

'Mean Guy' Thieves Get Central Park's Ugly Duck

By LINDA GREENHOUSE

Hans Christian Andersen's Ugly Duckling, one of the most popular statues in Central Park, was stolen from its granite base last week, and an intensive search by detectives and Parks Department personnel has so far failed to find it.

The cast bronze duckling, polished to a coppery shine, the hands and knees of children crawling over it, is about two feet high and weighs between 50 and 80 pounds. It stood at the foot of a statue of the Danish storyteller.

Joseph Bresnan, director of



George A. Woods

The bronze Ugly Duckling weighs 50 to 80 pounds and is about 2 feet tall.

monuments for the Parks Department, estimates that the duckling would cost \$2,500 to replace—a sum that makes its theft grand larceny.

Installed in 1956

The duckling and the nine-foot-tall statue of Andersen were installed in 1956 on the west bank of Conservatory Water, the model-sailboat lake near Fifth Avenue and 74th Street.

The monument's \$75,000 price was met by contributions from Danish and American schoolchildren in a fund-raising drive organized by the Danish-American Women's

Association to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Andersen's birth.

Almost from the minute the statues were in place, the duckling and its creator became a favorite climbing spot for children in the park. Every summer Saturday morning for the last several years, dozens of children have gathered at Andersen's feet to hear Diane Wolkstein, the city's official storyteller, read Andersen's fairy tales and the folk tales of other countries.

'Pretty Mean Guys'

Yesterday morning Andy Gelfman, a blond, green-eyed 9-year-old from Central Park West, perched atop Andersen's somewhat ungainly head and gazed sadly down at the empty socket where the duckling had been.

"It was such a pretty little duck," he said. "Some kids in New York are pretty mean guys."

In fact, vandals of park statues in the past have sometimes not been youths but professionals seeking the valuable metal. About 10 years ago the police located two seven-foot-high bronze statues of women, stolen from the Richard Morris Hunt memorial in the park, at the factory of a belt-buckle manufacturer to whom they had been sold for scrap.

The duckling statue has disappeared twice before, but both times the thieves abandoned it nearby and it was found quickly.

Mr. Bresnan, the monument director, said the city might consider replacing the statue. He said the original plaster model, by the sculptor Georg Lober, who died in 1959, might still exist.

The story of the ugly duckling is regarded as the most autobiographical of Andersen's 168 stories. The little bird, raised as a duckling and persecuted for his ugliness, grows up to be not a duck but a beautiful swan. Andersen had an unhappy childhood and was a tall, awkward young man who contemporaries predicted was doomed to failure.