

**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 Flying Horses Carousel

and or common Oak Bluffs Carousel

2. Location

street & number 33 Oak Bluffs Avenue

___ not for publication

city, town Oak Bluffs

___ vicinity of

state Massachusetts

code

county

Dukes

code

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
- other: recreation
(carousel)

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. James Ryan

street & number Ryan Amusement Company, 519 Yarmouth Road

city, town Hyannis

___ vicinity of

state Massachusetts

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Registry of Deeds, Dukes County Courthouse

street & number Main Street

city, town Edgartown

state Massachusetts

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Inventory of the Historic Assets

title of the Commonwealth #9-33

has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes ___ no

date 1978

___ federal state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records Massachusetts Historical Commission

city, town Boston

state Massachusetts

7. Description

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Condition | | Check one | Check one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered | <input type="checkbox"/> original site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins | <input type="checkbox"/> altered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved date 1884, 1889 |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed | | |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Summary

The carousel, which measures 36 feet in diameter, consists of a platform and an open canopy whose 14 spreaders are supported by the uprights which secure the horses and chariots. The carousel supports 20 prancing horses and 4 chariots. They are arranged in the following manner: a chariot, 2 pairs of horses, a chariot, 3 pairs of horses, a chariot, 2 pairs of horses, a chariot, and 3 pairs of horses. In all cases, the outer of the paired horses is larger. In addition to its fine hand-carved horses and chariots, the carousel retains rim, spreader, and center panels with intact paintings that are fine examples of late 19th-century folk art.

Location

The Flying Horses carousel is situated in the business district of Oak Bluffs at the base of Circuit Avenue, the main street of the town.¹ Its shelter building is placed on a triangular parcel, along with two other buildings, on the small block bounded by Oak Bluffs Avenue on the north, Kennebec Avenue on the southeast, and Lake Avenue on the southwest. This vicinity has always been the entertainment center of town. Late 19th-century and early 20th-century photographs show the carousel surrounded by a skating rink, a bowling alley, and hotels.

Shelter

The carousel's shelter is a simple 1-story utilitarian structure, sheathed with wood shingles painted a deep red and enclosed by a low pitched gable roof. Its date of construction and early history are unknown. The major entrance faces north at an angle to the northwest and northeast elevations. A secondary entrance is in a shed-roofed porch which runs the full length of the southwest elevation. The major alteration to the building, as revealed by historic photographs, is the enclosing of this porch about 1900, and the addition of the concrete steps at the main entrance. Although the shelter building does not fit the classic multi-sided carousel shelter design, its continuity of use is significant.

In addition to the carousel, the carousel shelter building houses a ticket counter and several pinball machines.

Additional Data on the Carousel

The machinery powering the carousel consists of a 10-horsepower belt-driven electric motor in the basement. Although originally steam-powered, the carousel has been driven by electricity since around 1900. Its present motor is connected to gears which are concealed by the eight center panels. The machinery which powers the carousel has recently been overhauled. The owner hopes to complete restoration when funds are available.

8. Significance

| Period | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below | | | |
|---|---|------------------------|------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric | archeology-prehistoric | community planning | landscape architecture | religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499 | archeology-historic | conservation | law | science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599 | agriculture | economics | literature | sculpture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699 | architecture | education | military | social |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | art | engineering | music | humanitarian |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899 | commerce | exploration settlement | philosophy | theater |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1900- | communications | industry | politics government | transportation |
| | | invention | | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Recreation (carousel) |

Specific dates ca. 1876-78 **Builder Architect** Charles W.F. Dare Co.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Summary

The "Flying Horses" carousel of Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts, and the "Flying Horse" carousel of Watch Hill, Rhode Island, are almost certainly the two oldest essentially extant carousels in the United States.¹ Because of difficulties attendant on dating carousels of that vintage, it is not possible to determine absolutely which is the older. Some experts give the nod to Watch Hill. Because the two are somewhat different types, both are excellent representatives of the early era of carousel manufacture in the United States. Both have also been on-site for exceptionally long periods.

They also represent the only surviving examples of the work of the Charles W. F. Dare Company of New York City,² one of the major carousel manufacturers, which was in business from 1866 until 1901 making hobbyhorses and other amusement devices. The company ceased operations at Dare's death.

History

"Flying Horses," at Oak Bluffs, which is, in any case, the oldest operating platform carousel in the United States, has been in the community since 1884.³ It was brought to Oak Bluffs (then called Cottage City), a well-established late 19th-century resort, by a Mr. F.O. Gordon of New York City. The tradition that it was first operated in the New York City area is suggested by the inscription "Coney Island #4" on the back side of one of the decorative panels. In 1889 the carousel was purchased by the town and moved to its present site. It was sold in 1896 to a Mr. Joseph Turnell. He applied the "Flying Horses" name to it, which is something of a misnomer, since the horses have always been stationary (i.e., they do not move up and down as do the horses on many later carousels).

The horses and chariots which form the major components of the carousel are examples of those found in the Charles W. F. Dare catalog (1878), "Constructions for Sea-Side & Summer Amusements, Carousels, Organ Figures, Fixtures &c." Also the canvas scene paintings used to cover the outside rim and inside poles of the carousel housing and machine covering, as well as painted views on the spreader boards, are very similar to those shown in the Dare catalog. Carousel expert Frederick Fried believes the artist who painted the panels and canvases may have made the catalog woodcut engravings from these paintings.⁴ Because of these factors, the carousel can be approximately dated to 1876-78.

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .10 acres

Quadrangle name Edgartown

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---|---------|---|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 9 | 3 | 6 | 9 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 5 | 9 | 0 | 4 | 8 | 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

The carousel's shelter building occupies Lot #33 of the town of Oak Bluffs.

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, Historian

organization History Division, National Park Service date October 1985

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

city or town Washington state DC 20013-7127

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 _____

For NPS use only

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

date _____

Keeper of the National Register

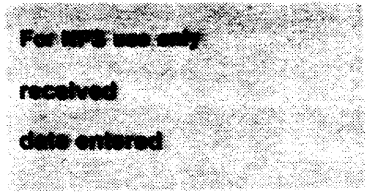
Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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



Continuation sheet

Item number

7

Page

2

The horses and chariots have not been painted for several years, but the owner hopes to restore them to their original appearance after paint research. The horses have large oxide eyes, horsehair tails, and painted bridles and saddle pads. The double-seated chariots resemble birds, dragons, and serpents.

Most of the panels, painted mainly with equestrian and marine scenes -- which originally concealed the gears, spreaders, and rims -- survive but are badly in need of restoration and are not in situ. Local scenes by Georgina McCarthy are in their place.

Footnote

¹This description is an edited version of that appearing in Candace Jenkins' nomination of the Flying Horses carousel to the National Register of Historic Places (1979).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number

9, 10

Page

Footnotes

¹This claim is supported by review of the National Carousel Association Census (Los Angeles: 1984) and Frederick Fried, "Flying Horses of Martha's Vineyard Offer Surprise," Antique Monthly (July 1974).

²Supported by review of all entries in the National Carousel Association Census.

³Historical data, except as noted, has been revised from Candace Jenkins' National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the carousel (1979).

⁴Frederick Fried, "Flying Horses of Martha's Vineyard Offer Surprise," Antique Monthly (July 1974).

Bibliography

Butler, Ron. "Carousels, the wind, & the Wurlitzer," Providence Journal-Bulletin, June 28, 1985, D1, D3.

"The Flying Horses at Martha's Vineyard," Merry-Go-Roundup 6, 4 (1979), 3-6.

Fried, Frederick. "Flying Horses of Martha's Vineyard Offer Surprise," Antique Monthly (July 1974).

Dare, Charles W. F., Co. "Constructions for Sea-Side & Summer Amusements, Carousels, Carousel Organs, Fixtures, &c." New York, 1878.