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MISSION STATEMENT

A) To discover, identify, gather, preserve, and display documents, records, items, etc. pertaining to eastern auto racing facilities, competitors, personalities or events.

B) To assist writers to publish and/or research articles regarding historical eastern auto racing topics.

Our organization collects & displays articles dealing with any eastern auto racing facilities for any racing enthusiast to enjoy. Please consider either joining our organization or contributing to our projects.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME: _____

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AREA OF INTEREST: _____

_____ \$25 SUPPORTER
Non-voting supporter of the mission statement of the EARHS. Admission to showroom by appointment.

_____ \$40 INTERNATIONAL
Non-voting international supporter with basic benefits.

_____ \$250 CORPORATE SUPPORTER
Corporate supporters are non-voting supporters whose contribution to the EARHS will be permanently noted in the EARHS showroom. Contributions will be used to develop additional displays, catalog information collected, and to defray expenses in pursuit of the mission statement.

PLEASE MAIL TO:

EARHS, P.O. BOX 333, OREFIELD, PA 18069
Make checks payable to EARHS.

For additional information
call 610 395-5303 or 610 398-2188

EARHS
P.O. Box 333
Orefield, PA 18069

**EARHS is recognized as a federally tax exempt charity by the IRS under section 510c(3).



Eastern Auto Racing
Historical Society

Newsletter

Vol. XVI 2019 Ed. #4

Eighty years ago Allentown, PA area racing fans began to enjoy the mighty midgets at the popular 1/5 mile oval at Dorney Park.



1939 ticket to the midgets at Dorney Park

In 1860 Solomon Dorney developed a fish hatchery on his land southwest of Allentown and began to hold weekend fishing contests. He later added picnic groves, a swimming pool, and a few playground rides for families, who spent the day while fathers and husbands fished. Pony rides and a few mechanical rides appeared by 1884 when the property was renamed Dorney's Trout Ponds and Summer Resorts as the community of Dorneyville developed to serve the burgeoning amusement park.

In the late 1890s the Allentown-Kutztown Traction Company completed a double track trolley line between Allentown and Kutztown and the most popular stop on the line was Dorney Park. In 1901 AKTC purchased the park from Solomon Dorney and Jacob Plarr, a visionary concessionaire from Philadelphia, installed an iconic Dentzel Carousel, a signature ride at Dorney Park. A few years later, Jacob's son, Robert Plarr, became an employee and started a lifetime association with Dorney Park. In 1923 Bob Plarr, Bill Ruske, and Ray Sandt purchased the park from AKTC and built the park's famous wooden roller coaster. In 1930 track was added to the enlarge the coaster to its current length and later in the decade, Dorney's 'Zephyr' art-deco train began to tour the park. Softball games were often held between local teams on a baseball diamond on a field above the main park.

By the mid-1930s the midget craze had come to the east coast and promoter, Sherman 'Red' Crise, was in charge of tracks at Freeport, Long Island and Hershey, PA. In the winter of 1938 he contacted Bob Plarr about racing at Dorney Park and it was decided to turn the low-income ball diamond into a standard 1/5 mile cinder track. The baseball bleachers provided seating around turns 3 and 4 (the reason these stands never really followed the contour of the track) and a new set of stands was constructed on the main straight.

On Sunday afternoon, May 28, 1939, Illinois racer Beuford 'Doc' Shanebrook won the first race at Dorney Park. Racing continued on Sunday afternoons and Shanebrook parlayed



Park owner, Bob Plarr, presents to Charlie Miller the 1940 AAA Dorney Park midget championship trophy.

For 1940, Crise signed with AAA to sanction midget events at Dorney until racing was banned for the duration of WWII. In September 1945 the midgets returned to the Park, but the sanction quickly shifted from AAA to the American Racing Drivers Club.

The ARDC sanction through 1949 produced some stirring weekly competition, but also claimed two drivers, Harry 'Hap' Pierson on 6-27-47 and 'Three-Wheeler' Harry Sheeler on 6-11-48. In 1949, Red Crise booked three stock car events in September with midget driver, Ralph Sheeler, Jimmy Stathman, and Tommy Coates taking the wins. In 1950, the stocks ran weekly Wednesday night programs, while the midgets remained the Saturday night headliners. In 1951, Crise moved the modified stock cars to monthly Saturday night appearances and by the following year, the modifieds were the Saturday night attraction and the midgets were banished to a traveling schedule.

Through the rest of the 1950s, modified stock cars were the attraction at Dorney Park with Kutztown's Freddy Adam taking the final modified track championship in 1959 in a season shortened by purse disagreements with promoter, 'Red' Crise. For the remainder of the 1959 season, go-karts were introduced on Sunday afternoons with limited success.

By 1960 Crise was gone, replaced by Jerry Fried, the veteran 'race organizer' on Sunday nights at the Nazareth, PA half mile. Fried experimented with several classes of stock cars to top the program, eventually choosing his limited sportsman division, second on the card to the modifieds at Nazareth. Fried also added a low-cost second division to provide a place for intrepid local young men to learn the ropes in stock car racing. As years went on headliners such as Don Hersh, Bill Lavenburg, Tom Rooney, Bimpy Marx, Norm Behler, Freddy Hamm, Charlie Gilmore, Tony Hirschman, Paul Bauscher, and George Wambold, became household names in the top Sportsman class and the support class went from hobby cars to late models with its own set of heroes.

Jerry Fried remained at the helm of the Dorney Park racing program for 27 seasons (1960-1986) before he had the rug pulled from under him when South Whitehall Twp. filed a suit against Dorney Park for unpaid amusement taxes. Dorney brought a suit of its own against the township for \$610,000 in amusement taxes it claimed to have overpaid since 1980. In the settlement the Park agreed to demolish the track and end all racing at the Park. In return, the Park received a permit for a new roller coaster on the site of the track and the tax ledger was wiped clean. Fried, who had a year left on his contract, sued, but the park immediately tore down the track and began construction of the Hercules coaster. They then slow-walked Fried's suit until Fried died in 1989, making the case moot.

EARHS Fall Open House
Sunday, October 27, 2019

10 am – 5 pm

5080 Kernsville Road, Orefield, PA 18069

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Freddy Adam – The Kutztown Komet

From Freddy's family, friends, and fans



Your monetary support in any denomination or donations of historically significant items, photos, documents, etc. toward projects undertaken by the EARHS are welcomed and encouraged. EARHS is recognized as a federally tax exempt charity by the IRS under Section 501c(3).

EARHS “wants and needs”

Wanted: Racing photo collections – share and preserve programs. If you have vintage racing photos, EARHS would like to be able to scan and copy these items. All items will be returned intact and we can provide you with a computer disc of those items from significant collections.

We are especially interested in Dorney Park items from the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's and all Allentown Fair items, including indoor racing events, but all items are welcome.

Wanted: Showcases and display cases. Often cases of unusual configuration can be used for displays of trophies and memorabilia.

Group tours of the EARHS showroom are available by appointment for civic and auto related groups, car clubs, etc.

Call 610 398-2188 or 610 395-5303 for details.

We continue to fill our showroom—all members are invited to visit and check our progress. Please call Pete Trumbauer (610 398-2188) or Paul Weisel (610 395-5303) to arrange a time to visit.