

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED MAR 17 1976

DATE ENTERED

SEP 19 1977

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Natatorium Carousel

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Spokane Falls Boulevard - opposite Howard

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Spokane

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

5th - Thomas S. Foley

STATE

Washington

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

CODE

COUNTY

Spokane

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

\_\_\_ TRANSPORTATION

\_\_\_ OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

City of Spokane

STREET &amp; NUMBER

N. 221 Wall

CITY, TOWN

Spokane

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Washington

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Spokane County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

W1116 Broadway

CITY, TOWN

Spokane

STATE

Washington

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Washington State Inventory of Historic Places

DATE

1974

\_\_\_ FEDERAL  STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Washington State Parks &amp; Recreation Commission

CITY, TOWN

Olympia

STATE

Washington

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MOVED
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		DATE 1968-1975

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

One of the few remaining carousels from the golden age of their design, the gilded and elaborately carved Spokane "merry-go-round" is said to be the last operating carousel designed by Charles I. D. Looff. Looff, a Danish wood carver, was the second major designer of carousels in America, creating the first Coney Island "merry-go-round". Looff was the only maker of carousels who could complete the entire operation alone, both setting the machinery and carving the animals.

The carousel was originally located on the north side of the Spokane River in a privately owned amusement area, the Natatorium Park. The park was a heavily wooded playground of the city until the late 1960's when it was converted to use as a trailer village. The owners for much of that period were the Vogels - daughter, son-in-law and grandson of Charles Looff.

Spokane is a city centered on a river. Majestic falls and islands provide the focal point for much of the city's early and present life. Facing the big island, Havermale (site of the Great Northern Railway depot), and the Falls, is Spokane Falls Boulevard. When known as Trent (as the eastern portion remains), the street was commonly referred to as "Skid Row". The pawn shops and seedy store fronts of that era have disappeared, replaced by vibrant and active businesses.

Riverfront Park, substituted for the less attractive features of the district and the site of Spokane's Expo '74, occupies some seven blocks of the Boulevard on the north, all of the islands and approximately six blocks along the north bank of the River. The park is an integral part of the revitalization of Spokane's business district. With that intent many of the permanent structures in the park were designed for use after Expo '74. The clock tower of the Great Northern Depot, in the center of the park, was retained for Expo '74 as a reminder of the historic past of Havermale Island, formerly the site of substantial railroading activity. An attractive portion of the design is the rechannelling of the Spokane River to form a lagoon, or fore bay, of water surrounded by concrete. Nine steps terrace from the carousel down to the lagoon.

The carousel's latest home, designed for it in 1973, (replacing the building designed for it by Looff in 1909), is a single story steel, glass, and concrete structure. An Octagon with a concrete slab foundation, it has five glass walls frontally, with the two solid diagonal plank walls separated by the glass wall facing the lagoon on the south. Entrance and exit are obtained through the east and west glass walls. The glass walls can be opened to permit greater air circulation during warm weather. Steel beams support the pyramidal roof.

Along the interior walls are tiers of benches for spectators. Maintenance facilities and restrooms are located on the solid walls. A clown face is located on the northeast wall to catch the discarded rings from the ring arm, which is located west of the carousel. The original housing was not moved because of complications and difficulties along the proposed path. It was a wood frame structure polygonal in plan with windows set into movable panels, a feature incorporated into the replacement structure.

The 25 ton carousel is a doughnut-shaped polygon with leaping horses surrounding a baroque central pavilion which encloses the control mechanism and band organ. Three tiers of diminishing size horses are suspended on brass poles above the pie shaped deck sections and connected to ornamental outer cresting. The sections of deck are 4'7" wide

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at the inside and 7'10" on the outside. The 20 sections have an outside circumference of 156.6' and a diameter of 54' at the crestings.

The 18 tons of machinery are driven by a motor through a series of belts, idler wheels drive wheels, drive shafts and gears. The prime mover consists of a 15 HP, 220 Volt, 3 phase motor. Power is transferred from this motor to the drive assembly through a 28' long by 3 3/4" wide single ply, flat belt to a 3'4" circular spoke idler wheel which runs continually.

The following excerpt from a Spokane Recreation Department brochure describes the operation of the original and still extant machinery. "As the machine is started, the operator pulls the black throttle stick, which transfers the drive belt, from the idler wheel very slowly onto the drive wheel. The drive wheel, which is the same size as the idler wheel now begins to move. The drive wheel is connected to a 4 1/2" x 2" horizontal drive shaft with a 7 1/4" tapered drive gear, with 3" teeth. This gear turns an 18" matching tapered flat gear, which is solidly connected to a 10'9" by 2 1/4" vertical drive shaft, which in turn transfers drive power through a 14" horizontal drive gear. This gear is matched to 10 equal sections of 54" full gear, which are bolted together, equidistant from the center shaft to form a 45' sectional ring gear, around the Carousel, just inside the interior wall panels. This ring gear is fastened to the underside of the 20 sweeps (ribs), which make up the overhead grid of the Carousel!"

"The brake assembly is very simple. It consists of a circular (approximate) 20" piece of 4 x 4 shaped to fit the drive wheel and lined with a 1/4" piece of leather to provide braking surface to the wheel. The brake is applied by the operator through a fulcrum and cable assembly which is locked into place on a notched upright 10" tall with teeth corresponding to the plate on the brake lever. There is a spring between the cable end and the solid brake lever which takes up any (excess) pressure if the operator accidentally sticks the plate in the wrong notch. No matter what, the machine cannot stop in less than 2 1/2 revolutions". It usually takes 3 1/2 revolutions to get up speed and 3 1/2 to halt. A top operator should be able to start and stop the machine at the same location. The machine travels at 12 1/2-15 miles per hour, six revolutions per minute. Each outside horse makes 6 leaps per circle, one leap at the brass ring arm.

While there are 54 leaping horses, there are two equidistant positions on the carousel which are stationary. On the Spokane carousel, the stationary positions are filled by two dragon seats, one accompanied by a tiger with a monkey riding behind the saddle, while the other dragon seat is accompanied by a giraffe. The stationary positions are necessary on a Loeff pit carousel because "the driving mechanism (gears) required a split bearing holder, within inches of the jumpers gears, therefore the split bearing ring, must be fastened stationary to the tops of the sweeps." Special machinery enabled the horses to jump. "The floating gear is the flat tapered gear of equal size and shape of its counterpart, which is fastened to the center column in a stationary position. This is the gear that does all of the work for the jumpers. The rods which are connected to the gear, which drives the jumpers, (are) called the crank rods. The crank rods are lined up in

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their respective bays, through two closed bearings connected to the end of the crank rods, by means of a flange in the crank. These cranks are set up according to equal weight distribution (loaded or unloaded) so that there is never any jerking because of more weight on one horse than on another."<sup>2</sup>

A pit 2½' deep is provided under the deck of the Carousel to permit sufficient clearance for the horse shafts on the down stroke.

A baroque masterpiece, the giant carousel has a number of unusual features. Among the more interesting points are the three rows of horses which decrease in size from the outside. Each trio of horses matches colors but otherwise differ. There are trios of white, black, brown, tan, yellow and palomino.

While most of Loeff's horses were gentle, jolly creatures, those of the Spokane carousel are dashing fiery steeds that appear to race around the room. Each animal has details that proclaim its individuality. They are adorned with brightly colored flowers, parrots, animal heads, cupids, gamebirds, bedrolls and clusters of fruit. But Loeff's attention to detail was such that each horse has the same number of shoe nails and teeth.

The horses, tiger, giraffe and the two dragon seats with pairs of dragons, were carved from single blocks of laminated New England Chinese elm and balsam. Loeff used a knife and a hot iron to gouge the wood; constant reheating of the iron was required. Loeff used real horse tails and all saddles, etc., were individually crafted by master leather workers as if for living animals. Eyes and harness jewels are handcut German glass.

The elaborate floral and shell scroll work of the Carousel cresting and pavilion were also carved by Loeff. Besides the gilt on white surface, some of the most notable features of the Carousel are the mirrors and lights. Along the outer cresting, tilted outward, are heavy etched plateglass mirrors purchased from J. R. Donnelly of Brooklyn. Decorating the upper cresting are 260 beveled mirrors and 20 round circle cresting mirrors; interior cresting contains 20 angel face mirrors and 20 lower cresting mirrors. The pavilion is 45' wide at the center column. Eleven interior wall panels are decorated with hourglass shaped mirrors on the upper two-thirds, with square recessed panels on the lower third. The frieze is decorated with delta-shaped mirrors of three lights each. Similar mirrors decorate the pavilion above the sweeps.

The organ apparatus projects from the pavilion, but is decorated in much the same motif. Surrounding panels have small hour glass mirrors. The tripartite facade of the organ has decorative pilasters capped with feminine protomas. The organ is surmounted by three cartouches, with the central more massive cartouche bearing the legend:CH Loeff/Riverside/R.I. The organ is an 87 key Band Organ which uses paper rolls providing 32 minutes play. Unfortunately, the rolls are relatively rare and the carousel is reduced to only two of ten songs each.

The Spokane Carousel was refurbished prior to the opening of Expo '74. William Oliver, who owned the carousel before selling the machine to the city, donated his time in the

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effort. Following the techniques taught to him by Lloyd Vogel, grandson of Charles Looff, Mr. Oliver imparted his knowledge to the City Recreation Department. The city has continued in this spirit by designating the winter months as an annual maintenance period for the equipment.

Vastly enjoyed by the city, it is evident that the Carousel shall remain one of its featured attractions. As long as the music plays and the mirrors glitter, Charles Looff's horses will be ridden, at least in the city of Spokane.

Footnotes: Description

<sup>1</sup>Spokane's Classic Carrousel, Spokane Parks and Recreation Department Pamphlet (Spokane, 1975), p.2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 2-3.

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Natatorium Carousel

The Natatorium Carousel was first installed on the grounds of Natatorium Park in 1909. Located three miles from the city center at a bend in the Spokane River, the park combined the attractions of a carnival midway with picnic grounds, a wooded natural setting and scenic vistas. The Carousel has since been relocated near the central business district at the edge of Riverfront Park, also on the Spokane River. Although the Carousel's surroundings have changed substantially, there are some similarities between the two locations.

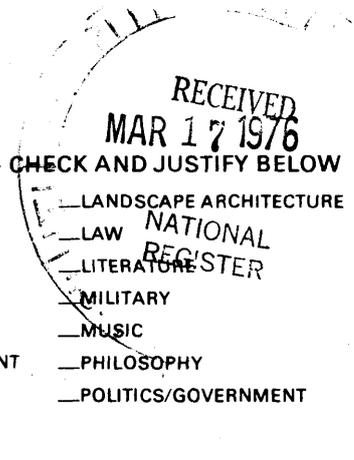
The original pavilion was constructed specifically as the carousel shelter. The building stood in the midst of several amusement park structures including a dance hall and other concessions. It was a 16-sided enclosure 100 feet in diameter consisting of a tall central section under a 16 faceted pyramidal roof and a bellcast, louvered cupola. This was surrounded by an enclosed veranda attached below a clerestory. The walls of the veranda were divided into wooden panels that could be folded back opening up three-fourths of the shelter so that the carousel could be seen from the outside and the building could be entered at almost any point. A pit was excavated beneath the carousel itself to allow for the machinery installed below the deck.

The newer pavilion is a permanent concrete frame shelter with a polygonal plan and a contemporary design. It too was built specifically for the carousel. Similar sliding doors are provided to open up the building when the weather permits, and a space below the floor has been provided for the drive mechanisms.

The carousel was dismantled and moved for the first time in 1974. Proposals to move the original shelter were considered and eventually scrapped due to its large size and structural characteristics. Several alternatives were studied including one that would have involved the use of a helicopter, but no practical method was found.

Although presently immature, landscaping has been planted around the new enclosure at Riverfront Park that will eventually restore some of the wooded setting once characteristic of the Natatorium site.

# 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"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INVENTION	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
			<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
			Entertainment

SPECIFIC DATES Built 1909

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Charles I. D. Looff

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Spokane Carousel is the product of a lost craft and is representative of one of the few art forms intended solely to amuse - to amuse its designer, its joyous passengers and the perennial spectators. Designed by the greatest of the artists, Charles I. D. Looff the Spokane Carousel was his last major project. Today it is the sole operating carousel designed by Looff. A part of Spokane since its completion in 1909, the Carousel has been an unforgettable experience of many children in the Inland Empire.

Charles Looff was born in Denmark, May 2, 1852. During his early years he had worked as a wood carver in his home province of Schleswig-Holstein, then part of Denmark. Looff emigrated to Brooklyn, New York, in August of 1870. Young Looff took a position in a furniture factory and his inspiration for designing carousels is said to have been the sight of the racing fire engine horses in the busy New York streets.

Charles Looff had been preceded to America by only one great carousel designer, Gustav Denzel, who had made a few carousels by 1870. But Looff was destined to design one of the world's most famous carousels, the first to be placed on New York's Coney Island in 1876. The carousel was wildly popular with the public, but was somewhat unlike later carousels; it had no leaping animals, all were stationary; it had but one tier of animals and horses did not predominate among the mounts.

Looff continued to develop his craft into an art form and he has been described as "the first of America's great carousel carvers."<sup>1</sup> His carousels were huge; that of his home amusement center, Crescent Park at Riverside, Rhode Island (which remained a family operation for many years), had 62 horses and four chariots. His specialty aside from great size were pit carousels (like Spokane's), which permitted his horses to leap. His invention was to avoid patent infringement on other designs.

It was Looff's carving that was particularly influential. While other carvers might excel in some particular detail, he was undoubtedly "a splendid carver"<sup>2</sup> who was capable, as in his first three carousels, of carving the entire machine. What makes this even more remarkable, is that Looff was one of the very few carvers who also set the machinery.

Spokane's carousel, arriving in the city in 1909, was a wedding present for Looff's daughter Emma Vogel. Looff designed two other wedding carousels, but this was the largest and most elaborate. In 1910, Charles Looff moved his factory from Rhode Island to Ocean Park, California; his home was in Long Beach. After 1910, Looff was involved heavily in business ventures and the Spokane Carousel was probably the last carved by him. In 1918, the master craftsman died in Long Beach.

In 1908, he had helped Seattle to create the Luna Park amusement grounds. As manager of the park, he suggested to the Washington Water Power Company that a fine carousel similar



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to Luna Park's would be a worthy addition to Natatorium Park in Spokane. For \$20,000 he would create a ride to surpass any on the West Coast.

Natatorium Park had been developed by Washington Water Power Company in 1893, to encourage the use of their cable car lines. Until the 1930's, a large turntable outside the entrance to the park permitted easy excursion trips by trolley. Originally known as Twickenham, the park grew rapidly in the decade and a half prior to 1909, but was still considered a secondary activity to the utility company. Loeff's offer was accepted initially but was rescinded at completion. Loeff then gave the completed carousel to his daughter, Emma, and her husband Louis Vogel as a wedding gift. Vogel, a banker, was in poor health and a more westerly climate had been suggested. An agreement was worked out that the Carousel would be placed at the Natatorium while Vogel ran it for his own profit and the other concessions on a percentage basis for the utility company. With Emma's experience in running the Carousel, combined with Vogel's natural showmanship, both the park as a whole and the Carousel in particular, ran at a considerable profit. Louis and his son, Lloyd Vogel, were entrepreneurs who brought the city everything from balloon ascensions to the big bands of Kay Kayser, and rock star Fats Domino. By 1929, Vogel had purchased the Park; it remained in the family under Lloyd Vogel from 1952 until 1963. The Park closed for a time in the mid-1960's but was reopened briefly in 1967 to 1968. It has been converted to a trailer village - San Souci.

The Carousel was the Natatorium's most popular attraction and it was estimated that 75,000 people boarded the Carousel in each year of the Park's operation. Since its relocation in the Riverfront Park in May 1975, an estimated 100,000 people have ridden its fiery steeds.

The joy of the carousel was unlimited in childhood. It was fraught with the danger that a parent or the operator might think the child too young for an outside horse and a chance at the brass ring. Ticket sales indicate that many an Inland Empire adult wishes to return to those sun-filled days at the Natatorium, picnics, fireworks, and baseball. The memory of all those things is embodied in the dashing horses, the gilt and the flashing mirrors of the Spokane carousel.

Footnotes: Significance

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Fried, A Pictorial History of the Carousel (New York, 1964), p.121.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 119