost, what's won is all to keep.*

*The gulls stoop down, the big toy jerks and flies;
And time is tethered where its centre lies.*

Compiled from sources in Geraldton Regional Library's Local Studies Collection.

References

1. *The Geraldton Guardian*, 17 December 1921, p. 2.
2. *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 26 January 1929, p. 2.
3. Minutes of Geraldton Municipal Council, 13 February 1929.
4. Minutes of Special Meeting of Geraldton Municipal Council, 20 March 1929.
5. Gordon Greenaway & George May, *A Brief history of Geraldton in 1925*, Geraldton Regional Library, 1999, p. 14.
6. *Geraldton: A photographic history*, Geraldton Regional Library, 2004, p 185.
7. City of Geraldton Municipal Inventory, Place 306.
8. Stow, Randolph, *The Merry-go-round in the sea*, Penguin Books, 1965, p. 1.
9. Letter from Mrs Mary Stow, held on file at the Geraldton Regional Library (G 173D5), 1985

