

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**DATA SHEET**

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED MAR 19 1976  
DATE ENTERED APR 21 1976

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

\* \*

AND/OR COMMON

Crescent Park carousel

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Bullock's Point Avenue

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

East Providence

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF #1 (Rep. Fernand J. St. Germain)

STATE

Rhode Island

CODE

44

COUNTY

Providence

CODE

007

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

STRUCTURE

SITE

OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

PUBLIC

PRIVATE

BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

IN PROCESS

BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

OCCUPIED

UNOCCUPIED

WORK IN PROGRESS

**ACCESSIBLE**

YES: RESTRICTED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

NO

**PRESENT USE**

AGRICULTURE

COMMERCIAL

EDUCATIONAL

ENTERTAINMENT

GOVERNMENT

INDUSTRIAL

MILITARY

MUSEUM

PARK

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

RELIGIOUS

SCIENTIFIC

TRANSPORTATION

OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Captain Rocky Incorporated

STREET & NUMBER

Rocky Point

CITY, TOWN

Warwick

VICINITY OF

STATE

Rhode Island

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

City Hall

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

East Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

not so represented

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Crescent Park carousel was probably built shortly after its manufacturer Charles Looff (1852-1918) signed a lease with the park's owner for the construction and operation of the ride in April, 1895. It was extant by July, 1898, when a photograph of the structure appeared in the Providence Journal of Commerce.

The machine has a circular wooden platform fifty feet in diameter with four figures abreast, including 62 horses, four chariots and a camel. It is larger than the average carousel of the period, and is unusual because all the animals are of different design. Atop the center post is a large wooden eagle, approximately four feet in wingspread, covered with gold leaf. Most of the figures probably date between 1905, when Looff arrived at Crescent Park, and 1910, when he left for Long Beach, California. The rim and center facade (enclosing the driving mechanism) are in a florid neo-baroque style typical of Looff's work, but somewhat restrained for carousel panels of the period. The band organ was installed shortly after the turn of the century and was manufactured by A. Ruth and Son, a noted German manufacturer of these instruments. Repeatedly, Looff promoted the sale of Ruth's organs to accompany his carousels, and the one here was made especially for display purposes. Originally, it employed a 94 keyless organ (played by air pressure) using cardboard books; but this was replaced early on by a Wurlitzer 165 military band organ roll mechanism.

The shed, also of Looff's design, is a fourteen-sided wood frame structure, its roof supported by two rows of vertical posts and suspended in the center by steel tension rods. It is enclosed by an unadorned frame consisting of four sliding and four stationary window panels on each bay, with vertical siding below. Four bays, and originally several more, carry two sets of double-folding doors giving access to the interior. Above, each bay has three-panel stationary transom windows with border panes of colored glass. This articulation is repeated at the clerestory, on line with the inner row of posts. Originally, the roof rose to a peak; sometime before 1909, Looff added the cupola and onion dome.

Both carousel and band organ were initially powered by steam supplied from the park's central plant. This source has been replaced by a fifteen horsepower, 550 volt, three-phase electric motor located within the structure. Lighting came from a large gas chandelier suspended over the center pole. Its fittings remain in situ. Probably by the 1920's, gas lights were replaced by 25-watt electric bulbs attached to the posts, carousel sweeps, and center facade.

The carousel and its shed remain in an excellent state of repair; recent painting of the figures and the frame as well as the shed's interior have generally conformed to the early twentieth century coloration. The carousel is prominently sited on a slight rise, at the main entrance to the park, overlooking the midway.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) Recreation
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES ca. 1895, dome before 1909 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Charles Looff, designer

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Crescent Park carousel is among the finest surviving examples of its type in the country, and a first-rate product of Charles I. D. Looff (1852-1918), one of the earliest and foremost manufacturers of carousels in the United States.

A native of Schleswig-Holstein, Looff immigrated to New York in 1870. Although he was trained as a furniture maker, he soon began to use his spare time constructing a carousel for Balmer's Pavilion at Coney Island (1876). Looff was probably the first man in the country both to carve the horses for these rides and to make their frames. He entered the business full-time in 1880, opening a plant at Greenpoint in Brooklyn. His operation never grew to be a large one, when compared to such other carousel makers as the Philadelphia Toboggan Company or Gustave A. Dentzel. This was partially due to the fact that Looff did much of the carving himself, and closely supervised four assistants who joined his workshop by 1890. The quality of his work quickly earned him a considerable reputation. During his career, Looff designed and built carousels throughout the United States.

Several orders came from parks in Rhode Island, including Rocky Point in Warwick (ca. 1892, destroyed), Boyden Heights in East Providence (ca. 1900, moved or destroyed), and Crescent Park. Of these the Crescent Park carousel was the largest and most elaborate. Here he opened a branch factory for regional business under the supervision of Thomas Murphy. In 1905, when his Brooklyn works were condemned for new development, Looff moved to East Providence and made the plant at Crescent Park his base of operations. This was housed in an unassuming wooden building attached to the rear of the carousel (with a six-room apartment on the second floor probably serving as his living quarters). Although it had long since ceased to serve its original function, this structure remained until recently.

Once relocated in Rhode Island, Looff proceeded to embellish the Crescent Park carousel so that it could be used as a display for prospective clients. New horses were added over the next few years, each different, and each representing the latest model. Thus, the

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Carvers and their Merry-go-Rounds" Exhibition catalogue for the Second Annual Conference, National Carousel Roundtable, Flint, Michigan, October 25-28, 1974.  
 Christenson, Erin O. Early American Woodcarving. Cleveland and New York: 1952.

See Continuation Sheet 3

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES

780			240					
A	1,9	3,0,3	4,6	2,5	2,7,5	B		
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING			ZONE	EASTING
C						D		

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

City of East Providence Assessor's Plats: Plat 56, lot 118  
 (section on east side of Bullock's Point Avenue, approx. 450 feet south of Crescent View Avenue)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Richard W. Longstreth, Senior Survey Specialist

ORGANIZATION

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

March 16, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

401-277-2678

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL XX

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

LOCAL \_\_\_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Richard W. Longstreth*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE March 16, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Acting

*Charles D. ...*

DATE

4/21/96

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST

DATE

4-17-26

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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carousel is extremely unusual, if not unique, in its variety. Generally, a carousel carries about five types of animals with additional differentiation coming only from color schemes. For many years, Loeff's carvings have been regarded by historians of American folk art as among the most distinguished representatives of their medium. The Crescent Park carousel is a veritable museum of his work. Of further note is the fact that not only are the animals and frame of the carousel by Loeff, but the shed enclosing them is of his design as well. Unlike many carousel casings of the period, Loeff's structures were polygonal, reflecting the form of the machine inside. Eschewing ornament, the shed's multi-surfaced mass, and the delicate articulation of its glass panes provide an unusually restrained and forthright visual statement.

Not the least significant aspect of the carousel is its excellent state of preservation. The carousels often have long histories of being moved from one park to another, and of alterations that have significantly changed their original character. During its eighty years of existence, the Crescent Park carousel has remained in its original location and has experienced little modification after Loeff left East Providence in 1910. A principal reason for this is that it has been owned and operated by members of the Loeff family up through 1966. Very few carousels in the country have been so faithfully maintained and so little altered. Complete with its original shed and early twentieth century band organ and lighting, the carousel affords a now-rare example of the total experience as it was in its heyday.

Crescent Park, itself, is noteworthy among Eastern amusement parks. Started by George B. Boyden in 1886, it was one of New England's major parks for several decades, and is the oldest in continuous operation in Rhode Island. By the turn of the century, it occupied over three hundred acres, offering a large variety of rides, dining facilities for 1000 people, the region's largest dance hall, a hotel, and a number of cottages. In 1898, the Providence Journal of Commerce asserted it was the largest shore resort in the world under the proprietorship of a single person. An estimated 50,000 to 75,000 people visited the park each day on weekends during the peak season. Over the past quarter century, however, the park has declined in size and prestige. During the past several years, Crescent Park has

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experienced major financial difficulties. Recently its mortgage has been foreclosed and the property is slated for sale at public auction. As separate items, the animals and other carvings on the carousel are considered extremely valuable, and the possibility of this magnificent example of nineteenth century popular art being broken up is very real.

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Fried, Frederick. A Pictorial History of the Carousel. New York: 1964.

Hale, Stuart O. "Old-Timers in Rhode Island Carousel Business..." Providence Journal, May 19, 1946, Section 6, p. 1.

Interview with Joseph Carrolo (Employed by Charles Looff during 1890's and 1900's). Warwick, R.I.: February, 1976.

Interview with Robert Newman (Current operator of the Crescent Park Carousel). Warwick, R. I.: February, 1976.

Journal of Commerce Guide Book. Providence: 1898.

Lipman, Jean. American Folk Art in Wood, Metal and Stone. Meriden, Connecticut: 1948.

Program for the Second Annual Conference, National Carousel Roundtable, Flint, Michigan, October 25-28, 1974.

Providence Journal of Commerce. July, 1898, pp. 215-216.

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCERS use only

received OCT 24 1980

date entered NOV 28 1980

Continuation sheet 20

Item number 7

Page 21

NAME: Crescent Park Carousel

*Other Name: East Providence MRA*

LOCATION: Bullock's Point Avenue

OWNER: City of East Providence  
City Hall  
Taunton Avenue  
East Providence, R.I. 02914

## DESCRIPTION:

The Crescent Park Carousel, constructed sometime between 1895 and 1898, stands at the entrance to the midway of Crescent Park, an amusement park that has been closed since 1975. The carousel shed is a one-story, fourteen-sided structure enclosed by an unadorned wood frame infilled with four sliding and four stationary window panels in each bay, with vertical siding below. Four bays (originally several more) contain two sets each of double-folding doors that give access to the interior. The upper portion of each bay contains a tripartite transom filled with stationary window panels that have border panes of colored glass. The structure is covered with a polygonal hip roof broken by a clerestory with four window panels in each bay. The roof originally rose to a peak but sometime before 1909 a cupola with onion dome was added.

Inside, the carousel is a circular structure fifty feet in diameter with a wooden platform surmounted by 62 horses, a camel, and four chariots. The rim and center housing enclosing the drive mechanism are decorated in a florid neo-Baroque style; the housing is topped by a central post supporting a large, gilded, carved wooden eagle. The carousel is larger than the average merry-go-round of the period and is unusual because each animal is different in design. The hand organ was installed shortly after the turn of the century and was manufactured by A. Ruth and Son, a noted German manufacturer of such instruments. Originally, it employed a 94 keyless organ played by air pressure using cardboard books, but this was replaced by a Wurlitzer 165 military band organ roll mechanism. The carousel and band organ were originally powered by steam from the park's central plant but are now operated by a fifteen-horsepower, 550-volt, three-phase electric motor. Light was originally provided by a gas chandelier suspended over the center post (its fittings are still in place); the electric bulbs attached to the posts, carousel sweeps, and central housing had probably replaced the chandelier by the 1920s.

(See Continuation Sheet #21).



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DATE: between 1895 and 1898, before 1909

## SIGNIFICANCE:

The Crescent Park Carousel is among the finest surviving examples of its type in the country and is one of the most outstanding creations of Charles I.D. Looff (1852-1918), one of America's earliest and foremost carousel manufacturers. Looff, a native of Schleswig-Holstein, emigrated to New York in 1870. Trained as a furniture maker, he spent his spare time on carousel construction before entering the business full-time in 1880, when he opened a plant in Brooklyn. Looff was probably the first man in the United States to both carve the figures and manufacture the frames that carried them. His shop never became very large because he did most of the carving himself and closely supervised the work of the few assistants that he did employ. Looff established a branch factory at Crescent Park, and in 1905, when the Brooklyn shop was forced to close, Crescent Park became the base of his operations. Looff used the Crescent Park Carousel as a display for prospective clients and he ornamented it with every type of figure he was capable of producing in his shop (the shop was attached to the rear of the carousel but has since been demolished). The Crescent Park Carousel is thus extremely unusual, if not unique, in its variety. It is a veritable museum of the work of Looff, who has long been regarded by historians of American folk art as one of the most distinguished practitioners in his field. Also noteworthy is the fact that Looff designed the shed in addition to the figures and the frame supporting them. The Crescent Park Carousel has stood virtually unaltered since Looff moved from East Providence to Long Beach, California in 1910. That this carousel remains intact on its original site is yet another feature which makes it a rare and significant artifact.

ACREAGE: about 3.5 acres

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: Parcel 2, lot 118, assessor's plat 56.

UTM: 19 303765 4625275

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: National

Entered on National Register 21 April 1976

(See Continuation Sheet #22).