

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Looff's Hippodrome

and or common Santa Monica Amusement Pier Carousel Building (Looff's Amusement Pier Carousel Building)

2. Location

street & number 276 Santa Monica Pier not for publication

city, town Santa Monica vicinity of

state California code county Los Angeles code

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Recreation

(Carousel)

4. Owner of Property

name City of Santa Monica

street & number c/o Pier Manager, 276 Santa Monica Pier

city, town Santa Monica vicinity of state California

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Building Department, City Hall

street & number 1685 Main Street

city, town Santa Monica state California 90401

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title None has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Summary

Looff's Hippodrome, or Santa Monica Pier Carousel Building, is the most intact element on the former "Looff Pleasure Pier," that was built in 1916 abutting the original Santa Monica Municipal Pier (1905). The Hippodrome is a 2-story frame structure that was designed to house a Looff carousel emplaced there the same year, but which was later sold. A different carousel is now in the building.

Additional Description

The Hippodrome Building rests on a portion of the former Looff Pleasure Pier, which abutts the original municipal pier. A square structure, it features octagonal 3-story towers at the corners with seven bays intervening between the towers. Each bay includes an arched opening on the lower level and paired arched windows above. Over the second, fourth, and six bays on each side decorative semi-domes or finials were originally positioned.¹ The openings on the first floor originally permitted free access to the carousel on the interior; they were closed at an unknown date to limit traffic. The corner towers contain restrooms and other conveniences for visitors.

The second level of the Hippodrome contains a series of offices and storage areas, built around the large interior space that shelters the carousel. Crowning the structure is a giant tent-like roof that culminates in a clere-story capped by a bulbous tower similar to the onion-shaped dome commonly found on Russian churches.

The vertical members (exposed wood beams) of the frame of the Hippodrome's plain interior converge at a peak over the central space where the carousel is installed. Except for non-historic railings and benches and the paint scheme, the interior of the Hippodrome is largely unaltered.

The original Looff carousel was removed from the Hippodrome in 1939; the present carousel, Philadelphia Toboggan Company #62, was installed in 1947. Until 1977, the structure was used for a variety of other purposes and underwent relatively minor alterations. In the latter year, a local group of carousel enthusiasts undertook restoration of the carousel. Since the carousel's restoration was completed in 1981, they have continued to operate it as a tourist attraction.

The Hippodrome has also recently been restored by the City of Santa Monica, the current owner of the building, as part of a master plan to revitalize the pier for recreational use by the community and tourists.

FOOTNOTE

¹ The correlation of present physical appearance with historic photographic views has been performed by Raymond Girvigian in his study, "Santa Monica Carousel, A Restoration Report" (Pasadena, California: May 27, 1983).

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
prehistoric	archeology-prehistoric	community planning	landscape architecture	religion
1400-1499	archeology-historic	conservation	law	science
1500-1599	agriculture	economics	literature	sculpture
1600-1699	architecture	education	military	social
1700-1799	art	engineering	music	humanitarian
1800-1899	commerce	exploration settlement	philosophy	theater
X 1900-	communications	industry	politics government	transportation
		invention		X other (specify) Recreation
Specific dates	1916	Builder Architect	Charles and Arthur Looff	(carousel shelter)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Summary

Looff's Hippodrome (Santa Monica Amusement Pier Carousel Building) is a rare intact example of an early shelter structure built to house a carousel in an amusement park. It is one of only two such structures that remain on the West Coast.¹ Its location on an amusement pier adds to its novelty, and it is also the principal intact historic element of the formerly extensive collection of amusement facilities at the Santa Monica Amusement Pier (Looff's Amusement Pier). The carousel presently in the Hippodrome is not, however, the Looff carousel originally installed there in 1916, when the Hippodrome opened, but is a Philadelphia Toboggan Company specimen that dates from 1922 and was emplaced in the Hippodrome in 1947.

History

Charles I.D. Looff and his son Arthur were well-known carousel crafters, roller coaster builders, and amusement park operators, who worked primarily on the West Coast after the turn of the century, although Charles' career had begun at Coney Island in 1876. Their center of operations on the West Coast was their factory in Long Beach (now largely demolished). One of their early carousels (1911) and a roller coaster (1924), at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, and a carousel and its shelter at East Providence, Rhode Island (their headquarters before moving to Long Beach) are described elsewhere in this study.

In 1915-16, the Looffs constructed the "Looff Pleasure Pier," over the waters adjacent to the existing 1000-foot Santa Monica Municipal Pier, which had been advertised since 1905 as the "largest concrete pier in the world."² Over the next few years, they built an impressive and popular set of attractions. These included the Hippodrome Building with its carousel of their own construction (1916); the "Blue Streak" roller coaster (ca. 1917); a giant rotating swing ride, known as the "Aeroscope"; the Bowling and Billiard Building (ca. 1917); and the La Monica Ballroom (1924), a vast structure of eclectic Byzantine, Persian, and Mission Revival motifs that accommodated 5,000 dancers. The Looff pier also featured picnic shelters and electric trams.³

Looff's amusement pier was accessible by electric trolley from Venice and downtown Los Angeles. Its attractiveness and ease of access were also enhanced when the main Santa Monica pier was rebuilt in 1921, widened, and extended to nearly 1600 feet. All the Looff facilities remained to the south of the landward end of the city's pier.⁴ Looff sold his interests in 1924.

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Less than 1

Quadrangle name Beverly Hills

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	1	3	6	1	9	1	0	3	7	6	4	0	9	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

Only the Hippodrome building

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 James H. Charleton

organization History Division, National Park Service date November 2, 1984

street & number 1100 "L" Street, NW telephone (202) 343-8165

city or town Washington state DC 20240

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national 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

title date

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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The height of the Santa Monica Amusement Pier's popularity was from 1924, when the La Monica Ballroom opened, through World War II, before the freeway system (begun only in 1939) made more distant coastside attractions and new inland theme parks, such as Knott's Berry Farm (1940) and Disneyland (1955), easily accessible to the burgeoning population and tourist trade of Southern California. The pier's popularity persisted into the 1950s, and the La Monica Ballroom became the first in the nation to televise its programs.⁵

The "Blue Streak" roller coaster, on the other hand, had survived only until 1931. The La Monica Ballroom was demolished in 1968.⁵ Today, other than the Looff pier itself, only the Hippodrome, the Bowling and Billiard Building, now used as a gift shop, and one minor structure survive. The Bowling and Billiard Building, which once featured early automatic pin-setting machinery,⁷ has been extensively altered on the interior; for that reason it is not recommended for inclusion in this nomination. Likewise, the Looff Pier and the Municipal Pier have both been so modified that they cannot be said to possess clear historic integrity.

The Carousel

The Carousel presently in the Hippodrome is Philadelphia Toboggan Company #62, a 3-row carousel that began its career in Cumberland Park, in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1922. It was emplaced at Santa Monica in 1947.⁸ As an intact carousel by a first-rate manufacturer and of the general period represented by the Hippodrome, its presence contributes to the integrity of the structure, since it maintains the building's historic use. The interior of the Hippodrome is, furthermore, being restored to its original appearance to provide an approximation of the historic setting of the former carousel.

On the other hand, the carousel is not the original Looff carousel that was manufactured for the Hippodrome. And, of itself, as a rather typical example of Philadelphia Toboggan Company carousel work in the early 1920s, it is, while quite attractive, not exceptionally early, rare, or unusually distinguished. It was, however, featured in the film "The Sting," and is well known from its appearance in other films and a host of television series episodes.

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FOOTNOTES

- 1 Raymond Girvigian, "Santa Monica Carousel, A Restoration Report" (Pasadena, California: May 27, 1983), p. 4.0-3.
- 2 Ibid., pp. 2.01-2 and 2.01-10.
- 3 Ibid., pp. 2.01-7--2.01-9 and 2.01-17.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 2.01-9 and 2.01-15.
- 5 Ibid., p. 2.01-17.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., p. 2.01-13.
- 8 National Carousel Association, "National Carousel Association Census" (Los Angeles, California: National Carousel Association, 1983), p. 6.
- 9 The basis for this conclusion is a review of all the Philadelphia Toboggan Company entries in the "National Carousel Association Census" and the list of the Philadelphia Toboggan Company carousels in Charles J. Jacques, Jr., "The Carousels of the Philadelphia Toboggan Company," Amusement Park Journal, 5, 4 (1983), pp. 36-37.

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Taucher, Willie Loeff. "Loeff Family Photo Memoirs," Carrousel Art, July 1982 (Special Edition).

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_____. "Santa Monica...not without pier," Merry-Go-Roundup 5, 1 (Winter 1978), pp. 13-15.

_____. "The Carousel on the Pier," Merry-Go-Roundup, 10, 4 (Winter 1984), entire issue.