

# Chapter 2

## The Early Years

The early years were tough. Moving the Ferris Wheel with the Mack Truck didn't work out immediately, because that first year N.S. booked with a traveling circus, and the circus moved by rail. So, each week he would have to tear the Wheel down, stack it in a pile, and hire a wagon and team of horses to haul it to the railroad yard so it could be loaded in the baggage car. Then he boarded the train and rode it to the next town where the whole scenario played out again.

The train ride from town to town cost \$100 each time they moved, and when you're charging 5¢ to ride the Wheel, that's a lot of money. It took 2,000 riders just to pay for the train, and that's not counting the men he hired to help with setting up, tearing down and loading and unloading. He also needed money for room and board.

N.S. realized very quickly that this wasn't going to work. Uncle Nick saw that too and sold out to N.S. after the first season.

Even N.S. realized that the circus route wasn't the way to go, so at the end of the season, he left the circus. For the next two years he hooked up with another ride owner who had a Merry-Go-Round, Whip and a ride he called the Sea-Plane, but it looked like a Chair-O-Plane with Rocket Ships on it.

He was finally starting to move the Wheel using the Mack Truck, which cut his expenses considerably, but they didn't want to get too far from home because vehicles weren't too reliable in those days. Besides, they could only travel about 17 miles-per-hour because the roads were bad and the truck had solid rubber tires which was nothing like the inflated tires we have today. To go any faster would shake the ride until it fell apart or fell off the truck.

Also, the Mack body wasn't big enough to move the entire ride, they had to make two trips. That wasn't practical, because the other rides were up and running, and they were still hauling the equipment from lot to lot. The solution to that was simple, hire someone to haul it for you.

This was almost like going back to the rail yard. On Sunday night they would tear the Wheel down and pile it on the ground. Then about midnight a company called Zipman Furniture Movers would have a driver bring a truck to the lot so N.S.'s crew could load the wheel into it. Then when they got to the next lot the Wheel would have to be taken from the truck and piled on the ground because the driver wouldn't wait for them to set it up. The cost of the truck and driver was \$50 each week. That's better than the \$100 for the train, but not much.

Their route started in St. Louis, Missouri in March, arriving in Chicago by May and heading back toward St. Louis in September. The season ended in St. Louis in October.

The reason this route was selected was that Spring came about two months earlier in St. Louis than in Chicago. That extended the season by four months.

It became apparent that this wasn't the answer either. So, after two years on the road, he decided to book the Wheel with a dance hall operator in Michigan City. The idea was that when the people got tired of dancing, or just wanted a little alone time with their girl friend, they would come out to ride the Ferris Wheel.

This sounded great. He didn't have to hire a crew to take down and set up the ride each week, he didn't have to hire a truck, move the ride, he didn't even have to buy gas for the ride, because the dance hall operator wanted an electric motor because the gasoline engine would be too loud right outside his dance hall entrance.

But, there is always a fly in the ointment. First of all, he didn't have an electric motor, and had to buy one. There was another problem, but before we delve into that, let me tell you a little about how a Ferris Wheel is erected.

The bottom part of the wheel is assembled on the ground. The towers are made up of two pieces that are simply called the top tower and the bottom tower. First the two bottom towers are assembled with braces in the front and back (knees) and sides (wind braces). After they are assembled, the top towers and main axel are assembled on the ground. Here comes the tricky part. Using a rope, a series of pulleys and the motor, the top towers are fastened to the bottom towers, and lifted into place. Finally, the motor is used to lift each of the twelve spokes that make up the wheel, into place,.

N.S. ordered the motor, but it hadn't arrived in time to put up the Wheel, and he had to open when the dance hall opened. He was assured the motor would be delivered in time for opening, but not in time for setting-up. So, the only thing he could think of was to hire a farmer and his team of horses to pull all the parts into place. It was a time consuming and costly solution, but it had to be done.

There was money to be made at the dance hall, but when he had the route at least he was in Chicago during the middle of the season and could come home at night, but now he was gone all summer, and Rose was home trying to take care of the kids. Needless to say, one year in Michigan City was enough.