

**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 Crescent Park Looff Carousel and Shelter Building

and or common Same

2. Location

street & number Bullock's Point Avenue not for publication

city, town East Providence vicinity of

state Rhode Island code 44 county Providence code 007

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Recreation

(Carousel)

4. Owner of Property

name Crescent Park Carousel Preservation Association

street & number 145 E. Taunton Avenue

city, town E. Providence vicinity of state Rhode Island 02914

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. City Hall

street & number

city, town East Providence state Rhode Island

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title National Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date March 16, 1976 federal state county local

depository for survey records National Register of Historic Places, 1100 L Street, NW

city, town Washington state DC 20013-7127

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Summary

The machine has a circular wooden platform 50' in diameter with four figures abreast, which makes it larger than the average carousel. No two of its 66 figures are exactly alike, another unusual characteristic. It includes 56 jumping horses in 14 sets of 4, four ornately carved chariots with dragons and serpents, and six stationary figures of camels and horses. Most of the figures probably date between 1905, when Looff arrived at Crescent Park, and 1910, when he left for Long Beach, California.

The Carousel

The Crescent Park carousel almost surely was built shortly after its manufacturer Charles Looff signed a lease with the park's owner for the construction and operation of the ride in April 1895. It was extant by July 1898, when a photograph of it appeared in the Providence Journal of Commerce.¹

Each figure fits precisely into an overall design.² Each horse of each row provides a complementary stance and attitude to those to its sides as well as those in front and behind. At least every other row abreast is all white, a typical Looff pattern.

The trappings and embellishments of this jumping horse group closely match descriptions and illustrations of an 1894 Austrian Imperial Court "carrousel." Their style is that of Looff's mature, or third and final period.

Almost equally spaced around the platform are four stationary chariots flanked on the outside by six stationary carousel figures. The two larger chariots are nearly identical dragon-prowed gondolas originally intended to rock. The two smaller chariots feature finely carved intertwined serpents and are the work of Looff's eldest son Charles. There are no other known chariots similar to the style, quality, or carving of these examples by the younger Looff on any other carousel.

The stationary figures flanking the chariots are all much older than the jumping horses. The camel and the lone gray horse (beside the pink gondola) represent some of Looff's earliest work. Both date from 1880. They feature brass tassels and round brass rosettes with mirrored centers which show this country's first application of "jewelling."

Beginning with the Crescent Park carousel, Looff began using one or two exceptionally fine examples of his early work to fill the stationary positions. No other existing Looff carousel, however, presents Looff's own carousel history as completely, orderly, or dramatically as does this one.

To Looff, the relationship between a carousel's ornamental framework and its figures was the same as that between a painting and its frame. On a Looff carousel the

8. Significance

		National			
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	
X 1700-1799	art	engineering	music	humanitarian	
X 1800-1899	commerce	exploration settlement	philosophy	theater	
X 1900-	communications	industry	politics government	transportation	
		invention		X other (specify)	
				Recreation	

Specific dates c. 1895, done before **Builder Architect** Charles I. D. Looff (Carousel and Shelter 1909)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)
Summary

The Crescent Park carousel is the largest, most elaborate, and probably best preserved of the surviving works of Charles I. D. Looff, one of the earliest and foremost manufacturers of carousels in the United States. Because it served as his "showroom" carousel during the time he was headquartered in East Providence (1905-10), it bears some of the finest examples of his carving.

Very few carousels in the country have been so little altered. Complete with its original shed and early 20th-century band organ and lighting, this carousel affords a now-rare example of the carousel experience as it was in its heyday.

Crescent Park probably is also the oldest extant and one of a handful remaining of the more than 100 carousels Looff built during his lifetime.¹ (The Looff Carousel at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk, from 1911, is included, along with the Looff coaster there, elsewhere in this study; its shelter is not original. The Looff Hippodrome [1916] at the Santa Monica Pier survives and has been restored; it is also included in this study. It no longer has a Looff carousel in it, however.)

History

A native of Schleswig-Holstein, Looff immigrated to New York in 1870.² Although he was trained as a furniture maker, he soon began to use his spare time constructing a carousel for Balmer's Pavilion at Coney Island, New York (1876). The first on Coney Island, it was wildly popular with the public. Looff was probably the first man in the country to both carve the horses for these rides and to make their frames. He entered the business full-time in 1880, opening a plant at Greenpoint in Brooklyn. His operation never grew to be a large one, when compared to such other carousel makers as the Philadelphia Toboggan Company or Gustave A. Dentzel, although during his career Looff designed and built carousels throughout the United States. He did much of the carving himself, and closely supervised assistants who joined his workshop. The quality of his work quickly earned him a considerable reputation.

Several orders came from parks in Rhode Island, including Rocky Point in Warwick (c. 1892, destroyed), Boyden Heights in East Providence (c. 1900, moved or destroyed), and Crescent Park.³ Of these the Crescent Park carousel was the largest and most elaborate. Here he opened a branch factory. In 1905, when his Brooklyn works were condemned, Looff moved to East Providence and made the plant at Crescent Park his

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name E. Providence

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	1	9	3	0	1	3	7	1	6	1	5	4	1	6	2	1	5	2	1	7	1	5
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

City of East Providence Assessor's Plats: Plat 56, Lot 118
(Section on east side of Bullock's Point Avenue, approximately 450' south of Crescent View Avenue)

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 National Park Service, History Division 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 _____

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

date _____

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration _____

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framework's function was to present the figures to their best advantage, not to compete with them. His frameworks were traditionally all white, accented only by a generous use of gold trim, often gold leaf. Early Loeff carousel rims and inner decorations were comprised only of paintings and scenic panels. Later, mirrors were introduced, and eventually Loeff carousels featured all-mirror rims. The Crescent Park carousel carries a mix of both paintings and mirrors. It was the last, and only existing, of the Loeff carousels produced which carried both the older and newer Loeff trademarks in rim decorations. Atop the center post is a large wooden eagle, approximately 4' in wingspread, covered with gold leaf.

The rim and center facade, enclosing the driving mechanism, are in a florid Neo-Baroque style typical of Loeff's work, but somewhat restrained for carousel panels of the period. The band organ was installed shortly after the turn of the century and was manufactured by A. Ruth and Sohn, a noted German manufacturer. For a time, Loeff served as their sole distributor and American representative. He promoted the sale of Ruth's organs to accompany his carousels, and the one here was made especially for display purposes. Originally, it employed a 94 keyless organ (played by air pressure) using cardboard books; but this was replaced early on by a Wurlitzer 165 military band organ roll mechanism.

The elaborate scrolls and swirls of the Crescent Park carousel band organ's facade are reproductions of their counterparts embellishing the carousel framework. This is no accident. Every Loeff carousel, from at least the Crescent Park model forward, was equipped with one of these large Ruth organs. Although its original 300 or so pipes are still intact and fully functional, its operating mechanism was converted several years ago into an automatic device which uses only a small range of the organ's potential.

Both carousel and band organ were initially powered by steam supplied from the Park's central plant. This source has been replaced by a 15-horsepower, 550-volt, 3-phase electric motor within the pavilion. Artificial lighting came from a large gas chandelier suspended over the centerpole; its fittings remain in situ. Probably by the 1920s, the gas lights were replaced by 25-watt electric bulbs attached to the posts, carousel sweeps, and center facade.³

The Shelter⁴

Specially designed pavilions to permanently house carousels are an American innovation, probably Loeff's, although it was widely copied by others. In this case, Loeff's design is a 14-sided wood frame structure, its roof supported by two rows of vertical posts and suspended in the center by steel tension rods. It is enclosed by an unadorned frame consisting of four sliding and four stationary window panels on each bay, with vertical siding below. Four bays, and originally several more, carry two sets of double-folding doors giving access to the interior. Above, each bay has 3-panel stationary transom windows with border panes of colored glass. This articulation is repeated at the clerestory, on line with the inner row of

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posts. The multi-colored panes project rays of colored light onto the moving, mirrored surfaces of the carousel's framework and figures. This illumination by natural light was developed at a time before electrical illumination was practical. Vents at the tip of the conical roof, many upper-level windows, ground-level doors, and the spinning carousel itself all combined to form a primitive, but welcome, air conditioning system. Originally, the roof rose to a peak; sometime before 1909, Loeff added the cupola and onion dome.

The carousel and its shed remain in an excellent state of repair; recent painting of the figures and the frame as well as the shed's interior have generally conformed to the early 20th-century coloration. The carousel is prominently sited on a slight rise.

Footnotes

¹This description draws on the National Register of Historic Places nomination form prepared by Richard W. Longstreth for the Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission in 1976.

²The bulk of the carousel description is an edited version of that appearing in Gail Durfee, "The Crescent Park Carousel," Merry-Go-Roundup 5,4 (October 1978), pp. 7-9.

³The data on power supply is taken from the National Register form.

⁴Ibid.

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base of operations. The plant was housed in an unassuming wooden building attached to the rear of the carousel, with a 6-room apartment on the second floor probably serving as his living quarters. (Although it had long since ceased to serve its original function, this structure remained until recently.)

Once he had relocated in East Providence, Loeff embellished the Crescent Park carousel so that it could be used as a display for prospective clients, although it remained a working carousel. New horses were added over the next few years, each different, and each representing the latest model. Thus, the carousel is extremely unusual, if not unique, in its variety, for a carousel generally carries about five types of animals, with additional differentiation coming only from color schemes.

The Crescent Park carousel is a veritable museum of Loeff's work. Of further note is the fact that not only are the animals and frame of the carousel by Loeff, but the shed enclosing them is of his design as well. Unlike many carousel houses of the period, Loeff's structures were polygonal, reflecting the form of the machine inside. Eschewing ornament, the shed's multi-surfaced mass and the delicate articulation of its glass panes provide an unusually restrained and forthright visual statement.

Another exceptional aspect of the carousel is its excellent state of preservation. Carousels often have histories of being moved from one park to another, and of alterations that have significantly changed their original character. During its existence, the Crescent Park carousel has remained in its original location and experienced little modification after Loeff left East Providence in 1910. A principal reason for this is that it was owned and operated by Loeff's children and grandchildren until 1967.

Crescent Park, itself, was noteworthy among Eastern amusement parks. Started by George B. Boyden in 1886, it was one of New England's major parks for several decades, and was the oldest in continuous operation in Rhode Island. By the turn of the century, it occupied more than 300 acres, offering a large variety of rides, including as many as four carousels at once; dining facilities for 1,000 people; the region's largest dance hall; a hotel; and a number of cottages. An estimated 50,000 to 75,000 people visited the park each day on weekends during the peak season.

Over the past quarter century, however, Crescent Park declined in size and prestige. During the 1970s, it experienced financial difficulties. By 1979, it appeared that the Park would be sold at auction and the carousel removed, sold, or broken up. A determined local group of concerned citizens, Save Our Carousel, Inc. (subsequently reorganized as the Crescent Park Carousel Preservation Association), sought to retain and restore the carousel in the community. Although the Park itself has been sold and its other features removed, the Association was able to convince the city to deed the carousel and its immediate site to the Association.

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As of late 1985, the Association had completed refurbishing the Looff pavilion and was making progress on restoring the carousel's figures, a notably expensive proposition.⁴

Footnotes

¹This conclusion is based on a review of the Looff entries in the National Carousel Association Census (Los Angeles, Calif.: 1983).

²Biographical data and information are drawn from Willi Looff Taucher, "Looff Family Photo Memoirs," Carrousel Art (Special Edition), July 1982, p. 2, which correlate with data in the National Register of Historic Places nomination form cited in Note 1 of the Description.

³The remainder of this section is a revised version of the corresponding section of the National Register of Historic Places nomination form cited in Note 1 of the Description.

⁴Crescent Park Carousel Preservation Association, "The Carousel Restoration Project" (E. Providence, R.I.: 1985), leaflet.

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