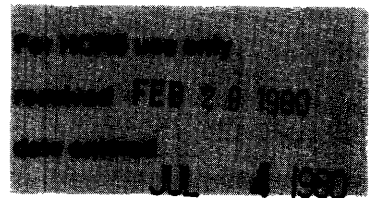


**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**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 Playland Amusement Park

and/or common same

**2. Location**

street & number Playland <sup>Pkwy</sup> ~~Parkway~~ at Forest Avenue  not for publication

city, ~~TOWN~~ Rye  vicinity of congressional district Twenty-fourth

state New York code 036 county Westchester code 119

**3. Classification**

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

**4. Owner of Property**

name County of Westchester (Alfred DelBello, County Executive)

street & number 148 Martine Avenue

city, ~~TOWN~~ White Plains  vicinity of state New York

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Westchester County Department of Land Records

street & number 148 Martine Avenue

city, ~~TOWN~~ White Plains  vicinity of state New York

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Historic Resources Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date Summer, 1979  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Div. of Hist. Preservation, NY State Parks & Recreation

city, ~~TOWN~~ Albany  vicinity of state New York

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
___ excellent	___ deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	___ ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	___ moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	___ unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Playland Amusement Park is a two hundred and eighty acre county-owned site on Long Island Sound in the city of Rye. Contained within the Park's boundaries are architecturally significant buildings, many amusement rides and concessions, an Entrance Plaza with a fountain, a central landscaped mall, a freshwater swimming pool and two beaches totalling 7,900 feet of shoreline, a man-made eighty-acre lake, and one hundred twenty-two acres of undeveloped bird and wildlife habitat. Opened to the public in 1928, Playland, the first totally planned amusement park in the country, was the result of the combined efforts of the Westchester County Park Commission and its staff, and the architectural team of A. Stewart Walker and Leon Gillette. The Park's basic plan and its main buildings, most of which were designed in the distinctive Art Deco style, remain largely intact.

The following building descriptions correspond numerically to the building index on the nomination's general plot plan:

1. Bath House, Pool, and Boardwalk. The Spanish Revival Bath House complex, completed in 1928 with the exception of the pool which was constructed the following year, was designed by Walker and Gillette and is the only one of the Park's main buildings not in the Art Deco mode. The main stuccoed structure, facing the Long Island Sound and the Park's swimming beach on the east, consists of a central section, two stories high and three bays wide, flanked by twin towers to which are attached wings extending to the west. The central section has three arched portals providing entrance to the north and south bath houses; stairs ascend on either side of the portals to the pool level where the arch motif is repeated in flanking arcades. Semi-circular open sections beneath the stairs are filled with decorative iron grillwork. Rectangular windows capped with triangular niches appear on the tower facades and on the main (east) facades of the wings. Above a bracketed cornice on each tower is a copper roof with a six-sided cupola supporting a wrought-iron seahorse weather vane. Decorative ironwork also appears on the tower balconies. Although the Bath House is of the Spanish Revival, or Mediterranean, style in massing and detail, it is related to the Park's Art Deco buildings by similarity in construction materials and color scheme. On the south and northeast, at the boardwalk level, are connecting one-story stuccoed galleries housing shops and concessions; these sections have low wooden balustrades above tiled overhanging eaves supported by large-scale carved brackets, and terminating pavilions with colonnades. To the northeast, the boardwalk extends past the Bus Terminal area, the Administration Building and Entrance Plaza, and the Casino; it leads to the dock where steamships from the New York City area were tied up during the Park's early decades. The configuration of the Bath House complex and boardwalk is that of a sickle blade, corresponding to the shape of the beach before it. Rock jetties, constructed to prevent the sand from washing away, run out into the Sound perpendicular to the boardwalk in front of the Bath House.

<sup>1</sup>The pool level originally also contained a restaurant, now closed.

## 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 type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input 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 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) entertainment/amusement park
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1928                      **Builder/Architect** Walker and Gillette

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Playland Amusement Park in Rye, a two hundred and eighty acre complex of amusements, concessions, and water-oriented facilities well-integrated with landscaping and the natural environment, is architecturally and historically significant. Located on a site long associated with recreational use, the complex was developed in the 1920's by the Westchester County Park Commission and was the first totally planned amusement park in America. After over fifty years of use, its basic design and much of its distinctive Art Deco architecture remain unaltered. Playland was the unique result of the combined efforts of an enlightened governmental body and the talents of many creative individuals, and is the prototype of the contemporary theme park.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Rye became a summer resort area for wealthy Manhattan residents. The popularization of the automobile in the 1920's accelerated the development of Westchester County, a "natural outlet for New York" as an important suburban region. Recognizing the need for regional planning early in that decade, the Westchester County Board of Supervisors, under the provisions of the Westchester County Park Law, created the county Park Commission in 1921.<sup>2</sup> Transportation and recreation were considered to be fundamental components in planning for suburban development, and the Commission was empowered to locate, create, acquire and improve parks, beaches, and open spaces, as well as parkways, boulevards, streets, roads, docks, and bridges which would serve to connect them. Jay Downer, Chief Engineer of the Commission, stated, "Until recent years, the automobile was an unknown factor in the planning of cities and other municipalities in which park areas are fundamentally as important as street systems. When Central Park was laid out in 1853, men thought of parks in terms of a unit area. But in our own era of vastly increased mobility resulting from mass production of motor cars we must think wholly in terms of a connected system of parks and parkways."<sup>3</sup> Acting upon this philosophy, the Commission, during the decade following its creation, was responsible for a number of major projects including the Saw Mill River Parkway, the Hutchinson River Parkway, the Westchester County Center in White Plains, Glen Island Park, Kingsland Point Park in Tarrytown, and Playland at Rye.

<sup>1</sup> New York Times, February 17, 1924, 9:2.

<sup>2</sup> Report of the Westchester County Park Commission; April 30, 1924, Albany, 1924, pp. 74-83.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

Acreeage of nominated property 280

Quadrangle name Mamaroneck

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References See Continuation Sheet

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B	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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D	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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E	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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F	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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G	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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H	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

# 11. Form Prepared By

Contact: Austin N. O'Brien

name/title Karen Morey Kennedy (See Continuation Sheet) (518)474-0479

organization Preservation Consultant

date October 22, 1979

street & number 20 Hix Avenue

telephone (914) 967-6091

city ~~or town~~ Rye

state New York

# 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Director, Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau

2/22/80

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

*[Handwritten signature]*

Keeper of the National Register

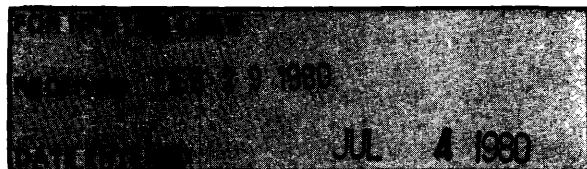
7-4-80

July 2, 1980

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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2. Casino. Although not constructed until 1929-30, the Casino, facing the Entrance Plaza on the east, was part of Walker and Gillette's original Park plan. Two stories high, eight bays wide, and nine bays deep, the stucco structure is the largest of the Park's main buildings in the Art Deco style. Entrance is provided by double glass doors in each of the three main (west) facade bays. A flat copper canopy extends the width of the entrance bays at door-height level; above the canopy in each bay is a round-arched multi-paned window to the roof line. The windows are flanked by triangular pilasters; the pilaster capitals are formed by alternating cream and beige bands of zig-zag trim. The central arch has a keystone, similar in its triangular configuration to the pilasters, supporting a flagpole. Behind the main facade can be seen the domed roof of the Casino's main skating arena. Decoration on this facade consists of the copper roofs topped with octagonal lanterns on the projecting Pavilion bays, decorative iron grillwork in the set-back bays connecting the central section to the Pavilions, classically inspired cornice trim on all bays except the central three, and the cream, beige, and sea-green color scheme. Up-lights on high pedestals, situated at the corners of the Pavilions, illuminate the main facade at night. Fenestration on all facades consists generally of rectangular windows with black metal sash, the three entrance doors on the main facade, and a large double utility entrance on the rear (east) facade. The Casino, which originally provided space for dining, dancing, and games concession as well as ice skating, underwent a major interior renovation in 1973. The building now contains two additional skating areas, a snack bar, and improved locker and skate shop facilities. The original exterior remains unchanged; Art Deco decorative elements in the lobby area, including the original chandeliers, have been retained. Also unchanged is the notable lamella framing of the large arena roof, and the diamond-shaped windows of colored glass set into the roof framing.

3. The Dragon Deli, an enclosed, flat-roofed stucco restaurant, faces the Entrance Plaza and forms the Plaza's northeast corner. The one-story five-bay structure has double windows with aluminum sash and a metal framed glass double entrance door. The restaurant is situated between two Pavilions: the Entrance Pavilion on the south connects the Deli to the Casino building, and on the north, the first Colonnade Pavilion connects the restaurant to the Mall. The original curved Colonnade section, from which the Dragon Deli projects, retains its drop cornice, hand-painted murals, and wooden balustrade.

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4. The Buffet Colonnade forms the northwest corner of the Entrance Plaza. Two cream-colored stucco Pavilions, one bay to each of the three exposed sides, flank the central section. The Pavilion to the south is of the Entrance Plaza type: enclosed, with a domed copper roof, compound inset bays, and classically inspired cornice decoration. The other pavilion forms the Plaza terminus of the west Mall Colonnade and has a flat roof, is open on three sides, and has simple rectangular bays. Food at this restaurant is ordered and served buffet-style inside; dining tables are set up outside under a flat plexiglass canopy which has replaced the original canvas awning. Decorative details on the central section consist of the original hand-painted murals, visible on the frieze above the canopy.

5. The Colonnades originally framed the entire central Mall and the western section of the cross-axis and extended across the front of the Boat House. Designed to provide visual unification of the amusements and concessions, and also to provide shelter from the weather, the Colonnades were built of frame, with octagonal columns at twelve-foot intervals. Drop panel cornices contained friezes with hand-painted murals; the cornice sections were topped with curved balustrade sections between low posts supporting classical frosted glass lighting fixtures. The primary color, for nighttime visibility, was white; but column capitals, mural frames, and balustrade posts and railings were occasionally emphasized with contrasting trim. Colonnade Pavilions, more severe than those in the Entrance Plaza, are square in section, with flat roofs, and were designed to be open on all sides. Stepped-back corners at the roof line provide platforms for light fixtures identical to those topping the Colonnades. The central Colonnades were heavily damaged by fire in the late 1960's; sections north of the cross-axis are no longer standing, and those south of the cross-axis have been altered by the removal of alternate columns and the replacement of the original frame cornices with steel and plexiglass superstructures. Two of the central Pavilions have been enclosed to provide space for food concessions. Sections of the original Colonnade remain intact on the Boat House and in the western section of the cross-axis.

6. The ten permanent Games and Concessions Buildings were designed by Walker and Gillette to house games of skill and chance, and food and souvenir concessions. The frame structures are related to the Art Deco theme of the Colonnades and the stucco buildings through the use of similar decorative motifs; a variety of colors have been used to trim the primarily white buildings to emphasize the Park's lighthearted "spirit of play."

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7. The Carousel, one of the Park's three remaining original rides, is housed in an open octagonal building with a green-shingled roof crowned by an enclosed cupola. The roof has lamella framing, a paneled cornice, and is supported by octagonal columns. The roofed-over area surrounding the Carousel is partially enclosed by a picket fence. Decorative trim is painted blue and orange. Playland's Carousel is one of only four still in existence featuring horses hand-carved by Charles Carmel; the ride's machinery was designed by Mangels and the organ is a rare Gavioli.

8. The one hundred and ten foot high Music Tower terminates the central Mall at the Park's north end. Of cream-colored stucco, the monolithic structure incorporates and repeats many of the characteristic Art Deco motifs and details found elsewhere in the Park. The Tower is stepped back on all four facades and is horizontally divided into three stages, or sections. The lower stage contains pilasters with fluted capitals at each corner, and on each facade, metal up-lights on high pedestals. At this stage on the main (east) facade are two openings covered with decorative grillwork similar in configuration, though not in scale, to that on the facade of the Casino.<sup>2</sup> The middle, or second, stage is distinguished by compound stepped-back insets containing a flagpole on the main facade and openings for the sound system speakers on all facades. The third stage contains an octagonal lantern on each corner, and on a high central base, a large octagonal bronze, copper, and glass lantern. The Tower was designed to contain the mechanical equipment for the Park's innovative synchronized sound system, no longer in operation. Directly behind the Music Tower are stucco gate posts, repeating the Tower's stepped-back configuration on a much-reduced scale. Folding metal gates between these posts at either end of the Mall allow the space to be secured when the Park is closed.

9. The Boat House, on the southern edge of Playland Lake, is comprised of two stucco pavilions of the Entrance Plaza type (although the dome-shaped copper roofs have been replaced with shingles) flanking a forty-two foot long colonnade. The colonnade retains its original

<sup>2</sup>These openings were originally functional; the lower one was part of the staging area for the band shell, no longer in existence, which was located directly in front of the Tower; the upper opening provided a platform for live keyboard (piano and organ) performances.

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columns, cornice, murals, balustrades, and lanterns. Several more contemporary and utilitarian lighting fixtures have been added to the colonnade since the Boat House was constructed; a small one-room frame administration structure has also been added and is located on the roof of the Colonnade near the eastern Pavilion. Beyond the Boat House on the lake shore are located the concessions for row boats, paddle boats, and an excursion boat.

10. The Whip, one of the Park's original rides, is housed in an elliptical Walker and Gillette designed structure. The wood frame building has a lamella roof supported by octagonal columns and is partially enclosed at the boardwalk level by a picket fence. In keeping with the decorative treatment of other permanent frame structures, details on the Whip relate the building to the Park's Art Deco theme; the color scheme is white with bright trim. The machinery of the Whip was designed and manufactured by Mangels.

11. The Dragon Coaster was constructed during the 1928-29 season under the direction of the Park's first superintendent, Frank Darling. A fine and well-maintained example of the prototypical amusement park "Scenic Railway" ride, the Coaster's cars are pulled upward by a mechanical cable grip and then released at the tops of the hills to roll down. Playland's ride differs from others built at the same time in that the occupants are hurled, as the cars descend, into a tunnel resembling the mouth of a dragon. The covered entrance and exit platform is related to the Park's other frame buildings through use of decorative motifs and color.

12. The Old Mill is a brown and white frame and stucco structure located on the western section of the Mall's cross-axis. The Mill was also erected during the Park's first season; its watercourse is under, and follows the configuration of, the Dragon Coaster tracks.

13. One of the Park's three remaining original rides, the Derby Racer is contained in a frame structure designed by Walker and Gillette. The building has a lamella roof, crowned with a cupola and supported by octagonal columns; in color scheme and decorative details it is related to the Park's Art Deco theme and other frame structures. One of only two Derby Racers remaining in the country, the ride's horses were carved by Marcus Illions and the unique mechanical action was designed by Fred Church.



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14. The concept of Kiddyland was an important element in the desired family orientation of Playland. As built, it contained two rides and a large playground; today the playground no longer exists and Kiddyland contains sixteen rides housed in a variety of structures designed to appeal to children. Much of the section's original boardwalk has been retained, and "Mary's Garden," near the entrance on the Mall, is a notable landscape feature.

15. Playland's Administrative Offices are housed in a structure at the southwest corner of the Entrance Plaza consisting of a Plaza Pavilion and an L-shaped wing extending to the south and west. Two stories high, five bays deep and six bays wide, the wing is sheathed with stucco, has a flat roof, and is connected to the covered Bus Terminal platforms on the west. Administration Building fenestration consists of, in the Pavilion, two doors and multi-paned windows with black metal sash, designed to fit the compound-edged insets in each facade; in the wing, two exterior doors and simple rectangular metal sashed windows. Decorative elements include the Pavilion's domed copper roof with octagonal lantern, the copper cornice flashing on the wing, the classical cornice motifs on the Pavilion, and the building's color scheme of cream, beige, and sea-green.

16. The small square Ticket Booths represent an important innovative aspect of Playland's administration: the use of scrip, or tickets, instead of money for the rides. The board and batten construction, corner pilasters, and bright color scheme relate the booths, constructed with central sections of heavy wire mesh, to the other frame structures in the Park. Their distinctive appearance and red-shingled pagoda-like roofs make them highly visible, as do their prominent locations on the Central Mall. When Playland opened, there were fourteen Ticket Booths; now there are nine.

17. The two Picnic Shelters, located near the Picnic Beach, are elliptical in shape. Shelter Number One has a covered eastern extension into the Picnic Grove area. The structures, erected during the Park's first decade, have green-shingled monitor roofs supported by simply carved brackets above square wooden piers; low railings, constructed of vertical sheathing, enclose the lower third of the buildings. The color scheme, primarily white, utilizes bright trim to relate the buildings to the Park's other frame structures.

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The establishment of a county park at Rye Beach, considered one of the best beaches on Long Island Sound, was unsuccessfully advocated as early as 1900.<sup>4</sup> Other interests took over, and by the 1920's, Rye Beach had become the site of two privately owned competing amusement areas: Rye Beach Amusement Park and Paradise Park. Together they comprised "a complete seaside resort...a typical assortment of amusement and retail business enterprises...ramshackle hotels, shanties, and cheap, run-down bath houses."<sup>5</sup> The area's unsavory reputation as a "meeting place for every pickpocket, drunkard, and prostitute in Westchester County"<sup>6</sup> prompted letters and petitions urging the Park Commission to redevelop the Rye Beach waterfront. In response, the Commission, in its report of 1924, stated a desire to include Rye Beach in the county park system; on April 13, 1925, the acquisition of the land was recommended.

The Park Commission's development of the contiguous one hundred and sixty acre Manursing Island Park was linked with Rye Beach by 1926 as a "great unified development under public operation and control"<sup>7</sup> and the new plan for Rye Beach also included an extension of the Cross-County Parkway from the Boston Post Road to the planned park.<sup>8</sup>

To acquire experience in amusement park management, Commission members decided to continue operation of the two existing parks through the 1926 season. As the Commission informed the county Board of Supervisors in its 1926 report, "Your commissioners believe that the logical and most economical course to pursue is to acquire experience by actual operation of the existing plant at Rye Beach. Extensive studies have been made and are being continued to obtain all possible data on the

<sup>4</sup>Report of the Westchester County Park Commission, April 30, 1925, New York, 1925, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>Leon N. Gillette and Gilmore D. Clarke, "Playland - An Amusement Park at Rye, Westchester County, New York" American Architect, Vol. CXXXIV, No. 2555, October 20, 1928, p. 492.

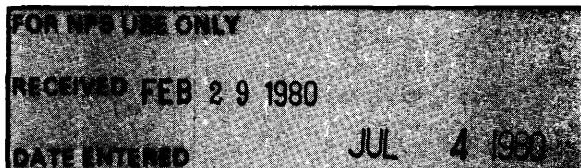
<sup>6</sup>Gary Kyriazi, The Great American Amusement Park (Secaucus, New Jersey: Citadel Press, 1976), p. 118.

<sup>7</sup>Report, 1925, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup>Report, 1926, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup>This extension was never built; Playland Parkway, however, accessible from I-95 and the Boston Post Road, was completed in 1929.

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planning, operation and management of shore resorts and amusement parks in various parts of the country. This information will be used as a basis for the transformation of Rye Beach and Manursing Island into an unequalled seaside public park to provide clean, wholesome recreation for the people of Westchester County."<sup>10</sup> Twelve dilapidated structures were torn down in the spring of 1926; in October of that year, Paradise Park suffered two fires which damaged the park "beyond further usefulness,"<sup>11</sup> and conveniently cleared the land for new development. Rye Beach Pleasure Park reopened for the 1927 season, its existing boat house and amusement facilities still in operation, with construction of a new amusement park underway.

American amusement parks of the 1920's, although popular, were not always held in high esteem. Many had been developed by transit companies and were known as "trolley parks," but by the late years of that decade, as members of the middle and upper classes bought their own cars, the numbers of riders on the trolley lines and attendance at these parks fell sharply. Amusement parks became "hangouts for the local rowdies."<sup>12</sup> Coney Island, the prototype of many amusement parks early in the twentieth century, had itself become an extremely popular but heterogeneous arena for "sideshow, barkers, hot dog stands, rides, and games, crooked or otherwise."<sup>13</sup>

The new amusement park at Rye Beach, however, was clearly to be different. It would be arrived at primarily by automobile to insure a family and middle-class orientation, and would be carefully and harmoniously planned. It would possess "artistic merit to attract a class of people who before resented going to summer amusement parks of the 'Coney Island type' and would educate the habitual amusement goers to an appreciation and a desire for things beautiful."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Report, 1926, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup>Al Griffen, Step Right Up Folks (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1959), p. 17.

<sup>12</sup>Kyriazi, The Great American Amusement Park, p. 117.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>14</sup>Gillette and Clarke, "Playland," p. 492.

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A study of the existing amusement parks east of the Mississippi had been undertaken by the Park Commission in 1925. Major Gilmore D. Clarke, head landscape architect of the Commission, was sent to visit many of these parks and to cultivate contacts in the amusement park industry. Frank Darling, an amusement park expert whose experience was gained in a management position at Coney Island, was employed as a consultant. Darling, an official of the National Association of Amusement Parks, was eventually persuaded to leave his position as president of the L. A. Thompson Scenic Railway Company to oversee construction of the new park; he also became Playland's first general manager.

Designs for all architectural structures at the new park, including a bath house, boat house, casino, and other amusement houses, were submitted to the Commission in 1927 by the New York firm of Walker and Gillette. A. Stewart Walker (c. 1880-1952), and Leon N. Gillette (1878-1945) had a fine reputation based largely, up to this point, on their residential designs in a variety of revival styles for wealthy clients. The firm had been awarded two gold medals for excellence in domestic architecture: from the Architectural League in 1922, and the American Institute of Architects in 1925. Throughout the years of their partnership (1906-1945) Walker and Gillette were often heralded by critics for their versatility.<sup>16</sup> During the late 1920's and early 1930's, the firm began designing a wide range of buildings in the Art Deco style; the<sup>17</sup> buildings at Playland represent their earliest designs in this mode.

<sup>15</sup>The William Coe Estate (1920) at Oyster Bay, Long Island, now listed on the National Register, was designed by Walker and Gillette.

<sup>16</sup>A. T. Covell, "Variety in Architectural Practice: Some Works of Walker and Gillette," Architectural Record, Vol. 35, pp. 277-355, April, 1914 and M. Price, "The National City Bank of New York," Architectural Record, Vol. 63, pp. 406-8, September, 1916.

<sup>17</sup>Other important Art Deco works of Walker and Gillette include: The National City Bank building at Broadway and Canal Street, Manhattan, 1928; The Westchester County Center, White Plains, New York, 1928; the Fuller Building in Manhattan, 1929; the Industrial Trust Company Building, Providence, Rhode Island, 1929; and the First National Bank Building, 52 Wall Street, Manhattan, 1933.

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Although the site plan of the park was the result of the collaboration of Clarke, Darling, Walker and Gillette, park engineers L. G. Holleran and Jay Downer, and lighting engineers Watson and Flagg, events in recent geological history, specifically, the retreat of glaciers, as well as man-made modifications, produced the present topography of Playland. Before the area was developed, "A tidal river or slough flowed from the open water of the Sound...through the marshes that once occupied Playland Lake...Open water existed in the central portion of Playland Lake and the area now covered by the parking lot."<sup>18</sup> During the pre-construction stage of the Park, the lake was dredged. Fill from the dredging was used extensively during construction to help close off the lake from its original southern connection with the Sound, to provide land for the playing field area, and to fill the former<sup>19</sup> salt marsh on which three-quarters of the amusement area was built.

Access to the park, considered to be the "junctional terminal of all the great boulevards of Westchester County,"<sup>20</sup> was provided by a new parkway, on axis with the towers of the Bath House, and lined with English elms. The parkway curved around the arrival area for patrons traveling by bus, went through a traffic circle, and into a large parking lot. Visitors could also travel to the Park by ferry from docks in the New York City area.

The Bath House and swimming pool were placed at one end of the Park. A forty-foot wide boardwalk with retail gallery, crescent shaped to conform to the configuration of the beach at this point, led to the ferry terminal past the main entry plaza. This plaza contained a single jet fountain, the administration building, and, after 1930, a year-round casino. Perpendicular to the boardwalk at this plaza was the amusement section of the Park, planned along an axial mall one thousand one hundred feet long. This mall, as designed, contained a central reflecting pool

<sup>18</sup> Carolyn Cunningham, "Playland: Park Development Prospects For Municipal Integration and Implementation of Water Resources Laws" (Thesis, SUNY at Purchase, January, 1978), p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> Gillette and Clarke, "Playland," p. 497.

<sup>20</sup> "A Super-Park in the Making," Amusement Park Management, Vol. 1, No. 4, March, 1928, p. 131.

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or lagoon; as built, the central section was planted in grass. Flanking this section on both sides was a row of trees, a wide promenade, and a colonnade. This axis, running from the main bathing beach to the Boat House on Playland Lake, was interrupted once by a cross promenade and was dominated at the lake end by a Music Tower one hundred and ten feet high.<sup>21</sup>

An unprecedented unity in amusement park design was attempted throughout the plan. The Art Deco detailing selected by the architects was considered to be "of simple design yet interesting...expressive of play."<sup>22</sup> The colonnades, in addition to providing protection from the weather, a crucial consideration given the location's propensity for spring and summer showers, also helped to unify visually an otherwise heterogeneous assortment of amusement activities. Painted white for increased visibility at night when attendance was highest, the colonnades were enhanced by decorative friezes designed and painted by a group of women artists under the supervision of Grace King Hutchins, one of Darling's assistants. The art work used on the panels was related to the type of amusement house behind and included figures from children's rhymes, mounted cowboys, dancers from around the world, dragons, and waterfowl. The overall effect, including the system of string lighting, was intended to "slay through art,<sup>23</sup> inhibition, and arouse in its stead a spirit of joy and carelessness."

A second unifying factor, the landscaping, carefully planned, planted, and maintained, is also an original design element. Elm trees, low evergreens, and fruit trees frame the entrance to the Park; pin oaks and barberry hedges line the central mall. Flowers are started in January for spring transplanting around the fountain, at either end of the mall and in Kiddyland's "Mary's Garden" and the blossoms are replaced as they fade. The contribution of the landscaping to the site was stressed in a contemporary journal: "When a World's Exposition is planned a most important part of the general scheme is the landscape planning. The same has been true of Playland. The Commission's Landscape Department has worked hand in hand with the other designers.

<sup>21</sup>Gillette and Clarke, "Playland," pp. 492-493.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 493.

<sup>23</sup>C. W. Wood, "Creating the Play Spirit," Amusement Park Management, Vol. I, No. 4, March, 1928, p. 134.

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There will be no barren holes in Playland. Every nook will be planted to soften the lines of the buildings, freshen the ground areas, and form grooves...between the buildings. Hedges, lawns, flowers, and trees will form a most important part of the beauty of Playland."<sup>24</sup> Near the end of the second season, Frank Darling, Playland's Director, also described the importance of the Park's landscaping. "Playland is justly proud of its shrubs, trees, and flowers. With the exception of half a dozen trees, everything growing was planted during the construction of Playland. It was expensive to do and expensive to maintain, but oh! how it pays. People go away talking of the flowers, newspapers constantly write of them, and Playland is sure that their beauty not only attracts many, many people but that it attracts a fine class of people and has much to do with the orderly and beautiful spirit exhibited by the patrons. Plantings are not so expensive to maintain as zoo animals and seem much more in keeping for amusement parks and are more attractive to most people."<sup>25</sup>

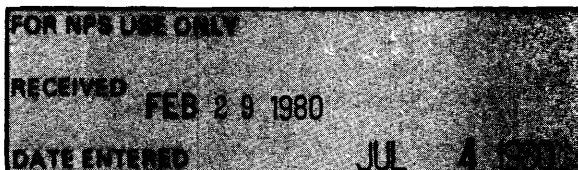
To avoid the typical amusement park problem of "bands and calliopes and orchestras playing against one another," an experimental centralized music system was designed for Playland. Wooden horns placed on the Music Tower and at various strategic locations throughout the Park broadcast a single musical program, as well as public announcements (including, during the first seasons, baseball scores).

The design of Playland also utilized contemporary theories of crowd psychology. Steps were avoided in handling level changes, and ramps were used wherever possible. Sharp corners that would block important vistas were also avoided in areas where promenades met; instead, the chamfered corner stations, or pavilions, of the colonnades allowed the spaces to merge subtly. Consideration was given to the nature of certain amusements and how they might enhance, or in some cases, neutralize one another. For example, Kiddyland, an area of mild amusements was located next to the more violent Aeroplane Coaster in order to reassure those who might be frightened by the Aeroplane.

<sup>24</sup>"A Super-Park in the Making," Amusement Park Management, Vol. I, No. 4, March, 1928, p. 134.

<sup>25</sup>Bulletin, National Association of Amusement Parks, Playland Number, August 15, 1929, p. 3.

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The ticket system, although an adaptation of one used at Euclid Beach, Cleveland, Ohio, was in its final form Playland's own. Scrip tickets were sold in 1928, as they are today, in red pagoda-like booths scattered through the amusement area. Then a strip of five tickets cost twenty-five cents, a book of twenty-one, one dollar, and a larger book of one hundred ten cost five dollars.<sup>26</sup> All tickets are good anywhere in Playland, except where merchandise (i.e., refreshments and game prizes) is sold; no cash is accepted at the entrance to any attraction. Advantages of the system are many: all cash is kept in a few places which can be well-protected; entrance collectors are relieved of the chore of change-making, thus facilitating the operation of the amusements and, importantly for the Park's profits, "It induces patrons to buy tickets in quantities. They pass out one dollar very easily. The psychology of the system is very interesting and tends to prove that the patron does not keep track of the quantity he spends as much as he does the number of times he spends."<sup>27</sup>

Playland opened in May, 1928. With the exception of the Casino and the pool, to be built the following year, and the replacement of the lagoon with lawn, it was erected according to the Walker and Gillette plan. The project had cost \$6,191,690.00,<sup>28</sup> with the exceptions of the Hutchinson River and Saw Mill River parkways, the most expensive undertaking of the Park Commission.

In 1928, features of the Park included a Japanese Tea Room (behind the colonnade near the Music Tower), a Parisian Boulevard Cafe (in the main entry plaza), and a Dance Hall (on the present site of the Auto Scooter ride). Devices "which had proven safe and profitable" were among the majority of the amusements. In this category were a Dodgem-Scooter, two popular competing "bumper car" rides powered by an overhead electric charge that were housed within the same elliptical building and "fed" each other, and the Tumblebug, Caterpillar, and Custer Car, variations of rides that had originated in the 1890's. The Aeroplane Coaster, designed by Fred Church and named in honor of the successful Lindbergh flight in 1927, was a

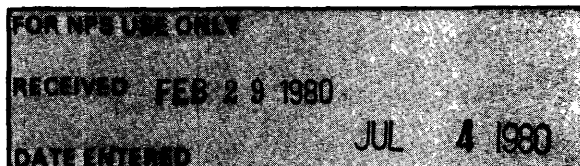
<sup>26</sup> Bulletin, National Association of Amusement Parks, Playland Number, August 15, 1929, p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 1. This figure included \$3,881,695.00 for the cost of the land, \$1,334,360.00 for "improvements," and \$975,635.00 for the 1929 additions.



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3,600 foot roller coaster similar to the "Bobs" at Chicago's Riverview Park. Called the "greatest body wringer and most violent ride ever built,"<sup>29</sup> it was taken down in 1957 because of structural problems.

Three of the surviving original rides are each individually significant. The Carousel is one of the four still in existence featuring the wooden carvings of master craftsman Charles Carmel (1865-1931).<sup>30</sup> Carmel, a Russian immigrant, owned a shop near Prospect Park in Brooklyn; he used horses in nearby stables as models for his carvings.<sup>31</sup> The mechanical action of the Carousel was created by Charles Mangels (1867-1958), a German-born manufacturer, who produced some of the finest carousel machinery ever built,<sup>32</sup> and who, uncharacteristically, had his signature inscribed several times on the Playland machine. A rare European Gavioli band organ, with three moving figures, decorates the center of Playland's carousel. The Gavioli family, active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with shops in Italy and France, created many innovative organ designs.<sup>33</sup> The organ, originally powered by steam, has been converted and now utilizes Wurlitzer rolls. Carmel's distinctive sixty-six horses, four abreast, and three chariots run counter-clockwise around the organ.

<sup>29</sup>Robert Cartmell, a roller coaster expert, quoted by Joan Cirillo in "How Playland Picks a Ride," Sunday, Gannett Westchester Newspapers, July 16, 1978, p. G4.

<sup>30</sup>Carmel's horses have magnificent manes, carved roses, and an abundance of jewels; saddles sometimes resemble bats' wings, or sea lions.

<sup>31</sup>C. Dinger, "Charles Carmel," Carrousel Art, No. 4, January, 1979, p. 4; T. C. Gottendaker, "Charles Carmel," National Carousel Roundtable: Carvers and Their Merry-Go-Rounds, Alfred P. Sloan Museum Exhibition Catalogue, Flint, Michigan, 1974, p. 11. James Feron, "Westchester Journal," New York Times, April 21, 1979. Of the other three Carmel carousels remaining, one is in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, one at Coney Island, and the third in storage in Connecticut.

<sup>32</sup>Fred Fried, A Pictorial History of the Carousel (New York: Bonanza Books, 1964), p. 102. On the Playland Carousel, the horses called "jumpers" swing slowly out, or sideways, as the ride begins to pick up speed.

<sup>33</sup>Fried, Pictorial History, pp. 187-188.

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Directly across the mall is the "Derby Racer," a derivation of the old steeple chase ride, and one of two still operating in America.<sup>34</sup> Fast, carousel-like, and intended to simulate a horse race, the Derby Racer features a jolting, up-and-down mechanical action designed by Fred Church. The horses, of a very different character than Charles Carmel's, were carved by Russian-born and English-trained Marcus Charles Illions (1871-1949). Illions was a superb draftsman whose meticulous carvings were much copied.

The Carousel, the Derby Racer, and the Whip are all contained in Walker and Gillette designed buildings with unusual lamella roofs. Particularly well-suited for structures housing amusement devices, this type of roof framing requires no central vertical supports.<sup>35</sup>

The "Dragon Coaster," erected during the Park's first season, was the creation of Darling's L. A. Thompson Scenic Railway Company. La Marcus Adna Thompson, a Sunday School teacher, built the first modern roller coaster in the United States at Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1886. This "scenic railway" was prototypical of all the firm's work. A mechanical cable grip pulled the cars upward, then released them to roll downhill. The interiors of the entrance and exit tunnels were painted with scenic tableaux.<sup>37</sup> The Dragon Coaster utilizes the same mechanical system, but as the cars descend, decorative motifs give the impression that riders are being hurled into the mouth of a dragon.

<sup>34</sup>Fried, Pictorial History, p. 102. The other is at Cedar Point, near Sandusky, Ohio.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>36</sup>Mario Salvadori with Robert Heller, Structure in Architecture: The Building of Buildings (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1963; Second Edition, 1975), p. 214. "In the lamella roof structure a series of parallel arches, skewed with respect to the sides of the covered area, is intersected by another series of skewed arches so that an efficient interaction is obtained between them. This system does away with the beams connecting parallel arches and constitutes a curved space frame." See also "Lamella House with Trussless Wooden Roof," Architects Journal, Vol. 102, September 6, 1945, pp. 175-176. The main skating arena in the Casino also has a lamella roof.

<sup>37</sup>Kyriazi, The Great American Amusement Park, p. 34.

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Other amusements to be found at Playland over the years included the "Jack and Jill," a large slide which riders descended on small mats; "Noah's Ark," a rocking replica of the original, and the "Magic Carpet," a Moorish fun house containing moving floors, dark passages, rotating disks, air jets, lopsided rooms, and a carpeted slide on rollers. A clipper ship, the Benjamin F. Packard, was moored at the Park until destroyed by a hurrican in 1938. A fire in 1966 destroyed much of the area opposite the roller coaster, including the Dance Hall, a good portion of the Colonnade, and the Magic Carpet building.<sup>38</sup> The Casino underwent extensive interior renovation in 1973 to increase the skating area.<sup>39</sup>

The county Park Commission operated Playland until 1940, when the Playland Authority was created with a twenty-five year tenure. This authority became the Playland Commission in 1942 under a charter of New York State as a Public Benefit Corporation. In 1965, the tenure was renewed for fifteen more years, to expire in 1980.<sup>40</sup> In 1978, a study group was appointed by the city of Rye to develop recommendations for the future of Playland, and the Playland Task Force was established at the county level for the same purpose.

Playland has played an important role in the shared experience of millions of individuals living in the New York metropolitan area. Attendance at the Park for its first season was 2,800,000. By 1932, in the midst of the Depression, attendance was up to 3,823,000.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Louis Botto, "Playland: Where It All Began" Sunday (Daily News) Magazine, May 21, 1978, pp. 8-34, passim.

<sup>39</sup>J. Kaplan, "Playland Casino: Westchester's Ice Palace," Spotlight on Rye, Vol. 1, No. 4, November, 1977, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup>Joanne Goetz, "Playland: Which Will It Be?" Spotlight on Rye, Vol. 3, No. 2, February, 1979, pp. 28-29, 42-43.

<sup>41</sup>Botto, "Playland: Where It All Began," p. 9. In recent years, attendance annually has averaged around 1,500,00. "Playland: 1976 Fact Sheet," mimeograph on Playland letterhead.

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A visitor during the 1930's recalls: "St. Michael's in Union City, New Jersey, the school my sister and I attended, had an annual outing to Playland. It was the social event of the year. For months we talked of nothing else at school: 'Are you going? Who are you going with? ... Will your parents allow you to go on the Dragon Coaster?' One fine June morning, after attending mass and praying that the boat wouldn't sink, we joined hundreds of parishioners on local buses bound for Pier 15 in Hoboken to board the 'palatial steel steamer,' the 'Belle Island.' It was a delightful three-hour sail that took us down the Hudson River, around Battery Park, up the East River, and onto Long Island Sound... Shortly after noontime, the cry went up: 'There it is!' and in the sunny distance over the blue waters, Playland sparkled like the Shangri-La of the Depression. There were clipper ship masts, roller coaster hills, Airplane Swings, a glittering Casino, a stately Music Tower, and a sandy beach with a twin-towered Bath House."<sup>42</sup>

An amusement park, unlike other elements of the built environment, is designed primarily to evoke strong emotional responses from its viewers. As such, in addition to its historical, architectural, cultural, and environmental significance, Playland's image has been particularly durable in the context of American popular culture.

<sup>42</sup>Botto, "Playland," pp. 14 and 20.

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The property boundaries of Playland Amusement Park enclose an area which is irregular in shape. Beginning at a point near the intersection of Forest Avenue and Ridgeland Terrace (letter O on the U.S.G.S. map), proceed approximately 250 feet north along Forest Avenue to Ridgeland Manor, then 625 feet easterly, 125 feet north-easterly to Beck Avenue, 250 feet along Beck Avenue, approximately 2,250 feet northerly, 125 feet easterly, 400 feet northeasterly, 350 feet due north, 250 feet northwesterly, approximately 1,250 north to Manursing Way, 350 feet east along Manursing Way, approximately 300 feet south, 225 feet east, 350 feet north to Manursing Way, 1,000 feet east along Manursing Way, 325 feet southeast, 1,500 feet easterly, 1,250 feet south, approximately 500 feet southeast to Long Island Sound, 500 feet south along Long Island Sound, approximately 1,000 feet northwesterly, 1,250 feet southwesterly along Long Island Sound, 325 feet northwesterly, 750 feet west to Playland Lake Inlet, 250 feet south, 275 feet due east (to Rocky Point), approximately 350 feet southwest, 250 feet west, 875 feet south, approximately 500 feet westerly curving along Rye Beach, 500 feet southwest curving along Rye Beach, 350 feet west (inland from Rye Beach), 500 feet north, and 750 feet west to Forest Avenue and beginning point.



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## Assistance Provided By:

County of Westchester (Alfred DelBello, County Executive)  
148 Martine Avenue  
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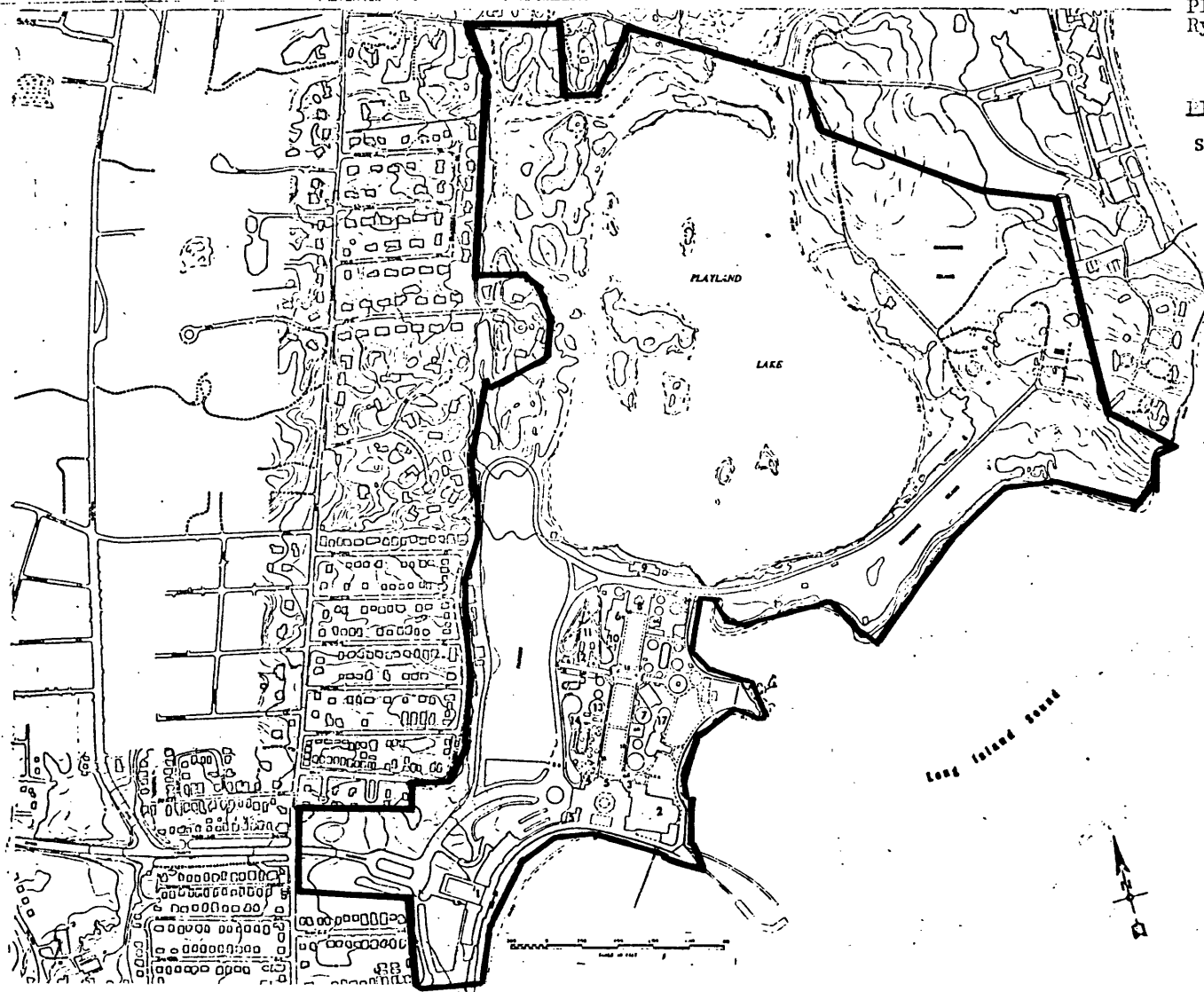
Carolyn Cunningham  
18 Soundview Avenue  
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Fred Fried  
875 West End Avenue  
New York, New York

Wes Haynes  
22 Brightside Drive  
Stamford, Connecticut

Donna and Jim Lee  
12 Coakley Avenue  
Harrison, New York

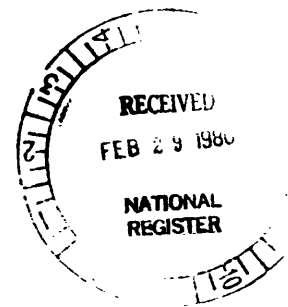
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Playland Amusement Park  
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Plot Plan and Environment

Solid Black Line - Nominated Property



Playland Amusement Park  
Rye, Westchester County

Plot Plan

Legend:

1. Bath House, Pool, Boardwalk
2. Casino
3. Dragon Deli
4. Buffet Colonnade
5. Colonnades and Colonnade Pavilions
6. Games and Concessions Buildings
7. Carousel
8. Music Tower
9. Boat House
10. Whip
11. Dragon Coaster
12. Old Mill
13. Derby Racer
14. Kiddyland
15. Administration Building
16. Ticket Booths
17. Picnic Shelters

