

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	
DATE ENTERED	

**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 Flying Horse Carousel

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER End of Bay Street

CITY, TOWN Westerly

VICINITY OF

# 2 Hon. Edward Beard

STATE Rhode Island

CODE 41

COUNTY Washington

CODE 009

**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"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input checked="" 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 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

STATE

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Historic and Architectural Resources of Westerly  
Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report

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

EXCELLENT

GOOD

FAIR

DETERIORATED

RUINS

UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

UNALTERED

ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE

MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

---

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

The Flying Horse Carousel at Watch Hill (photo 1) is one of the two oldest carousels in existence in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Thought to have been built about 1876 and attributed to the early carousel maker Charles W. F. Dare Company of New York, it stands at the southern end of Bay Street, about two hundred yards from the ocean, beside the town beach, in the quiet summer resort of Watch Hill.

The carousel consists of twenty wooden horses ranged two abreast and suspended by chains from wooden sweeps, (photos 2-4), sheltered by a decagonal, hip-roofed pavillion with cobblestone piers. Each horse is said to have been carved from a single block of wood, although legs appear to be separately carved, and each horse has a leather saddle and bridle and real horsehair tail and mane. Saddles, bridles, tails, and manes have been replaced several times, but the horses' agate eyes are the originals. The horses are grouped in two rows, all facing the same direction, and come in two sizes. They are small animals, naively carved and quite plain when compared with other horses attributed to Dare -- notably those on the carousel at Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts -- and certainly when compared with the elaborate work of other slightly later master carousel makers such as Charles I. D. Looff.<sup>2</sup>

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 somewhat limit their arc. As the carousel turns, the horses swing out by centrifugal force, hence the enduring and endearing name "Flying Horse Carousel." Three double seats were originally included in addition to the horses for those who were too old, young, or too timid for free flight, but these vanished in the hurricane of September 21, 1938, which devastated Watch Hill. Because it was judged that the sweeps were too old and weak to support the weight of seats, they have not been restored to the carousel. Fortunately, all the horses survived the hurricane and were unearthed from nearby sand dunes which wind and water had piled about them. Most of the carousel housing also survived the onslaught of the storm.

-----  
<sup>1</sup>The other carousel is at Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, and is also attributed to the Charles W. F. Dare Company.

<sup>2</sup>Looff's Crescent Park Carousel in East Providence, Rhode Island, built c. 1895 with horses dating from that year and for fifteen years thereafter, was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

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

CONTINUATION SHEET 1

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

The horses are housed in a small decagonal building whose rough cobblestone columns support a wood-frame hip roof. This pavillion appears to have been built, or much altered, in the bungalow era of the opening decades of the twentieth century. The original canopy is said to have been of canvas. The present roof material is asphalt shingling. A low picket fence set on a two-foot cinderblock base partially encloses the spaces between the shelter's piers and keeps over-eager riders out of the path of the flying horses.

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 chariots or seats), and by years of continued use. Restoration of the house 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 the more detailed attention of local cabinet makers William Street and Son of Westerly, who recarved two missing legs and oversaw installation of new leather saddles 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 -- only those twelve years of age or younger -- are now strapped on their mounts.

The carousel was originally powered by a calico horse,<sup>3</sup> who spent his summers walking in circles, and music was provided by a hand organ. In 1897 horsepower gave way to waterpower, which, in turn, was replaced, about 1914, with electicity which is still the motive power. By the turn of the twentieth century, the hand organ had been replaced by a band organ which played from paper rolls. Music is now provided by a tape player installed in 1975 within a copy of a band organ.

The floor of the carousel, originally of sand, is presently poured concrete. 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 this now-white-painted housing in an attempt to recapture its period flavor.

-----  
<sup>3</sup>Tallman, Pleasant Places in Rhode Island, p. 29.

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) amusements
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1876

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Charles W. F. Dare Carousel Company of New York

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Flying Horse Carousel at Watch Hill is reputedly the oldest carousel extant in the United States today. It is also one of the few surviving carousels attributed to Charles W. F. Dare Carousel Company of New York, among the earliest American makers of carousels and other amusements. It is an important artifact for the study of American carving, a still-active reminder of the early development of "amusements" in the United States, and a landmark which holds a unique place in the affections of local and area residents.

The carousel is tentatively dated as having been built about 1876, although it may have been built several years earlier. The carousel at Oak Bluffs, Martha's Vineyard, is also dated to c. 1876 because its horses and chariots are identical in every detail to those illustrated in catalogs issued by the Dare Company in 1876 and 1878.<sup>4</sup> Because the horses at Martha's Vineyard are slightly more elaborate than those at Watch Hill, there is some conjecture that the Watch Hill horses may be earlier, made before 1876.

Price, rather than age, however, may account for the difference. The Dare catalog makes the offer: "Those wishing smaller horses made with the common enameled cloth or leather saddles and plain finish, can have such made in any size they wish, and in any color or quality, too . . . 14" (width) horse, complete in any attitude, with carved saddle, &c. \$25.00 to \$35.00. The difference in price is in the perfection of finish and near approach to life in effect, etc., desired by the party ordering."<sup>5</sup> Perhaps price does explain the difference between the two carousels: the "party ordering" on Martha's Vineyard went "whole hog," ordering the housing, complete with platform and paintings, as well as

<sup>4</sup>Fried, "Flying Horses of Martha's Vineyard Offer Surprise." Additionally, the canvas scene paintings used to cover the outside rim and inside pole of the carousel housing and the machine covering, as well as painted views on the spreader boards, are very similar to those shown in the Dare catalogs. Carousel expert Frederick Fried believes the artist who painted the panels and canvases may have made the catalog woodcut engravings from these paintings.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED

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

CONTINUATION SHEET 3

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 3

Street Railway began direct trolley service between Westerly Village and Watch Hill. This line terminated at the carousel, as turn-of-the-century views show. The trolley was in operation six months a year until it closed in 1921. Around 1883, a large Cincinnati syndicate began to sell house lots out of an 160-acre tract they had acquired; many New York and Cincinnati families purchased these lots and soon the hillside was covered with large "handsome and picturesque" summer houses.<sup>9</sup> By 1888 there were seven hotels and about fifty cottages.

By the time the trolley closed, the automobile had made significant inroads. This began the decline of Watch Hill's height as a hotel summer resort, and only one hotel survives today. Large summer houses continued to be built, however, and despite the devastation of the '38 hurricane -- 15 lives lost and 53 houses swept out to sea -- Watch Hill remains a popular community for wealthy, summer and year-round residents. The Flying Horse Carousel 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 other visitors as well.<sup>10</sup>

The recent restoration efforts, carried out by the Watch Hill Improvement Society under the leadership of Mrs. Cyril V. Moore; the on-going concern of its owner, the Watch Hill Fire District; and the affection in which it is held by the general public testify to the importance of the Flying Horse Carousel and ensure its survival.

-----  
<sup>9</sup>Nebiker, Historic and Architectural Resources of Westerly, RI. p. 18

<sup>10</sup>In 1960 the French children's author Paul Jacques Bonzon was so taken with the carousel that he wrote a story about it "LePetit Cheval de Bois," published in his Contes de L'hiver. The story was translated into English and, with illustrations, published in the U.S., in 1976, as The Runaway Flying Horse.

FHR-8-300A  
(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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

FOR HGRS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

4

ITEM NUMBER 9

PAGE 2

- Fried, Frederick. A Pictorial History of the Carousel. Bonanza Books, New York, 1964.
- Libby, Steve. "Wooden Horses at Watch Hill." Worcester Sunday Telegram, August 15, 1976.
- Moore, Mrs. Cyril V. Notebook on the carousel, in her possession. Also interview with Mrs. Moore, August 1976.
- Nebiker, Walter. "Historic and Architectural Resources of Westerly, Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report." Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, Providence, Rhode Island, March, 1978.
- South County Vol. IX, 1951. Narragansett Times, Inc., Wakefield, Rhode Island, 1951.
- Tallman, Mariana M. Pleasant Places in Rhode Island, and How to Reach Them. Providence Journal Company, Providence, R.I., 1894.

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Cawley, William A. The 1938 Hurricane, Westerly, Rhode Island, and Vicinity. Lewis R. Greene, Westerly, 1938.  
 Fried, Frederick. "Flying Horses' of Martha's Vineyard Offer Surprise." Antique Monthly, July 1974.

See continuation sheet 4

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,9	26,07,00	4,517,67,7,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

That portion of plat 14 lot 21 immediately beneath the Carousel, with a twenty-foot margin around the Carousel 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

Ancelin V. Lynch, National Register Coordinator

ORGANIZATION

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

August 1979

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

401-277-2678

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

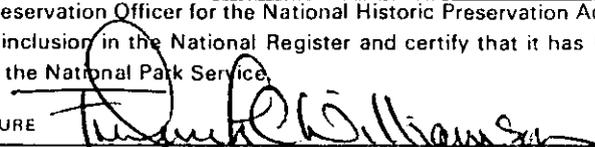
**12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X 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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE



TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE October 3, 1979

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

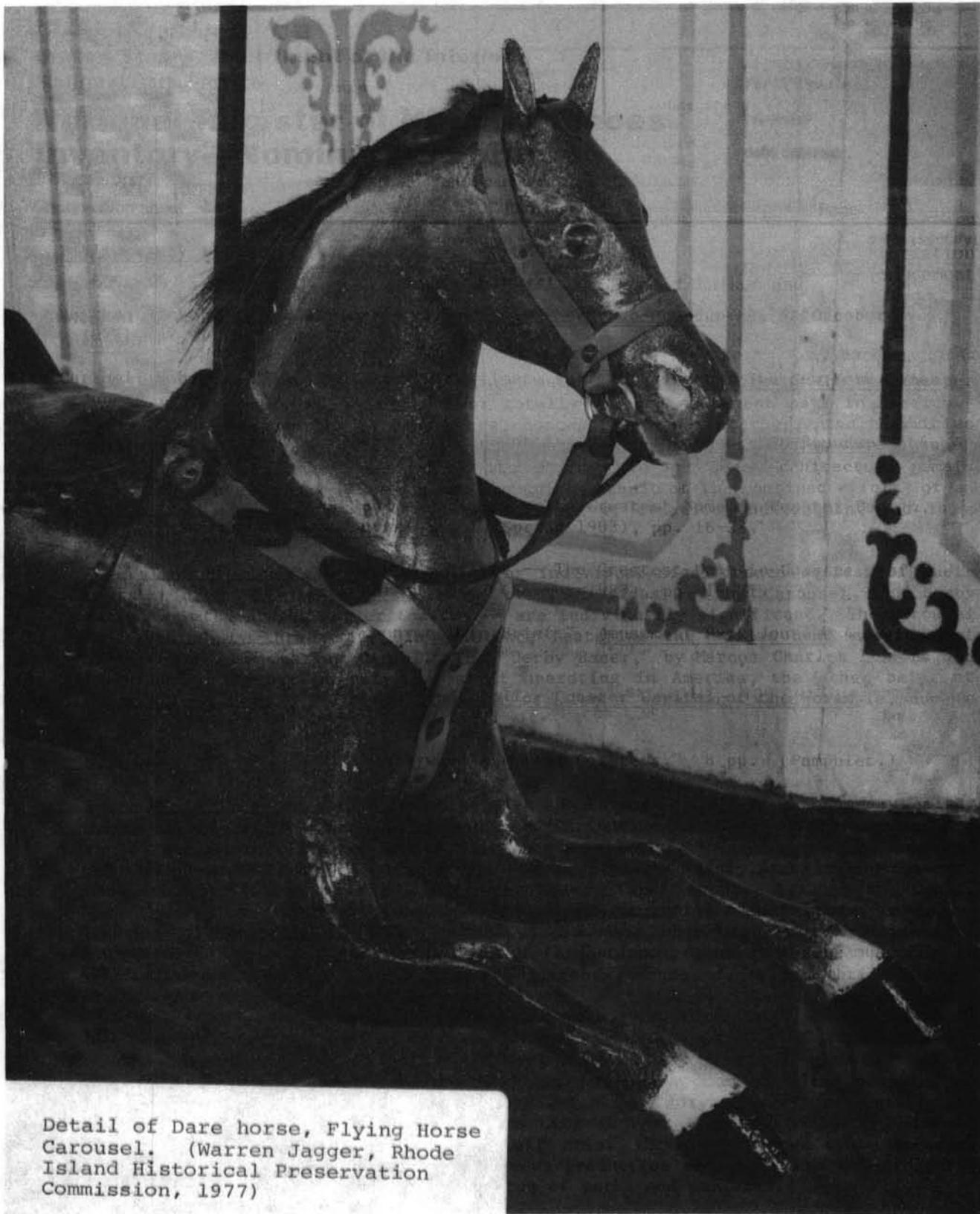
DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

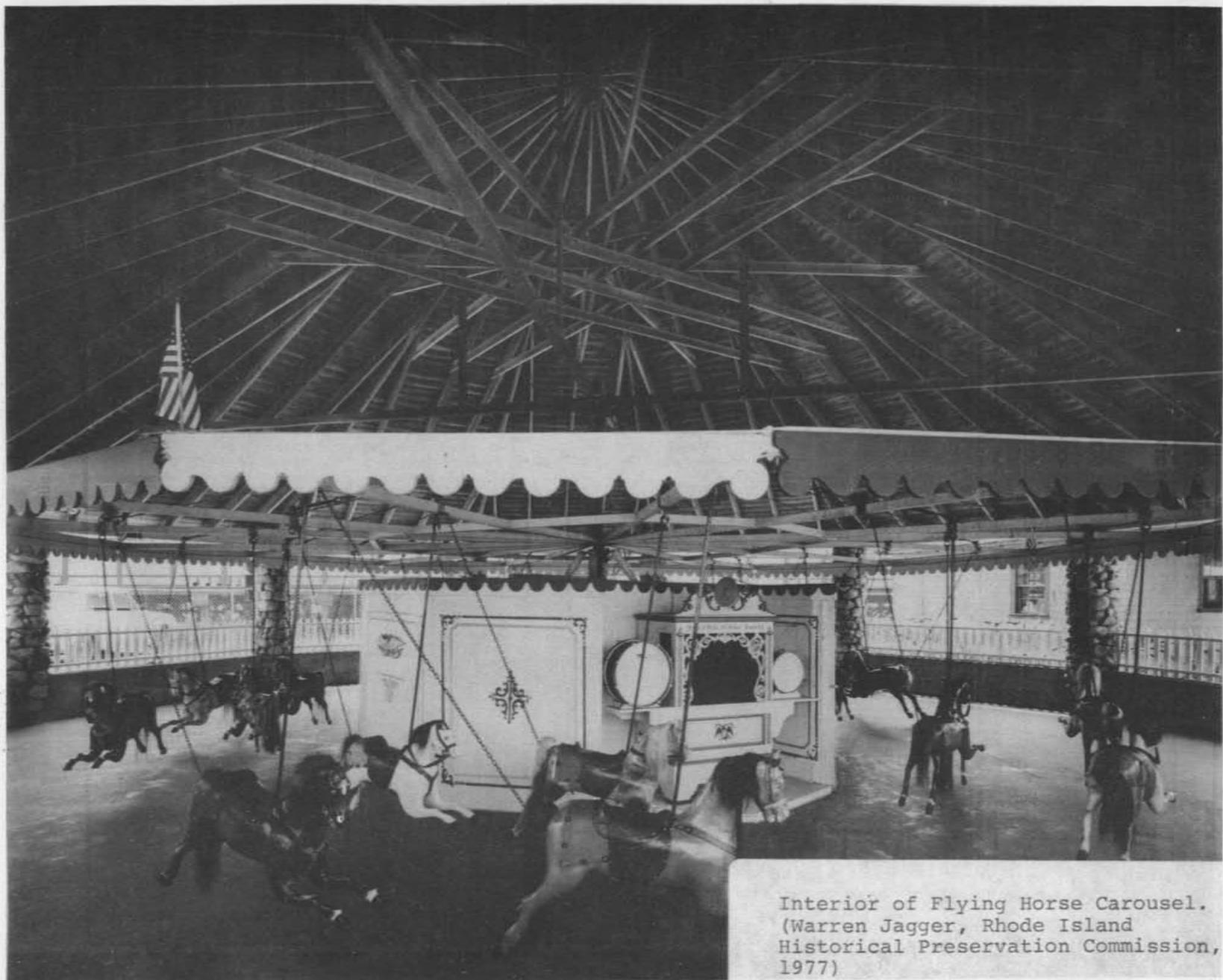
ATTEST:

DATE

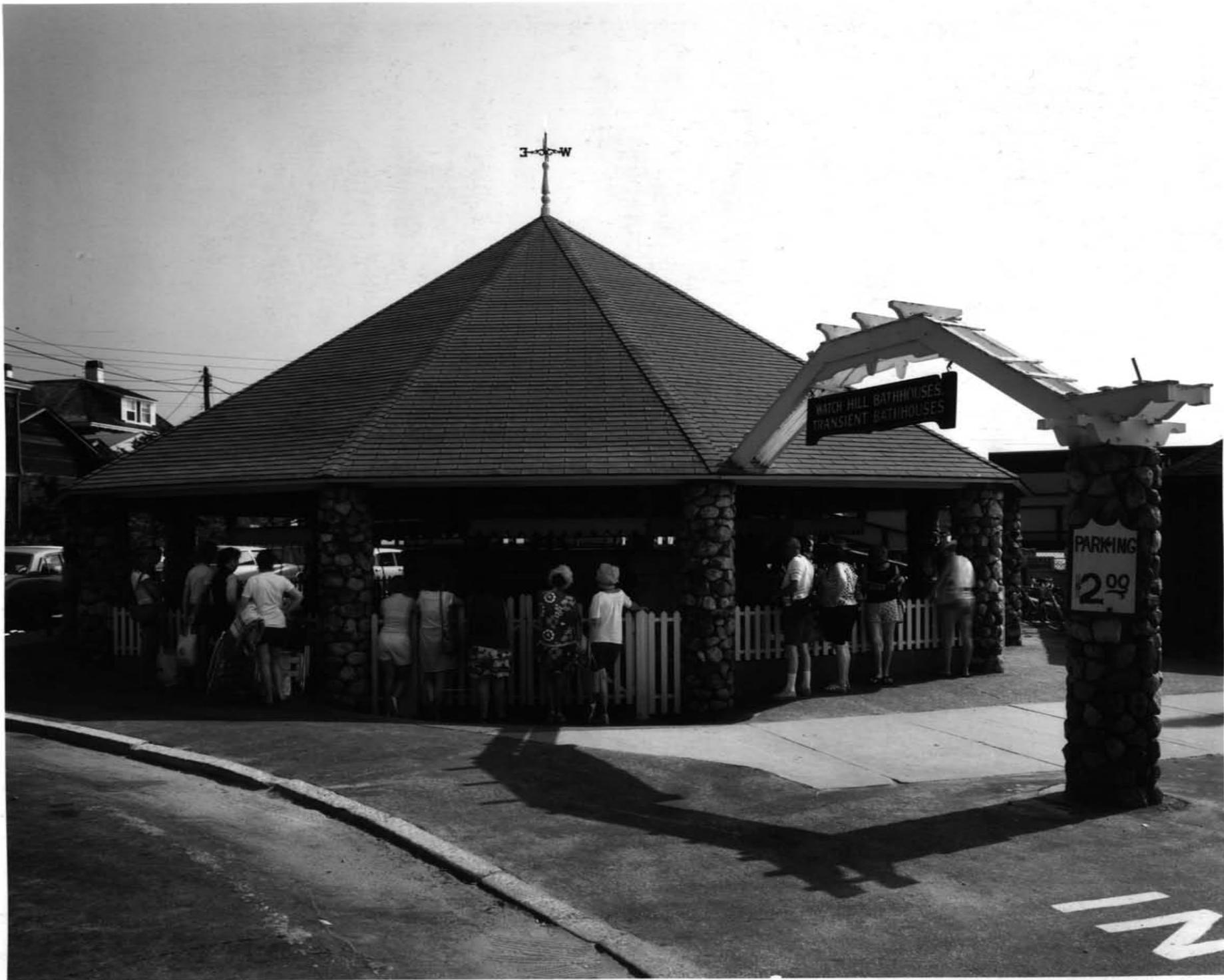
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER



Detail of Dare horse, Flying Horse  
Carousel. (Warren Jagger, Rhode  
Island Historical Preservation  
Commission, 1977)



Interior of Flying Horse Carousel.  
(Warren Jagger, Rhode Island  
Historical Preservation Commission,  
1977)



Flying Horse Carousel  
Watch Hill, Westerly, Rhode Island

Warren Jagger, photographer August, 1977  
Negative: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

View looking south.

Photograph 1

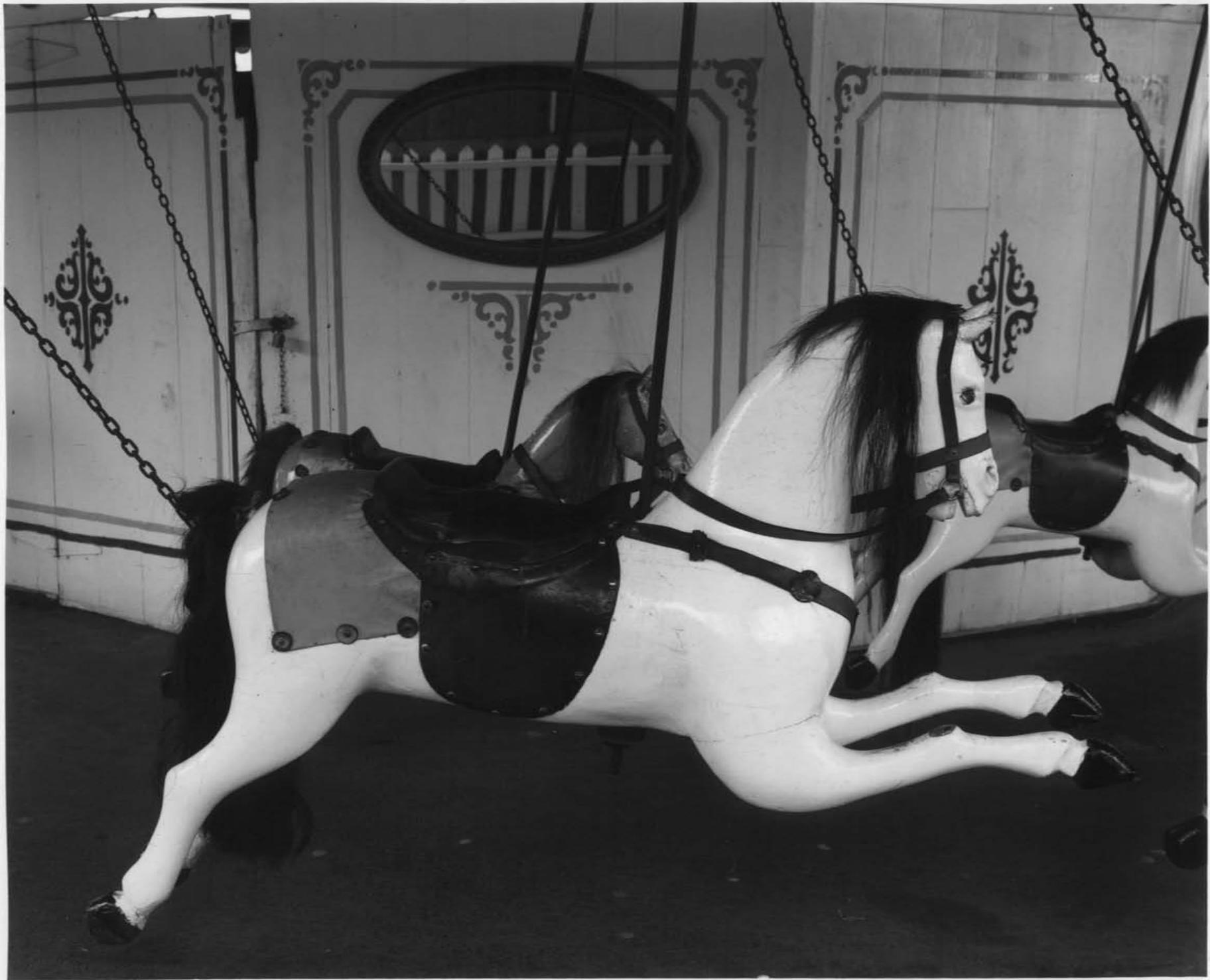


Flying Horse Carousel  
Watch Hill, Westerly, Rhode Island

Warren Jagger, photographer August, 1977  
Negative: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

Interior view looking south.

Photograph 2



Flying Horse Carousel  
Watch Hill, Westerly, Rhode Island

Warren Jagger, photographer August 1977  
Negative: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

Close-up of horses, showing smaller horses in  
inner row.

Photograph 3



Flying Horse Carousel  
Watch Hill, Westerly, Rhode Island

Warren Jagger, photographer August 1977  
Negative: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

Detail of horse.

Photograph 4



FLYING HORSE CAROUSEL  
WATCH HILL HISTORIC DISTRICT  
Westerly, Rhode Island

Photographer: William F. Chittick  
Date: June 1981

Negative filed At: R. I. Historical  
Preservation Commission  
150 Benefit Street  
Providence, R. I.

View facing southwesterly.

Photo #5

