



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

Report to the Historical Resources Board

DATE ISSUED: November 4, 2021 REPORT NO. HRB-21-063

HEARING DATE: November 18, 2021

SUBJECT: **ITEM #03 – Balboa Park Carousel**

RESOURCE INFO: [California Historical Resources Inventory Database \(CHRID\) link](#)

APPLICANT: Friends of Balboa Park; represented by Heritage Architecture & Planning

LOCATION: 1889 Zoo Place, Balboa Park, Council District 3
APN 760-212-4400

DESCRIPTION: Consider the designation of the Balboa Park Carousel located at 1889 Zoo Place as a historical resource.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Designate the Balboa Park Carousel located at 1889 Zoo Place as a historical resource with a period of significance of 1922-1968 under HRB Criterion A and a period of significance of 1910 under HRB Criterion C. The designation excludes the reconstructed ticket booth and includes the exterior structure and kiddie ride constructed within the period of significance. This recommendation is based on the following findings:

1. The resource is a special element of the City's social development and retains integrity to its 1922-1968 period of significance. Specifically, the resource reflects the leisure culture that developed around beaches and amusement parks as populations began to flee American cities in search of recreation during the early twentieth century. The resource is significant as the only carousel from this time period to be located in San Diego for the majority of its life.
2. The resource is a valuable example of the craftsmanship required to construct a "golden age" carousel and continues to convey its historic significance from its 1910 date of construction. Specifically, the resource features intricately carved menagerie animals and chariots, hand painted scenic panels, an original band organ and an original General Electric Company motor and turning mechanisms.

BACKGROUND

This item is being brought before the Historical Resources Board in conjunction with the owner's desire to have the site designated as a historical resource. The carousel is located in Balboa Park immediately north of the Spanish Village and just off of Park Boulevard at the entrance of the San Diego Zoo. The resource includes the carousel and its surrounding structure, a ticket booth and a kiddie ride.

The property has not been identified in any historic surveys, as the subject area has not been previously surveyed.

The historic name of the resource, the Balboa Park Carousel, has been identified consistent with the Board's adopted naming policy and reflects the name historically given to the resource by the community.

ANALYSIS

A Historical Resource Research Report was prepared by Heritage Architecture and Planning, which concludes that the resource is significant under HRB Criteria A, C, D and F. Staff concurs that the site is a significant historical resource under HRB Criteria A, and C but not Criteria D and F. This determination is consistent with the *Guidelines for the Application of Historical Resources Board Designation Criteria*, as follows.

CRITERION A - Exemplifies or reflects special elements of the City's, a community's or a neighborhood's historical, archaeological, cultural, social, economic, political, aesthetic, engineering, landscaping or architectural development.

The Balboa Park Carousel was originally constructed in 1910 by the Hershell-Spillman Company of North Tonawanda, New York during the "golden age" of carousel manufacturing. Originally located in Luna Park in Los Angeles, the carousel was moved to Coronado's Tent City in 1913. In 1922 it was relocated to Balboa Park and finally moved to its current location in 1968. There are only two other carousels in San Diego; the first is a circa 1890 carousel relocated to Seaport Village in the early 2000's, the second is a reproduction installed in Belmont Park in 1989. The Balboa Park Carousel is the only "golden age" carousel to have spent most of its life within San Diego. Further context on the history of carousels in the United States can be found in the Historical Resource Research Report.

Significance Statement: The resource is a special element of the City's social development and retains integrity to its 1922 to 1968 period of significance. Specifically, the resource reflects the leisure culture that developed around beaches and amusement parks as populations began to flee American cities in search of recreation during the early twentieth century. The resource is significant as the only carousel from this time period to be located in San Diego for the majority of its life. Therefore, staff recommends designation of the resource under HRB Criterion A.

CRITERION C - Embodies distinctive characteristics of a style, type, period or method of construction or is a valuable example of the use of natural materials or craftsmanship.

The subject resource is a carousel originally constructed by the Herschell-Spillman Company in 1910 in the menagerie style, meaning that there are other animal in addition to horses. The 51 animals and four chariots are hand carved and exceptionally detailed. At the center of the carousel's platform is the original General Electric Company motor and turning mechanisms. Hand-painted scenic panels surround the ride's

mechanical components and depict images of pastoral and seaside scenes as well as portraits of Indigenous Americans. The original band organ is located at the center of the carousel and is still used to play music when the ride is in use. The ride also features an original ring game. The structure surrounding the carousel exhibits a dodecagon shape, two-tiered roof and clerestory windows. The structure, which features tri-fold doors and T1-11 siding, was added in 1913 when the resource was relocated to Coronado. Located near the carousel is an associated ticket booth and kiddie ride.

Carousels built by the Herschell-Spillman Company during the “golden age” of amusement park rides exhibit a high degree of craftsmanship. Production of these carousels involved a whole team of artists and craftspeople including machinists, painters, electricians and carvers. The animal’s heads, which required the most skill, were carved by Mater Carvers. The Journeymen carved the bodies and the beginners carved the legs. The pieces were then joined together and painted. The company had several signature animals including zebras with no saddles and frogs with human clothes. The subject resource was constructed only a few years before the retirement of Allan Herschell during a period when the company was producing its largest and most elegant carousels.

Modifications to the resource are few, and do not have a significant impact on its integrity. In 1913 the exterior structure was added when the carousel was relocated to Coronado and the wood tri-fold doors were likely added when it was moved to Balboa Park in 1922. The kiddie ride was added sometime in the early 1950’s. When the carousel was moved again in 1968 to its current location the roof was extended and a small storage addition was constructed. The roof was replaced in 2010 and the ticket booth was demolished and reconstructed. These modifications do not impair integrity of design, material, workmanship or feeling as it relates to HRB Criterion C as a valuable example of craftsmanship.

The HRRR asserts that the resource is a good example of the Victorian style of architecture and the Golden Age Menagerie/ County Fair style of Carousel. Historical resources staff finds that the carousel structure reflects the broad term of Victorian architecture in only a minimal way and does not rise to the level of significance to be individually eligible as a good example of architecture from the Victorian period. Additionally, staff finds it difficult to evaluate the quality of the resource’s design without more context about carousels from this period. However, staff does find that the level of craftsmanship required to create the resource was exceptional and worthy of individual historic designation.

Significance Statement: The resource is a valuable example of the craftsmanship required to construct a “golden age” carousel and continues to convey its historic significance from its 1910 period of significance and date of construction. Specifically, the resource features intricately carved menagerie animals and chariots, hand painted scenic panels, an original band organ and an original General Electric Company motor and turning mechanisms. Therefore, staff recommends designation under HRB Criterion C.

CRITERION D - Is representative of a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, engineer, landscape architect, interior designer, artist or craftsman.

The subject resource was constructed by the Herschell-Spillman Company in 1910. Although the company undoubtedly constructed quality carousels which they successfully sold throughout the country, they were most productive outside of San Diego and there are no other Herschell-Spillman designed carousels in the city and there is no evidence to suggest that others will be discovered. The company has not been established by the Historical Resources Board as a Master Designer, Builder, Artist or Craftsman and there is insufficient information to designate them as such at this time. Therefore, staff does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion D.

CRITERION F - *Is a finite group of resources related to one another in a clearly distinguishable way or is a geographically definable area or neighborhood containing improvements which have a special character, historical interest or aesthetic value or which represent one or more architectural periods or styles in the history and development of the City.*

The resource is located within the El Prado Area historic district, HRB #1 and National Historic Landmark, which mostly includes the structures on El Prado from the 1915 Panama-California Exposition and the 1935 California Pacific International Exposition. The resource was relocated to Balboa Park in 1922 and would have been present during the 1935 Exposition; however, evidence is limited to support its contribution to the event. The National Register nomination does not clearly define what resources from the 1935 Exposition were included in the designation and it does not contain a clear significance statement to interpret which resources could be considered district contributors. Staff concludes that there is not enough information to determine if the subject resource is a contributor to the El Prado Area historic district at this time and therefore does not recommend designation under HRB Criterion F.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Designation brings with it the responsibility of maintaining the building in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards. The benefits of designation include the availability of the Mills Act Program for reduced property tax; the use of the more flexible Historical Building Code; flexibility in the application of other regulatory requirements; the use of the Historical Conditional Use Permit which allows flexibility of use; and other programs which vary depending on the specific site conditions and owner objectives. If the property is designated by the HRB, conditions related to restoration or rehabilitation of the resource may be identified by staff during the Mills Act application process, and included in any future Mills Act contract.

CONCLUSION

Based on the information submitted and staff's field check, it is recommended that the Balboa Park Carousel located at 1889 Zoo Place be designated with a period of significance of 1922-1968 under HRB Criterion A and a period of significance of 1910 under HRB Criterion C. The designation excludes the reconstructed ticket booth and includes the exterior structure and kiddie ride constructed within the period of significance.



Suzanne Segur
Senior Planner/ HRB Liaison
Development Services Department

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Attachment(s):

1. Draft Resolution
2. Applicant's Historical Report under separate cover

RESOLUTION NUMBER N/A
ADOPTED ON 11/18/2021

WHEREAS, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego held a noticed public hearing on 11/18/2021, to consider the historical designation of the Balboa Park Carousel (owned by Friends of Balboa Park, 2125 Park Boulevard, San Diego, CA 92101) located at **1889 Zoo Place, San Diego, CA 92101**, APN: **760-212-44-00**, further described as BALBOA PARK CITY#760045(77)(CAROUSEL)IN in the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, State of California; and

WHEREAS, in arriving at their decision, the Historical Resources Board considered the historical resources report prepared by the applicant, the staff report and recommendation, all other materials submitted prior to and at the public hearing, inspected the subject property and heard public testimony presented at the hearing; and

WHEREAS, the property would be added to the Register of Designated Historical Resources as **Site No. 0**, and

WHEREAS, designated historical resources located within the City of San Diego are regulated by the Municipal Code (Chapter 14, Article 3, Division 2) as such any exterior modifications (or interior if any interior is designated) shall be approved by the City, this includes but is not limited to modifications to any windows or doors, removal or replacement of any exterior surfaces (i.e. paint, stucco, wood siding, brick), any alterations to the roof or roofing material, alterations to any exterior ornamentation and any additions or significant changes to the landscape/ site.

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED, the Historical Resources Board based its designation of the Balboa Park Carousel on the following findings:

(1) The property is historically significant under CRITERION A as a special element of the City's social development and retains integrity to its 1922-1968 period of significance. Specifically, the resource reflects the leisure culture that developed around beaches and amusement parks as populations began to flee American cities in search of recreation during the early twentieth century. The resource is significant as the only carousel from this time period to be located in San Diego for the majority of its life. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

(2) The property is historically significant under CRITERION C as a valuable example of the craftsmanship required to construct a "golden age" carousel and continues to convey its historic significance from its 1910 date of construction. Specifically, the resource features intricately carved menagerie animals and chariots, hand painted scenic panels, an original band organ and an original General Electric Company motor and turning mechanisms. This finding is further supported by the staff report, the historical research report, and written and oral evidence presented at the designation hearing.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, in light of the foregoing, the Historical Resources Board of the City of San Diego hereby approves the historical designation of the above named property. The designation includes the parcel and exterior of the building as Designated Historical Resource **Site No. 0**.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall include the exterior structure and kiddie ride constructed within the period of significance.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the designation shall exclude the reconstructed ticket booth.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Secretary to the Historical Resources Board shall cause this resolution to be recorded in the office of the San Diego County Recorder at no fee, for the benefit of the City of San Diego, and with no documentary tax due.

Vote:

BY: _____
DAVID MCCULLOUGH, Chair
Historical Resources Board

APPROVED: MARA W. ELLIOTT,
CITY ATTORNEY

BY: _____
LINDSEY SEBASTIAN,
Deputy City Attorney

RECORDING REQUESTED BY
CITY OF SAN DIEGO
DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DEPARTMENT

WHEN RECORDED MAIL TO

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD
ATTN: HRB SECRETARY
1222 FIRST AVENUE, MS 501
SAN DIEGO, CA 92101

SPACE ABOVE THIS LINE FOR RECORDER'S USE

RESOLUTION NUMBER **N/A**

HISTORICAL DESIGNATION OF PROPERTY ON

1889 Zoo Place, San Diego, CA 92101

ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBER **760-212-44-00**

HISTORICAL RESOURCES BOARD NUMBER **0**