Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
HISTORIC PROPERTY DATA FORM

TOWN  East Providence
VILLAGE  Riverside

ADDRESS  700 Bullocks Point Ave
PLAT/LOT  413/13/001

NAME(s)  Crescent Park and Crescent Park Carousel

PROPERTY TYPE  Bld  Site
OWNERSHIP  Loc

STATUS  NHL  NR  Indiv  C

NR DISTRICT

USES:  Select terms from National Register table
CURRENT  Recreation
HISTORIC  Recreation

SITING:  SETBACK  ft  LOT SIZE  3.51  acres

STORIES  1  ROOF(s)  Conical

MATERIALS:  Select terms from National Register table
ROOF  Asphalt
WALL  Wood

FOUNDATION  Stone  OTHER

WINDOWS  6-, 8-, and 11-light wood

ALTERATIONS:  PORCH  WINDOWS  TRIM  OVERALL

| Material | Min | Min | Min | Min |
| Configuration | None | None | Min | Maj |

INTEGRITY  X  Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor  X  Destroyed

PROPERTY COMPONENTS:  List & number in order of importance. Include the primary component of the resource as number 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component Type</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Component Type</th>
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<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Carousel</td>
<td>B-C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(4) Gazebo</td>
<td>St-NC</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) Clam Shack</td>
<td>B-NC</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>(5) Former amusement park site</td>
<td>Si-C</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>(3) Bathhouse</td>
<td>B-NC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

EVENT  DATE  SOURCE  NAME (person/firm/organization)  ROLE

Crescent Park opens  1886  ArtInRuins  Charles Boyden  Owner/Operator
Carousel construction  1895  Sign  Charles I. D. Looff  Designer
Crescent Park closes  1977  ArtInRuins
Crescent Park sold/demo  1979  ArtInRuins
Concession Stand built  2004  Assessor  City of East Providence  Owner
Carousel restored  2018  Website  City of East Providence  Owner

ARCHITECTURE:  If more than one, list & number in order of importance

TYPE

STYLE(s)

SURVEYOR  PAL  DATE  Nov. 2018  REVIEWER

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This form was produced as part of a survey of resources associated with the twentieth-century African American Civil Rights Movement in Rhode Island and provides a summary of information relevant to that historical context. The surveyed property may have associations with additional historical contexts that are not discussed.

**History:**

Crescent Park in East Providence opened in 1886 under the ownership of Charles Boyden. Boyden hired famed wood carver Charles I. D. Looff to build the Crescent Park Carousel, which opened in 1895. The park changed ownership in 1901, and the new owners, the Hope Land Company, had Looff add other rides to the nascent amusement park, including a tunnel of love and rollercoaster. Looff’s son, Charles Looff, took ownership of the park in 1920 and expanded it, adding a roller rink and the Alhambra Ballroom. Other rides were added through the mid-twentieth century. In 1969, the Alhambra Ballroom burned down. Through the remainder of the mid-twentieth century, attendance dwindled and the park began to fall into disrepair. The park closed in 1977, and pieces of it were auctioned off in March 1979. The buildings and structures that didn’t sell, including the carousel, were slated for demolition, but local residents rallied to save the carousel, which remains in operation today following a 2018 restoration (ArtInRuins.com 2019; CrescentParkCarousel.org 2019).

Crescent Park’s association with the civil rights movement in Rhode Island stems from its use for Emancipation Day festivities. Rhode Island’s Emancipation Day celebrations began in August 1854 at Roger Williams Park and initially celebrated only the emancipation of Caribbean blacks (Stokes 2018). In the United States, Emancipation Day is recognized on a variety of dates, depending on when various states and territories learned of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Abraham Lincoln, which took place on January 1, 1863. Celebrations were often held on January 1 and on August 1, the date of the emancipation of blacks in the West Indies, but the January celebrations appeared to have died out by the 1880s (Greenwood 2009:176). The shift to a preference for August celebrations in New England may have been influenced in part by the harsh winters (Greenwood 2009:176). Celebrations sponsored by the Grand United Order of Colored Odd Fellows began in 1882 and were initially held at Crescent Park’s rival amusement park across Narragansett Bay, Rocky Point (Providence Daily Journal 1890). In the late 1920s, the Otha Boon Lodge 931 of the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World took over organizing Emancipation Day celebrations at Rocky Point, promoting the event and receiving a percentage of the day’s ticket sales in exchange. Several years into the arrangement, the Lodge learned that park management was closing the swimming pool during the Emancipation Day celebrations so black visitors were unable to use it. Park management refused to change the policy despite protestations from the Lodge, prompting the Elks to move the celebrations to a rival amusement park across the bay – Crescent Park (Bell Jr. 1997).

Former Rhode Island State Historic Preservation Officer Fred Williamson was interviewed by Rhode Island state folklorist Michael Bell about his memories of Emancipation Day celebrations at Crescent Park (quahog.org 2015). According to Williamson, the events provided an opportunity for older folks to gather and reminisce about the old days while children played at the amusement park. People came from across the region, including Worcester, Boston, and Springfield, to take part in the celebrations. Families packed a picnic lunch or ate at the Shore Dining Hall, which served clam cakes, clam chowder, and other seaside favorites. In the evening, the Alhambra Ballroom hosted a dance played by one of the leading black bands in New England that lasted until around one in the morning (quahog.org 2015).

At the 1951 Emancipation Day celebrations, noted newspaper editor John Carter Minkins, then 82 years old, addressed nearly 15,000 people about uplifting the African American race (Lemons and Lambert 2003:437). Emancipation Day celebrations were held at Crescent Park through at least the 1960s (Conrad 2012). Later celebrations in Rhode Island were held at Roger Williams Park and Waterplace Park in Providence and continue to the present day.

The Crescent Park Carousel was listed in the National Register in 1976 and became a National Historic Landmark in 1987.
Bibliography:

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2019  “Crescent Amusement Park.” Electronic document,  

Bell Jr., Andrew J.

Conrad, Nancy J.
2012  “Juneteenth Celebration in Boston at National Center of Afro-American Artists.” Electronic document, 

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2019  “The History of the Looff Carousel.” Electronic document,  

Greenwood, Janette Thomas

Lemons, J. Stanley, and Diane Lambert

Providence Daily Journal
1890  “Emancipation Day.” 2 August, p.4.

Quahog.org
2015  “A Living Museum.” Electronic document,  

Stokes, Keith, and Theresa Guzman Stokes