

**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 Horse Carousel

and or common Watch Hill Carousel

2. Location

street & number terminus of Bay Street not for publication

city, town Westerly vicinity of

state Rhode Island code county Washington code

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input checked="" 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: <u>Recreation</u> <u>(carousel)</u>

4. Owner of Property

name Watch Hill Fire District

street & number Watch Hill

city, town Westerly vicinity of state Rhode Island

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Westerly Town Hall

street & number

city, town Westerly state Rhode Island

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic and Architectural Resources of Westerly Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date March 1978 federal state county local

depository for survey records Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

city, town Providence state Rhode Island

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved' date
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		1879

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Summary

The Flying Horse Carousel at Watch Hill operates in a simple shelter at the southern end of Bay Street, about 200 yards from the ocean, beside the town beach, in the quiet summer resort of Watch Hill, Rhode Island.¹ The carousel consists of 20 wooden horses ranged 2 abreast and suspended by chains from wooden sweeps. The horses all face the same direction, and come in two sizes. All are small animals, naively carved and quite plain when compared with other horses attributed to Charles W. F. Dare -- notably those on the Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts, carousel.

Shelter

The shelter is a small decagonal hip-roofed pavilion of wood frame supported by rough cobblestone columns. The structure appears to have been built, or much altered, in the opening decades of the 20th century. The original canopy was likely of canvas; the present roof is asphalt shingling. A low picket fence set on a 2-foot cinderblock base partially encloses the spaces between the piers and keeps over-eager riders out of the path of the "flying horses." The floor of the carousel shelter, originally of sand, is now poured concrete.

Detailed Data on the Carousel

Each horse is said to have been carved from a single block of wood, although the legs appear to have been carved separately, and each horse has a leather saddle and bridle and real horsehair tail and mane. The saddles, bridles, tails, and manes have been replaced several times, as is common in carousels, but the horses' agate eyes are the originals.

Each horse is suspended from the heavy wooden framing of the canopy roof by a chain connected at the rump and an iron bar joined to the pommel. The bars may have been substituted for original neck or head chains, perhaps in an attempt to steady the steeds and limit their arc. As the carousel turns, the horses swing out by centrifugal force, hence the enduring and endearing name "Flying Horse Carousel."

In addition to the horses, three double seats, or chariots, were originally included for those too old, young, or timid for "free flight." These vanished in the hurricane of September 21, 1938, which devastated the community; because it has been judged that the sweeps were too old and weak to support the weight of seats, they have not been restored to the carousel. All the horses, on the other hand, survived the hurricane and were unearthed from sand dunes nearby where the force of the wind and water had buried them. Most of the carousel housing also survived the storm.

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Alterations to the carousel have been necessitated by changes in technology (motive power and source of music), by the hurricane (replacement of the roof framing and cover and the picket fence and the loss of the seats), and by years of continued use. Restoration of the shelter and horses occurred in 1961 and again in 1974. The 1961 work included strengthening the sweeps and center pole, installing new roofing and metal work and a paved floor, and application of fresh coats of paint and new tails and manes to the horses. In 1974, the horses received more detailed attention from local cabinetmakers, who recarved two missing legs and oversaw installation of new leather saddles and reins and flowing horsehair tails and manes. The horses were also stripped and repainted. The metal stirrups, which once hung by the horses' flanks, have been removed in an effort to preserve the wooden bodies; and riders -- now limited to those 12 years of age or younger -- are strapped on their mounts.

The carousel was originally powered by a calico horse, who spent his summers walking in circles, and music was provided by a hand organ.² In 1897 horsepower gave way to waterpower, which, in turn, was replaced, about 1914, by electricity. By the turn of the 20th century, the hand organ had been replaced by a band organ which played paper rolls. Music is now provided by a tape player installed in 1975 within a copy of a band organ. The ring dispenser is of uncertain date.

Architectural ornamentation of the housing is limited to a scalloped wooden canopy edging the perimeter of the revolving frame and to the match-boarded central housing which conceals both the motor and the tape system. Victorian-style stencil patterns have recently been applied to the housing in an attempt to recapture its period flavor.

The preservation and restoration efforts, carried out since 1948 by the Watch Hill Improvement Society under the indefatigable leadership of Mrs. Harriet C. Moore; the on-going concern of its owner, the Watch Hill Fire District; and the affection in which the Flying Horse Carousel is held by the general public testify to the carousel's great appeal.

It has even inspired a book. In 1960 the French children's author Paul Jacques Bonzon was so taken with the carousel that he wrote a story about it, "Le Petit Cheval de Bois," published in his Contes de L'hiver. The story was translated into English and, with illustrations, published in the United States in 1976, as The Runaway Flying Horse.

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¹This description is an edited version of that appearing in the National Register of Historic Places nomination form by Ancelin V. Lynch of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission (1980). Mrs. Harriet C. Moore's Around and Around, the Story of the Watch Hill Carousel (Westerly, Rhode Island: Sun Graphics, 1980) was also helpful.

²Mariana Tallman, Pleasant Places in Rhode Island... (Providence, Rhode Island: Providence Journal Company, 1894), p. 29.

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
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	... commerce	... exploration settlement	... philosophy	... theater
... 1900-	... communications	... industry	... politics government	... transportation
		... invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
				Recreation (carousel)

Specific dates ca. 1876 **Builder/Architect** Charles W.F. Dare Carousel Co.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Summary

The "Flying Horse" carousel of Watch Hill, Rhode Island, and the "Flying Horses" carousel of Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts, are almost certainly the two oldest extant carousels in the United States. Because of difficulties attendant on dating carousels 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, however, 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.

The two carousels also are the only intact surviving examples of the work of the Charles W. F. Dare Company of New York City, one of the major carousel manufacturers, which was in business from 1866 until 1901 making hobbyhorses and other amusement devices.

History

The Watch Hill carousel is tentatively dated about 1876, although it may have been built several years earlier.² The carousel at Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, is also dated to about 1876 because its horses and chariots match those illustrated in catalogs issued by the Dare Company in 1876 and 1878. Because the horses at Martha's Vineyard are somewhat more elaborate than those at Watch Hill, it is possible that the Watch Hill horses may be more "primitive" examples of Dare's work from as early as 1867.

Price, rather than age, on the other hand, may account for the differences in the two carousels, for the Dare catalog offered custom work in any desired size. The party ordering on Martha's Vineyard apparently went "whole hog," ordering the housing, complete with platform and paintings, as well as the horses, direct from Dare. It appears that at Watch Hill only the horses and their original support system and mechanisms came from the Dare Company; the ready availability of stone may explain this preference for a locally built pavilion or price may have made the difference. It is unfortunate that whatever paintings once ornamented the Watch Hill housing no longer survive.

The question of the age of the Flying Horse Carousel at Watch Hill is of interest, but ultimately of relatively minor significance. Whether it is the oldest or the second oldest in the nation, it is an important and rare survivor of the Charles Dare Company's work. The Charles W. F. Dare New York Carousel Company was in business manufacturing hobbyhorses and amusement devices for "Sea-Side & Summer Amusements" as early as 1866 and continued until Dare's death in 1901. The company produced three types of carousels and accessories and other amusement paraphernalia such as ferris wheels, shooting galleries, swings, and bowling alleys.³

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The Flying Horses came to Watch Hill as part of a traveling carnival about 1879. By this time, Watch Hill had developed as a summer resort, featuring several hotels. The era of cottage building had begun here about 1870, the same year a bathing beach with bathhouses was established. It was adjacent to the beach that the carousel was set up.

The resort continued to grow as improved transportation brought increasing numbers of visitors. Steamer service was available from several points, and, beginning in 1894, a trolley line terminated at the carousel.

By the time the trolley closed in 1921, the automobile had made significant inroads. This began Watch Hill's decline as a hotel summer resort, and today only one hotel survives. Large summer houses continued to be built, however, and despite the devastating 1938 hurricane -- in which 15 lives were lost in the town and 53 houses swept out to sea -- Watch Hill remained a reasonably popular community for wealthy, summer, and year-round residents. The Flying Horse Carousel, which operates every year from June through Labor Day, continues to be one of its singular attractions, a landmark known and valued not only by residents throughout Rhode Island and neighboring Connecticut, but by visitors from afar as well.

¹This conclusion is based on study of the entries in the National Carousel Association Census (Los Angeles, 1984) and Frederick Fried, "Flying Horses of Martha's Vineyard Offer Surprise," Antique Monthly (July 1974).

²Most historical data in this statement has been revised from the National Register of Historic Places nomination form by Ancelin V. Lynch of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission (1980).

³Frederick Fried, A Pictorial History of the Carousel (New York: Bonanza Books, 1964), p. 81.

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1

Quadrangle name Watch Hill

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	9	2	6	0	7	0	0	4	5	7	6	7	7	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

That portion of Plat 14 Lot 21 immediately beneath the carousel, with a 20-foot margin around the carousel's circumference.

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 August 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 _____

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

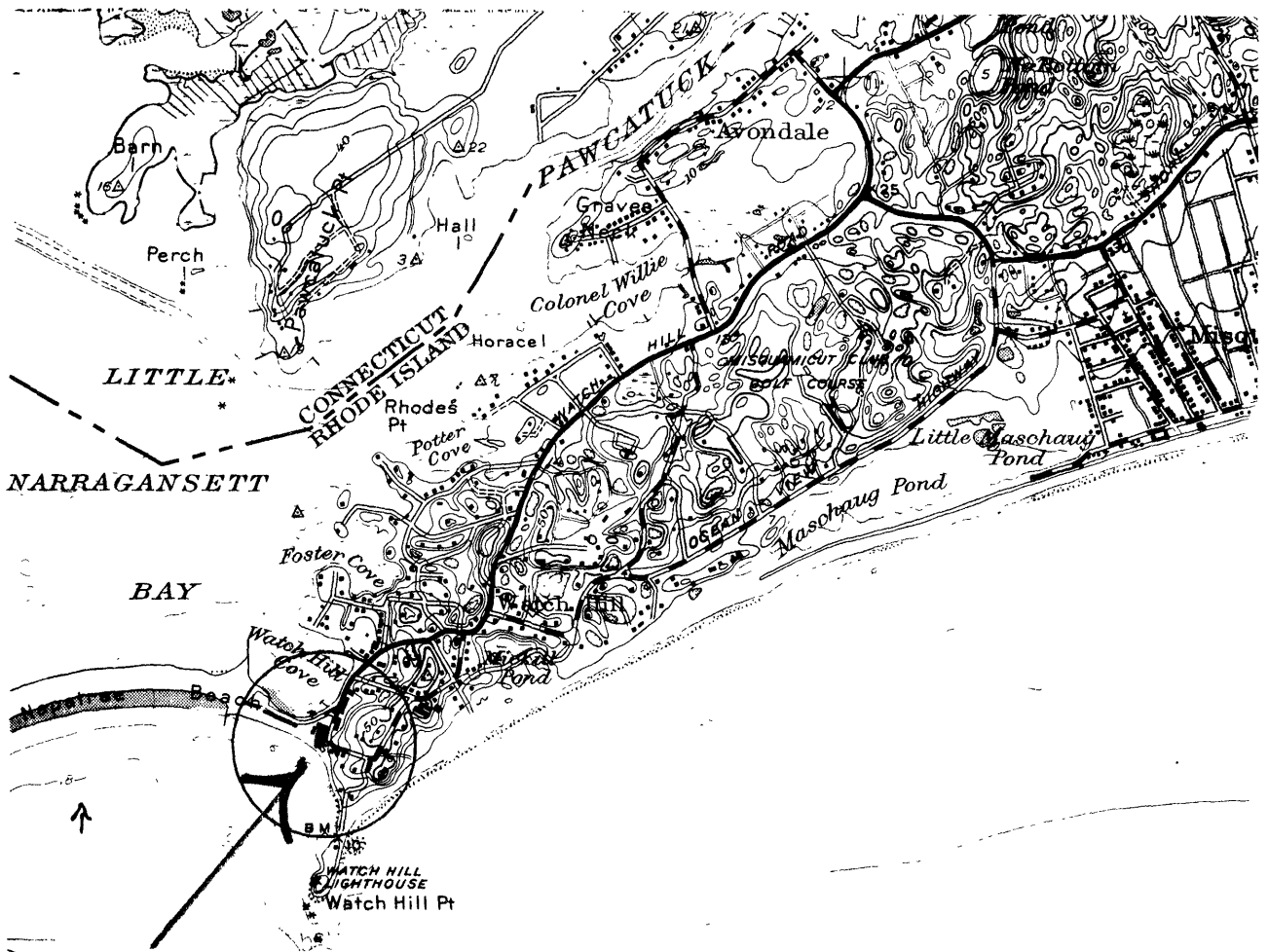
date _____

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration _____



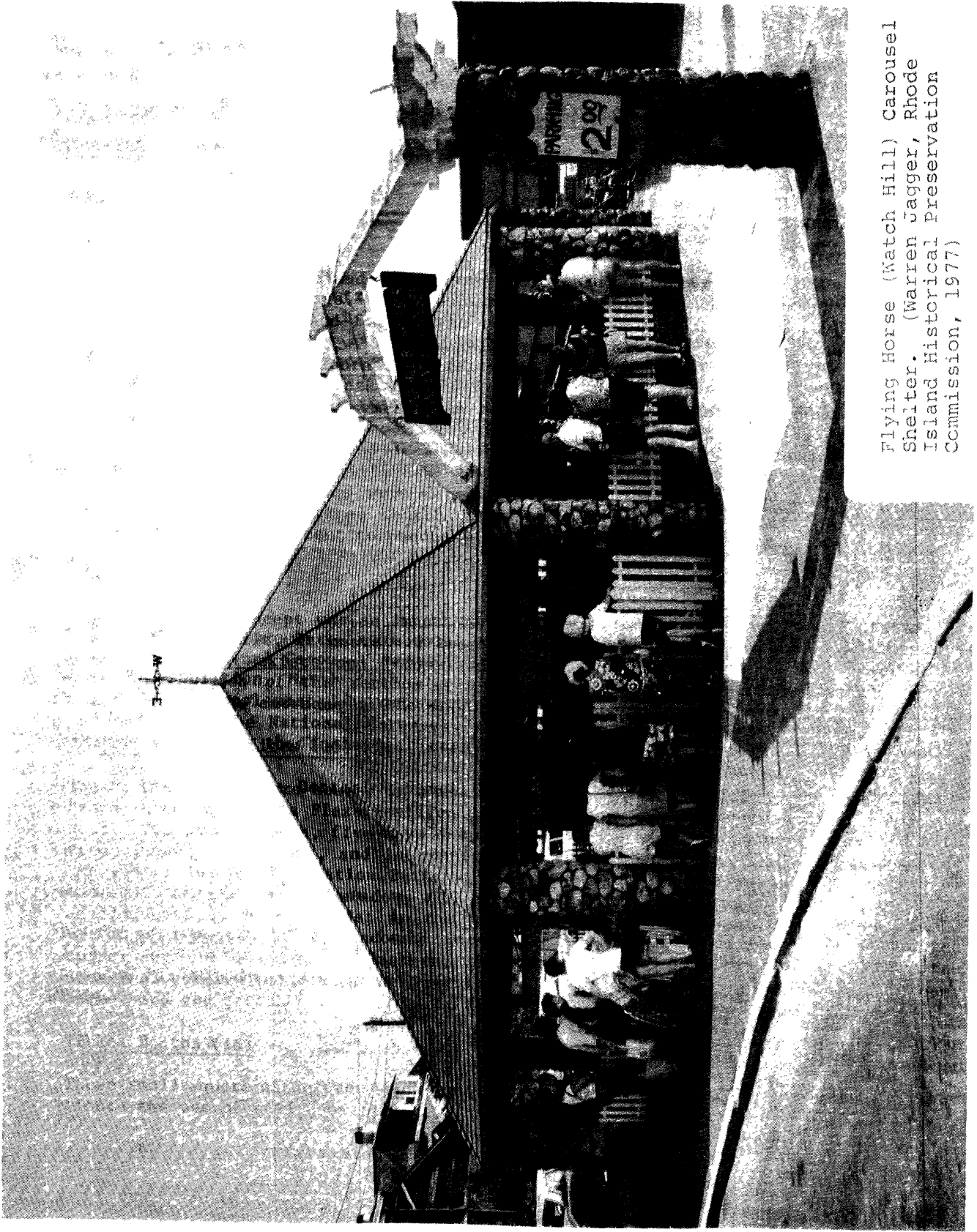
Flying Horse Carousel, Westerly, Rhode Island

Watch Hill Quadrangle

UTM References:

19/260 700/4576 770

B L O C K I S L



Flying Horse (Watch Hill) Carousel Shelter. (Warren Jagger, Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1977)