United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 Land Park Carousel (1928-59)

and or common Dickinson County Parker Carousel; Riverton Parker Carousel (1959-76)

2. Location

street & number 412 S. Campbell Street

not for publication
city, town Abilene

vicinity of

state Kansas

county Dickinson

3. Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Present Use</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>district</td>
<td>public</td>
<td>occupied</td>
<td>agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>building(s)</td>
<td>X private</td>
<td>unoccupied</td>
<td>museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structure</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>X work in progress</td>
<td>commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>site</td>
<td>Public Acquisition</td>
<td>X yes: restricted</td>
<td>park</td>
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<tr>
<td>X object</td>
<td>in process</td>
<td>Accessible</td>
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<tr>
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<td>being considered</td>
<td>X yes: unrestricted</td>
<td>entertainment</td>
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4. Owner of Property

name Dickinson County Historical Society

street & number 412 S. Campbell Street

city, town Abilene

vicinity of

state Kansas

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Not applicable

street & number

city, town

state

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title None

has this property been determined eligible? __ yes __ no

date

federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town

state
# 7. Description

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<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
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<tr>
<td>good</td>
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<td>moved</td>
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**Summary**

The Abilene carousel is a 2-abreast, track-type machine. It has 24 Parker horses and 4 Parker chariots (2 with large yellow sunflowers on the sides) on a platform 40' in diameter, one of the largest made by the Charles W. Parker Amusement Company. The paired horses, though mostly unrestored, are in generally excellent condition. When the carousel is in operation, they are mounted on flexible metal frames, or rocking mechanisms, that produce a ride much more realistic than the up-and-down motion of later carousels with horses mounted on poles. There is no top to the carousel, as it was intended to be set up under a tent.

**Alterations and Other Equipment**

The platform rests on wheels running on a track on the ground. Some of the wooden planks mounted on the frame have required replacement; otherwise, the platform is in good condition. The military band organ designed to accompany the carousel is no longer with it.

The carousel has traditionally been powered by a 2-cylinder, 2-horsepower steam engine, which is set up a short distance away and connected to the carousel drive wheels by a cable. The boiler on the original steam engine has been replaced to accommodate current safety regulations so that the carousel can again be operated by the steam engine.

A new building to house the carousel is under construction behind the Dickinson County Historical Museum, just east of the Eisenhower Library and Memorial in Abilene. The 3,600 square-foot carousel building will be octagonal, with portions of five of the walls capable of being raised as viewing windows. An extension of the octagon will house the steam engine and serve as a workshop. An electric motor will power the carousel in its day-to-day operation, but the steam engine will be on display and will operate the carousel on special occasions.¹

**Footnote**

¹Bob Guenthner, "The Abilene Parker" (Abilene, Kansas: Dickinson County Historical Society, 1984), unpaginated leaflet, provided the bulk of the data on which this description is based.
8. Significance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Areas of Significance—Check and justify below</th>
<th>Builder/Architect</th>
<th>Company</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>prehistoric</td>
<td>archaeology-prehistoric</td>
<td>Charles W. Parker</td>
<td>Amusement (carousel)</td>
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<td>— 1900-</td>
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Specific dates: ca. 1898-1901

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Summary

Of some 68 carousels built by the Parker firm in Abilene between 1896 and 1910, the Abilene carousel is one of only three that survive essentially intact. It is the earliest of the three, dating sometime from 1898 to 1901. This rare and wandering survivor has returned to the community in which it was built; it is the only tangible evidence of the company's presence in the city.

Parker's early hand-carved wooden horses have been described as

in a class by themselves. They were long sinewy creatures with long leg muscles carved in interesting shapes. Their heads were thin, long, and sensitive; their manes rolled back in gentle "s" curves and forelocks flowed back under the ears, following the contours of the head.

History

Charles W. Parker, an Abilene native, began making carousels in Abilene in 1898. He manufactured many other amusements and carnival accessories, including mechanical shooting galleries, portable electric lighting plants, concessions, show fronts, hand-painted banners, tents, and band organs. Parker employed the best skilled carvers and artists for the carving and painting of his merry-go-rounds. He brought craftsmen from Switzerland, Germany, and Austria to hand-carve the horses and is generally credited with inventing the mechanism that makes his horses rear up and down. His carousels became particularly well known in the Midwest and West.

Parker also at one time owned four complete carnivals. In addition, he operated an amusement center, "The Midway," or "Parker's Playhouse," in Abilene. (Neither the carousel factory nor "The Midway" is extant.)

He continued manufacturing the equipment in Abilene until 1910, when he moved his plant to Leavenworth, Kansas. In Leavenworth, he began using carving machines that gave the carousels a standardized mass-produced appearance. They are not, for that reason, as attractive to carousel connoisseurs as his earlier work. The Parker Company quit making carousels in the late 1930s, after Charles' death in 1932.

The "Abilene" Carousel

A mechanic in Lander, Wyoming, James Weisner, purchased this carousel from one of Parker's traveling carnivals in 1928. Thereafter he annually put it up for the town's 4th of July celebration. He sold it in 1959, shortly before his death, to

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Tom Knight, of Riverton, Wyoming, who operated it at a drive-in theater he owned in the community. Following Knight's death, his widow, desiring to dispose of the carousel to a party who would keep it intact, contacted the Smithsonian Institution in 1975. The Smithsonian in turn contacted the Dickinson County Historical Society in Abilene.

By mid-1976, the historical society and the associated Abilene Carousel Committee had raised enough money to purchase the carousel from Mrs. Knight. The carousel was brought back to Abilene and placed in storage. The need for funds to build a secure shelter and to restore the carousel has caused work to proceed slowly.

Construction at last began on the shelter building in June 1984. The society expects to complete it and begin operation of the carousel on a regular basis in the summer of 1986.

Footnotes


2Based on review of data in National Carousel Association, National Carousel Association Census (Los Angeles, 1983).

3Frederick Fried, cited in McClure, op. cit., p. 25.


5Bob Guenther, "The Abilene Parker" (Abilene, Kansas: Dickinson County Historical Society, 1984), unpagedinated leaflet.
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property  less than 1

Quadranle name  Abilene, Kansas

UTM References

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Verbal boundary description and justification
The area embraced by the carousel shelter building. (The nomination, however, covers only the carousel itself.)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>state</th>
<th>code</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title  James H. Charleton, Historian

Organization  History Division, National Park Service

Date  November 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:

Chief of Registration

Date


- "Parker REALLY made animals," Merry-Go-Roundup, 4, 1 (January 1977), pp. 5-10.


Hintz, Forrest. "Life a Merry-go-round," The Wichita Eagle, October 1, 1975, p. 12A.


