9 Restoring the Drum Panels and Pilasters

When the National Park Service acquired the carousel in 1970, the eight panels surrounding the carousel machinery had red backgrounds with yellow and blue splotches or blue backgrounds with yellow and red splotches. The pilasters were red and blue. Nick Veloz, the park curator, had uncovered a landscape painting when he cleaned off two layers of paint from a small area. Rosa cleaned a 2-inch square sample to the next layer down, which was the original layer, and uncovered a few rocks and some greenery. Nick decided the drum panels should be restored to the landscape painting.

Rosa documented all the paint layers. The second layer down was a red surface decorated with green and yellow hard-edged vertical and horizontal stripes.

The next step was to remove the top two layers. When Rosa restored the first panel and pilaster, she tested different methods of removing paint.

The carousel drum panels had been painted red, blue, and yellow.

Rosa dabs on methylene chloride with a brush.

To find the best method, she conducted tests using three methods: heat (from a hair dryer) and a scalpel, dimethylformamide (DMF) and xylenes, and methylene chloride (paint stripper). The goal was to find a method that was effective and efficient while causing minimal disturbance to the original paint layer.

The method of using DMF and xylenes was unsatisfactory. It was difficult to control the evenness of application, so some areas cleaned up faster than others. When the original layer began to show, there was some paint loss due to continued application of the solvent in order to clean the uneven layers.

Using a hair dryer producing light heat and a scalpel, Rosa easily cleaned away the top layer. However, it was impossible to clean beyond the second layer without major paint loss.

Rosa wipes away the unbonded paint with a cloth.