

HERITAGE IN THE FAST LANE: PRESERVATION POTENTIAL FOR NASCAR
RACETRACKS IN NORTH CAROLINA

by

CARTER ALAN FINCH

(Under the Direction of Cari L. Goetcheus)

ABSTRACT

The State of North Carolina has long been associated with the sport of stock car racing and more notably NASCAR. Nowhere in the state does the sport hold greater significance than in the Piedmont region of the state. Several early NASCAR tracks were located in the Piedmont region, but were eventually removed from the NASCAR schedule for larger, faster, racetracks all across the United States. These North Carolina tracks have been all but lost, despite the fact that they hold a great deal of cultural significance both locally and statewide. This thesis seeks to understand how the preservation of remaining NASCAR tracks in North Carolina can in turn preserve the heritage of stock car racing in the state.

INDEX WORDS: racetracks, stock car racing, stock car, auto racing, motorsports, NASCAR, sports heritage, Piedmont

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CARTER ALAN FINCH
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CARTER ALAN FINCH

Major Professor:	Cari L. Goetcheus
Committee:	Scott Nesbit
	David Spooner
	Daniel S. Pierce

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2019

DEDICATION

To my parents Ken and Dorothy...who always believe in me, even when I don't believe in myself.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

When I was growing up, I watched NASCAR races with my dad on Sunday afternoons. I gained an interest in the sport at a young age and renewed that interest in recent years. I became interested in stock car racing, the history of the sport, and what it means to the Southeast and particularly my home state of North Carolina. I learned that several of the historic race tracks in the Southeast were abandoned and threatened by neglect and possible demolition. I also found that many NASCAR fans consider some of these tracks among the most important that were included on the NASCAR circuit. I became interested in what significance these tracks hold and how they may be preserved and interpreted to preserve the history of stock car racing in North Carolina.

Since the 1930s, stock car racing has been an important part of the cultural heritage of North Carolina. Stock car racing can be defined two ways. The first definition is as follows: racing between automobiles that are comprised of stock parts from the auto manufacturer and have not been altered in any way. Stock car racing quickly changed, however, as modifications were made by drivers and teams. These changes to the sport require a secondary definition which is: any racing between cars that maintain a stock appearance but may not be made up of any actual stock parts.

Stock car racing's highest level, the NASCAR Cup Series, has seen many of its stars come from the state of North Carolina, especially the Piedmont area. Although Daytona, Florida, was the birth place of NASCAR, stock car racing at all levels has found

a home in North Carolina. The majority of NASCAR race teams are headquartered in the Charlotte area, along with several NASCAR offices and the NASCAR Hall of Fame. In 2011, the North Carolina State Legislature passed a bill designating stock car racing as the official sport of North Carolina. There have been hundreds of stock car race tracks built around the state. While many of these dirt and asphalt oval tracks have disappeared, several still remain in one form or another in different states of integrity. Stock car racing was, and still is, important to the cultural heritage of North Carolina even though the popularity of the sport has declined in recent years in terms of participation and viewership.

NASCAR has had a national presence since its inception. The addition of asphalt superspeedways in the 1960s and the sport's growth since the 1970s caused the loss of many stock car tracks in North Carolina that were not only historically significant at the local and state level, but also at the national level. Race tracks such as North Wilkesboro Speedway, a staple on the NASCAR circuit for almost fifty years, are sitting abandoned and in disrepair. Only one of several extant historic NASCAR tracks in North Carolina is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The popularity of the sport has decreased over the last decade, as many sports fans in the Southeast have turned to college football for preferred entertainment, and the average age of stock car racing fans has increased. These factors constitute additional threats to historic stock car racetracks. These race tracks hold an important place in North Carolina history and NASCAR history, and I believe that their cultural significance and historic integrity should be researched and advocated. There is also a need for strategies to preserve these race tracks in a way that focuses on the cultural significance that the tracks had at local, regional,

state and national levels. These tracks played an important role in the social lives of many white, working-class people in mid-century Piedmont communities. The history of the white, working-class, especially in the Piedmont regions, is often undervalued but should be considered a valid, and important area of research. In terms of stock car racing history and cultural significance, as it existed in the mid-century southeast, it was primarily enjoyed by the white, working-class. Minorities have never had a strong presence in the sport in the southeast, however, there was never a formal segregation of the sport. The lack of minorities in stock car racing has historically been a product of culture rather than a strict enforcement of a color-barrier. NASCAR as an entity allowed Wendell Scott, an African-American driver to compete as early as 1961 and has allowed women drivers since its inception.¹

Considering these thoughts helped me to formulate the following research question:

How can the preservation of racetracks in the Piedmont region of North Carolina be used to interpret the cultural significance of stock car racing in the region?

Methodology

In general, my method to answer the research question is to undertake background research, identify case study sites, visit and study those sites, present and analyze my findings, and develop some proposals for preservation. My research will cover the early history of auto racing in the United States, the history of stock car racing and stock car

¹ Daniel S. Pierce, *Real NASCAR: White Lightning, Red Clay, and Big Bill France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 238-239.

race tracks (specifically NASCAR), and the history and culture of the Piedmont region of North Carolina. From researching the history of the stock car racing I hope to identify the typical built and landscape features of early stock car tracks in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. Once I identify key features broadly concerning early stock car tracks, I will visit and document conditions at five case study sites and confirm key features extant from the period of 1940 to 1960. I will then assess their significance and integrity per the nomination standards for the National Register of Historic Places, evaluate any present preservation efforts, and propose strategies for future preservation including physical preservation and interpretation.

I will conduct research within the Appalachian State Stock Car Racing Collection in their special collections library, the Save the Speedway, Inc. Collection, the Ayr Mount Collection, and through interviews with experts in the field of NASCAR history, site managers, track historians, and former NASCAR drivers. The collections contain photographs and newspaper articles relevant to stock car racing and racetracks overall, as well as photographs and newspaper articles specific to each track. Some of the articles are from NASCAR and auto racing-specific publications, while others are from local newspapers that covered racing. I will speak with Dr. Daniel Pierce at the University of North Carolina-Asheville who specializes in stock car racing history. I will also meet with the track historian at North Wilkesboro Speedway, Steven Wilson, the historian at Oconeechee-Orange Speedway, Lavergne Zachary, and the site managers at each of the case study sites. I will also speak with NASCAR Hall of Famer and driver Ned Jarrett, who is from the Piedmont region of North Carolina and was a NASCAR driver during the 1950s and 1960s.

Research Inclusions and Exclusions

I will be focusing on oval race tracks built between 1940 and 1960 that were constructed specifically for stock car racing. The tracks that I am focusing on in my research are all in the Piedmont to Appalachian regions of North Carolina. Though the most important area geographically for stock car racing in the Southeast was the Piedmont region, several locations which are technically in the Appalachian region took on many of the same economic, demographic, and cultural characteristics as the locations of tracks in the Piedmont. The sites focused on in my research are tracks that were important assets to the communities in which they were located and an important part of the cultural fabric. The race tracks included in my research were not asphalt superspeedways that became popular in the 1960s. These are tracks originally constructed out of the red clay in the region in the 1940s and 1950s. Often connected with men in the illegal liquor business, these tracks were integral to forming NASCAR into the nationalized sport that it would later become, but were left behind by the sport when it reached its pinnacle. The sites focused on in this research have a strong connection to the history of the sport, the communities in which they are located, and to the demographic of people who congregated there.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. Following the introduction, Chapter 2 focuses on the culture of the Piedmont region, early history of auto racing in the United States, early history of stock car racing in the United States, history of stock car tracks in

the Piedmont and the history of NASCAR. Chapter 3 will give an overview of historic preservation concepts and review previous National Register nominations that were written for auto racing venues. Chapter 4 contains descriptions, existing conditions, and assessment of the five case study sites. Chapter 5 presents the findings and contains an analysis of those findings including preservation strategies and proposals for case study sites and stock car tracks overall. Chapter 6 contains the conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

This chapter will introduce background topical information the reader needs to understand the case studies in Chapter 3 and the analysis and conclusions in Chapters 4 & 5. It provides an introduction to the people and culture of North Carolina in the early- to mid-1900s that produced conditions for stock car racing to become a major focus of attention, attraction and recreation. It also provides an introduction to the development of NASCAR and stock car racing as a sport. This background information provides the context to the potential preservation of stock car race tracks which is discussed in later chapters.

People and Culture in the North Carolina Piedmont

Stock car racing found a home in the Southeastern United States, particularly in the Piedmont regions of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. The Piedmont region can best be described geographically and physiographically as follows:

[The] geographic region in the eastern United States, running some 600 miles (950 km) between New Jersey (north) and Alabama (south) and lying between the Appalachian Mountains (west) and the Atlantic Coastal Plain (east). It comprises a relatively low rolling plateau (from 300 to 1,800 feet [90 to 550 m]) cut by many rivers and is a fertile agricultural region.²

² The Editors of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Piedmont: Region, United States", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed March 2, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Piedmont-region>.



Figure 1 Map of the Piedmont Region
(<http://www.hiltonpond.org/piedmontmain.html>)

It is important to note, however, that the physiographic region does not take into account the cultural, demographic, and economic aspects of the regions which often may bleed over into other regions, specifically the Appalachian region.

The rise and popularity of stock car racing in the Southeast, and especially the Piedmont region of North Carolina, is often attributed to moonshining. Author Scott Beekman, argues in *NASCAR Nation*, that there were actually several factors that led to the rise and popularity of the sport in the region. According to Beekman, the moonshiners and bootleggers only played a significant role in the sport from the 1930s to the 1950s. An underlying factor was the major sports of the early 20th century, mainly baseball and boxing, were not easily accessible to Southerners. Although southerners could follow the sports through news, they did not have the opportunity to watch or

participate first hand because major league baseball teams (professional baseball being the most popular major sport at the time) did not see the benefit of relocating or starting a franchise in the sparsely populated Southeast preferring to remain in the North. Even when auto racing became a popular sport, the major sanctioning bodies largely ignored the Southeast as a venue.³

Stock car racing is often considered a southern sport, but it was not popular across the entire Southeast region. According to Dr. Daniel Pierce, who has focused a great deal of his research on the Piedmont and Appalachian regions of North Carolina, stock car racing was most popular in the Piedmont region of the Southeast. This is considered to be the “cultural hearth” of stock car racing due to the concentration of drivers and fans. Pierce argues that the people and culture of the Piedmont region was a major factor in stock car racing’s popularity in the region.⁴ Beekman, who describes cultural values and ideals of manhood in the South, has concurrence by Pierce who confirms that many old ideals were carried over from the late 19th and early 20th century. Many of the past times important in the Piedmont South were connected to the idea of being a real man. The image that Pierce uses to describe these men is the “hell of a fellow” ideal that was developed in literature and culture in the early to mid-20th century. Pierce notes that W.J. Cash developed the term “hell of a fellow” to describe the poor whites that took on this persona often as a way to establish a male identity.⁵ In his book, *Mind of the South*, Cash describes the “hell of a fellow” as follows:

³ Scott Beekman, *NASCAR Nation: A History of Stock Car Racing in the United States* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), xi, 1-6.

⁴ Dan Pierce, “Bib Overalls and Bad Teeth: The Southern Piedmont Working-Class Roots of NASCAR,” *Atlanta History: A Journal of Georgia and the South* 46, no. 2 (July 2004): 28-29.

⁵ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 21-23.

To stand on his head in a bar, to toss down a pint of raw whisky at a gulp, to fiddle and dance all night, bit off the nose or gouge out the eye of a favorite enemy, to fight harder and love harder than the next man, to be known eventually far and wide as a hell of a fellow—such would be his focus.⁶

In turn, sports became the outlet through which men displayed and tested their manhood.⁷ Pierce's argument is closely related to Beekman's who also described sports as a proving ground for men in the 19th and early 20th century throughout the rural South.

Pete Daniel notes similar patterns in his book. While he is speaking more broadly about the southern working-class men in the mid-20th century, the same ideals he writes about seem to have been prevalent in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. He notes that while the post-war years in the South brought about changes among the white working-class southerners and changed their ideals to more closely resemble those of the middle and upper classes, there was still a significant portion of the population that remained unrefined. They were thought of by those who were of higher social status to be "white trash". Daniel writes that "the middle class and elite aspired to more polished behavior and habits, attended less fundamentalist churches, often sent their children to college, and sneered at country music, blues, stock car racing, wrestling and other enthusiasms of the vulgus."⁸ He goes on to say the following concerning the culture of working-class southerners:

"Still, a large element of black and white southerners remained untamed, ignoring conformist pressure to acquit themselves in a way that made respectable people comfortable. Black and white musicians, stock car drivers, and their fans were on the cutting edge of wildness. In the dense, loud sexually-charged dance halls and the wild and frenzied infields and

⁶ W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), 52.

⁷ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 21-23.

⁸ Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s*, Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press for Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C, 2000), 92-93.

grandstands at stock car races, southerners found the space to reclaim their wildness.”⁹

Daniel and Pierce both quote Rick Bragg from his book *All Over But the Shoutin’* in which Bragg states about poor white southern men,

“It was common and acceptable not to be able to read, but a man who wouldn’t fight, couldn’t fight, was a pathetic thing.” He also stated that he learned from his working-class relatives “much of what a boy should know, of cars, pistols, heavy machinery, shotguns, and love, all of which, these men apparently believed could be operated stone drunk.”¹⁰

Economics and industry also played a role in forming the working-class culture of the Piedmont Southeast. Manufacturing jobs and moonshining were two important industries which had profound effects on the people living in the region and on the popularity of stock car racing. After the Civil War (the late 19th and the early 20th century) small family farms in the Piedmont region could no longer financially sustain families, so people turned to manufacturing jobs in the larger cities which provided a slightly better standard of living. However, moving to cities to work in factories, away from the rural family farm, came at the cost of losing individual freedoms. Some who stayed on farms began the illegal manufacture of moonshine as a source of revenue, because it was one of the few lucrative ways to make money and not work in a mill.¹¹ Moonshining in the Piedmont and Appalachian regions of the Southeast grew to an industrial scale. Many of these early moonshiners were located in North Carolina, particularly in Wilkes County, (future home of North Wilkesboro Speedway), where a

⁹ Ibid, 93.

¹⁰ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 28.; Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 93.; Rick Bragg, *All Over but the Shoutin’* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 58.

¹¹ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 14-16.

large still—known as the “Wilkes-type”—produced hundreds of gallons of whiskey at a time.¹²

Junior Johnson, moonshine runner and 1930s/1940s NASCAR driver stated the following concerning his father and growing up in the Piedmont:

“When I was a boy, the economic conditions didn’t matter to me, because I wasn’t trying to survive. My father was in the moonshine business. He was one of the few around in this community who had money and could do more than some of the other people could do who didn’t have a way of making money. He was willing to gamble on being arrested for making moonshine in order to support his family in a more realistic fashion than some of the other people were.”¹³

Ned Jarrett, former 1950s NASCAR driver, stated that during his time as a driver, many of the people involved with the sport were also involved in the moonshine business, or sometimes the bonded whiskey business. Grafton Burgess, one of the founders of Hickory Motor Speedway, was involved in the bonded whiskey business which involved buying large quantities of whiskey where it was available and selling it in the dry counties of North Carolina.¹⁴

The connection between the illegal liquor business and stock car racing was not exclusive to track owners such as Burgess. Several of the early drivers were involved in the illegal liquor business as well. This was a prevalent source of income for many working-class Piedmont families since it produced more income than working in the mills or furniture factories. In order to transport, or “run”, moonshine from the place of manufacture to the point of sale, it was necessary to have skilled drivers with fast cars.

¹² Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 16.

¹³ Peter Golenbock, *American Zoom: Stock Car Racing from the Dirt Tracks to Daytona* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1993), 19.

¹⁴ Ned Jarrett, Interview by Author, Digital Recording, Newton, NC, January 4, 2019.

As with the early stock car challenges on back roads, these cars had a stock appearance, but had significant modifications to make them drive faster and handle better on the hilly and winding Appalachian and Piedmont roads. The car had to be able to outrun law enforcement and handle well enough to protect the moonshine aboard the vehicle. The drivers who transported the moonshine developed superb driving skills that enabled them to escape law enforcement. Deliveries of moonshine often took place at night. As the federal government began to more heavily enforce the manufacture and sale of untaxed liquor in the 1940s, the government sent a force of federal revenue agents to the Piedmont and Appalachian regions of the Southeast. The agents were often referred to by locals as “revenuers.” The skills learned running moonshine on back roads often developed into skills necessary to be a good stock car driver.¹⁵ Dr. Daniel Pierce states that many of the early stock car races were challenges on back roads between moonshine runners who wanted to see who had the fastest car.¹⁶

The illegal liquor business left a definitive mark on stock car racing and contributed significantly to the early history of the sport. Some of the early drivers who also ran moonshine before or during their careers as drivers include stars such as Junior Johnson, the Flock brothers (Tim, Bob, and Fonty), and Buddy Shuman. Junior Johnson was able to do things in a stock car that other drivers, who did not run moonshine, could not do, such as driving through turns on a dirt track without slowing down, known as a “power slide”.¹⁷

¹⁵ Robert G. Hagstrom, *The NASCAR Way: The Business that Drives the Sport* (New York: Wiley, 1998), 21-23.

¹⁶ Daniel S. Pierce, Interview by Author, Digital Recording, Asheville, NC, November 19, 2018.

¹⁷ Hagstrom, *The NASCAR Way*, 23-24.

Manufacturing jobs also played a large role in the Piedmont working-class culture and the early development of stock car racing. Factory jobs changed the everyday lives of people who no longer enjoyed the freedom they had on their farms.¹⁸ The majority of men living in the Piedmont South in the mid-20th century either worked in textile mills, furniture factories or tobacco processing plants. These men were not accustomed to being under the tight control of mill and factory owners. While this led many to get involved in the illegal moonshine business, others worked in factories with no union to support the workers. NASCAR driver Benny Parsons stated, “Trust me, there was nothing to do in the mountains of North Carolina back in the 30s, 40s and 50s. You either worked in a hosiery mill, a furniture factory, or you made whiskey.” Pierce argues that stock car racing offered an escape for these men from the realities of a working-class life in the Piedmont South.¹⁹ Many of these men had left behind a life of significant freedom as farmers to work in the crowded and noisy mills and live in mill villages which were also supervised by the mill owners. They were no longer able to pursue their traditional recreational activities such as fighting, drinking, and hunting and had abandoned those old practices in favor of better paying jobs. However, these men needed to find an outlet for recreation and entertainment. Stock car racing proved to be the perfect replacement in the post-WWII era.²⁰

With the decline of rural life and the migration of blacks and whites to cities in the North and South, lowdown culture relocated and evolved. Whatever their misgivings about being uprooted, migrants to cities found jobs, housing, and opportunities that infused them with optimism. Having worked outdoors in

¹⁸ Ibid, 14-16.

¹⁹ Daniel Pierce, “The Most Southern Sport on Earth: NASCAR and the Unions” in Eveleigh, Lisa, *Southern Cultures: The Fifteenth Anniversary Reader*, edited by Harry L. Watson, and Larry J. Griffin, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), accessed October 21, 2018, ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ugalib/detail.action?docID=361360> , 410-412.

²⁰ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 14-15.

harmony with the seasons most of their lives, they resented confining hourly jobs that demanded discipline and regularity. Each day they faced the whip, chair, and pistol of corporate management that punished them for displaying any residue of wildness. They chafed at punching a time clock and other constraints that challenged their will, and they longed for escape not retribution.²¹

Stock car racing finally gave working class white Southern men the change to demonstrate their honor and masculinity in a democratic public cultural endeavor. Working class stock car drivers competed not just among themselves, as they had previously in horse racing, but with the entire community. Success among peers, and potentially social betters as well, on the track gave these men both status and a public voice.²²

Ned Jarrett stated the following concerning stock car racing and the entertainment it provided for him and his family:

When I was young, my dad took me to races at North Wilkesboro and to the dirt tracks at Charlotte, it was a lot of fun and I think that is what drew my attention to the sport. My dad was not a driver or involved in racing. We just enjoyed going for the entertainment. My family was in farming and saw-milling in Catawba County. We were making a decent living, but being young, I didn't see myself working on the farm or in the sawmill.²³

While stock car racing has had a presence all over the United States throughout its history, it thrived in the Piedmont region of the Southeast. The popularity of the sport in this region is understandable considering the cultural factors of the Piedmont working-class people in the early- to mid-20th century. Stock car racing has a long and often complicated history, much of which is connected to the Piedmont working-class people and culture.

²¹ Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 93.

²² Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 26.

²³ W.D. Washburn, *Hickory Motor Speedway: The World's Most Famous Short Track* (Hickory, NC: Tarheel Press, 2003), 29.

Brief History of Stock Car Racing and Development of NASCAR

The history of stock car racing and auto racing, in general, is unclear at best. It can be assumed that informal racing took place once cars were introduced to the public in the late 1800's. While stock car racing took place as early as 1895, the stock car racing we think of today did not get its start until the 1930s.²⁴ The following is a brief history of auto racing, stock car racing, and the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR), and is intended to provide the reader with broad background information to assist in understanding the significance of stock car racing and the race tracks that are the subject of this thesis. In no way is this brief history intended to give an extensive history of auto racing in the United States, as it does not highlight every important event in auto racing history.

Prehistory and Beginning of Auto Racing

The first auto race in the United States is reported to have been run in Chicago in 1895 with six contestants.²⁵ The race was from Chicago to the city of Evanston, Illinois, and was won by a car manufacturer by the name of Frank Duryea.²⁶ Auto racing increased as manufacturers and racers focused on speed records.²⁷

From the 1890s to the 1920s the elite classes in the United States controlled auto racing, as they financed the teams and the cars being raced.²⁸ Auto racing was considered a gentleman's sport and hobby for those who were wealthy enough to afford

²⁴ Claude Milot, "Racing and Motor: The Early Years", *MOTOR*, March 2003, https://www.motor.com/magazinepdfs/032003_04.pdf.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 6.

²⁷ Milot, "Racing and Motor."

²⁸ Don Radbruch, *Dirt Track Auto Racing, 1919-1941: A Pictorial History*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., Inc. Publishers, 2004), 5.

to modify cars to race, the standard practice. At the turn of the century, upper classes, mostly in the North, began to fund auto racing competitions that rivaled auto racing in Europe with races such as the Vanderbilt Cup, first hosted in 1904 by William Kissam Vanderbilt II. Vanderbilt's race was meant to be an American version of the road races that took place in France. The Vanderbilt Cup was sanctioned by the American Automobile Association (AAA) which controlled and sanctioned almost all auto racing in the United States in the early 20th century.²⁹ The AAA was established in 1902 and based in Chicago in the early years of the organization. While the organization was created as a platform for promoting car ownership and safer, improved roads, the AAA also sanctioned auto racing. The AAA held tight control over drivers and car owners and even punished drivers who competed in non-sanctioned events. The AAA monopolized early auto racing, making it impossible to set speed or endurance records outside of its sanctioned events. Aside from the AAA, other associations arose and hosted racing events such as the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) and the Central States Racing Association (CSRA). . The most popular form of racing that emerged from the early years of auto racing was open-wheel racing, in which expensive purpose-built race cars were built and driven by well-funded teams and elite drivers. The earliest of the sanctioned auto races involved stock cars. By 1909 these were completely replaced by either heavily modified production cars or purpose-built racers.³⁰

Racing in these early years in the U.S. was not only controlled by the elite classes and the AAA but also by elite auto manufacturers. Auto races in the early 20th century

²⁹ Robert Dick, *Auto Racing Comes of Age: A Transatlantic View of the Cars, Drivers, and Speedways, 1900-1925*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., Inc. Publishers, 2013), 14-20.

³⁰ Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 7-8; Radbruch, *Dirt Track Auto Racing*, 5-7.

were dominated by European cars such as Fiat, Daimler Mercedes, Panhard, and the like. These cars were imported by New York auto importers who often imported European cars built specifically for racing.³¹ The auto manufacturers saw racing as a way to promote their products. Founders of auto manufacturing companies, such as Henry Ford, often drove cars in the races to give a first-hand demonstration that their product was superior.³²

While races such as the Vanderbilt Cup were important to the establishment of auto racing in the United States, those races were run on public roads, which could be costly in terms of car damage and dangerous due to generally poor road conditions of the era. In 1909, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway was constructed as the first track purpose-built for auto racing.³³ Early auto racing oval tracks that emerged were mostly horse tracks that were slightly altered for auto racing because they were large enough and had space for paying spectators to sit and watch the races. Many of these early tracks were in the North, primarily in New York, since large cities could draw large crowds of paying spectators.³⁴ Some horse track owners who continued to host horse races would also host auto racing events between horse races. These already extant dirt ovals helped to promote the sport of auto racing across the nation. The spread of oval track racing continued when the AAA stopped sanctioning road racing events in 1916 and race promoters began looking for ovals. They found horse tracks to be most amenable to their needs. As many states also began to place heavy restrictions on gambling at horse

³¹ Dick, *Auto Racing Comes of Age*, 41.

³² Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 6-7.

³³ *Ibid*, 7.

³⁴ Milot, "Racing and Motor."

tracks, the owners of the tracks needed to find another way to make a profit. They found auto racing to be a suitable replacement and business opportunity.³⁵

Early racing events in the Southeast were mostly events for the elite. Many of these races around the turn of the century were connected to the Good Roads Movement, which promoted safe and improved roads, particularly in the Southeast, where many roads outside of town and city limits were often in extremely poor condition.³⁶

The AAA and IMCA would occasionally host events in the Southeast. There are some documented cases of racing in Florida as early as 1903, particularly in the Daytona and Ormond Beach areas.³⁷ Savannah, Georgia, was another site of elite auto racing events before 1920. The Vanderbilt Cup, mentioned earlier, was typically held in New York. It was moved to Savannah in 1911.³⁸ North Carolina has no known record of auto racing until 1921 at the Kinston Fairgrounds in eastern North Carolina.³⁹ An early attempt to bring racing to North Carolina was the construction of a one-mile pinewood track in Pineville, North Carolina, by Osmond Long Barringer, Sr., in 1924.⁴⁰ Racing in Charlotte, now the home of nearly all NASCAR teams, took place first in 1926 at the Southern States Fairgrounds. The AAA held events in Charlotte in the 1930's and 1940's. Racing also took place in Greensboro, Raleigh, Rocky Mount and Wilmington. South Carolina held several events in the 1930s.⁴¹ In addition to the Carolinas and Georgia, events were held in New Orleans and Galveston, Texas. Racing in the

³⁵ Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 6-8.

³⁶ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 31.

³⁷ Radbruch, *Dirt Track Auto Racing*, 248-249.

³⁸ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 31.

³⁹ Radbruch, *Dirt Track Auto Racing*, 248-249.

⁴⁰ Jay Mazzocchi, "Auto Racing", NCPedia, accessed January 27, 2019, <https://www.ncpedia.org/auto-racing>.

⁴¹ Radbruch, *Dirt Track Auto Racing*, 248-249.

Southeast, however, declined sharply with the Great Depression and did not rise again until the mid-1930's.

When stock car racing emerged as a popular form of motorsport in the Southeast, it did not have competition from open-wheel racing (purpose-built race cars with no fenders). These remained popular in the aforementioned regions because most southerners did not have exposure to open-wheel racing or the funds to participate in it.⁴² In addition to the AAA and IMCA largely ignoring the Southeast in terms of venues, auto racing was not as popular among the general population of the Southeast because automobiles did not become affordable or accessible to working and middle-class families as quickly as they did in the Northeast and Midwest.⁴³

Stock Car Racing History 1930-1970

Early Dirt Track Racing

While purpose-built race cars dominated racing in the United States until the 1940s, some stock car racing did take place in the Southeast. The majority of stock car races that took place in the 1920s was not controlled by sanctioning bodies such as the AAA and IMCA, due to the belief among elite racing organizations that stock car racing was a less respectable form of racing. Early stock car races were often challenges between automobile owners on country roads and although these cars maintained a stock appearance, the drivers made significant alterations to the cars to make them handle better and drive faster. While the AAA and IMCA excluded stock car racing, stock car

⁴² Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 8.

⁴³ Mazzochi, "Auto Racing."

racing in the Southeast, especially in the 1930s, provided a way for middle and working-class whites to participate in auto racing.⁴⁴

As the popularity of stock car racing grew in the Southeast, some horse tracks were converted into auto racing tracks. In the 1940s, dirt tracks began to spring up all over the Southeast, especially in the Carolinas. The 1950s saw a large increase in number of dirt tracks in communities since they were not difficult for track owners to build.⁴⁵ Dr.

Daniel Pierce, Professor of History at University of North Carolina-Asheville, author of the book *Real NASCAR*, and an expert in the area of Piedmont stock car racing, states that due to the surplus of military construction equipment after WWII, earth moving and construction equipment was cheap and could be easily obtained by aspiring track owners and promoters.⁴⁶ Deb Williams states the following concerning these tracks in her book,

Charlotte Motor Speedway History: From Granite to Gold:

“It wasn’t uncommon for entrepreneurial men, who were never short on money-making ideas, to take a bulldozer and move dirt around in a field to form a crude, small track, where cars – or jalopies, as they were often called – could rumble around and beat and bang on each other to the delight of the crowd. Clapboard fences would quickly be erected and a turnstile for ticket takers installed. Some of these quickly built community tracks lasted only a season, while others survived for several years.”⁴⁷

Ned Jarrett, two-time NASCAR Grand National Series champion and NASCAR Hall-of-Fame driver from the Piedmont, gave a similar explanation for these early tracks stating that businessmen trying to make money would often “push out a track” with a bulldozer. According to Jarrett, many of these early racetracks did not survive long.

⁴⁴ Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 21-26.

⁴⁵ Deb Williams, *Charlotte Motor Speedway History: From Granite to Gold* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2013), 13.

⁴⁶ Pierce, Interview by Author.

⁴⁷ Williams, *Charlotte Motor Speedway History*, 13.

Jarrett stated that “there was not much engineering or a big investment made in those race tracks.”⁴⁸

Pierce states that the early success of stock car racing can be attributed to the participation of “charismatic liquor haulers,” exciting races, and the efforts of race and track promoters. Race promoters in the 1930s worked hard to bring in fans and used several strategies for doing so, such as paying off newspapers to promote the race in local papers, or adding additional attractions such as boxing matches and beauty contests. Many of these races were promoted as championship races, even though there was no points system or sanctioning body to determine a champion. The promoters also commonly used the inherent danger of the sport as a selling point.⁴⁹

Founding of NASCAR and Early Years

William (Bill) Henry Getty France, the founder of NASCAR, was originally from the Washington, D.C. area but eventually settled in Daytona Beach, Florida, with his wife in 1934 in order to continue his work as an auto mechanic and pursue his interest in racing. In Florida, he first opened a gas station that ultimately became a gathering place for local race car drivers and mechanics.⁵⁰

The Daytona area had long been a hub for racing, especially land speed records. As the popularity of Daytona Beach with land speed record drivers diminished, city officials began to search for a new way to attract drivers and fans to the area. Bill France was approached to help promote a race in 1938 because of his strong connections to the

⁴⁸ Jarrett, Interview by Author.

⁴⁹ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 59-61.

⁵⁰ Hagstrom, *The NASCAR Way*, 24-25.

racing and auto mechanic community in Daytona. France and his financial backer, Charlie Reese, held a Fourth of July race on the beach in 1938. The success of this event led to an additional event in 1939 which was also a success. World War II put France's race promoting career on hold. After the war, France continued to attempt to organize stock car racing.⁵¹

France focused more heavily on race promotion after the World War II. Many of the drivers France had competed against at Daytona were back from the war and needed some form of entertainment. During his time as a driver and promoter before the war, France had met several men from the Piedmont areas of the Southeast. Many of these men were involved in the illegal liquor business and would become some of France's closest business partners and prove invaluable to the beginning of NASCAR.⁵²

Stock car racing outside of Florida was heavily concentrated in the Atlanta, Georgia, area after World War II. The men in the Piedmont areas, as mentioned earlier, had returned from the war and needed an outlet for entertainment and dangerous thrills. Many of the drivers were involved in the moonshine business in the North Georgia mountains, and many had criminal records. The congregation of these men and their fans, who were considered among the lower class of southern whites, were not welcome in the Atlanta area. The auto races of the late 1940s were halted by Atlanta officials and religious leaders who hoped to rid Atlanta of the immorality they believed pervaded everyday society among post-war, lower class, white southerners. Daniel L. Pierce, concludes in his work, *Real NASCAR: White Lightning, Red Clay and Big Bill France*, that the hiatus of stock car racing in the Atlanta area allowed for the Piedmont region of

⁵¹ Ibid, 26-27.

⁵² Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 67-74.

North Carolina and South Carolina to become a major center of stock car racing in the 1940s and 1950s as the people in this region were much more tolerant of the perceived immorality of lower-class southern whites. Bill France recognized the opportunity available for stock car racing in the Piedmont region of North Carolina and began to organize and promote races there in 1945. When he returned to Daytona to revive his annual beach race, several of the men who raced in his Piedmont races came to Daytona as well.⁵³ Although stock car racing was already popular in the Piedmont region of North Carolina, Pierce's conclusion helps to explain why North Carolina, and especially the Piedmont region, became the unofficial home of stock car racing and has such strong cultural ties to the sport.

One of Bill France's earliest attempts to sanction stock car racing came in 1946 with the National Championship Stock Car Circuit (NCSCC) which was focused more on traveling the country and racing at a greater number of tracks.⁵⁴ His attempts in 1946 were made up of individual races in Charlotte and Greensboro in North Carolina, Daytona and Orlando in Florida, and Greenville, South Carolina. France worked to try to convince the AAA to sanction his races in 1946. His attempts were unsuccessful. He established the NCSCC in the summer of 1946. Under this organization, France attempted to set up rules and regulations for stock car racing which were not particularly successful.⁵⁵ The 1947 season was the first full season of this new organization. This early attempt to sanction stock car races was in response to France's inability to convince

⁵³ Ibid, 69-77.

⁵⁴ Eddie Samples, "NSCRA...Rise and Fall", *Georgia Automobile Racing Hall of Fame Association* 2, no. 1 (March 1999): 7 (Accessed through the Stock Car Racing Collection at the Appalachian State University Special Collections at Belk Library).

⁵⁵ Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 32-33.

the AAA to sanction a stock car race at the old Charlotte Speedway, a one-mile dirt track in Charlotte, NC. France planned for his new organization to sponsor a race once every month at a different location, therefore creating a stock car racing circuit.⁵⁶ These races were spread out across the Southeast from Virginia to Florida and as far west as Alabama. Three races were held outside of the Southeast including one in Rhode Island, one in Pennsylvania and one in New Jersey.⁵⁷ The drivers who competed on this circuit would earn points based on their race results and a champion would be determined. Georgia native, Fonty Flock, was the 1947 NCSCC Champion, and a purse of \$3,000 was divided among the top finishers for the season.⁵⁸ In this first full season, France tried to distinguish himself from other promoters by adding more races to the schedule including a wildly popular and successful race at the newly opened North Wilkesboro Speedway owned by Enoch Staley.⁵⁹

This first full season of sanctioned stock car racing under the NCSCC would prove that stock car racing needed tighter rules and regulations if it was going to succeed. While France had some control over drivers and race rules, there was no control over dishonest track owners and promoters who often failed to pay winnings to drivers. France wanted stock car racing to be controlled under one organization with enforceable rules and regulations that created fair and competitive racing. This would lead to the establishment of the National Association of Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) in 1947.⁶⁰ Speaking of the unorganized sport in the 1940s, France once stated, “There were

⁵⁶ Hagstrom, *The NASCAR Way*, 27-28.

⁵⁷ “National Championship Stock Car Circuit”, Auto Racing Research Associates, accessed January 27, 2019, <https://sites.google.com/site/arradocumentingracinghistory/home/national-championship-stock-car-circuit>).

⁵⁸ Hagstrom, *The NASCAR Way*, 27-28.

⁵⁹ Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 33-34.

⁶⁰ Hagstrom, *The NASCAR Way*, 28-29.

no uniform rules or anyone who could make and enforce them. The only way a stock car race or driver could get recognition was to have someone break a neck.”⁶¹

Although the AAA was initially unwilling to sanction stock car races when approached by France in 1946 and 1947, AAA began to sanction races in the 1947 season. This spurred many independent promoters to promote more races and was possibly one impetus for France holding the meeting at Daytona Beach in 1947 to establish the NASCAR.⁶²

The meeting that France organized at Daytona Beach in December 1947 was the second of annual meetings that France organized among track owners and promoters of stock car racing. France and other promoters, such as Bill Tuthill, realized that the most viable way for stock car racing organizations not affiliated with the AAA to survive was to join together as one organization. The main issue this group faced was that several promoters with bad reputations created a general distrust of promoters among drivers and damaged the image of stock car racing.⁶³

“If a sanctioning body with several promoters could establish itself as an honest broker, it would instill loyalty in drivers and help bring more fans to the track. Further, by creating a unified body of rules, especially those related to car modifications, such an organization could expand the geographical range of drivers, who often ran only on tracks they were familiar with out of fear of having their cars ruled ineligible at new ones. With the best drivers willing to travel to additional tracks, promoters could assure fans they would see the finest stock car racing possible. Such a system would also lend validity to claims of crowning a “national” champion”.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Joe Dowdall, “Bill France: He Rules NASCAR with an Iron Hand”, *Auto Racing Digest* 8, no. 2 (March 1980): 40.

⁶² Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 35.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 35.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 35.

France and others at the meeting set out to establish a sanctioning body based on the above ideas and did so through establishing strict rules for drivers. The following principles summarize the result of the meeting: establish a strong authority in the sport, pay more drivers in each race, prohibit drivers from competing in other series, ensure equal specifications for each car entered in a race, and ensure funds for driver bonuses and a national championship purse.⁶⁵

France incorporated NASCAR on February 18, 1948. He was named president of the organization and William Tuthill was appointed secretary. While the principles that France founded NASCAR on are well-documented, Betty Boles Ellison, author of *The Early Laps of Stock Car Racing*, found that the organization was set up as a corporation with only France and his lawyer having knowledge of the exact corporate structure. France was adamant that NASCAR was in the entertainment business, not in the business of testing for auto manufacturers as other stock car racing series often were. The incorporation document for NASCAR stated the following concerning NASCAR's function and purpose:

“To engage in the advancement of automobile racing in all its branches; to sanction and supervise auto racing in all its branches. To promote auto racing. To hold or arrange auto races and other matches and competitions and offer and grant or contribute toward provision of prizes, awards, and distinctions.”⁶⁶

The meeting that officially established NASCAR in December, 1947, was not the first meeting of its kind that year. Earlier in the year, France met with Enoch Staley, owner and founder of North Wilkesboro Speedway, and several other track owners, who

⁶⁵ Betty Boles Ellison, *The Early Laps of Stock Car Racing: A History of the Sport and Business Through 1974*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., Inc. Publishers, 2014), 51-52.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 53 (From NASCAR Incorporation Document).

would in turn come to Daytona to discuss the future of stock car racing. The meeting was held after a race at North Wilkesboro at the Hotel Wilkes. Staley was a close friend of France and was heavily involved in the establishment of NASCAR. He was unable to attend the December meeting in Daytona due to illness.⁶⁷

France believed that racing with true stock cars would draw fans in who wanted to see common automobiles available to the average fan. While this was his ultimate goal with NASCAR, the first season sanctioned by NASCAR would be made up of races with modified cars. These modified cars were what were typically raced in “stock car” races at the time. They were heavily modified from their original stock function and appearance to drive faster and handle more efficiently. As most of the drivers at the time only had modified race cars, it was much easier to lure drivers during the initial 1948 season by allowing the use of modified stock cars.⁶⁸ Auto manufacturers were slow to catch up to consumer demand in the years immediately following WWII, so cars designed for the purpose of racing were not readily available to be purchased. .⁶⁹

Ellison points out in her book that the first race of the 1948 season was not officially under NASCAR as it had not yet been incorporated. It may have operated under rules from France’s former sanctioning body, the NCSCC. However, this is often considered the first NASCAR race. The race was held on February 15, 1948, on the newly constructed Daytona Beach Road course. It was a 2.2-mile track made up of the beach and Route A1A in Daytona. The old beach course had closed due to new

⁶⁷ Steven Wilson and Paul Call, Interview by Author, Digital Recording, North Wilkesboro, NC, December 8, 2018.

⁶⁸ Ellison, *The Early Laps of Stock Car Racing*, 56-57, 63.

⁶⁹ Hagstrom, *The NASCAR Way*, 30.

development in the area. Fifty-six modified cars entered the first race, and only twelve finished with Red Byron coming in first.⁷⁰

The 1948 season officially began on April 11, 1948, at Lakeview Speedway near Lexington, North Carolina. Three races took place that week in the Piedmont area of North Carolina with races in Lexington, Greensboro, and North Wilkesboro. France continued to promote races throughout 1948 at various locations, sometimes promoting NASCAR races at two different tracks on the same day.⁷¹

Although modified cars were the first cars raced under the new organization in 1948, the Strictly Stock Division became what NASCAR is known for today. The Strictly Stock Division began racing officially in 1949 at Charlotte Speedway, a three-quarter mile dirt track in Charlotte, North Carolina. This series, as France had envisioned it, was comprised of races between full-sized American cars that had standard parts which could be found in the manufacturer's parts catalogs. The first Strictly Stock race in Charlotte was initially won by Glenn Dunnaway. Upon inspection of his car after the race, NASCAR officials found that his rear suspension was illegally modified and the win went to second place finisher, Jim Roper. This set the precedent that NASCAR would enforce the rules of its races, and strengthen the connection to actual "stock" cars. NASCAR sanctioned eight races in total during the first season of the Strictly Stock Division with Red Byron emerging as the series champion.⁷² The eight races sanctioned in the 1949 season were at the following tracks: Charlotte Speedway (NC), Daytona Beach and Road Course (FL), Occoneechee Speedway (NC), Langhorne Speedway (PA),

⁷⁰ Ellison, *The Early Laps of Stock Car Racing*, 56-57.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 58-59.

⁷² Hagstrom, *The NASCAR Way*, 30-31.

Hamburg Speedway (NY), Martinsville Speedway (VA), Heidelberg Raceway (PA), and North Wilkesboro Speedway (NC). Four of these eight races were held in the Piedmont region of the Southeast with three of these four taking place in North Carolina. There were six race winners in 1949, four of which were from the Piedmont or mountain regions of the Southeast. Six of the eight races were won by drivers from the Piedmont or mountain regions of the Southeast.⁷³

The 1949 season was an important season for NASCAR and stock car racing in general. This was the first time a sanctioning body had sanctioned races for true “stock” cars with little alteration since the AAA races of the early 20th century. No other racing organization at that time had utilized late model family sedans in races with the exception of an attempt by the NSCRA around the same time. France wanted the cars to be the same cars on the show room floors at dealerships. He recognized that if his drivers drove the same cars that fans drove to the races, the fans would have a much stronger connection and association with the cars, drivers, and races. France also realized that this would open up opportunities for more competitors, as the average working-class man could drive his everyday car to the track, make a few small safety alterations and drive in the race. Although NASCAR was still in competition with several other sanctioning bodies at the time, this would help set NASCAR apart from organizations such as the National Stock Car Racing Association (NSCRA), National Auto Racing League (NARL), the American Stock Car Racing Association (ASCRA), the United Stock Car

⁷³ Racing-Reference.info, “1949 NASCAR Strictly Stock Series Results”, accessed December 20, 2018, <https://www.racing-reference.info/season-stats/1949/W/>.

Racing Association (USCRA), the International Motor Contest Association (IMCA) and the AAA.⁷⁴

NASCAR in the 1950s

The 1950s marked the beginning of NASCAR's dominance in the world of stock car racing. For the 1950 season, France expanded the race schedule to include nineteen races, but still faced stiff competition from the NSCRA, AAA, IMCA, ASCRA, and other smaller regional sanctioning bodies. France's success in stock cars, as well as that of other organizations, spurred the AAA to start including more stock car races, as the importance of the American automobile gained popularity among race fans and the average American citizen. The NSCRA continued to be tough competition especially in the Southeast, when drivers who did not wish to comply with France's strict rules, transitioned over to the NSCRA in 1949 and 1950. France enforced a rule which would not allow drivers to compete in races not sanctioned by NASCAR. Any driver who raced outside of NASCAR would lose championship points. Perhaps the greatest success in the 1950 season was the running of a 500-mile race at Darlington Raceway in Darlington, South Carolina named The Southern 500. Considering the toll that a 500-mile race took on cars, this was an impressive feat for true stock cars, and it helped to position NASCAR to take over as the top stock car racing organization.⁷⁵ In addition to

⁷⁴ Greg Fielden, *Forty Years of Stock Car Racing Vol. I: The Beginning 1949-1958, Revised Edition* (Surfside Beach, SC: The Galfield Press, 1995); Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 39-40, 44, 50.

⁷⁵ Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 44-50

these developments, France changed the name of the Strictly Stock Division to the Grand National in 1950.⁷⁶

The 1950s not only saw an expansion of NASCAR in terms of number of races, but also in terms of geography. Although there were some races in the North in the 1949 season, there were some minor expansions into the North and Midwest in 1950. The Piedmont region of the Southeast still saw most of the racing with seven of the nineteen races taking place in the Piedmont at four tracks—Martinsville Speedway, Charlotte Speedway, North Wilkesboro Speedway, and Occoneechee Speedway. Three of those four tracks were in North Carolina.⁷⁷ Beekman states that NASCAR continued to expand and change throughout the 1950s “with new tracks, an abortive effort to establish a significant northern presence, new series for different types of cars and the arrival of a host of successful young drivers.”⁷⁸ Starting in 1951, France started to expand past the Midwest to give NASCAR a presence in the West. There were six events in the West in 1951: Phoenix, Arizona; Gardena, California; Oakland, California; and Hanford, California.⁷⁹

In his book *Real NASCAR*, Dr. Daniel Pierce states that another important innovation in stock car racing, especially in the Piedmont region, was taking place around 1949 and the early 1950s. Weekly racing began to become more popular throughout the Piedmont Southeast at tracks such as Bowman-Gray Stadium in Winston-Salem. Bill France promoted this Sportsman series at local tracks across the Piedmont. This was

⁷⁶ Fielden, *Forty Years of Stock Car Racing Vol. I*, 18.

⁷⁷ Racing-Reference.info, “1950 Grand National Results”, accessed December 21, 2018, <https://www.racing-reference.info/season-stats/1950/W/>; Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 43.

⁷⁸ Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 43.

⁷⁹ Fielden, *Forty Years of Stock Car Racing Vol. I*, 42-76.

amateur-level racing which later developed into a proving-ground for up and coming stars in stock car racing. Local tracks in the Piedmont, which may only host one or two Grand National races per year, were now able to host races several weeks out of the year with a field made up almost entirely of local drivers. Several new tracks were built which would later become venues for the Grand National division, such as Hickory Motor Speedway, built in 1951. Aside from boosting revenue for existing tracks and building new ones, Pierce points out that these weekly racing events reinforced the ties between the people of the Piedmont working-class, as the majority of drivers and fans were recognizable members of the community. These drivers held regular jobs, had families, and raced for fun and for supplemental income each week.⁸⁰

Pierce notes that the early to mid-1950s was a time of tremendous growth for NASCAR; an average of thirty-seven races per year were held between 1951 and 1954.

For France, NASCAR, and its hard-partying drivers, promoters and fans, the first years of the 1950s brought unbelievable progress. The sport had grown from its roots in Piedmont red clay and spread into the Northeast, across the Midwest and Plains states, regularly traveled to the West Coast, and even made inroads into Canada and Hawaii.⁸¹

National news stories were printed about NASCAR races during this period, giving the sport national recognition. This spurred Detroit auto manufacturers to take a greater interest in the sport because they recognized the marketing opportunities that it

⁸⁰ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 119-121.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 155.

provided.⁸² Hudson Motors was the first of these auto manufacturers to become directly involved with Grand National racing. They supplied cars to a number of NASCAR drivers in the early 1950s and won seventy-eight races between 1951 and 1954. Their cars were driven by stars of the sport at the time such as Tim Flock and Herb Thomas. Hudson's dedication to the sport encouraged other auto manufacturers to become involved in the sport, as they realized the lucrative opportunity it afforded to the companies. Chevrolet was the first of the major manufacturers to get involved, which in turn spurred Ford into action in 1955. Other manufacturers such as Dodge, Mercury, and Packard all became involved around the same time. Chrysler emerged as the leader of the manufacturers in terms of producing quality cars that won races. However, they did not provide any direct support to the drivers. By the late 1950s, almost all of the American auto manufacturers were involved in NASCAR with Ford and Chevrolet leading the way. Other manufacturers included Pontiac, Mercury, Oldsmobile, and Plymouth. This involvement by auto manufacturers proved tremendously successful for drivers who were fortunate enough to be on a factory team such as Ford or Chevrolet. Drivers who were racing independently, and not part of a factory team, often proved to be uncompetitive. In 1957, due to increased awareness by the general public regarding highway safety, auto manufacturers decided to stop funding these factory teams, and all drivers became independent drivers. Car manufacturers were making cars on the road as fast as the cars on the track, and automobile accidents and deaths were increasing dramatically. Detroit automakers no longer wanted to be closely associated with the high-speed daredevils on the racetrack and focused their efforts on safety. In addition,

⁸² Ibid, 155-156.

several deadly accidents on superspeedways, such as Indianapolis and the Daytona Beach course, prompted auto manufacturers to distance themselves from the sport.⁸³ Despite the exit of the auto manufacturers, Pontiac, a General Motors brand, spent significant sums of money to support famous mechanic Smokey Yunick in 1958. Ford and Chevrolet also secretly gave support in the form of parts to a few select race teams soon after the ban.⁸⁴

When the auto manufacturers backed out in 1957, Bill France had to start over in terms of building his sport back to the national level it had achieved in the early to mid-1950s. NASCAR had to go back to its roots in the Piedmont in order to rebuild. In the season following the loss of manufacturer support, the Grand National only ran twenty-five percent of its races outside of the Southeast, with the majority of races being held in the Piedmont. In addition, Piedmont drivers such as Junior Johnson and Curtis Turner, both involved in the illegal liquor business earlier in their lives, were among the greatest stars of the 1958 season. Racetracks owned and operated by those involved at some point in the illegal liquor business, such as Enoch Staley (North Wilkesboro), Charlie Combs (North Wilkesboro and Hickory), Clay Earles (Martinsville), Grafton Burgess (Hickory), and Gene Sluder (Asheville-Weaverville), were among the core of the racetracks on the Grand National circuit in the late 1950s. Other drivers besides Curtis Turner and Junior Johnson who made a mark on NASCAR in the late 1950s were Lee Petty, Buck Baker, Joe Weatherly, and Glenn “Fireball” Roberts. All except Roberts were from the Piedmont.⁸⁵

⁸³ Beekman, *NASCAR Nation*, 58-63.

⁸⁴ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 205-206.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 157-158, 190-191.

During this period, the reputation of NASCAR in the Piedmont was further tarnished by religious leaders and upper classes who attempted to issue bans on racing on Sundays. One instance that Pierce notes is the closure of Occoneechee Speedway in Hillsborough, North Carolina. The county eventually banned racing on Sundays. This was detrimental to France since the majority of his fans were from the working-class, and they were only off of work on Sundays.⁸⁶

The 1950s saw the rise of many NASCAR stars who captivated fans with their skills on the track and antics off the track. Among the drivers who became popular in the 1950s many of them were from the Piedmont Southeast. These stars from the Piedmont included the Flock brothers, Tim, Bob, and Fonty from Atlanta, Georgia; Lee Petty from Randleman, North Carolina; Red Byron from Anniston, Alabama; Curtis Turner from Roanoke, Virginia; Ned Jarrett from Conover, North Carolina; Ralph Earnhardt from Kannapolis, North Carolina; Junior Johnson from Ronda, North Carolina; and Herb Thomas from Olivia, North Carolina.⁸⁷

In the 1950s, the number of races increased dramatically from its first season. Races were run all over the country, and fifty-percent of those races were run in the Piedmont South. Pierce considers the core tracks of the NASCAR schedule during the 1950s to be North Wilkesboro, Martinsville, Charlotte, Hillsborough (Occoneechee), as well as the newly added Asheville-Weaverville Speedway and Hickory Motor Speedway. These six Piedmont tracks hosted eighty-four Grand National races from 1949 to 1958.⁸⁸ Out of these six racetracks, five were located in the North Carolina Piedmont. For

⁸⁶ Ibid, 188-189.

⁸⁷ Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 96-99; Racing-Reference.info, "Driver Search, accessed December 24, 2018, <https://www.racing-reference.info>.

⁸⁸ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 125-127, 155.

context, three-hundred eighty-one races were run between 1949 and 1958. The races run at these six tracks in the Piedmont made up twenty-two percent of these races. This does not take into consideration the other Piedmont tracks that made up part of the NASCAR schedule during this time period.⁸⁹

Superspeedway Racing and the Loss of Dirt Tracks

The 1959 season and the early 1960s marked a turning point for NASCAR and stock car racing that would eventually alter the landscape of stock car racing venues. Daytona International Speedway was completed in 1958, and the first race was held in 1959. The 2.5-mile track was unlike any track built before for stock cars. It was an enormous, asphalt, D-shaped oval and was vastly different from the short dirt tracks of the Piedmont. Before Daytona, Darlington Raceway in South Carolina was the largest speedway used for stock car racing, with a length of 1.375 miles. Two other tracks, Raleigh Speedway in North Carolina and Memphis-Arkansas Speedway in West Memphis, Arkansas, were also over one-mile in length. This was the dawn of the superspeedway era. Superspeedways are defined now as oval tracks over two miles in length. However, when writing about the construction of these tracks in the late 1950s and early 1960s author Greg Fielden refers to tracks one-mile or longer in length as superspeedways.⁹⁰

In 1960, two more superspeedways were constructed, Charlotte Motor Speedway, a one and a half-mile asphalt track in Charlotte, NC, and Marchbanks Speedway, a 1.4-

⁸⁹ Racing-Reference.info, "Race Track Listing", accessed December 22, 2019, <https://www.racing-reference.info/tracklist>.

⁹⁰ Greg Fielden, *Forty Years of Stock Car Racing Vol. II: The Superspeedway Boom 1959-1964* (Surfside Beach, SC: The Galfield Press, 1992), 11-13, 51, 93.

mile asphalt oval in Hanford, California, and Atlanta International Raceway, a 1.5 mile oval in Hampton, Georgia.

In his series of books entitled *Forty Years of Stock Car Racing*, author Greg Fielden calls the period between 1959 and 1964 “The Superspeedway Boom” in reference to the number of these large paved ovals that were constructed during this time. He notes that only twenty-two of the first three-hundred eighty-one events in NASCAR were run on tracks of one-mile length or greater. From 1959 to 1964, however, forty-seven races were run on superspeedways. Fielden argues that this period was one of significant change in the sport as new stars such as Richard Petty were beginning their careers and stars from the 1950s such as the Flock brothers and Red Byron were fading away. Superspeedways facilitated much of the change during this period.⁹¹

Pierce argues in his book that the development of superspeedways also changed the experience for the fans. He states:

Races at these larger tracks became weekend pilgrimages, not just pop-in-for-the-evening type of events. Now more and more fans could camp in the infield and cook out, drink, and party with friends. Technology, particularly in the development of camper trailers and pickup truck covers and campers, and increasing disposable income for working-class fans helped crowd the infield for such major events as the Daytona 500, the Atlanta 500, the Rebel 300, the World 600, the Firecracker 400, and the American 500.⁹²

⁹¹ Ibid, 7-8.

⁹² Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 221.

Other advances in the sport at this time included the broadcasting of major races on the radio across forty stations. The new network formed by Hank Schoolfield and Bob Montgomery was known as the Universal Racing Network. This allowed fans to listen to races on Sunday afternoons wherever they were and included major races in the Piedmont such as Charlotte, Atlanta, Bristol, North Wilkesboro, and Martinsville. In addition to the races being broadcast to wider audiences, the USAC (United States Auto Club) made an agreement with NASCAR allowing several of their star drivers to compete in NASCAR events. These drivers, however, did not always receive a warm welcome from NASCAR drivers, as the USAC drivers often considered themselves superior.⁹³

The mid to late 1960s was a troubled time for NASCAR due to issues with manufacturers who could not agree with Bill France's decision to limit the types of engines and cars that were eligible to race. Chrysler and Ford officially re-entered NASCAR in 1962 despite the 1957 ban by the AMA.⁹⁴ General Motors was still abiding by the ban, although they had secretly supported teams since the beginning of the ban. Due to France's new rules concerning the engines used by Chrysler and Ford, Chrysler pulled out of NASCAR in 1965. Ford boycotted NASCAR in 1966, leaving stars such as Fred Lorenzen, Dick Hutcherson, Curtis Turner, Marvin Panch, and Ned Jarrett without rides at the beginning of the season. Due to the loss of star drivers, race attendance decreased.⁹⁵ In addition to drivers leaving due to manufacturer issues, several

⁹³ Ibid, 222-223.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 223-224.

⁹⁵ Greg Fielden, *Forty Years of Stock Car Racing Vol. III: Big Bucks and Boycotts 1965-1971* (Surfside Beach, SC: The Galfield Press, 1994), 4; Fielden, *Forty Years of Stock Car Racing Vol. II*, 235; Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 250-251.

drivers retired due to the lack of safety on the superspeedways. Among those who retired in the mid to late-1960s were Junior Johnson, Ned Jarrett, Marvin Panch and Fred Lorenzen. The loss of these stars gave opportunity to new stars such as Richard Petty, David Pearson, LeeRoy Yarbrough, Bobby Isaac, Cale Yarborough, and Bobby Allison. All of these drivers were from the Southeast, and all but Cale Yarborough and Bobby Allison were from the Piedmont region.⁹⁶

With the “Superspeedway Boom” and the loss of many of the drivers from the 1950s and early days of NASCAR, many of the local dirt tracks began to fade away. In a *Speed Age* article from 1957, France stated that he did not want the sport to lose its roots and wanted to keep NASCAR as an organization that was supporting local drivers at local tracks.⁹⁷ Despite this sentiment by France, NASCAR began to move away from its roots on the dirt tracks of the Piedmont and from the men in the moonshine business and mill workers who helped establish the sport. Pierce states, “In place of dirt tracks, liquor barons, and Big Bill France, NASCAR would have even more, and faster superspeedways, corporate sponsorship of both cars and the series itself, a lucrative television contract that began to showcase the sport to more and more people outside the Piedmont region, and new leadership in Bill France, Jr.”⁹⁸

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, many of the dirt tracks on the schedule had either been paved over or removed. On September 30, 1970, the last NASCAR Grand National Series race on a dirt track was run. The top level of NASCAR has not returned to dirt tracks since. Only two of the early major tracks of the Piedmont were still hosting races past 1971; North Wilkesboro and Martinsville were the only two to survive the superspeedway boom.⁹⁹ North Wilkesboro would eventually stop hosting Cup races after 1996, when Bruton Smith’s Speedway Motorsports Inc., who acquired the track after the

⁹⁶ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 254-257.

⁹⁷ Al Berger, “Mr. Stock Car”, *Speed Age*, February 1957, 40-41, 58-59 (Accessed through the Stock Car Racing Collection at the Appalachian State University Special Collections at Belk Library).

⁹⁸ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 261.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 280-281.

death of Enoch Staley, decided to move its two dates on the schedule to Texas Motor Speedway and New Hampshire Speedway.¹⁰⁰

The racing venues of the early days of NASCAR are all but gone. With the exception of Martinsville Speedway in South Central Virginia, no track that was used during the 1949 Strictly Stock season is still used today. Hickory Motor Speedway is the only dirt track built between 1940 and 1950 in North Carolina and used in the Grand National series that is still in operation. Due to the extensive cost of updating the tracks on which it is still possible to race, it has not been the priority of NASCAR or the track owners to return NASCAR's top series to these tracks. Safety improvements on tracks such as SAFER barriers on the walls, would prove to be a significant cost for track owners. In addition, these tracks are not updated with amenities that are prevalent among larger, more up-to-date racetracks. Due to the changing nature of the sport, the face of stock car racing has changed dramatically overall and in the Piedmont region.

Summary

This chapter has provided a historical and cultural context that will inform the case study and analysis process going forward. The context of the people and culture of the Piedmont region of North Carolina is important to understand as it relates to stock car racing. The white working-class culture, physiography, and economy of the region provided perfect conditions in which the sport of stock car racing was able to thrive. The people working in manufacturing jobs or involved in the illegal manufacture of moonshine and their need for an outlet to display their wildness provided both a fan base,

¹⁰⁰ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

drivers, promoters, and track builders. The conditions and people led to the creation of hundreds of dirt tracks in the region, which were constructed quickly and out of simple materials, and the breeding of some of NASCAR's earliest stars. While Bill France intended for NASCAR to be a national sport, he found that his most loyal core of fans and drivers along with most successful tracks were in the Piedmont region of the Southeast, North Carolina's Piedmont region being among the most prominent. As NASCAR grew into a national sport, the core tracks and fan base remained in the Piedmont Southeast. NASCAR eventually outgrew many of these core tracks and expanded all over the nation, leaving many of its most important tracks behind. Though few of these tracks are still in operation, they remain embedded as an important part of NASCAR history and Piedmont culture. The history and significance of these tracks are important in considering how these tracks might be preserved. The preservation of these tracks will, in turn, preserve an important part of the culture in the North Carolina Piedmont. In introducing both cultural and historical contexts that surround stock car racing and the Piedmont region, this chapter has begun to answer the research question by explaining what the cultural significance of stock car racing is in the region. In addition, the information gained in this chapter concerning the history of stock car racing and early racetracks can be used to identify significant racetracks and the important features that remain at those sites. The next chapter will introduce preservation concepts that may be implemented to achieve this goal.

CHAPTER 3

PRESERVATION CONCEPTS

This chapter provides a brief overview of the key aspects of historic preservation and of the three primary tasks that are carried out in preservation. These three tasks are: identification and documentation of historic resources, physical preservation and care of historic resources, and interpretation of historic resources. After a broad introduction to those tasks, I delve into several National Register of Historic Places nominations already completed for racetracks, in order to assess what features they incorporated, and the type of significance and integrity factors used to justify their significance. This effort was done to influence my approach as I choose and assess case studies racetracks in Piedmont North Carolina.

It is important to understand that guidelines for each of these tasks have been established by the National Park Service within the Department of the Interior. In 1966 the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) was passed and it designated the National Park Service, under the Secretary of the Interior, as the federal agency designated to address standards for identification, documentation, and preservation of historic resources in the United States. In addition, the NHPA provided for the creation of the National Register of Historic Places which is an important facet of identification and documentation. The NHPA charges the Secretary of the Interior and the National Park

Service with expanding and maintain the National Register.¹⁰¹ According to the National Park Service,

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's historic places worthy of preservation. Authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect America's historic and archeological resources.¹⁰²

The standards and guidelines for identification and documentation, physical preservation, interpretation, and nominating properties to the National Register are all set forth by the National Park Service, and are often used as a guide regardless of whether the historic resource is required to adhere to them or not or whether or not the resource will be nominated to the National Register.

Identification, Documentation, and Planning

Identification and documentation of historic resources is often the first step in the planning process for historic preservation. Identification and documentation can include National Register nominations, architectural drawings, cultural landscape reports, historic structure reports, c photographs, and landscape site plans.

National Register nominations are an important part of identification and documentation. Properties must meet the qualifications of age, significance, criteria, and integrity in order to be added to the National Register:

¹⁰¹ National Historic Preservation Act, accessed March 3, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/history/local-law/nhpa1966.htm>.

¹⁰² National Park Service, Secretary of the Interior, "What is the National Register of Historic Places?", accessed January 7, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/what-is-the-national-register.htm>.

Age

In order for a site to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places it must be at least fifty years old or meet the criteria consideration for a property under fifty years of age that is under threat.¹⁰³

Significance

Significance of a historic property can be at the local, state, or national level and can be significant under any of the four criteria set forth by the NPS.¹⁰⁴

Criteria

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA) sets forth four criteria for nomination to the National Register. In addition to age and to help determine what kind of significance a property may have, it must meet at least one of these criteria in order to be nominated:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A. The property is associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or
- B. The property is associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or
- C. The property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess

¹⁰³ National Park Service, Secretary of the Interior, "National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation", National Park Service, 1, accessed January 7, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/pdfs/nrb15.pdf>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 1, 9.

high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

D. The property has yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.¹⁰⁵

Integrity

As a part of determining significance, the NHPA gives seven aspects of integrity of which properties must meet at least one to be added to the National Register. The aspects of integrity are described by the NPS as follows:

Location:

“Location is the place where the historic property was constructed or the place where the historic event occurred.”

Design:

“Design is the composition of elements that constitute the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a property.”

Setting:

“Setting is the physical environment of a historic property.”

Materials:

“Materials are the physical elements that were combined or deposited during a particular period of time and in a particular pattern or configuration to form a historic property.”

Workmanship:

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 2.

“Workmanship is the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular culture or people during any given period in history or prehistory.”

Feeling:

“Feeling is a property’s expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time.”

Association:

“Association is the direct link between an important historic event or person and a historic property.”¹⁰⁶

As previously stated, the National Park Service sets forth standards and guidelines for identification and documentation. Many of these standards and guidelines relate to nominating a property to the National Register. In addition to the standards and guidelines for identification and documentation, there are guidelines for nominating a property to the National Register. National Register Bulletin 16A provides guidance on property descriptions, boundary descriptions, photography, narrative descriptions, etc.¹⁰⁷

Inventories often make up another important part of identification and documentation. They note unique features about each site, while identifying features and resources that one would expect to find at the site. An inventory will later be used to make a plan for the continued maintenance and preservation of the site. Cultural landscape inventories, which often deal with sites made up of a collection of different

¹⁰⁶ National Park Service, Secretary of the Interior, “How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property”, National Park Service, accessed January 7, 2019, https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/nrb15_8.htm.

¹⁰⁷ National Park Service, Secretary of the Interior, “National Register Bulletin 16A”, accessed January 25, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/index.htm>.

resources, are helpful in determining what resources are present at a site, and can later be used to create a preservation plan for the site.

Cultural landscape inventories, according to the National Park Service, “create a baseline from a detailed record of the landscape and its features as they exist at the present (considering seasonal variations). Each landscape inventory should address issues of boundary delineation, documentation methodologies and techniques, the limitations of the inventory, and the scope of the inventory efforts.”¹⁰⁸

Inventory also makes up an important part of National Register Nominations. When preparing an inventory as a part of a National Register nomination, the identified historic resources on the site are divided into contributing to historic significance of a site or non-contributing. Contributing resources will be those that existed and contributed to the character and function of the site during the historic period of significance. Each resource on an individual site can be evaluated for significance and integrity to determine whether it contributes to the overall significance and character of the site.

The National Park Service, as the federal agency designated to address standards for identification, documentation, and preservation of historic resources in the United States, created specific standards and guidelines for documentation of historic sites via three programs: the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), and the Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS).¹⁰⁹ Documentation guidelines were crafted for each of these programs, as they focus on different historic resources. Though it is not required to adhere to these guidelines if the

¹⁰⁸ National Park Service, Secretary of the Interior, “Preservation Brief 36: Protecting Cultural Landscapes: Planning Treatment and Management of Historic Landscapes”, accessed March 3, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/36-cultural-landscapes.htm#treatment>.

¹⁰⁹ National Historic Preservation Act.

documentation will not be submitted to HABS, HALS, or HAER, they are helpful in understanding the most thorough approach to documenting historic resources. These give guidelines for history of the resource, drawings, photography, and Computer-Aided Drafting (CAD).¹¹⁰ The guidelines set forth are available on the National Park Service website.¹¹¹

Other types of documentation, include Historic Structures Reports (HSR) and Cultural Landscape Reports. An HSR gives a detailed description of a building or structure and its existing conditions specifically related to the materials and physical condition of the structure, although architectural detail and building evolution are also included. The report then gives treatment recommendations detailing what steps need to be taken for preservation, rehabilitation, or restoration depending on proposed future use.¹¹² Cultural Landscape Reports (CLR) are used to document and recommend treatments for various types of cultural landscapes. These can include vernacular landscapes, designed landscapes, ethnographic landscapes, and historic sites. According to the NPS,

A Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) is the primary report that documents the history, significance and treatment of a cultural landscape. A CLR

¹¹⁰ National Park Service, Secretary of the Interior, “Standards and Guidelines,” accessed January 25, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/hdp/standards/index.htm>.

¹¹¹ NPS Guidelines Websites:
<https://www.nps.gov/hdp/standards/index.htm>,
<https://www.nps.gov/hdp/standards/halsguidelines.htm>,
<https://www.nps.gov/hdp/standards/habsguidelines.htm>,
<https://www.nps.gov/hdp/standards/haerguidelines.htm>)

¹¹² Deborah Slaton, “Preservation Brief 43, “The Preparation and Use of Historic Structure Reports”, National Park Service, Secretary of the Interior, accessed January 25, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/43-historic-structure-reports.htm>;

evaluates the history and integrity of the landscape including any changes to its geographical context, features, materials, and use.¹¹³

Physical Preservation

One of the purposes of undertaking identification and documentation is to have that information assist in the physical preservation of historic resources. Once again, the NPS, under the Department of the Interior created Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. These treatments include preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction. The standards are written in a such a way that the standards can be applied to both individual buildings and cultural landscapes. Various factors, such as land use purpose, code requirements, physical condition, and relative importance of the property, are used to determine which treatment option is suitable for the property.¹¹⁴

The various treatments and definitions of each are as follows:

1. Preservation: “Preservation focuses on the maintenance and repair of existing historic materials and retention of a property’s from as it has evolved over time.”
2. Rehabilitation: “Rehabilitation acknowledges the need to alter or add to a historic property to meet continuing or changing uses while retaining the property’s historic character”

¹¹³ National Park Service, “Preservation Brief 36”.

¹¹⁴ National Park Service, “The Treatment of Historic Properties”, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, accessed January 7, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards.htm>; Kay D. Weeks and Anne E. Grimmer, *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating,* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resource Stewardship and Partnerships, Heritage Preservation Services, 1995), 1.

3. Restoration: “Restoration depicts a property at a particular period of time in history, while removing evidence of other periods.”
4. Reconstruction: “Reconstruction re-creates vanished or non-surviving portions of a property for interpretive purposes.”¹¹⁵

As mentioned earlier in reference to documentation, Historic Structure Reports and Cultural Landscape Reports are an important aspect of documentation for buildings, but are also intended to be used in physical preservation of the structure. The report can guide and provide recommendations to one who is attempting to preserve, rehabilitate, or restore a historic structure.

Interpretation

One of the major results of inventory and documentation, aided by physical preservation is the potential for interpreting historic sites to the public. Interpretation is vital to the preservation of historic sites. It can be done in many different ways and at many different levels, however, it is essential in telling the story of a site especially to the general public who have no previous knowledge of the site. Freeman Tilden, who wrote *Interpreting Our Heritage* which has been used as a resource by the National Park Service, defines interpretation as “An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ National Park Service, “Four Approaches to the Treatment of Historic Properties”, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, accessed January 7, 2019, <https://www.nps.gov/tps/standards/four-treatments.htm>.

¹¹⁶ Freeman Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 4th revised and enlarged ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 33.

Tilden also defined six principles for successful site interpretation:

1. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
2. Information, as such, is not interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based upon information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
3. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical, or architectural. Any art is in some degree teachable.
4. The chief aim of interpretation is not instruction but provocation.
5. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
6. Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentations to adults but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best will require a separate program.¹¹⁷

Interpretation of historic sites can take on many different forms, including historic markers, interpretive panels that display information, museums on site or converting the museum to a site, physically engaging with the site and the activities that took place there, and identification of site features or artifacts through the use of signs and markers. This is not by any means an exhaustive list, but gives a few basic examples of how a site may be interpreted so that the visitor might actively engage the site and the interpretation may fulfill the six principles set forth by Tilden.

Description and Critique of Racetracks Already Nominated to the National Register

In this section I will describe three racetracks that have already been nominated to the National Register. The purpose of doing this analysis is to understand the features identified as significant, the significance criteria chosen and the way integrity was

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 34-35.

determined. The intent of this critique is to guide my case study and assessment work for nomination of 1940-1960 NASCAR racetracks in Piedmont North Carolina.

While racing venues have been added to the National Register, only one racetrack that was built for stock car racing in the Piedmont and used by the NASCAR Grand National Series has been added, that being Occoneechee-Orange Speedway. Other racetracks used by NASCAR but not built for NASCAR or stock car racing have been added to the National Register. Other oval tracks listed on the National Register include Riverside International Speedway in West Memphis, Arkansas and the Missouri State Fair Speedway which is on the Register as part of a larger nomination of the Missouri State Fairgrounds.¹¹⁸

Indianapolis Motor Speedway

Indianapolis Motor Speedway was the first race track to be nominated to the National Register and is likely the most famous racetrack to be nominated. It is located in Speedway, Indiana and is the home to the Indianapolis 500, “the largest single-day spectator sporting event in the world”¹¹⁹ and “the oldest continuously operated automobile race course in the world.”¹²⁰ It is a four-sided, 2.5 mile racetrack. The racetrack was built in 1909 as a macadam surfaced racetrack and was later resurfaced with brick. Since the nomination was completed in 1974 and revised in 1987 it is not as complete as many of today’s nominations are, but provides good insight into nominating

¹¹⁸ Daniel Strohl, “Ask a Hemmings Editor: How many race tracks are on the National Register of Historic Places?”, *Hemmings*, accessed January 7, 2019, <https://www.hemmings.com/blog/2018/09/10/ask-a-hemmings-editor-how-many-race-tracks-are-on-the-national-register-of-historic-places/>.

¹¹⁹ J. Reid Williamson, edited by Unknown, “National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form” for Indianapolis Motor Speedway, 1974 and 1987, Summary Section.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

a track that holds historical significance but has been heavily altered in the years since its creation.

It was nominated as a site with the area of significance being recreation (automobile racing). Criteria for significance are not mentioned, but based on the nominations of other racetracks, it can be assumed that it was nominated under Criterion A. The period of significance is from 1900 to present. The statement of significance states the following:

“Auto racing is the second most popular sport in the United States, attracting more than 40 million paid attendance each year. The Indianapolis Motor Speedway, long the premier auto racing site in the United States, is also the only reasonably intact early 20th-century high-speed auto race course in the country. It is the oldest continuously operated automobile race course in the world.”¹²¹

The nomination further adds that the site “has made significant contributions to automobile design, performance, technology, and safety” and is “an extremely important example of integration of engineering and landscape architecture for a single purpose.”¹²²

Integrity is not explicitly stated; however, the nomination mentions the intact historic features of the track in the significance and inventory. The nomination bases its argument for integrity on the fact that the basic original layout of the 1909 site is still extant. It states that the “track itself is the principal feature contributing to the Speedway’s historical significance.”

The nomination does not list resources as contributing or non-contributing, but gives a list of features and resources considered important. They are as follows: 1) the racetrack; 2) pit stalls and pit area; 3) original grandstands (replaced but same layout); 4)

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

scoring tower; 5) garage area 6) office building and museum; 7) Chevrolet Memorial; 8) golf course; 9) parking; 10) concession stands; 11) repair shops; 12) field hospital; 13) motel; and 14) other accessory structures.¹²³

This nomination was obviously done in earlier years of National Register nominations, so the standards for completing the nominations were understandably different. This nomination focuses heavily on layout of features as opposed to original structures, materials, etc. The racetrack is the most prominent feature and strongest argument for integrity and significance. The track has been resurfaced, but the configuration has remained the same as it was in 1909. In terms of layout, the grandstands and pit area are also mentioned, however, the grandstands are not constructed of the original material and the pit area had been heavily altered. The scoring tower, garage, office building, museum, Chevrolet memorial, part of the golf course, motel, and other buildings listed were less than fifty years old at the time of the nomination. Although these resources give good context for how the track has evolved since its inception, they are not contributing, and this needs to be explained in the nomination.

Aside from the fact that this nomination is lacking in some information and is not up to current standards for a National Register nomination, it gives some good insight into arguing for integrity at a racetrack that has been heavily altered and had little to no historic fabric remaining. The focus on the layout of the actual track itself is important, as this is a feature unique to each race track. Racetracks like North Wilkesboro

¹²³ Ibid.

Speedway, while it has been heavily altered, still retains a track layout that was conceived within its historically significant period.

Occoneechee-Orange Speedway

Occoneechee-Orange Speedway was nominated to the National Register in 2002. It is, to date, the only track built as a NASCAR track to be nominated to the National Register. It is nominated as a site with one contributing site, one contributing structure, and one contributing building. It lists five non-contributing resources. It was nominated under Criterion A with areas of significance in Recreation and Social history “for its association with early organized stock car racing in piedmont North Carolina.”¹²⁴ The nomination goes on to say that it is “significant at the state level in the areas of social history and recreation for its association with a sport with roots in the bootlegging activities of rural North Carolina where “trippers” transporting illegal liquor in cars with modified engines and beefed-up transmissions attempted to outrun revenuers.”¹²⁵ The nomination used Criteria Consideration G for the site having acquired significance in the last fifty years, because, at the time of this nomination, a portion of the period of significance fell within the last fifty years and the track was considered a rare property type. Aspects of integrity included setting, materials, workmanship, location, design, feeling, and association.

Focusing on the importance of contributing and non-contributing structures, this track gives a good idea of what can be included in nominations for early NASCAR

¹²⁴ Jennifer Martin, Sarah Woodward, and Virginia Freeze, “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form” for Occoneechee Speedway, March 5, 2002, section 8 page 7.

¹²⁵ Ibid, section 8 page 7.

tracks. The contributing resources included the track structure, a men's restroom, and the overall site. The non-contributing resources and the reasons they are non-contributing are listed as follows: 1) a light post (later than period of significance) 2) The grandstands (later than period of significance) 3) concession stand (in ruinous condition) 4) women's restroom (ruinous condition) 5) ticket office (ruinous condition). The entrance, and fence surrounding the racetrack, constructed of wood posts and pressed metal sheet is not listed as a resource, although it was likely present from the early years of the track and is representative of stock car tracks from the 1940s to 1950s. There is also no mention of the woven wire fence surrounding the track on the frontstretch which is mostly original. It is worth noting that the nomination was written prior to any improvement being done on the property and the woven wire fence may have not been visible at the time. The outer fence at the entrance was in disrepair at the time of the nomination.

The nomination states that though the site is overgrown and does not hold a great deal of integrity, "significant intact structural features convey the property's history and significance as an automobile speedway."¹²⁶ The features mentioned are as follows: 1) the hard packed dirt track; 2) prominent dirt banking; 3) culverts used to drain water from the infield 4) the hillside on the west side of the track from which spectators watched races; 5) separate entrance and exit roads for competitors and fans; 6) the metal fence used to keep out non-paying fans 7) buildings in different states of disrepair; and 8) the concrete grandstand.

This nomination employs Criteria Consideration G for a property under fifty years of age, arguing that the track is a rare property type, due to the fact that it is the only

¹²⁶ Ibid, section 8 page 7.

remaining dirt track from NASCAR's first Strictly Stock season in 1949. The nomination furthers the argument in stating that most early dirt stock car racing tracks no longer exist. It states that the track's "rarity as a property type should mitigate the issues of integrity that arise because of the poor condition of some of its associated buildings and the overgrowth of plant life, the latter condition being reversible."¹²⁷

The boundary justification of the site included all features mentioned above, whether contributing resources or not, stating that the features included "contribute to the property's significance as an eligible site."¹²⁸

As this site is included in the case studies of this project, it is important to note that the author has visited the site, and that several changes have been made to the track since this nomination was drafted in 2002. This nomination focuses primarily on the track structure as the main feature of the site. Buildings in severe disrepair are not listed as contributing, but their existence and location is noted to argue for integrity. The existence of the entrance gate and metal fence around the site is rare, and despite its state of disrepair, there should have been an attempt to list it as a contributing resource. The woven wire fencing on wood posts should be added if revised, as this is an important feature that is rarely extant at stock car racing tracks. In addition, the hill to the west of the track used for spectators could be listed as a contributing resource despite its being a natural feature. The concrete grandstand is not considered a contributing resource on the site, as it was added in 1958, according to the nomination, and was built after the city began to use the track as a football field. Regardless of its later date and use by football fans, it was still used by race fans, and in considering the development of racetracks,

¹²⁷ Ibid, section 8 page 16-17.

¹²⁸ Ibid, section 10 page 24.

concrete grandstands were almost always added within the decade after the track's inception. The last thing to be considered would be a revision of the nomination to include the above resources, and extend the period of significance, as the track existed as a dirt track for stock car racing until 1968.

The nomination did an excellent job of explaining the significance of the track, especially considering the unique nature of such property. The emphasis on the track surface and banking was important in overcoming issues with integrity that may arise in the nomination of racetracks that are no longer being used as such. The preparer focused on important features, such as the track surface and banking to show integrity, despite the disrepair of buildings and other features.

Elkhart Lake Road Race Circuits

The Elkhart Lake Road Race Circuits were parts of public roads in the Village of Elkhart Lake and Town of Rhine in Wisconsin where sports car racing took place from 1950 to 1952. This venue was added to the National Register in 2006. Unlike the other nominations in this section, this nomination is not for a purpose-built race track or an oval track. This site is not particularly a race track, as it is primarily made up of public roads that were used for sports car racing. Although this site is in stark contrast to NASCAR tracks of the 1940s and 1950s it is nonetheless an auto racing site and gives some good insight for understanding how to nominate such sites. The Elkhart Lake Road Race Circuits were nominated as a site under Criterion A at the national level, with areas of significance in Entertainment and Recreation. The period of significance for the site is 1950-1952, when races were held at the circuits. The circuits are composed of a 3.35-

mile course and a 6.5-mile course. The second course used from 1951-1952 was comprised of the older 3.35-mile course with additional roads added in.

The statement of significance states the following:

“The Elkhart Lake Road Race Circuits are significant at the national level under Criterion A, in Entertainment and Recreation, as the major road racing venue in the Midwest and one of the premier road racing venues in the country during the brief era of sports car road racing on public streets in the United States.”¹²⁹

“While components of the course have changed over time as part of routine road maintenance and a small section is now closed to vehicular traffic, the character and corridor of the racing route is largely intact.”¹³⁰

The nomination lists only two resources on the nomination, which are the two circuits, both listed as structures. In terms of integrity, the nomination argues that the circuits retain a high degree of integrity due to the fact that other than routine road maintenance and the loss of a seven-hundred and fifty-foot segment and a hotel that served as a visual landmark. None of the roads located along the old circuits have been relocated or regraded. The nomination also states that the setting remains mostly intact.

This nomination brings up some interesting considerations when evaluating race tracks in light of the National Register. It does a good job of describing the current layout of the circuits and comparing them to layout during the period of significance. The idea of keeping the same layout is relevant not only to circuits on public roads, but also purpose built oval tracks. Another major point that the nomination focuses on is the setting of the racetrack. Aside from the one visual landmark being demolished, the nomination states that the setting is largely intact. This could be useful in considering

¹²⁹ Elizabeth Miller, “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form” for Elkhart Lake Road Race Circuits, January 3, 2006, section 8 page 1.

¹³⁰ Ibid, section 8 page 1.

other race tracks. However, oval race tracks do not interact with the surrounding setting as much as public road courses.

Riverside Speedway

Riverside Speedway, or Riverside International Speedway, is one of only three oval tracks on the National Register and the only extant dirt oval aside from Occoneechee-Orange Speedway. It was built as one-quarter mile heavy-clay racetrack in West-Memphis, Arkansas. The site was listed on the National Register in 2010. It is listed as a site and contributing resources include four buildings, one site, and two structures. There is one non-contributing building and two non-contributing structures listed. The period of significance is 1950-1959. It is nominated under Criteria A in the areas of Entertainment and Recreation for its being an example of an early dirt race track for stock car racing. The statement of significance states the following:

As a result of the unaltered state and rare intact example of a dirt race track that was built to accommodate stock car racing and later other entertainment events, the Riverside Speedway is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with local significance under Criterion A. Of the fifteen dirt race tracks still operational in Arkansas, Riverside Speedway is the only continually running race track in the state, providing entertainment and recreation to the tri-state area every weekend, from March to November, for fifty-nine years.¹³¹

In terms of integrity, the nomination notes that the track “retains remarkable integrity” for this type of resource. It notes that many of the original resources from the period of significance are still intact and notes which resources are not from the period

¹³¹ Travis Ratermann, “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form” for Riverside Speedway, 2010, section 8 page 5.

and non-contributing. It also considers the changes in the surrounding environment, noting that while some urban sprawl has affected the track, there are still open fields around the track, as it was in the 1950s.

The contributing resources on the site are as follows: 1) racetrack (includes the racing surface, walls, and fencing); 2) flag stand; 3) ticket booth; 4) concession stand; 5) concession stand/cotton candy stand; and 6) concession stand/storage/bathrooms. Non-contributing resources include 1) bleachers (not original); 2) Ticket booth (contemporary building); 3) Entrance gate and fence (contemporary structure). Boundary justifications for this site are based on the original land leased by the builder of the track.

This nomination brings to light several aspects of nominating a racetrack to the National Register. It thoroughly incorporates buildings into the inventory of contributing resources and is a good example of considering resources that were added as the track grew. It also gives approximate dates for the resources. This nomination also focuses on the track surface, especially the material of the track surface, and even specifies the degrees of banking. Since the race track is still in operation, it does not need to rely as heavily on this to prove integrity as abandoned tracks or track rehabilitated for another use. In listing the racetrack as a resource to the site in itself, this nomination included the walls and fencing surrounding the track surface as a part of the racetrack and not as separate resources. This brings up an important issue in whether the walls and fencing should be considered distinct resources or included with the track surface. Considering the importance of the track surface in this nomination, it would appear that the walls and fences should be separate resources. This nomination is important to consider when determining significance for sites like Hickory Motor Speedway which is still in

operation, since it is often difficult to separate historic and significant resources from contemporary resources. The significance portion of this nomination relies heavily on the fact that the track had been in continuous operation for fifty-nine years at the time of the nomination.

Summary Table

Nomination	Area(s) of Significance	Criteria	Aspects of Integrity (mentioned)
Indianapolis Motor Speedway	Recreation (auto Racing), also mentions contributions in automobile design, performance, technology, and safety and landscape architecture	None listed, assumed A, given areas of significance	None listed, assumed design, setting, based on statement of significance
Occoneechee-Orange Speedway	Entertainment and Recreation and Social History		
Riverside International Speedway	Entertainment and Recreation	Criterion A	Design, materials, setting
Elkhart Lake Road Race Circuits	Entertainment and Recreation	Criterion A	Location, design, setting

Table 1. Summary of National Register Nominations for Racing Venues (Created by Author)

Nominations Conclusion

Previous nominations of racing venues reveal several considerations that should be made when evaluating race tracks by National Register standards. First, all of the nominations focus heavily on the fact that the race track itself is still somewhat intact, and retains the original layout. This follows precedents set in terms of preservation of tangible elements and is likely the most important characteristic of a historic property. Second, racetrack materials are often of less importance than the layout of the track,

except in the case of Riverside International Speedway. This is likely due to the fact that changes in track surface materials alone do not alter the original design of the racetrack or the spatial arrangement. Third, the actual track and track surface are listed as structures in all of the nominations. Fourth, the setting of the racetrack is important and should be considered. Racing venues are built in certain locations for a variety of reasons. However, the surroundings of a track often change the experience for fans and drivers. Rural settings are prominent among many racing venues and when these areas become more developed, an important characteristic of the track is lost and the track is under threat of impending development. Fifth, development of the race track, especially ancillary buildings and structures should be given more consideration, even if they are not original. All racetracks develop over time and could be considered in most cases, vernacular in their spatial organization and function. Only taking into account features from the early years of the track would fail to effectively present the history of the track. In addition, the nominations should include a more thorough description of when each building was built and how the track developed over time. This would strengthen the argument for why certain resources are added as contributing while others are not. Sixth, spatial organization should be heavily considered and is important in terms of integrity, even in the absence of historic fabric. Spatial arrangement seems to be an important feature mentioned in each nomination and is used to prove integrity of design. Finally, areas of significance other than Entertainment and Recreation should be considered. Entertainment and Recreation are used for Elkhart and Riverside and is alluded to in the Indianapolis Motor Speedway nomination. Indianapolis Motor Speedway, however, also mentions contributions to the automobile industry and automobile technology. Social

History should be considered for racetracks due to the role that they played as gathering places for certain demographics of people and the importance they held in their community. Community Development should be considered as many racetracks, especially ones that have national significance, are an important part of the economy in the communities in which they exist. Overall, more racetracks should be nominated to the National Register. They are unique property types and often play a large role in the communities surrounding them. Many racetracks are now old enough to be considered for nomination and should be taken more seriously as historic sites.

Summary of Preservation Concepts

This chapter covered common preservation concepts such as identification, documentation, physical preservation, and interpretation can be used to determine how to preserve stock car racetracks in general. These concepts will be applied in Chapter 5 when the case studies are analyzed and findings are presented. In addition, the review of the National Register nominations for racetracks already nominated, will be used to help determine which criteria, areas of significance, and aspects of integrity are important in assessing racetracks. With the background history and preservation concepts, having been introduced, the next two chapters will focus on five race tracks in the Piedmont and Appalachian region that represent the condition of tracks all over the region and how preservation concepts can be used to preserve the key features and overall history of the track and North Carolina Piedmont.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDIES

With an understanding of the culture of Piedmont North Carolina, the development of NASCAR stock car racing, and general historic preservation processes, this chapter will merge those research threads together to begin to determine if and how to preserve 1940s-1960s NASCAR stock car tracks located in Piedmont, North Carolina.

The methodology I will use to pull all these threads together is through review of case studies. Case studies are a valid research method for the historic preservation field. They have been used in the field for years and can produce generalizable information about a subject. They can be performed using a wide variety of cases which can be drawn used to inform historic preservation practices. Though case studies are often lacking in empirical data, they are a useful and valid method in the field of historic preservation.¹³²

In order to identify appropriate case study sites, criteria were developed, as follows:

- 1) The track must be located in the Piedmont to Appalachian region of North Carolina. Although the focus of this research is on the Piedmont region of North Carolina, the tracks may be located in the Appalachian region geographically if they represent the demographics, economics, and the culture that surrounded the mill towns of the Piedmont

¹³² Mark Francis, "A Case Study Method for Landscape Architecture", (Washington, D.C.: Landscape Architecture Foundation, 1999), 6-10.

region. An example is the Asheville Motor Speedway and Asheville-Weaverville which are located in the Appalachian region where the communities surrounding them have characteristics similar to communities in the Piedmont region.

- 2) The track must be purpose-built for stock car racing. The track must have been constructed originally as a dirt track; however, tracks paved later will still be considered.
- 3) The track must be oval in design.
- 4) The track must have been constructed in the defined period of significance for this study from 1940 to 1960.
- 5) The track must have been used on the NASCAR Strictly Stock Division which was later known as Grand National Division and Winston Cup Series. The NASCAR Grand National races do not need to have taken place during the period of significance.
- 6) The track can be abandoned, still in operation, or serving another purpose.

Based on the criteria, five case study sites were identified for further study: Asheville-Weaverville Speedway, Hickory Motor Speedway, New Asheville Speedway, Occonechee-Orange Speedway, and North Wilkesboro Speedway.

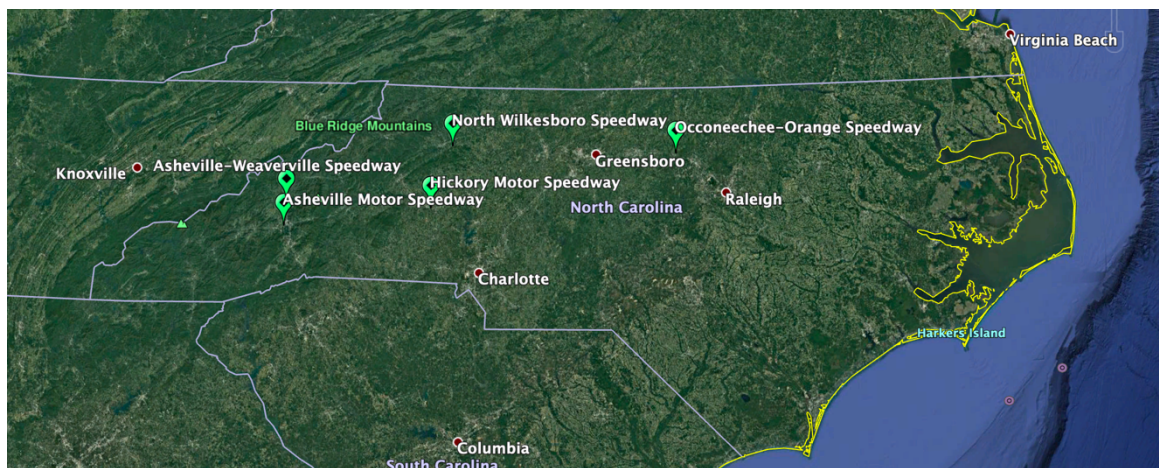


Figure 2 Location of case study sites in North Carolina. (Google Earth Pro and Author)

For the remainder of this chapter, each case study will reveal similar types of information: history of the site, evolution of the site, an inventory of existing condition, and an assessment of the inventory. Tables listing extant historic and non-historic resources at each site are at the end of each case study. For the purposes of this study, historic resources are those that were extant (or possibly extant based on evidence) during the period of significance from 1940 to 1960. Track information is at the top of the table and the track surface is listed as it exists today.

North Wilkesboro Speedway

History and Description

North Wilkesboro Speedway, located in North Wilkesboro, North Carolina, is an inactive 5/8-mile asphalt track that was used on the Grand National or Cup circuit from 1949 to 1996.¹³³ The town of North Wilkesboro and the surrounding area is known for its association with moonshining and stock car racing. During the post-WWII era the town experienced growth with the establishment of several furniture factories and textile mills. Its association with stock car racing developed in part because of the speedway, but also due to the moonshine industry in the area which in turn played a significant role in the history of stock car racing. Wilkes County, in which North Wilkesboro is located, was considered one of the moonshine capitals of America in the mid-20th century.¹³⁴

¹³³ Allen J. Brown, *History of America's Speedways: Past and Present*, 4th ed. (Comstock Park, MN 2017), 544.

¹³⁴ Dick Underwood, "A Brief History of North Wilkesboro", City of North Wilkesboro, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://www.north-wilkesboro.com/history/>; Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 18; Andrew Baker, "When the Engines No Longer Roar: A Case Study of North Wilkesboro, NC and the North Wilkesboro Speedway", Electronic Thesis, Ohio University, 2005, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://etd.ohiolink.edu/>, 26; Wilson and Call, Interview by Author; Pierce, Interview by Author.

North Wilkesboro Speedway was constructed in 1945 and designed and funded by Enoch Staley, Charlie Combs, Lawson Curry, and John Mastin. Staley and Mastin had attended some races earlier in the year in Spartanburg, South Carolina, and Mt. Airy, North Carolina. Staley remained the president and part-owner of the track until his death in 1995 and is the most common name associated with the racetrack. Combs would go on to design and help establish Hickory Motor Speedway and own an interest in Asheville-Weaverville Speedway.¹³⁵

The track pre-dates the formation of NASCAR in 1947. The first race, a modified stock car race, was held at the track on May 18, 1947. Fonty Flock, a future NASCAR star, won the first race.¹³⁶ The early success of this track, under the leadership of Enoch Staley, drew the attention of stock car promoter Bill France. France, Staley, and other promoters such as Clay Earles, Alvin Hawkins, and Joe Littlejohn, met in North Wilkesboro after a race in the fall of 1947 to discuss organizing a sanctioning body. This small meeting led to the meeting at the Streamline Hotel in Daytona, Florida, which led to the formation of NASCAR.¹³⁷ Six races were held at the track between 1947 and 1948 including Modified division NASCAR races.¹³⁸ North Wilkesboro was one of nine tracks on the first NASCAR Strictly Stock Series schedule in 1949. It held the finale for the season on October 16th.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Washburn, *Hickory Motor Speedway*, 12; Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 127; Baker, "When the Engines No Longer Roar", 27; Herman Hickman, "Enoch", *Goodwrench Racing Report*, April 1992, 8.

¹³⁶ Neal Thompson, *Driving with the Devil*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006), 215

¹³⁷ Suzanne Wise, "Carolina to California: The History of North Wilkesboro Speedway as a Mirror of the Growth of NASCAR", 4.

¹³⁸ Hickman, "Enoch", 8.

¹³⁹ Keith Waltz, "NASCAR's Cup Series Makes its Final N. Wilkesboro Run", SpeedSport, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://speedsport.com/racing-history/torn-from-the-headlines/nascar-s-cup-series-makes-ts-final-n-wilkesboro-run/>.

Among the most successful drivers at the track was Junior Johnson. He began racing at North Wilkesboro shortly after it was constructed and remembers the infield consisting of a cornfield.¹⁴⁰ Johnson was from nearby Ronda, North Carolina and ran moonshine as a teenager and young man in the 1940s and 1950s. He drove his brother's moonshine car in a 1949 modified race at the track and stated that most of the drivers in that race were bootleggers. Johnson would go on to win fifty races in the NASCAR Grand National division with eighteen of those wins coming at North Wilkesboro.¹⁴¹

The track hosted ninety-three Grand National division races during its operation.¹⁴² In 1996, one year after founder and part-owner Enoch Staley passed away, the track was purchased by Bruton Smith, the founder of Speedway Motorsports, Inc., and Bill Bahre, who owned New Hampshire Motor Speedway at the time. Smith wanted to purchase the entire track; however, the Staley family refused to sell him their shares. Smith purchased the shares of the Combs family, and Bahre purchased the shares of the Staley family. Bahre eventually sold his shares to Smith in 2008 and Speedway Motorsports, Inc. took over full ownership of the track. After the 1996 season, Smith and Bahre moved the track's two dates to New Hampshire Motor Speedway, owned by Bahre, and Texas Motor Speedway, owned by Smith.¹⁴³ The closure of the track was controversial on many levels and has proven to be economically detrimental to the city of North Wilkesboro. Steven Wilson with Save the Speedway, a group trying to bring

¹⁴⁰ Associated Press, "A Thundering Silence: Fans still come to visit the track many thing of as the Holy Land of NASCAR", *Winston-Salem Journal*, August 12, 2001.

¹⁴¹ Associated Press, "A Thundering Silence", *Winston-Salem Journal*; Racing-Reference.info, "Junior Johnson", accessed February 12, 2019, https://www.racing-reference.info/driver/Junior_Johnson; Wise, "Carolina to California", 3.

¹⁴² "North Wilkesboro Speedway", Racing-Reference.info, accessed February 12, 2019, https://www.racing-reference.info/tracks/North_Wilkesboro_Speedway.

¹⁴³ Associate Press, "A Thundering Silence", *Winston-Salem Journal*; Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

racing back to North Wilkesboro, estimates that the city has lost revenue of over forty-million dollars per year due to the track's closure.¹⁴⁴ The track was a significant part of the community, not only in terms of economics, but also as a part of people's lives. Its meaning to the people of the community is exemplified by the life of Paul Call, who has dedicated a significant part of his life to North Wilkesboro Speedway. He began working at the track with his father when he was ten years old in 1947. Call states, "The first day I worked here I made ten cents an hour." He did everything from cutting corn off of the infield when the track was constructed to bringing in new seats on the front stretch during the 1970s. Call continues to dedicate his time to the track and still resides in a small house next to the racetrack where he keeps a watchful eye on a racetrack which has been a part of his life for over seventy years.¹⁴⁵

Save the Speedway, also known as STS, Inc., is a North Carolina Corporation started by Robert Marsden in 2005 with the purpose of bringing racing back to the speedway. The group led the efforts of the track revival which took place between 2009 and 2011. The revival attempt was somewhat successful with volunteers working to get the track in operation condition. Save the Speedway leased the track from Speedway Motorsports, Inc. and hosted races at the track five weekends between 2010 and 2011 which included the Pro All-Stars Series, the US Super Trucks Series, and the USA Racing Pro Cup Series. Two earlier attempts to revive racing at the track occurred earlier in 2009 but were unsuccessful.¹⁴⁶ Save the Speedway continues to look for opportunities

¹⁴⁴ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author; Dave Caldwell, "The Drive to Bring Sentimental Journeys Back to a Beloved NASCAR Track", Forbes, April 5, 2018, accessed February 12, 2010, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davecaldwell/2018/04/05/why-a-beloved-nascar-racetrack-might-not-provide-a-sentimental-journey/#ffaf01f53f11>.

to revive racing at the track and regularly works with Speedway Motorsports, Inc., the city of North Wilkesboro, and Wilkes County to explore options. The largest obstacle faced by the organization is raising enough money to be able to make improvements necessary to revive racing.¹⁴⁷

As is the case with most race tracks that were constructed in the 1940s and 1950s that endured for several decades, the track evolved significantly. The founders built the track as a ½ mile dirt track; the track was extended to 5/8-mile circa 1950. A concrete block grandstand large enough for 3,500 fans was constructed and a nearby chicken coop was converted into a ticket office. The ticket office was also used as offices for executives of the track such as Enoch Staley and his son Mike Staley. A rear addition was added for more office space. Enoch Staley's office was in this rear addition, and the office is much as he left it when he died in 1995. The office was used until the track closed in 1996 and was used again during the revival from 2009-2011.

Photos from the first race at the track indicate that a concrete wall existed at least on the front stretch.¹⁴⁸ A photo from 1949 indicates that a wooden picket fence was in at least one of the turns.¹⁴⁹ On top of the wall was a woven-wire fence on wood posts. The flag stand was on the infield of the track and constructed with wood. In early years a picket fence kept drivers from leaving the track in the turns. The infield was dirt and grass with a fence on wooden posts around it to protect the fans from the racetrack. A photo from 1947 shows the infield filled with cars and fans watching a race.¹⁵⁰ There

¹⁴⁷ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

¹⁴⁸ "Green Flag First Race at NWS", Save the Speedway, Digitized Photograph, Save the Speedway Collection.

¹⁴⁹ "1949 Racing Action", Save the Speedway, Digitized Photograph, Save the Speedway Collection.

¹⁵⁰ Herman Hickman, "Enoch", 8; "North Wilkesboro Speedway", Racing-Reference.info, accessed February 12, 2019, https://www.racing-reference.info/tracks/North_Wilkesboro_Speedway; Wilson and Call, Interview by Author; "Green Flag First Race at NWS", Save the Speedway, Digitized Photograph,

appears to have been a fence surrounding the infield to protect fans. A fence post is visible in a photograph from the first race at the track in 1947.¹⁵¹

The track was paved with asphalt in 1957 and repaved in the late 1970s.¹⁵² A flag stand appears over the outside wall as early as 1961; however, it is not the same flag stand that exists today.¹⁵³ Based on photos, it can be determined that the current flag stand was built in the late 1970s.¹⁵⁴ Grandstands were improved to poured concrete and chair backs placed on them in 1970. Paul Call, caretaker of the facility and lifelong employee of the track, states that the concrete stands were installed during the construction of the track and that the metal chairs were brought in from the State Fairgrounds Speedway in Raleigh when it closed in the 1970s. According to photos it appears that the original grandstands were wooden and did not extend all the way to turns one and four as do the current concrete grandstands.¹⁵⁵ The scoring stand on the front stretch near turn four was constructed from concrete masonry units in the 1960s. It was used for teams to keep track of the driver's position during the race. A concrete masonry unit concession stand was constructed on the infield circa 1961. Circa 1970, a concrete masonry unit building was constructed just west of the grandstands. It served as

Save the Speedway Collection; "1949 Racing Action", Save the Speedway, Digitized Photograph, Save the Speedway Collection; "NWS 1947", Save the Speedway, Digitized Photograph, Save the Speedway Collection; Washburn, Hickory Motor Speedway, 11.

¹⁵¹ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author; "NWS 1947", Save the Speedway, Digitized Photograph, Save the Speedway Collection; Mike Pinto, "1987 Holly Farms 400", Filmed 1987, YouTube video, 2:15:18, Posted September 27, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mA56t4iYZRc>; Buggy1Boy, "1994 Tyson Holly Farms 400 at North Wilkesboro Part 1 of 11", Filmed 1994, YouTube video, 13:10, Posted November 27, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ybENF41MQ0&list=WL&index=25&t=10s>.

¹⁵² Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

¹⁵³ "Rex White 61 Wilkes 400 Checkered Flag", Save the Speedway, Digitized Photograph, Save the Speedway Collection.

¹⁵⁴ Unknown Photo, Save the Speedway, accessed February 12, 2019, <http://www.savethespeedway.net/nascar-at-north-wilkesboro-speedway-3/>; Petty Allison 1972 Wilkes 400", Save the Speedway, Digitized Photograph, Save the Speedway Collection.

¹⁵⁵ "Byron 2", Save the Speedway, Digitized Photograph, Save the Speedway Collection; Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

concession stands, storage, and offices for ESPN on the first floor and as an apartment for Enoch Staley on the second floor which he used on race weekends.¹⁵⁶ Suites and press boxes were constructed on the front stretch from the 1970s to 1980s. The press boxes were used for the television and radio broadcasters, such as the Universal Racing Network. One suite was the president's lounge for Enoch Staley, and one was dedicated to the title sponsor of the Cup Series, Winston. The other buildings were corporate suites. Six of the buildings, from just north of the start/finish line to the entrance of turn one, were not all constructed at the same time but were constructed during the 1970s. A photo from a race in 1972 does not show any of these buildings. However, a photo from the mid to late-1970s shows two of these buildings. The 1972 photo shows a shelter over the grandstands from turn four to the start/finish line. This shelter is not present in the later photograph. It is likely that the shelter was removed when the suites and press boxes were built.¹⁵⁷ Two suites were built separate from the main concourse and concessions and were constructed between turn four and the start/finish line likely in the 1980s.

The outside wall evolved from some concrete on the front stretch to concrete around the entire track replacing guardrail; a portion of a concrete wall appears on the backstretch as early as 1969.¹⁵⁸ A concrete inside wall on the front stretch replaced guardrail circa 1987 and circa 1994 on the back stretch.¹⁵⁹ The 1980s and 1990s saw a

¹⁵⁶ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

¹⁵⁷ Unnamed Photo, Save the Speedway, Digitized Photograph, savethespeedway.net, accessed February 9, 2019, <http://www.savethespeedway.net/nascar-at-north-wilkesboro-speedway-3/>; "1972 Richard Petty North Wilkesboro Win", Digitized Photograph, Save the Speedway Collection.

¹⁵⁸ CarolinaCliff, "North Wilkesboro Speedway 1969.wmv", Filmed 1969, YouTube video, 5:14, Posted November 20, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ca225nzgWvA>; Randall Dubin, "1970 NASCAR Grand National Gwyn Staley 400 @ North Wilkesboro (Full Race)", Filmed 1970, YouTube video, 1:16:50, Posted September 15, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaF1dXE4AEU>.

¹⁵⁹ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author; "NWS 1947", Save the Speedway, Digitized Photograph, Save the Speedway Collection; Mike Pinto, "1987 Holly Farms 400", Filmed 1987, YouTube video, 2:15:18, Posted September 27, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mA56t4iYZRc>; Buggy1Boy, "1994

major increase in seating with modern metal grandstands added from turn one to the entrance of turn three. The first section of these stands was constructed in turn one circa 1980. This section added an additional 2,700 seats. The remainder of the stands from the exit of turn one, through turn two and down the backstretch past the new suites were built from the mid-1980s to 1995. The expansion of the grandstands meant added concessions, bathrooms, and pump houses. Two corporate suite buildings for Tyson/Holly Farms and Lowes Home Improvement were added in the 1980s outside of turn four and just north of the grandstands and scoring stand. The concrete masonry unit and wood buildings were constructed almost identically. These were severely damaged by lightning and a fire in 2009. Several other improvements took place on the infield in the 1980s and 1990s including the addition of a multipurpose building which served as victory lane, the infield care center, the driver's lounge, the Winston room, a media room, and concession stand. In addition, an electronic scoring tower, pit road credentials buildings, and a garage were added in the 1980s. A metal building, now used as storage, was constructed just northeast of the ticket office circa 1980 as a storage facility for the county fair which was held at the track. The 1990s brought the last additions to the track which included the large luxury suites above the back-stretch grandstands and the tire buildings on the infield.¹⁶⁰

Tyson Holly Farms 400 at North Wilkesboro Part 1 of 11”, Filmed 1994, YouTube video, 13:10, Posted November 27, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ybENF41MQ0&list=WL&index=25&t=10s>.

¹⁶⁰ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

The site has suffered damage from vandalism in the recent years, including several buildings being broken into, glass broken in the back stretch suites, and a fire that severely damaged the garage.¹⁶¹



Figure 3. Green Flag at First Race at North Wilkesboro, 1947. (Save the Speedway)

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

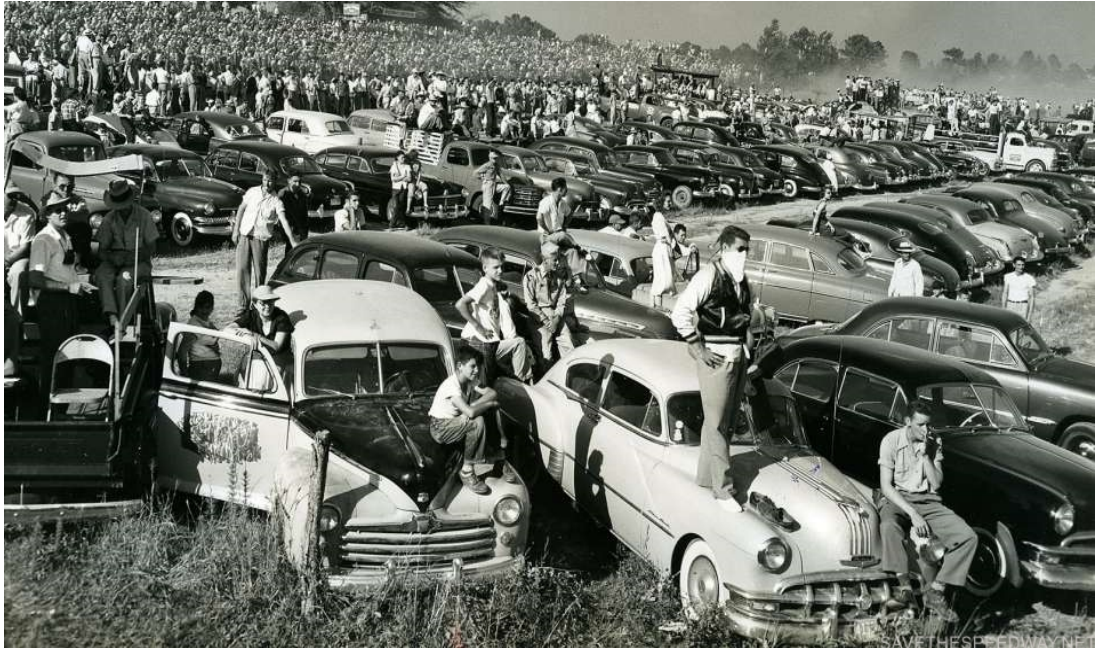


Figure 4. Fans filling the infield to watch the first race in 1947. (Save the Speedway)



Figure 5. Turns and wooden fence at North Wilkesboro, 1949. (Save the Speedway)

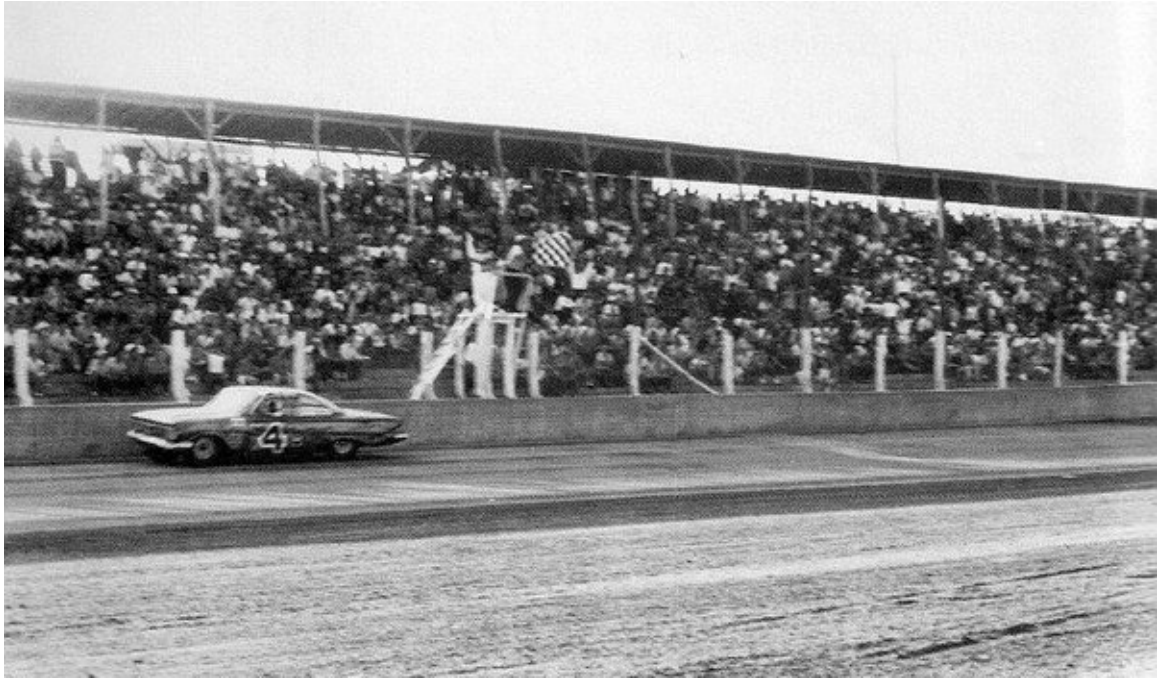


Figure 6. Start/finish line and grandstands at Wilkes 400, 1961. (Save the Speedway)



Figure 7. Front stretch with suites and press boxes before last Winston Cup race in 1996. (<https://www.nascar.com/news-media/2016/09/29/thunder-in-the-hills-north-wilkesboro-20-years-later/>)

Existing Conditions

North Wilkesboro Speedway witnessed tremendous growth in the sport and as a result was upgraded multiple times during its time on the NASCAR schedule. The majority of the resources were constructed after the period of significance and many original features have been removed. The existing track conditions documented below consists of mostly features constructed after the period of significance.

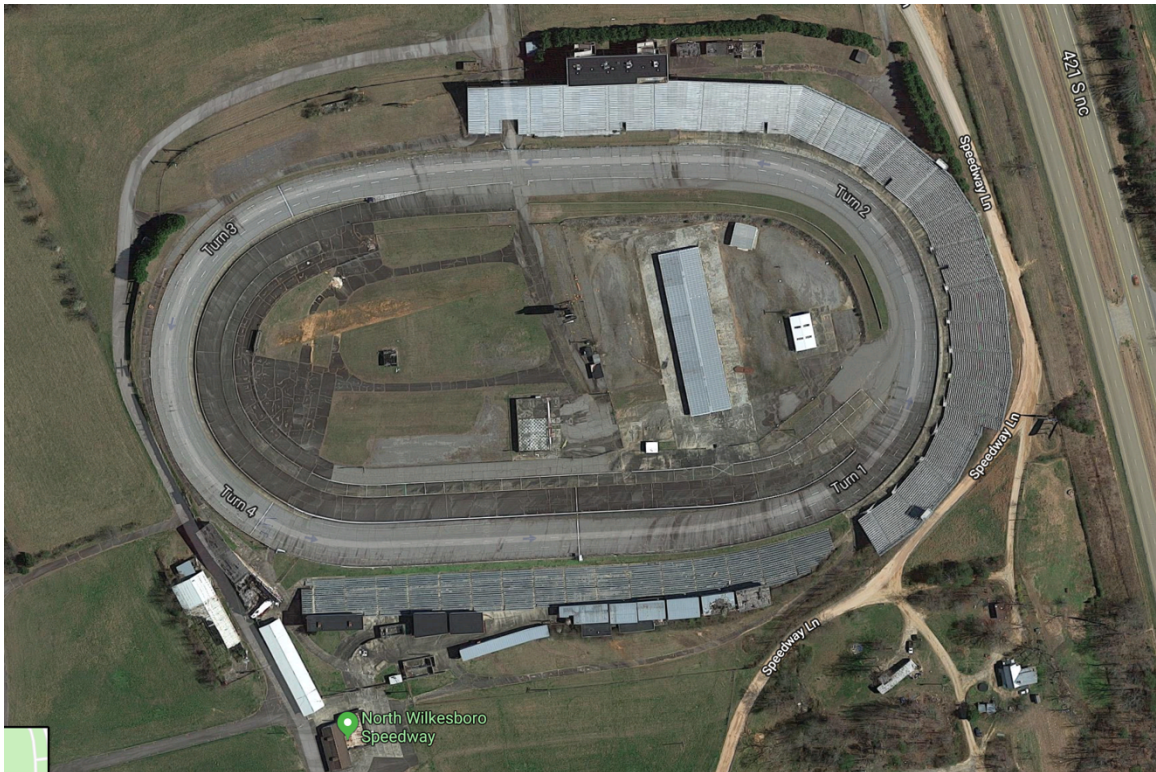


Figure 8. Aerial of North Wilkesboro Speedway. (<https://www.google.com/maps/@36.1425154,-81.0725178,663a,35y,90h/data=!3m1!1e3>).

Track

The current track is 5/8-mile in length. It is paved with asphalt. The track surface is cracked and somewhat affected by vegetation, but is in overall good condition and can be used for racing in its current state.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Wilson and Call, Interview by Author; “North Wilkesboro Speedway”, Racing-Reference.info.



Figure 9. North Wilkesboro asphalt track surface still in overall good condition. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook).

Ticket Office

The ticket office is a rectangular building with an addition on the rear. It is located at the turn four gate of the racetrack. The office is constructed of concrete masonry units and wood with vinyl siding on the rear addition. The ticket office is in fair condition. Although the building seems to be structurally sound, there is some water damage on the interior and the interior seems to suffer from neglect.¹⁶³

¹⁶³ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.



Figure 10. Ticket office with additions converted from what was once a chicken coop. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook).

Fair/Storage Building

A long rectangular metal building is located directly northeast of the ticket office. It is now used for storage by the speedway.¹⁶⁴

Tyson/Holly Farms and Lowe's Suites

The Tyson/Holly Farms and Lowe's suite buildings are just outside of turn four north of the grandstands and scoring tower. They are constructed out of concrete masonry units on the first floor and wood with vinyl siding on the top. They are both painted in Winston red and white, the official colors of the Winston Cup Series. They have large plexiglass windows on the second story for fans to view the race. The suite to the west has a garage door on the front and the suite on the east has a garage door on the

¹⁶⁴ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

side. There is a metal staircase running between the two buildings. These buildings are both in severe disrepair with the roof and second floor almost completely collapsed in the Tyson suite. There is some fire damage to the suites and severe water damaged caused by loss of the roofs of the buildings. Save the Speedway has had discussions with the city on having the buildings demolished.¹⁶⁵



Figure 11. Tyson-Holly Farms and Lowe's Suites from grandstands in very poor condition. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)

Scoring Stand

This building was used for scorers of each team who kept track of their driver during the race. It is located near the exit of turn four and rises above the grandstands. The building is a rectangular building constructed out of concrete masonry units and

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

wood for the roof structure. It is also painted with Winston colors. It has large plexiglass windows with permanent seating inside.¹⁶⁶



Figure 12. Scoring stand rises above front stretch grandstands near turn 4. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)

Suites on Front Stretch

Two suites, constructed from wood and on metal supports with large plexiglass windows, are located above the grandstands between turn four and the start/finish line. They are not connected to the main concourse or concessions like the other suites and media booths. They are in overall good condition.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.



Figure 13. Suites on Front Stretch. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)

Enoch Staley Apartment/Concessions/Storage/ESPN Office

The concrete block and wood building, located south of the ticket office and outside of the grandstands, was constructed circa 1970s. The first floor served as concession stand and storage as well as an office for ESPN when ESPN began broadcasting races. On the second story of the building is an apartment for Enoch Staley. The upstairs apartment is mostly untouched since the Staley's death. The building still has several appliances that were used for concessions. There has been a security issue with the building as one of the first-floor concession areas was broken into in 2018. This building is also painted Winston red and white.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.



Figure 14. Enoch Staley Apartment, Concessions, and ESPN Office. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)

Front Stretch Suites and Press Boxes

Six buildings are located along the front stretch extending from just north of the start/finish line to the entrance to turn one. They were used as press boxes and corporate suites on top with concession stands underneath. The buildings are rectangular wood buildings with wood siding. They are raised on steel supports. The first three from the start/finish line are attached to concrete block restrooms on the rear. A concrete masonry unit concession stand is attached underneath the first suite. The rooms inside the suite still contain furniture and equipment.

The suites and press boxes are in varying degrees of disrepair. Some of the upper floors in the buildings have rotted and fallen in and are no longer safe to enter. Overall,

water damage is prevalent and the structures suffer from vandalism as does much of the facility.¹⁶⁸



Figure 15. Front Stretch Suites and Press Boxes at Start/Finish Line. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)



Figure 16. Front stretch suites and press boxes which are in overall poor condition. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)

¹⁶⁸ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

Front Stretch Grandstands

The grandstands along the front stretch are metal chairs set on a concrete terrace. Although the stands may not be original material, they retain the same general spatial arrangement to the track and the concrete portion was likely constructed during the period of significance.



Figure 17. Front stretch grandstands with chair back seats. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)

Turns One and Two and Back Stretch Grandstands

The metal grandstands located in turns one and two and on the back stretch are steel bleacher stands that were constructed over approximately fifteen years between 1980 and 1995. The stands are of modern construction being supported by Corten steel

beams on concrete footings. These grandstands were built with the same methods that stands are built today.¹⁶⁹

Turns One and Two and Backstretch Concessions and Restrooms

As stands were added to turns one and two in the 1980s, a concession building and restrooms were added underneath and just behind the grandstands. Concessions and restrooms were added as needed around the racetrack. There are three concrete masonry unit concession stands with shed roofs that are painted Winston red and white. Men's and women's restrooms are also located below the grandstands on turns one and two. These are constructed of concrete masonry units and are painted Winston red and white. A utility building for electrical equipment is also located beneath the grandstands. It is also built of concrete masonry units and painted Winston red and white. There is a small blue pre-fabricated wooden shed and a red pre-fabricated wooden shed used for concessions located beneath the grandstands. Behind the grandstands is another wooden pre-fabricated concession stand painted red and white. There are two more buildings and one more structure behind the grandstands just past the exit of turn two. There is a men's and women's restroom within a single concrete masonry unit building with a missing roof and doors. A concrete masonry unit structure used to contain a water tank and pump with a damaged and partially missing roof is located just north of the restroom. North of the pump building is a concrete masonry unit concession stand with three concession windows on the front and painted Winston red and white.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

New Back Stretch Suites

A large building raised above the back stretch was constructed in 1995. It is a rectangular steel building with large tinted glass windows across the front of the building. The suites and the stairs leading to them are supported by Corten steel I-beams as are the turns one and two and backstretch grandstands. The windows in the suite are damaged due to vandalism.¹⁷¹



Figure 18. Back stretch suites, which recently suffered vandalism and grandstands. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)

Scoring Tower

The electronic scoring tower located in the infield is a steel structure containing electronic scoreboards on three sides and a spinning three-sided sign at the top. It is

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

located in the center of the infield and was constructed circa 1980. It is no longer operational.¹⁷²



*Figure 19. Scoring tower on infield no longer operational.
(Photo Credit Jacob Cook)*

¹⁷² Ibid.

Credentials Buildings

Two small rectangular buildings are located southwest of the scoring tower. These are both constructed of concrete masonry units with metal shed roofs and are painted Winston red and white. There is a wooden shelter with a gabled roof on four wooden supports located between these two buildings. These buildings were constructed in the 1980s.¹⁷³

Victory Lane/Concessions/Driver's Lounge/Media Room/Winston Room/Infield Care Center

A multipurpose building constructed of concrete masonry units is located on the infield, northeast of the start/finish line. It is painted Winston red and white and is the second largest and most prominent of infield buildings and has been heavily vandalized. The building served many purposes and contains the following rooms:

- 1) Infield Care Center- used to treat injured drivers; still contains medical equipment
- 2) Concessions- still contains equipment
- 3) Driver's Lounge- two rooms; one meeting room with chairs where NASCAR would hold pre-race meetings with drivers; one bathroom containing showers
- 4) Winston Room- used by Winston promotional workers; this was used during the revival for souvenirs
- 5) Media Room- used by radio and television broadcasters

In addition to interior rooms, victory lane is located on top of the building. There is a concrete surface on top of the building painted with a checkered flag pattern. Metal

¹⁷³ Ibid.

railing is located around the top. A metal hydraulic lift is located on the south side of the building and was used to lift the winning car to the top of the building.¹⁷⁴



Figure 20. Victory Lane and Multipurpose Building. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)

Infield Concession Stand

A concrete masonry unit concession stand with a shed roof is located northeast of the multipurpose building and aligned with the center of turns three and four. It is also painted Winston red and white. It is the oldest of the infield buildings being constructed circa 1961.¹⁷⁵



Figure 21. Infield concession stand, the oldest building on the infield. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

Gas Building

The gas building is a small metal building located south of the multipurpose building. It was used as a station for pumping race fuel. A gas tank is located underground adjacent to the building.¹⁷⁶

Tire Buildings

Two buildings, used for tire mounting and storage, are located in turns one and two at the south end of the infield. One is the Goodyear tire building the other is the Hoosier tire building. These are both metal buildings and have garage doors. The Goodyear building is aligned with the center of turns one and two. The Hoosier building is located near the exit of turn two. Both buildings are relatively new compared to other buildings and are in good condition.¹⁷⁷

Garage

The garage is the largest of the infield buildings and was constructed in the 1980s. It is constructed of steel beams with aluminum siding and roofing. It is a rectangular building which is approximately 230 ft. x 57 ft. It is open on the north and south sides with beams dividing entrances. It contains a poured concrete floor and a scale for weighing race cars. The building was severely damaged by fire in 2018 which caused the building to partially collapse.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.



Figure 22. North elevation of garage which has sever fire damage. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)

Outside Wall

A poured concrete wall with chain link fence on top surrounds the track surface. This wall, though it has been added on to over the years, surrounds the entire track surface. Considering the fact that the track was repaved and lengthened, it is unlikely that the concrete wall present on the front stretch is the original front stretch wall. However, there are lumber marks indicating that a form was used to build the concrete wall on the front stretch. These marks do not extend into the turns, indicating that the front stretch wall is the oldest portion of the wall. The remainder of the fence, from turn one, down the backstretch, and to turn four was guardrail after the existence of wooden

fence and before the concrete wall was extended around the entire track.¹⁷⁹



Figure 23. Close-up of outside wall, board forms are visible. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)

Inside Wall

A poured concrete wall surrounds the infield to protect fans and teams on the infield from cars on the track. On the front stretch, a wall is between the track and pit area and another wall is between the pit area and infield. There are several breaks in the wall to allow access to pit road and the infield.

¹⁷⁹ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.



Figure 24. Inside Wall on Front Stretch and into Turn 1. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)

Flag Stand

A metal flag stand (circa 1970) is located at the start finish line, and rises above the fence and wall. This flag stand replaced a wooden flag stand in the same location.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ “Green Flag First Race at NWS”, Save the Speedway, Digitized Photograph, Save the Speedway Collection.



Figure 25. Metal flag stand located on the outside wall at the start/finish line. (Photo Credit Jacob Cook)

Assessment

North Wilkesboro Speedway is nationally significant under Criterion A in the area of Recreation and Entertainment due to its association with the first NASCAR season and the development of the sport. The track is also significant under Criterion C as an example of a racetrack constructed from the red clay of the region by the track builders and owners, Enoch Staley and Charlie Combs, who were involved in the construction of other track such as Occoneechee-Orange Speedway and Hickory Motor Speedway, respectively. It is significant at the state level under Criterion A in the areas of Recreation and Entertainment and Social History due to its association with stock car racing in the Piedmont region and the Piedmont working-class. It is locally significant

under Criterion B for its association with Enoch Staley, an early NASCAR promoter from the area. The track is also locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Community Development for its association with the economy of the town of the town of North Wilkesboro.

North Wilkesboro Speedway has an incredibly high number of extant racetrack features compared to other racetracks studied. North Wilkesboro has also undergone extensive changes since its inception and retains very few resources from its first season or from the period between 1945-1960. The track is a good example, however, of the evolution and development of NASCAR tracks from the early years to one of the sport's most successful periods, the 1990s. There are physical resources at the track from every decade from the 1940s to 1990s. Many of the historic resources that still exist are either in poor condition or have been heavily altered, but the alterations are expected at a site that was continuously used for almost fifty years.

The site retains integrity of design in that the actual track length and layout has remained largely unchanged since 1950 when it was lengthened from ½-mile to 5/8-mile. The front stretch grandstands, although not original to the track, and the track have the same general spatial organization as they did when the track was constructed. The setting is retained as the track is still in a rural setting near the small town of North Wilkesboro, NC in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Location has remained the same for the duration of the track's existence. Integrity of association is retained depending on the period it is associated with. Many fans of the sport associate this track with the 1970-1990s and not necessarily the early years of Piedmont stock car racing, although many fans consider it important in the history of NASCAR. Integrity of feeling is retained by

the spatial arrangement and design of the track; however, the feeling is likely more associated with the track toward the late 1950s after it was paved. Integrity of material from the 1940s to 1960s is poor except for the few original materials of the ticket office, and possibly the concrete wall on the front stretch and concrete grandstands. Integrity of workmanship is retained, as the track structure retains the overall design of a track laid out in the Piedmont red clay by track builders such as Enoch Staley and Charlie Combs.

Although the integrity of the track is not as strong as it is at other tracks studied, this track represents the success of stock car racing in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. It is also an excellent example of the development of a racetrack built in the 1940s and improved and expanded over the years. Improvements were being made to the track through 1995, one year before the last NASCAR Cup race at the track. Although it is not representative of a 1940s to 1950s racetrack, it is a good example of track evolution. In several years, it could be a good representation of the growth of NASCAR in the 1990s.

North Wilkesboro Speedway North Wilkesboro, NC 1945 Length: .5 mi. (1945) .625 mi (1950) Surface: Asphalt Paved: 1957 Active: 1947-1996			
Historic Resources	Circa	Non-Historic Resources	Circa
Track	1945	Fair/Storage Building	1980
Ticket Office (Converted from Chicken Coop)	1946	Tyson and Lowes Turn 4 Suites	1980
Front Stretch Concrete Grandstand	1950s	Scoring Stand	1965
Front Stretch Outside Concrete Wall	1947	Front Stretch Suites	1970s-1980s
		Staley Apartment/Concessions/ESPN	1970
		Metal Grandstands Turn 1-3	1980-1990s
		Turn 1-2 and Backstretch Concessions and Restrooms	1980-1990s
		Backstretch Pumphouse	1980-1990s
		Back Stretch Suites	1995
		Scoring Tower	1980
		Credential Buildings	1980
		Multipurpose Building/Victory Lane	1980
		Infield Concession Stand	1961
		Gas Building	Unknown
		Tire Buildings	1990s
		Garage	1980s
		Infield Concrete Wall	1987 and 1993
		Flag stand	1970s

Table 2. Summary of key features at North Wilkesboro Speedway (Created by Author)

Occoneetchee-Orange Speedway

History and Description

Occoneetchee-Orange Speedway (1948-1968), formerly known as Occoneetchee Speedway (1948-1954) and Orange Speedway (1954-1968), was located in Hillsborough, North Carolina next to the Eno River. It was a one-mile dirt racetrack that operated from 1948-1968. NASCAR's Grand National series ran thirty-two races at the track starting in 1949.¹⁸¹ Occoneetchee-Orange Speedway is considered the last remaining dirt track from the 1948 NASCAR season. There are other extant racetracks that were on the 1949 schedule; however, these have since been paved. Occoneetchee-Orange is the only track from the 1949 season which has not been paved and is still relatively intact.¹⁸² Bill France spotted the location for the racetrack while flying over the area in the 1940s and purchased the property in 1948. He partnered with Enoch Staley (owner of North Wilkesboro Speedway), Ben Lowe, Dobe Powell, and Joe Buck Dawson, all from North Carolina, to form Hillsboro Speedway, Inc.¹⁸³ Hillsboro Speedway, Inc. acquired over two-hundred acres of land in all which encompassed a former horse track owned by retired General Julian Carr. Prior to this, the land consisted of farms owned partly in the late 1700s by James Hogg.¹⁸⁴

NASCAR ran their first race at the track with the Modified Series in 1948. The Strictly Stock (later Grand National) Series ran their first race at the speedway on August

¹⁸¹ Racing-Reference.info, "Occoneetchee Speedway", accessed February 7, 2019, https://www.racing-reference.info/tracks/Occoneetchee_Speedway.

¹⁸² Historic Speedway Group, "Our Mission—Preserving NASCAR's last remaining dirt track...", accessed February 7, 2019, <http://www.historicspeedwaygroup.org>.

¹⁸³ Jennifer Martin, Sarah Woodward and Virginia Freeze, 2002, "Occoneetchee Speedway", Edwards-Pitman Environmental, Inc., Raleigh, NC, section 8 page 17, 18; Sidney Cruze, "They're Kickin' Up Dust Again at the Orange Speedway," *Carolina Country*, 36 no. 1, January 2004, 16.

¹⁸⁴ Historic Occoneetchee Speedway Trail, and Classical American Homes Preservation Trust, "Welcome to the Historic Occoneetchee Speedway", Interpretive Panel.

7, 1949. The first race at Occoneechee Speedway included female driver Sarah Christian, one of the three female NASCAR drivers in the 1949 Strictly Stock season. Bob Flock won the first Strictly Stock race at the speedway.¹⁸⁵ The speedway became known as Orange Speedway in 1954 after Bill France, Ann France, and Enoch Staley formed Orange Speedway, Inc. and took ownership of the racetrack. In 1955, the track was shortened from one-mile to 9/10-mile; however, it was still considered to be a one-mile track and was referred to as such by drivers.¹⁸⁶

During the mid to late-1950s, auto racing in the county was met with opposition from community members and religious leaders who formed an Anti-Racing Association. Those in opposition to the track argued that the presence of a racetrack in the county was disruptive to the peace on Sunday afternoons and exposed children of the community to dangerous driving, drinking, and gambling. The Anti-Racing Association, along with the North Orange Ministerial Association, took their case to the North Carolina General Assembly in 1957 and had racing banned on Sundays in the county. This proved to be a loss for Bill France, as Sunday was one of the best days when he could easily attract working-class fans.¹⁸⁷ To help appease the community members, France leased the track to the Orange County Board of Education for ten years starting in 1958 so it could be used for football games. He also continued to donate money to the athletic program at Orange High School for several years. The infield of the racetrack

¹⁸⁵ Martin, Woodward and Freeze, "Occoneechee Speedway", section 8 page 18-19; Racing-Reference.info, "Occoneechee Speedway", accessed February 7, 2019, https://www.racing-reference.info/tracks/Occoneechee_Speedway.

¹⁸⁶ Martin, Woodward and Freeze, "Occoneechee Speedway", section 8 page 19; Jarrett, Interview by Author.

¹⁸⁷ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 188-189.

was used for football for several years, even after racing ended at the venue.¹⁸⁸ As dirt tracks began to give way to paved superspeedways in the 1960s, Orange Speedway lost its date on the schedule to Bill France's new venture, Talladega Superspeedway in Alabama. The last race at the speedway was September 15, 1968.¹⁸⁹ Buck Baker, Lee Petty, and Richard Petty are the all-time wins leaders at the track with three wins each.¹⁹⁰ Occoneechee-Orange Speedway was important to many working-class citizens of the area. According to one fan, Casey Bateman, he used to wade across the Eno River from his house and sneak into the race when he was a child in the 1950s and 1960s. He stated that he would often go down to the infield and converse with the drivers, becoming friends with NASCAR legend Junior Johnson. This is only one example of how fans were able to gain more access to drivers in the early years and the racetrack and drivers were more closely connected to the community.¹⁹¹ The France and Staley families owned the speedway through France Staley, LLC., until 1997.¹⁹² Much of the surrounding land had been sold for industrial use after the closing of the track. The trustees of the Classical American Homes Preservation Trust, which owns Ayr Mount, a historic site across the Eno River from the speedway, were concerned with a proposed bypass in Hillsborough in 1997. They believed that the noise and traffic associated with the bypass could cause issues for the historic site. The plan for the bypass included using the former

¹⁸⁸ Martin, Woodward and Freeze, "Occoneechee Speedway", section 8 page 29; Lavergne Zachary, Interview by Author, Phone Interview, February 7, 2019.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 20.

¹⁹⁰ Racing-Reference.info, "Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series Drivers' Statistics for Occoneechee Speedway", accessed February 7, 2019, <https://www.racing-reference.info/trackdet?s=3&show=1&series=W&trk=104>

¹⁹¹ Cruze, "They're Kickin' Up Dust Again at the Orange Speedway," 16.

¹⁹² Ibid, 20.

site of the speedway. In order to keep the bypass from affecting the historic site, the trust planned to purchase the speedway so that it would not be sold to the state. That same year Preservation North Carolina purchased the track with funding from the Classical American Homes Preservation Trust and the James M. Johnston Trust and transferred the property to the Classical American Homes Preservation Trust. Although the trust was only interested in blocking the construction of the bypass, several community members approached the trust concerning the preservation of the track. In order to prevent any road construction on the site, a National Register nomination was written for the site, and it was added to the National Register in 2002. This resulted in the site being the only NASCAR track on the National Register. The trust planned to make walking and running trails on and around the speedway, and they were successful in doing so with the trails opening in 2002. The trail system on the property was expanded five-and-a-half miles. Stairs off of the back of the track banking were added for trail access and an exercise area with wooden platforms and pull-up bars was added on infield near the back stretch. The community members concerned with preserving the racetrack formed the Historic Speedway Group. They undertook preservation efforts alongside the Classical American Homes Preservation Trust. The Historic Speedway Group was formed in 2006. In 2007, they took on several projects including reconstructing the ticket booth, press box/concession stand, flag stand, and women's restroom. Classical American Homes added interpretive panels around the site with information related to track history, including important races, and drivers at the tracks. The site is now known as the Historic Occoneechee Speedway Trail (HOST) and is open to the public.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Crowther, Bill, Interview by Author, Personal Interview, Hillsborough, NC, January 5, 2017.

Although this track did not endure as many major changes as some of the other case study sites, it did undergo some modifications over the years. According to photos, the track did not include any infield buildings and had no outside or inside wall. The track features included the banked dirt oval, a dirt embankment on the front stretch with hog-wire fence on top, a concession stand, restrooms, concrete grandstands, spectator gate and fence constructed from wood and pressed sheet, ticket booth, flag stand, press box, and an entrance road from U.S. Highway 70. This track never had a concrete safety wall erected either on the infield or on the outside. The hog wire fencing on a dirt embankment was the only fencing or “wall” ever at the track. A wall constructed from pressed sheet and wood is located on the west side of the site and served to keep non-paying spectators out and as an entrance for fans and drivers. Restrooms constructed from wood and metal were on the site. The men’s restroom was constructed west of turn four and the women’s restroom was just inside the main gate. The concrete grandstands were added around 1958. According to photos and videos from the early 1950s-mid 1960s, along with comments from track historian Lavergene Zachary, there were additional stands prior to and after the construction of the concrete stands. These appear to have been wood and metal possibly set on concrete. It is reported that Enoch Staley would often bring in stands from North Wilkesboro Speedway to accommodate large crowds. The spectator hill above the track, primarily south of the concrete grandstands, appears to have some terracing where stands may have been located or fans may have sat on the ground or in lawn chairs. Photos indicate fans sitting or standing close to the track from just south of the press box to the entrance of turn one. Buildings and structures at the racetrack were constructed of wood and sheet metal. It appears from video footage that

two press boxes or at least two structures appearing to be press boxes or scorer stands existed in both 1951 and 1958. The reconstructed press box/scorer stand/concession stand likely only represents one of these buildings. The flag stand was wooden and located on the infield at the start/finish line, as many flag stands were on early dirt tracks. In addition to the concrete grandstands, the addition of the football field also added six light poles on either side of the infield. These were installed circa 1958 along with metal goal posts on the infield. Unlike many tracks of its time, Occoneechee-Orange Speedway was never paved.¹⁹⁴



Figure 26. Front stretch with grandstands and dirt embankment ca. 1960. (Ayr Mount Collection of Photos)

¹⁹⁴ Ayr Mount Collection of Photos, undated; Lavergne Zachary, Interview by Author, Phone Interview, February 7, 2018; King Rose Archives, “Orange Speedway 1957”, Filmed 1957, YouTube video, 8:10, Posted January 22, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1qzjCboZxE&t=219s>; allendale101, “Occoneechee Speedway Highlights 1951”, Filmed 1951, YouTube video, 6:09, Posted December 16, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2ravT36snQ&t=1s>.



Figure 27. Front stretch, grandstand, and scorer stand ca. 1967. (Ayr Mount Collection)



Figure 28. Historic Aerial of Occoneechee-Orange. (Ayr Mount Interpretive Panel)



Figure 29. Front stretch with lights, date unknown. (Ayr Mount Collection of Photos)

Existing Conditions

This site is mostly wooded. However, several of the original track features still exist. Due to the fact that this track closed in 1968, this track was never updated, as many were in the 1970s resulting several original track features being left intact.

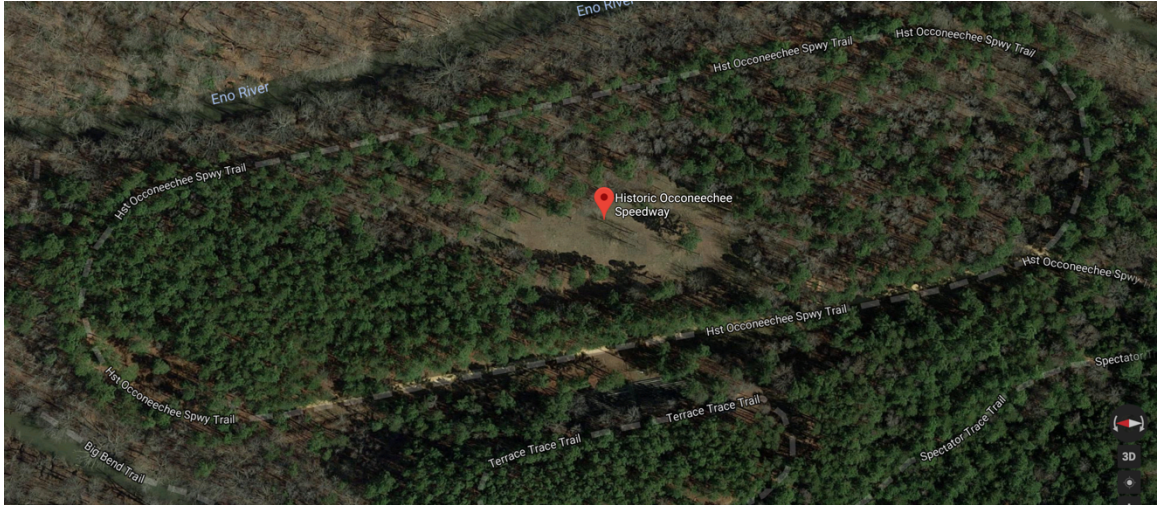


Figure 30. Aerial of Occoneechee-Orange Speedway.
(<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Historic+Occoneechee+Speedway/@36.0741901,-79.0808665,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x89acdf18b4fa98bb:0xbfd057f1c6969075!8m2!3d36.0741901!4d-79.0808665>)

Track

The 0.9-mile track with banking is still somewhat intact. Banking is evident in the turns and behind the turns near the river. The track and its banking are wooded with the exception of the walking trail which is along the inside of the racetrack footprint. Despite the presence of trees, the footprint of the track is obvious and retains its overall form and layout.



Figure 31. Front Stretch toward Turn 1, now covered in pine straw and trees. (Photo Credit Author)



Figure 32. Turn 1 banking. (Photo Credit Author)

Infield

The infield still consists of only dirt and grass with the exception of trees, goal posts, and an area with bars and platforms for exercise along the backstretch.



Figure 33. Grass Infield, also served as a football field. (Photo Credit Author)

Dirt Embankment

Along the front stretch, the dirt embankment which was present from the beginning of the track is still intact.



Figure 34. Dirt embankment on front stretch toward turn 1. (Photo Credit Author)

Fencing

Occoneechee retains portions of the original fence which consisted of woven wire on wooden posts. The fencing spans from turn four to turn one. Portions of the fence are in disrepair; however, a significant portion of the fence with original woven wire is still standing. Woven wire has been replaced in some areas with woven wire of the exact same pattern. This feature is extremely rare.



*Figure 35. Woven wire fencing on front stretch, a rare sight at racetracks of today.
(Photo Credit Author)*

Concrete Grandstands

Although these grandstands were built circa 1958 mainly due to the addition of the football field on the infield, they were still used by race fans for approximately ten years. The grandstands were constructed using both concrete masonry units and poured concrete. They extend on either side of the start/finish line and have concrete stairs with a rail down the middle. They are located slightly north of the press box/concession stand/scorer stand. Although these were not considered to be contributing in the 2002 National Register nomination, they are representative of the evolution of a 1940s to 1960s stock car track.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Martin, Woodward and Freeze, “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form” for Occoneechee Speedway.”



Figure 36. Concrete grandstands on front stretch. (Photo Credit Author)

Outside Spectator Fence and Entrance Gate

At the entrance to the speedway trail, a pressed sheet metal fence on wooden posts is visible and runs the length of the front stretch in various states of disrepair. The fence is approximately ten feet in height and has two gates, one near turn one and the other near the start/finish line at the ticket booth. Until it reaches the ticket booth, the fence is in overall good condition. As the fence extends from the ticket booth toward turn four, its condition worsens and portions of the fence are missing in several locations. Materials of the fence are visible on the ground near turn four and the men's restroom.

This fence would have served as an entrance for fans and drivers and to keep non-paying spectators out of the race track. This type of fencing at a racetrack was common for the era, but is extremely rare to find at surviving racetracks.



Figure 37. Pressed-sheet Spectator Gate and Fence. (Photo Credit Author)

Men's Restroom

The men's restroom is the only surviving building from the track's period of operation. It is constructed of wood and pressed sheet metal and has a pyramidal roof. It is located west of turn four. It is in severe disrepair.



Figure 38. East elevation of men's restroom, facing the track. (Photo Credit Author)

Original Entrance Road

The road that originally led to the speedway is visible off of U.S. Highway 70, southwest of the speedway. The trail leading to and from the speedway runs along a portion of the old road bed, southwest of the speedway across Elizabeth Brady Rd. which had not been constructed at the time of the speedway's operation.

Reconstructions

There are four reconstructed buildings on the site. Photos show they were reconstructed using like materials.¹⁹⁶ The ticket booth is located outside of the entrance gate located just west of the track. It is constructed of concrete masonry units, wood, and wooden novelty siding. It is a rectangular building with a gabled roof and exposed rafter tails. The women's restroom, or outhouse is located just inside the gate and is constructed of concrete masonry units, wood, and novelty siding with a shed roof and exposed rafter tails. The press box/scorer stand/concession stand is located east of the gate and southwest of the start finish line. It is also constructed of concrete masonry units, wood, and novelty siding with a shed roof and exposed rafter tails. The flag stand is located on the infield at the start finish line. It is constructed of wood and has a roof over the rear portion. It also contains a sign with a Pepsi-Cola logo and the name and dates of the track.



Figure 39. East elevation of women's restroom reconstruction. (Photo Credit Author)

¹⁹⁶ Zachary, Interview by Author; Crowther, Interview by Author.



Figure 40 Southwest oblique of ticket office reconstruction. (Photo Credit Author)



Figure 41 Northeast oblique of scorer stand and concessions



Figure 42. West elevation of flag stand reconstruction. (Photo Credit Author)

Football Goal Posts

Two metal H-style football goal posts are located on the infield. Though they were erected during the track's operation, they did not contribute to the racetrack and are not an important feature of the site.

Light Pole

One light pole remains from the six light posts erected for football. It is a wooden utility pole with light still attached. Though it was erected during the track's operation, it was not used for lighting the racetrack and is not considered a contributing resource.

Trails/Recreation

A five-and-a-half-mile network of trails exists on the property owned by Ayr Mount and the Classical American Homes Preservation Trust. These trails incorporate the track by using the original track surface as part of the trail. The trail runs around the

inside of the track mostly avoiding the banking. There are sets of wooden stairs on the backstretch and in the center of turn three and four that lead to the trails outside of the track. On the infield beside the back stretch is an area consisting of pull-up bars and wooden platforms for exercise.

Existing Interpretation

The three interpretive panels erected by Classical American Homes Preservation Trust are still located on site. One is located in the parking lot at the entrance to the trail and approximately five-hundred feet southwest of the actual speedway. Another panel, detailing further history of the site, is located at the turn one entrance gate. A third panel is located inside the main entrance gate near the ticket booth and women's restroom. These panels give background and a short history of the site including a record of races that were run at the track and the winners of those races.

In addition to interpretive panels, there are small wooden signs marking each reconstructed building and features of the racetrack such as the spectator areas. There is a brochure available at the entrance to the trail that gives information about features around the track.

Three historic race cars are located around the track. Two cars are located on the edge of the infield just past the start/finish line heading toward turn one. One car, a Dodge Polara driven by NASCAR driver, Gene Hobby, is located near the turn four entrance.

Assessment

The 2002 National Register nomination for Occoneechee-Orange Speedway states that the site is significant under Criterion A with areas of significance in Recreation and Social history “for its association with early organized stock car racing in piedmont North Carolina.”¹⁹⁷ The nomination goes on to say that it is “significant at the state level in the areas of social history and recreation for its association with a sport with roots in the bootlegging activities of rural North Carolina where “trippers” transporting illegal liquor in cars with modified engines and beefed-up transmissions attempted to outrun revenuers.”¹⁹⁸ The nomination used Criteria Consideration G for the site having acquired significance in the last fifty years, because, at the time of this nomination, a portion of the period of significance fell within the last fifty years and the track was considered a rare property type. The significance determined in the National Register nomination is sufficient but should be revised. The site should also be considered locally significant in the area of social history for its association with the working-class culture of the town of Hillsborough and the tension that ensued between those people and the religious leaders of the area. It should also be considered locally significant in the area of community development for its association with the local high school and the fact that it served as a community facility. The site should be considered nationally significant in the area of Recreation and Entertainment as it is one of only three surviving race tracks from the NASCAR Strictly Stock 1949 season and the only one of those tracks that was never paved. The track is also nationally significant under Criterion B for its association with

¹⁹⁷ Jennifer Martin, Sarah Woodward, and Virginia Freeze, “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form” for Occoneechee Speedway, March 5, 2002, section 8 page 7.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, section 8 page 7.

its founder and owner, Bill France, the founder and president of NASCAR at the time. Finally, the racetrack is nationally significant under Criteria C as an example of an early stock car racetrack constructed from the red clay of the Piedmont and basic materials available at the time.

Despite the fact that this site sat abandoned for several decades and is now used for a walking trail, it retains a high degree of integrity compared to similar racetracks of the era. It retains integrity of setting and location in that it is still surrounded by a wooded area and is located next to the Eno River. Integrity of design has been retained with the extant banking, track footprint, and dirt embankment along the front stretch as well as the spatial organization between the spectator area and the track. Although many of the buildings are reconstructions, they help the visitor to better understand spatial arrangement. These reconstructions were not listed in the 2002 nomination as they had not yet been constructed. Buildings that were in disrepair were listed as non-contributing, however, these have been demolished and are should no longer be listed in the nomination. Integrity of materials has been retained in the fence material for both the fence along the front stretch and the outside spectator fence and gate. Original materials are also extant in the men's restroom. Integrity of workmanship is retained in the original track structure which was constructed out of the red clay prominent in the region. It was designed and constructed by men involved in the racing business such as Bill France and Enoch Staley. Integrity association is retained mainly due to the clean-up efforts by the Historic Speedway Group and the Classical American Homes Preservation Trust. Once again, although many buildings are reconstructions, they help the visitor understand the importance of the site and its association to stock car racing.

As stated in existing conditions, this track has several rare resources such as the fencing, dirt embankment, and men’s restroom. In addition, this track was never paved which is extremely rare among mid-century stock car tracks that were used on the NASCAR Grand National circuit. Despite the heavily wooded areas, this is a remarkably intact example of a racetrack constructed for NASCAR in the 1940s. Its association with Bill France, Enoch Staley, and possibly Charlie Combs increases the significance of this site as a Piedmont racetrack. It is also a good example of reuse of a historic racetrack which retains the integrity of the track and relays its significance to visitors effectively.

Occonechee-Orange Speedway Hillsborough, NC 1948 Length: 1.0-mi. (1948) 0.9-mi. (1955) Surface: Dirt Paved: N/A Active: 1948-1968			
Historic Resources	Circa	Non-Historic Resources	Circa
Track	1948	Ticket Booth	2007
Infield	1948	Press Box/Scoring Stand/ Concessions	2007
Fencing	1948	Women’s Restroom	2007
Dirt Embankment	1948	Flag Stand	2007
Spectator Fence and Gate	1948	Trails	2002
Men’s Restroom	1950s	Interpretation	2007
Entrance Road	1948		
Football Goal Posts	1958		
Light Pole	1958		
Concrete Grandstands	1958		

Table 3 Occonechee-Orange Speedway Historic Features

Asheville-Weaverville Speedway

History and Description

The Asheville-Weaverville Speedway was built in 1950 as a ½ mile dirt track. It is located in Weaverville, North Carolina. This track was nestled in the mountains in the small town of Weaverville, North Carolina, and the natural features around the site are indicative of that. The Flat Creek Tavern, located approximately four hundred yards from the track, as well as several houses that would have been extant during the period of operation, are still intact in the area. This track was constructed by Gene Sluder, a known moonshiner, who owned an earth-moving company in the area. The Speedway became known as the fastest ½-mile race track on the NASCAR schedule due to its high banks which made high speeds possible. The track hosted weekly racing divisions, as well as thirty-four Grand National races during its existence, including the annual Western North Carolina 500. The track was paved in 1957 and continued to host the Grand National Series until 1969.¹⁹⁹ During the 1950s and 1960s, the track would draw over 10,000 fans.²⁰⁰ The fans were mostly from the surrounding area and, according to one particular story, were passionate about racing at the speedway. During the WNC 500 in 1961, the track began to develop large potholes in the asphalt. Due to the danger posed to drivers, NASCAR officials decided to shorten the race. When the fans found out the race was

¹⁹⁹ Dan Pierce, “A History of Buncombe County Racing” in *Mountain Thunder: Stock Car Racing in Buncombe County 1949-1999*, A Project of the West Asheville History Project, the Asheville-Buncombe Library System, The North Carolina Humanities Council, and the Stock Car Racing Community in Buncombe County (Asheville, NC: Asheville-Buncombe Library System, 2003), 5-7.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 5; Keith Jarrett, “That’s Racin’: WNC has Rich 50-Year Tradition”, *Asheville Citizen-Times*, September 20, 2010, A3 (Accessed through The Stock Car Racing Collection at the Special Collections at Belk Library, Appalachian State University).

shortened, they blocked the exits, not allowing drivers to leave the track until they got to watch the number of laps for which they paid.²⁰¹

According to Dr. Daniel Pierce, Asheville-Weaverville Speedway was among some of the core NASCAR tracks in the Piedmont to Appalachian region that were associated with bootleggers. He asserts that bootleggers had the money and willingness to venture into stock car racing. Tracks that were built and/or owned by those involved in the illegal liquor business included North Wilkesboro, Occoneechee, Hickory, old Charlotte Speedway, Martinsville, and Asheville-Weaverville.²⁰² The track nearly went bankrupt in 1966 causing Bill France, Grafton Burgess, Clay Earles, Enoch Staley, Joe Littlejohn, and Raymond Parks to purchase the track from Sluder.²⁰³ The track finally closed in 1969 and the land was purchased shortly thereafter by the Buncombe County School Board; it is now the site of North Buncombe High School and its athletic fields.²⁰⁴

The track was originally dirt with dirt embankments separating the fans and cars on the front stretch. Atop this embankment sat a woven wire fence. The track was paved and a wall installed around the outside of the track circa 1957.²⁰⁵ The track had very little seating with the exception of a grandstand on the front stretch. People would stand or sit on the hillsides to the north, northeast, east, southeast, south, and southwest of the current football field. To the north of the track on the back stretch there was an elevated area where cars would park to watch the race.²⁰⁶ North Buncombe High School was

²⁰¹ Pierce, "A History of Buncombe County Racing", 6-7.

²⁰² Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 86-87.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 257.

²⁰⁴ Pierce, *Real NASCAR*, 281; Pierce, "A History of Buncombe County Racing", 7

²⁰⁵ Pierce, "A History of Buncombe County Racing", 5-7.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 5; Keith Jarrett, "That's Racin': WNC has Rich 50-Year Tradition", *Asheville Citizen-Times*, September 20, 2010, A3 (Accessed through The Stock Car Racing Collection at the Special Collections at Belk Library, Appalachian State University).

constructed on the site in 1987 and the athletic fields were added to the site from 1987 to the present.



Figure 43. 1956 race at Asheville-Weaverville. Dirt embankment, woven wire fence, infield fence, and flag stand visible. (<https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/lee-petty-wonthe-200-lap-race-at-the-dirt-asheville-news-photo/84314873>)

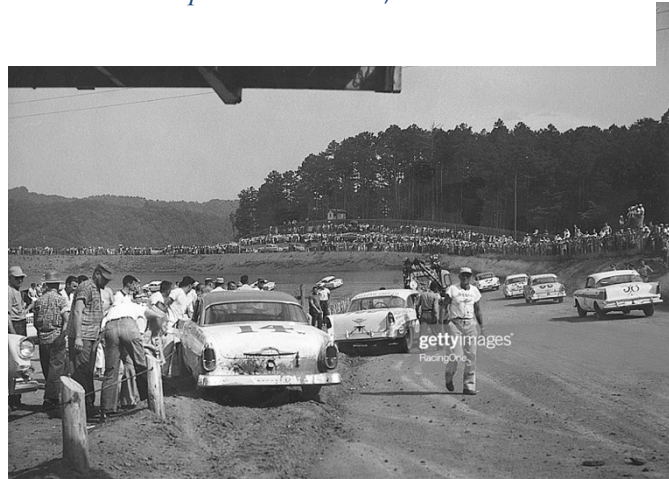


Figure 44. 1956 photo of the track. The spectator hill, now located south of the football field, is visible in the background. The flag stand indicates this is the front stretch. (<https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/july-1-1956-track-crews-work-on-removing-the-cars-of-billy-news-photo/146301933>)



Figure 43. 1969 race, after the track was paved. View of backstretch and turn 3. Football stands are now located where spectators are seated in this photo. (<https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/bobby-isaac-sits-on-the-pole-position-for-what-would-be-the-news-photo/109178484>)

Existing Conditions

Asheville-Weaverville Speedway is almost completely gone. North Buncombe High School's athletic facilities now occupy the former racetrack, and includes the football field and grandstands, four softball fields, six tennis courts, and a small practice field.

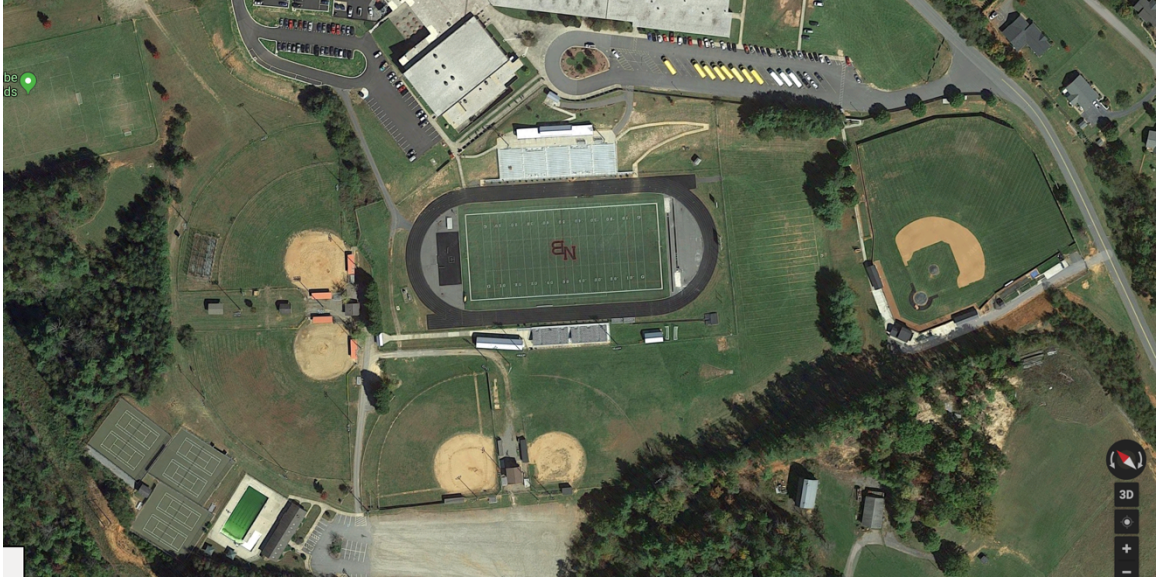


Figure 44. Aerial view of North Buncombe High School's athletic facilities, former site of Asheville-Weaverville Speedway. The start/finish line was directly southwest of where the current football field.

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/North+Buncombe+High+School/@35.7396177,-82.5574707,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x885a1f634bb60455:0x327ef46be33c4e1d!8m2!3d35.7396177!4d-82.5574707>

Turn 4 Banking

Remains of turn four are located west of the football field behind a softball field and in front of the tennis courts. They are slightly sloped dirt areas with no asphalt remaining.



Figure 45. The banking from turn 4 is still barely visible between the softball field and tennis courts. (Photo Credit Author)

Spectator Areas

Spectator areas, which are both natural and man-made hillsides, exist and are located on the north, northeast, east, southeast, southwest and south. of the football field. The backstretch spectator area, where many fans would park cars to watch the race, is believed to be in the location of the bleachers and press box on the north and northeast sides of the football field.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Determined using the following photos: *NASCAR Western NC 500 – Weaverville, 1968*, October 18, 1968, RacingOne, Getty Images; *NASCAR Weaverville – 1968*, August 18, 1968, RacingOne, Getty Images; *Myers/King Crash – NASCAR Weaverville 1956*, July 1, 1956, RacingOne, Getty Images; *Asheville-Weaverville Speedway*, May 4, 1969, RacingOne, Getty Images; *Bobby Welborn and Curtis Turner*, June 2, 1957, RacingOne, Getty Images; all accessed February 5, 2019, <https://www.gettyimages.com/photos/asheville-weaverville-speedway?mediatype=photography&phrase=asheville%20weaverville%20speedway&sort=mostpopular>.



Figure 46. Football stand on back stretch spectator hill where fans parked cars to watch the races. (Photo Credit Author)

Athletic Facilities

All existing buildings and structures are non-historic and not associated with the track. They include the swimming pool building, dugouts for the softball fields, a ticket booth, two storage buildings, a picnic shelter, press box for softball fields, stands for football on either side of the field, and the press box, bathrooms, and concessions for the football field, which are located on both sides of the football field. A parking lot is located to the southwest of the former track. A baseball field is located to the southeast of the former track location and the school building and parking lots are located to the north and northeast.



Figure 47. Athletic fields that now occupy the site of Asheville-Weaverville Speedway. (Photo Credit Author)

Assessment

Asheville-Weaverville Speedway is significant at the state level under Criterion A in the areas of Entertainment and Recreation and Social History for its association with stock car racing in Western North Carolina and mid-century Piedmont working-class culture. It is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Social History for its close connection to the surrounding town of Weaverville.

Although there are remains of turn four and the spectator hills at the former site of the Asheville-Weaverville Speedway, these features do not retain integrity. The only aspect of integrity that may still remain is the setting, since the track continues to be nestled in the mountains of a small town and is surrounded by sporadic residences and a

nearby tavern from the period of significance. Since the setting is the only characteristic of the Asheville-Weaverville Speedway which maintains its integrity, one cannot say the racetrack complex has integrity. While physical preservation is no longer an option, interpretation of the site is warranted due to the Speedway's importance in the early years of NASCAR.

Asheville-Weaverville Speedway Weaverville, NC 1950 Length: .5-mi. Surface: N/A Paved: 1957 Active: 1950-1969			
Historic Resources	Circa	Non-Historic Resources	Circa
Spectator Hills	1950	Softball Fields	1990s
Turn 4	1950	Football Field	1990s
Setting	NA	Football Stands	1990s
		Football Concessions/Press Box/Restrooms	2000s
		Tennis Courts	1990s
		Practice Field	1990s
		Swimming Pool	1990s
		Pool Building	1990s
		Ticket Booth (Non-Racing)	2000s
		Storage Buildings	2000s
		Picnic Shelter	2000s

Table 4. Summary of key features at Asheville-Weaverville Speedway. (Created by Author)

Hickory Motor Speedway

History and Description

Hickory Motor Speedway was built in 1951 as a ½ mile dirt track in Newton, NC; the first race took place that same year. Although originally ½ mile long, at an unknown date it was shortened to 4/10-mile distance. Charlie Combs, one of the founders of North Wilkesboro Speedway, had the idea for the track and partnered with Marshall McRee, Grafton Burgess, and Ralph Burgess to finance the construction of the track.²⁰⁸ Combs, the Burgess brothers, and McRee chose a plot of land along US Highway 70 in Newton near Hickory to build the track. Combs reportedly drew the design for the track in the dirt and the track was built using earth moving equipment provided by McRee. Ned Jarrett stated that McRee owned a trucking business, and he sent several of his trucks to the track to drive around it and pack the dirt. This, in part, made Hickory one of the smoothest tracks in stock car racing. Combs was familiar with building a race track after his time at North Wilkesboro. He incorporated many features of North Wilkesboro at Hickory, such as steep banks, hard surface, and the incorporation of a flag stand on the infield. In addition, the track had dirt embankments on the outside of the backstretch to protect fans from the cars. Hickory Motor Speedway was built to attract the Grand National division, and as a result, the track had a press box (likely not the current one), poured concrete grandstands, and concession stands at the first race.²⁰⁹ The construction of the speedway was exciting news to many of the members of the community in Newton

²⁰⁸ Washburn, *Hickory Motor Speedway*, 10-13, 24.

²⁰⁹ Washburn, *Hickory Motor Speedway*, 21-24; Jarrett, Interview by Author.

and Hickory. Ned Jarrett recalls "...it was a big thing in the community when they announced they were going to build a racetrack."²¹⁰ Jarrett is also quoted as saying:

On rainy days, I would go down to the local country store where farmers and millers would be sitting around an old wood stove talking. They would be saying things like, 'wait til they get that track built, I'll go down and show them how to drive.' Hearing the local men and boys talking about plans for the new track to be built really caught my attention. Secretly, I decided I wanted to see what it was like, so I made arrangements to have half interest in a car with a friend of mine by the name of John Lentz.²¹¹

The first two seasons of racing at Hickory Motor Speedway were Sportsman Series races or Limited Sportsman races. These races consisted primarily of local amateur drivers who competed at the same track on a weekly basis. The track at Hickory was shorter than North Wilkesboro and less dangerous. Jarrett states that this made Hickory more successful as it supported a weekly racing series with amateur drivers.²¹²

During the 1950s, several NASCAR stars and future stars won championships at the track such as Junior Johnson, Ned Jarrett, and Ralph Earnhardt.²¹³ The Grand National Series finally made it to Hickory Motor Speedway in 1953. A few years later, after Charlie Combs and his associates were caught in an illegal liquor scandal, Grafton Burgess became the General Manager. Unfortunately, he was known for being dishonest and leaving with the winnings before the race was over. After Ned Jarrett retired from NASCAR as a driver, he became the General Manager of the track in 1967.²¹⁴

The Grand National Series ran thirty-five races at Hickory Motor Speedway over almost twenty years. Junior Johnson has the most Grand National wins of any driver at

²¹⁰ Jarrett, Interview by Author.

²¹¹ Washburn, *Hickory Motor Speedway*, 29.

²¹² Jarrett, Interview by Author.

²¹³ NASCAR, "Hickory Motor Speedway", NASCAR Home Tracks, accessed March 8, 2019, <https://hometracks.nascar.com/tracks/hickory-motor-speedway/>.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

the track with seven. After NASCAR added more superspeedways and RJ Reynolds got involved with sponsorship, Hickory Motor Speedway was removed from the NASCAR schedule in 1971. The Sportsman Series continued to race at Hickory through the 1970s and early 1980s. The Busch Grand National Series, which in some ways replaced the Sportsman Series and become a feeder series for the Winston Cup Series, raced at the speedway from 1982-1998. Benny Yount, a local car dealer, purchased the track in 1985 and continues to own it at present.²¹⁵ The weekly racing series continues to this day with several divisions of racing competing each week from March to October with special events in November.²¹⁶ The divisions that currently compete on a weekly basis at the track are the Late Model Stock, Limited Late Model Stocks, Super Trucks, Four Cylinders, Renegades, and the Classic Sportsman Racing Series (AKA Hickory Vintage).²¹⁷ The track is recognized by the NASCAR Home Tracks Program, which highlights smaller local tracks,. Races at the speedway are sanctioned by NASCAR with some divisions participating in the Whelen All-American Series.²¹⁸ In addition to the weekly racing divisions, the track also hosts three touring series including the Pro All Stars Series (PASS) Super Late Models, the Southeast Super Trucks Series, and the CARS Tour.²¹⁹ The current general manager of Hickory Motor Speedway is Kevin Piercy. Due to the fact that several NASCAR greats began their career at the track, it has

²¹⁵ Washburn, *Hickory Motor Speedway*, 73, 99-101, 107.

²¹⁶ "Tentative 2019 Race Schedule", Hickory Motor Speedway, accessed February 2, 2019, <http://www.hickorymotorspeedway.com/schedule.php>.

²¹⁷ Hickory Motor Speedway, "2019 Driver Information Packet".

²¹⁸ NASCAR Hometracks, "Hickory Motor Speedway", accessed February 7, 2019, <https://hometracks.nascar.com/tracks/hickory-motor-speedway/>.

²¹⁹ Hickory Motor Speedway, "Tentative 2019 Race Schedule".

become known as both “The World’s Most Famous Short Track” and “The Birthplace of the NASCAR Stars.”²²⁰

Several physical changes took place at the track during its existence. One of the earliest changes was the addition of grandstands and a new flag stand. The metal grandstand to the east and west of the main concrete grandstands and above the turn four concrete grandstands were added over a period of time starting in the mid-1950s. Some of the stands were originally portable stands that were taken back and forth between Hickory and North Wilkesboro.²²¹ The concrete grandstands in turn four are present in photos as early as 1966.²²² A new flag stand was constructed on the outside wall as early as 1956.²²³ This would later be replaced by a metal flag stand which can be seen in photos as early as 1967.²²⁴ A concrete outside wall extending from the center turns three and four to the center of turns one and two, was constructed in the 1950s or 1960s. There is some discrepancy as to the date that the outside wall was constructed. Ned Jarrett contends that the wall on the front stretch was constructed when the track was built, however, photos show only a dirt embankment.²²⁵ One source states that the wall was constructed in 1967, however, earlier photos show at least a wall on the front stretch.²²⁶ Another photo from 1956 shows that the dirt embankment was still intact and no concrete wall had been erected.²²⁷ What can be concluded from photos is that the wall was

²²⁰ Washburn, *Hickory Motor Speedway*, 129.

²²¹ Jarrett, Interview by Author.

²²² Washburn, *Hickory Motor Speedway*, 71.

²²³ Smyle, “Ralph Earnhardt’s First Grand National Start”, *Speed Sport*.

²²⁴ Hickory Motor Speedway Memories, “Photo Gallery”, accessed February 3, 2019, <https://hickorymotorspeedwaymemories.com>

²²⁵ Jarrett, Interview by Author; Washburn, *Hickory Motor Speedway*, 24-27.

²²⁶ Washburn, *Hickory Motor Speedway*, 55; Hickory Motor Speedway Memories, “Photo Gallery”, accessed February 3, 2019, <https://hickorymotorspeedwaymemories.com>.

²²⁷ Don Smyle, “Ralph Earnhardt’s First Grand National Start”, *Speed Sport*, accessed February 3, 2019, <https://speedsport.com/racing-history/ralph-earnhardts-first-grand-national-start/>.

constructed between 1956 and 1965. The wall was extended around the entire track and woven wire fencing added to the top of the wall as early as 1973.²²⁸ A concrete inside wall was also constructed circa 1966 in order to protect the pit area from the cars. It likely replaced a single guardrail.²²⁹

The track was paved with asphalt in 1967. The repaving is when the track was slightly altered to become a 4/10-mile track. The change caused by paving, however, was minimal, and the altered distance of track was likely the result of recalculating the distance.²³⁰ Prior to 1967, the media control tower was constructed above the grandstands. It was preceded by another scorer stand or press box, which is visible in a photo circa 1964.²³¹ The earliest version of this building was a rectangular wooden building with large windows and a small walking area around the outside with railing. This was likely constructed circa 1965 according to photos. The smaller wooden portion on the top was added circa 1967, and was used for the public-address announcer and the scorer.²³² This building was added onto several times including the public-address and scorer booth. The dates of these additions are not available. Ned Jarrett stated the VIP suites added onto the east side were begun during his tenure as general manager.²³³ The main ticket booth, now located just east of the main office, was constructed prior to Jarrett's arrival in 1967. The restrooms at the front entrance were also constructed prior

²²⁸ William Roberts and William Kerby, *The Last American Hero*, Directed by Lamont Johnson, 20th Century Fox, 1973.

²²⁹ Hickory Motor Speedway Memories, "Photo Gallery", accessed February 3, 2019, <https://hickorymotorspeedwaymemories.com>; Dennis Cook, photo identification.

²³⁰ Washburn, *Hickory Motor Speedway, 55-56; Jarrett, Interview by Author*.

²³¹ Hickory Motor Speedway Memories, "Photo Gallery", accessed February 3, 2019, <https://hickorymotorspeedwaymemories.com>.

²³² Hickory Motor Speedway Memories, "Photo Gallery", accessed February 3, 2019, <https://hickorymotorspeedwaymemories.com>; Jarrett, Interview by Author.

²³³ Jarrett, Interview by Author.

to 1967.²³⁴ There is no photo evidence to determine a more precise date. However, they are all similar in features and in materials. Another restroom and ticket booth is located behind the turn four grandstands and was likely constructed around the same time, considering materials and design. The infield concession and infield tire building were also constructed prior to Jarrett's arrival in 1967 and were likely constructed in the same era as the restrooms and ticket booths.²³⁵ The main office, located at the main entrance was added by Jarrett shortly after he arrived at the track in the late 1960s. It was originally a pre-fabricated wooden building that was later sheathed in concrete masonry units.²³⁶ A camera stand for television cameras was constructed outside of the wall no earlier than the late 1970s. Several small, pre-fabricated buildings have been added both behind the grandstands and on the infield. There are no exact dates for these buildings.

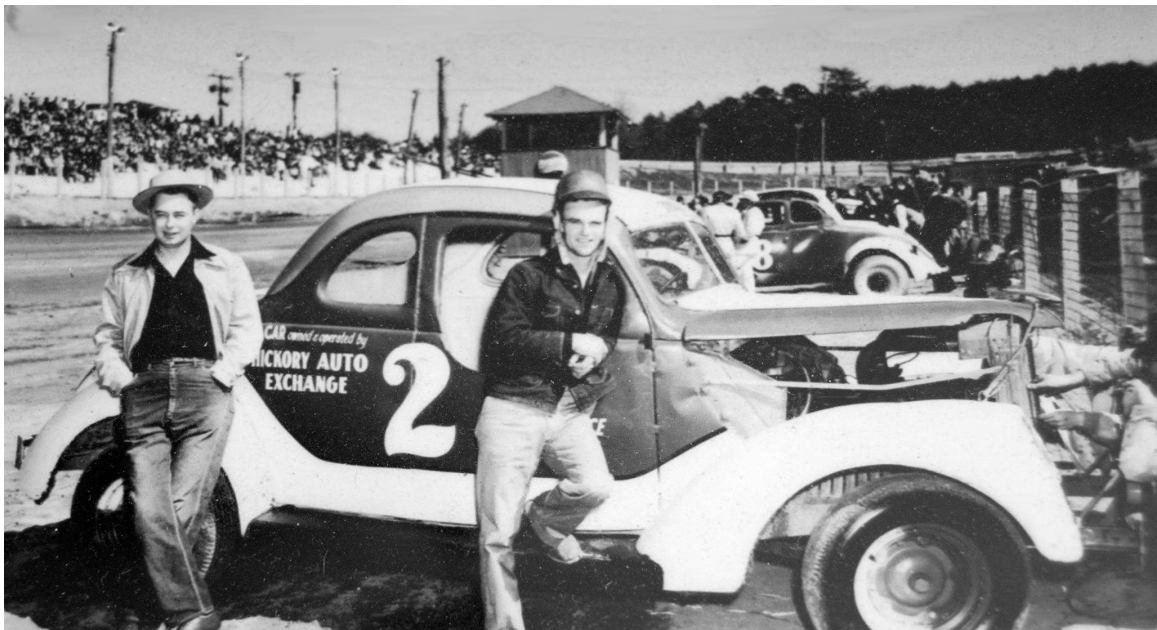


Figure 48. Front stretch and flag stand/scorer stand at a race in 1956. (<https://hickorymotorspeedwaymemories.com/#Gallery>)

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.



Figure 49. 1956 race at Hickory. Flag stand can be seen on the outside as opposed to inside. Dirt embankment is still intact. (<https://speedsport.com/racing-history/ralph-earnhardts-first-grand-national-start/attachment/n-v1-6-5/>)



Figure 50. Hickory Motor Speedway ca. 1964. No inside wall is shown and the older control/media tower is present. (<https://hickorymotorspeedwaymemories.com/#Gallery>)



*Figure 51. Front stretch ca. 1966. Wall is constructed but the track is still dirt. Media and control tower has been built but not expanded. Concrete grandstands are visible.
(<https://hickorymotorspeedwaymemories.com/#Gallery>)*

Existing Conditions

Hickory Motor Speedway continues to operate on a regular basis as a racetrack, so the track has a mix of historic resources as well as non-historic, more modern resources that are used on a regular basis. The breadth of those resources are described more fully below.

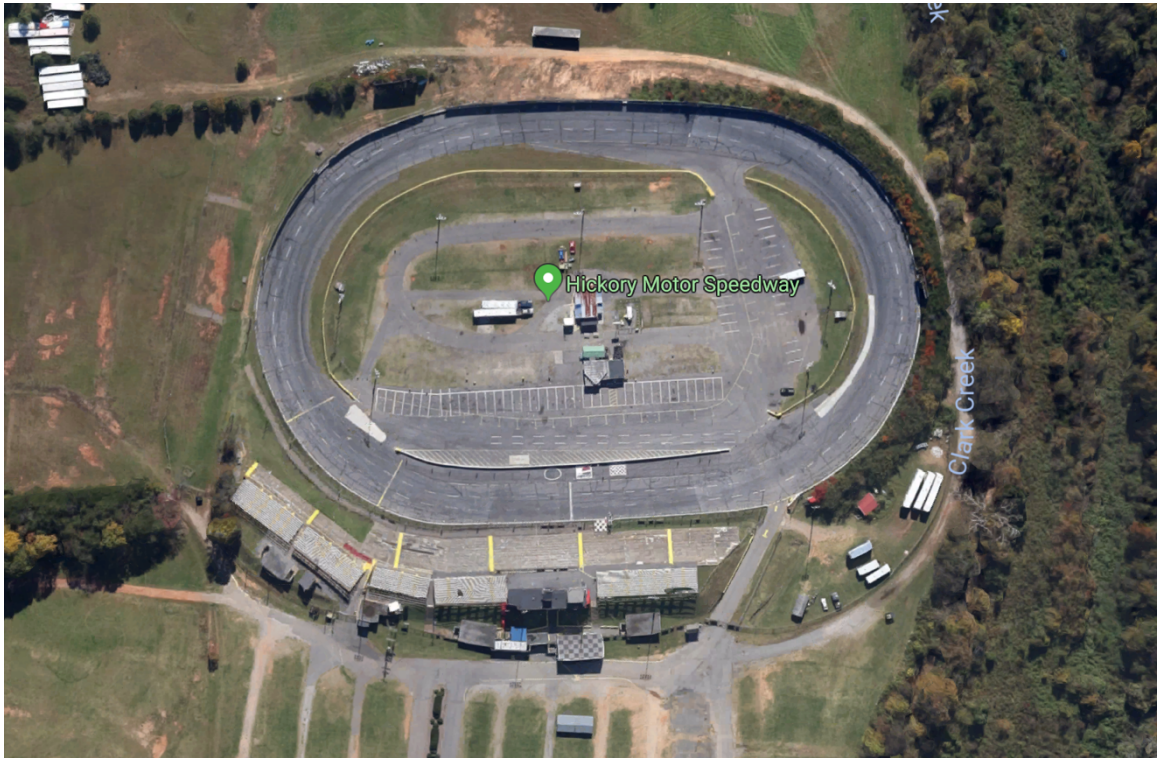


Figure 52. Aerial view of Hickory Motor Speedway, present day.
(<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Hickory+Motor+Speedway/@35.6956952,-81.2691817,17z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x88513143694d9ae3:0xc70f5cb3c6474b6a!8m2!3d35.6956952!4d-81.2691817>)

Racetrack

The racetrack currently is a .363-mile asphalt racetrack. According to Ned Jarrett, driver and general manager, the track has always been close to 4/10 of a mile. The current track layout and design has remained largely unchanged from the original. There is fourteen-degree banking in turns 1 and 2, twelve-degree banking in turns 3 and 4, and eight-degree banking on the front and back straightaways.²³⁷ The track surface is in good condition and still used for racing on a weekly basis during the racing season.

²³⁷ Hickory Motor Speedway, “About Hickory Motor Speedway.”



Figure 53. Asphalt track surface at HMS from start/finish line to turn 1. (Photo Credit Author)

Concrete Outside Wall:

The outside wall of the racetrack is constructed of poured concrete. There is a definite discontinuity in the outside wall in the center of turns one and two and the center of turns three and four where it is evident that the walls were not constructed at the same time. It can be assumed that the front stretch wall and wall at turns one and four was erected before the wall on the backstretch and in turns two and three. The concrete wall is thirty-nine inches tall at its tallest and thirty-inches at its shortest. It is painted red,

white, and blue in a pattern that was not uncommon for racetrack of the 60s to the present. The wall is tapered on the back, likely for durability. A woven wire fence serves as a catch fence to keep spectators safe. This fencing is held up by metal poles. The woven wire fence runs from turn four to turn one. The woven wire fencing on top of the wall is possibly historic. The remainder of the wall has chain link fence located directly behind the concrete wall. The wall appears to be in overall good condition.



*Figure 54. Outside concrete wall on front stretch with woven wire fence on top.
(Photo Credit Author)*

Inside Wall

The concrete wall that separates the pit area and infield from the track is an approximately two-foot high concrete wall that runs from the exit of turn four to the entrance of turn one.



Figure 55. Inside concrete wall on the front stretch protecting the infield from the track. (Photo Credit Author)

Main Office

The main office is a rectangular building constructed of concrete masonry units and painted white with red and blue stripes. It is outside of the entrance on the north side of the racetrack. The concrete masonry unit version of this building is likely old enough to be considered historic.



Figure 56. Northeast oblique of main office, built in 1967 and still in use. (Photo Credit Author)

Restrooms

The restrooms are constructed of concrete masonry units and are located just west and east of the main office. They are painted in the same colors and pattern as the main office and have an approximately two-foot roof overhang. A third restroom is located behind the turn four grandstands and appears to be of the same period as the other restrooms. It is constructed of concrete masonry units.



Figure 57. Northwest oblique of men's restroom, representative of three restrooms on the site. (Photo Credit Author)

Ticket Booths

The main ticket booth is located approximately ten feet to the east of the main office. It is a concrete masonry unit building which incorporates a women's restroom on the rear. It is connected to a concrete masonry unit wall that surrounds a small storage building on the east side of the ticket booth. second small ticket booth is located outside of turn four at the turn four entrance. This ticket booth appears to be non-historic.



Figure 58. North elevation of ticket booth and storage area. Ticket booth is to the right next to the gate. (Photo Credit Author)

Turn Four Concession Stand

A concession stand is located just inside the turn four entrance behind the ticket booth. It is constructed with concrete masonry units and has the similar characteristics to the restrooms such as the two-foot overhang. It appears that there is a small addition on the front of the building.



Figure 59. Concession stand in rear of ticket booth. Concession stand appears to be of similar construction to restrooms. (Photo Credit Author)

TV Stand

There is a small raised wooden building just outside the wall of turn one which was used by television crews to film races. This building appears to be in poor condition.



Figure 60. Wooden TV stand for use by broadcasting companies. Located in turn 1. (Photo Credit Author)

Media/Control Tower

The media and control tower, which has concession stands underneath, is constructed of concrete masonry units and wood. It has undergone several changes including the addition of VIP suites and concession stands. The additions are to the east of the original building and are of the same materials as the original tower with a concrete masonry unit first floor and wooden second floor. The first floor of this structure is used as a concession stand. Between concession windows is an opening similar to a breezeway which allows fans to walk under the suites to get in and out of the grandstand area.



Figure 61. South elevation of media/control tower with concessions beneath. (Photo Credit Author)



Figure 62. Original part of the media/control tower. (Photo Credit Author)

Grandstands

The original 1951 poured concrete grandstands line the front stretch. Other concrete grandstands, constructed later, are located in turn four and are constructed of concrete masonry units and concrete slabs. Metal grandstands are located to the east and west of the main concrete grandstands and above the turn four grandstands. The poured concrete grandstands are the only grandstands from the 1951 to 1960 period.



Figure 63. Front stretch and turn 4 concrete grandstands, with metal grandstand above concrete in turn 4.

Flag Stand

The current flag stand is constructed of steel pipe and wood and is located just outside of the wall at the start/finish line.

Infield Concession Stand

The infield concession stand with restrooms is located in the center of the infield. It is a concrete masonry unit building with a metal roof and has multiple additions. The additions are wood and include two garage doors. A wooden addition was also added on top of the original concrete masonry unit building. This building may be considered historic but is not likely to have been on the infield during the 1950s.



Figure 64. Infield concession stand with garage addition. (Photo Credit Author)

Tire Building

The tire building, located north of the infield concession stand, is constructed of concrete masonry units and wood. The concrete masonry portion appears to be similar in construction to other concrete masonry unit buildings on site such as the restrooms and concession stand in turn four. This is likely the original portion of the building. All but one exterior wall of the original portion is sheathed in asbestos shingles. The addition on the west side of the building is constructed of wood with wooden vertical siding.



Figure 65. Tire building with additions clearly visible. (Photo Credit Author)

Infield Overall

The infield consists of dirt, grass and asphalt. There are no pit stalls. The asphalt in the infield behind the inside wall is considered the pit area. There is a chain link fence atop a small concrete wall no more than twenty inches tall surrounding the infield from turn one to turn three. This barrier likely replaced an earlier guardrail.



Figure 66. Overall view of buildings on the infield. (Photo Credit Author)

Other Non-Historic Buildings

There are two small wooden buildings that are used as concession stands on either side of the restroom outside of turn four that are non-historic. There is a small wooden outbuilding on the infield just east of the tire building and infield concession stand that

does not appear to be historic. A small, metal, pre-fabricated storage shed is located between the tire building and infield concession stand would not be considered historic.

Assessment

Hickory Motor Speedway is nationally significant under Criterion A for its association with the early years of NASCAR. The track is also nationally significant under Criterion C as an example of an early stock car track constructed with simple and limited materials. It is significant at the state level under Criterion A in the areas of Entertainment and Recreation and Social History for its association with stock car racing in the Piedmont and mid-century Piedmont working-class culture. The track is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Social History for its connection to the surrounding towns of Newton and Hickory. It is locally significant under Criterion B for its association with Ned Jarrett, a NASCAR Champion who later became the general manager of the track. It is also significant due to its association with Charlie Combs who was involved with the construction of both North Wilkesboro Speedway and Hickory Motor Speedway and exemplified the connection between stock car racing and moonshine.

Overall, Hickory Motor Speedway does not retain a great deal of features from the 1950s in terms of buildings and building material. It does, however, retain some important characteristics. The layout and design of the race track itself has remained much that same as it did in 1951. In addition, the spatial organization between the grandstands and the track has remained the same, with the exception of the addition of metal grandstands in both turns. The spatial organization further helps retain the same

feeling for fans and drivers. The site continues to retain an overall rural setting with the surrounding hills and forested area. The location has remained the same for over sixty years. Materials have changed drastically with the exception of the concrete grandstands on the front stretch which were present during the first race. Integrity of workmanship remains, as it is a track designed and constructed with the prominent red clay of the region and basic materials available at the time. It was also designed by Charlie Combs, who was also involved in the construction of North Wilkesboro Speedway. Although the track was modernized and added onto several times, it retains the feeling of an older NASCAR track associated with the early eras of the sport. It retains integrity of association, as the design, location, setting, and feeling represent a strong connection to the important events that took place at this track and the people, and the people who were associated with the track respectively. Hickory Motor Speedway is a good example of a racetrack constructed during the early years of NASCAR in the Piedmont that evolved over time to accommodate a growing and ever more popular sport in the region.

**Hickory Motor Speedway
Newton, NC
1951
Length: .363-mi.
Surface: Asphalt
Paved: 1967
Active: 1951-Present**

Historic Resources	Circa	Non-Historic Resources	Circa
Oval racetrack	1951	*Turns and Backstretch Wall	> 1967
*Front Stretch Concrete Wall	1956-67	Inside Wall	1965
*Restrooms	< 1967	Main Office	1967
*Ticket Booth	< 1967	Turn 4 Ticket Booth	Unknown
*Turn 4 Concession	< 1967	TV Stand	> 1970
Media/Control Tower/Concessions	1966	Turn 4 Concessions	Unknown
*Front Stretch Concrete Grandstands	1951	2 Outbuildings	Unknown
*Turn 4 CMU Stands	< 1966	Tire Building	Unknown
Metal Stands	1950s		
*Flag Stand	< 1967		
*Infield Concessions	< 1967		

*Table 5. Summary of key features at Hickory Motor Speedway. * Indicates that the feature was constructed prior to 1967, but exact date is not known. (Created by Author)*

Asheville Motor Speedway

Description and History

Asheville Motor Speedway, often referred to as New Asheville Speedway, was a 1/3-mile oval dirt track constructed in 1960 and paved in 1962.²³⁸ The track was funded and built by Harry Clay, Jim Harrin, and Max Wilson. Eight Grand National races were run on the track from 1962 to 1971.²³⁹ Local weekly racing continued at the track until 1999. Divisions that competed in the weekly race included late-model stocks, Winston minis, four-cylinders, rookies, street stocks, and super stocks.²⁴⁰ Many of the drivers that competed in the weekly divisions were locals who worked regular jobs and raced on the weekends.²⁴¹ There was a strong local connection to the racetrack among working-class fans who patronized the racetrack for years. Several NASCAR Grand National (and later Winston Cup) drivers began their racing careers at Asheville Motor Speedway such as Robert Pressley, Banjo Matthews, Jack Ingram, Harry Gant, and Morgan Shepherd. Bob Pressley, Robert Pressley's father, was a well-known short-track driver who raced at the speedway and won seven championships at the track.²⁴²

The racetrack was sold to Riverlink Corporation in 1998 who in turn donated it to the City of Asheville. Due to the secrecy under which the track was sold to Riverlink Corporation, drivers and fans alike were outraged over the closing of the track. While the sale took place in 1998, a group called Speedway 99 was formed by track supporters,

²³⁸ Dean Hensley, *When the Thunder Stopped: The History and End of Asheville Motor Speedway*, (Alexander, NC: Land of the Sky, 2003).

²³⁹ Racing-Reference.info, "New Asheville Speedway," accessed February 5, 2019, https://www.racing-reference.info/tracks/New_Ashville_Speedway.

²⁴⁰ Daniel Pierce, "Hallowed Ground", in *27 Views of Asheville: A Southern Mountain Town in Prose and Poetry*, (Hillsborough, NC: Eno Publishers, 2012), 73; Pierce, "A History of Buncombe County Racing", 9.

²⁴¹ Pierce, "A History of Buncombe County Racing", 9-10.

²⁴² Hensley, *When the Thunder Stopped*, 43-49; Pierce, "A History of Buncombe County Racing", 8.

drivers, and car owners. The group negotiated a deal with the City of Asheville to allow Paul and James Young, a father and son team, to lease the racetrack for one year so that racing could continue for the 1999 season. James Young attempted to convince the city to allow racing for the 2000 season but was unsuccessful.²⁴³ Asheville Motor Speedway represented more than a racing venue to the white, working-class citizens of Asheville, who regularly attended races at the track. One fan, who attended every race at the speedway, requested that when he passed away, the hearse containing his body be brought around the track for one lap, before proceeding to the cemetery. His request was granted and the hearse made one lap around the track, followed by a stock car, as his family and friends watched from the grandstands.²⁴⁴ This event alone indicates the importance of the track to the working-class community in Asheville and the social history of the working-class in the area.

The racetrack was closed in 1999. It was converted into a recreational facility, and today is incorporated into the larger Carrier Park.²⁴⁵ In 2010, eleven years after the final race at Asheville Motor Speedway, a monument to racing in and around Asheville was unveiled in front of a large crowd of race fans.²⁴⁶

As with any racetrack that evolves with the times, it underwent several changes. The track was constructed as a dirt track in 1960, and was paved with asphalt in 1962.²⁴⁷ A poured concrete wall was constructed around the outside of the track when the track was constructed. Evidence indicates that there were I-beams where a guard rail was

²⁴³ Hensley, *When the Thunder Stopped*, 8-9, 19-21.

²⁴⁴ Pierce, "Hallowed Ground", 74.

²⁴⁵ Pierce, "Hallowed Ground", 73-81; Hensley, *When the Thunder Stopped*, 74-77.

²⁴⁶ Jarrett, Keith, "Racing Monument Unveiled", *Asheville-Citizen Times*, September 24, 2010; Pierce, "Hallowed Ground", 80-81; Pierce, "Hallowed Ground", 80-81.

²⁴⁷ Hensley, *When the Thunder Stopped*, 42.

likely attached. The wall was painted red and white during the majority of the tracks' years of operation.²⁴⁸ Physical evidence suggests that a catch fence surrounded at least a portion of the track, at least on the front stretch. A newer concrete wall was poured in front of the original wall. It is unclear whether this was done during the track's active years or whether this was a part of the city's later improvements while converting it to a recreational facility. A building consisting of restrooms, the press box, and the concession stand was constructed directly outside of the track, aligned with the start/finish line and was red and white during the track's operation.²⁴⁹ Metal grandstands surrounded the front stretch and turns one and four. These were installed over time with no exact construction date.²⁵⁰ Sheet metal and wood remains outside of turns three and four indicate that a wooden and corrugated sheet fence and gate were present outside of the track likely to admit spectators. After the park was purchased by Riverlink Corporation and converted into a recreational facility circa 2000, the racetrack was converted into a velodrome and amenities on the infield were added such as volleyball courts, a roller hockey rink, basketball courts, and a playground.²⁵¹ The facility underwent several upgrades in 2017. The asphalt racing surface was replaced with concrete and chain link fencing was added on top of the outside wall and around the infield. The fencing surrounding the infield replaced guardrail that existed during the racetrack's operation.²⁵² According to photos, three rows of guardrail were attached to

²⁴⁸ Bob Dudley, "Tommy Houston", racersreunion.com, accessed February 6, 2019, http://racersreunion.com/robert-bob-dudley/gallery/15046/new-asheville-speedway-nc-1979-1980#gallery_img.

²⁴⁹ National Motorsports 1, "Asheville Motor Speedway Through the Camera Lens of Barb Saunder", YouTube video, 3:39, Posted October 26, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICavF4Knfuo>.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Pierce, "Hallowed Ground", 73-81; Hensley, *When the Thunder Stopped*, 74-77.

²⁵² TRLWNC1, "2017 11 09 Asheville Speedway Construction", Filmed November 9, 2017, YouTube video, 1:08, Posted November 9, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=visi1NgYTzw>; Robert Dudley,

the inside of the wall as early as 1980.²⁵³ Photos and video show the guardrail remained on the walls until 2017.²⁵⁴

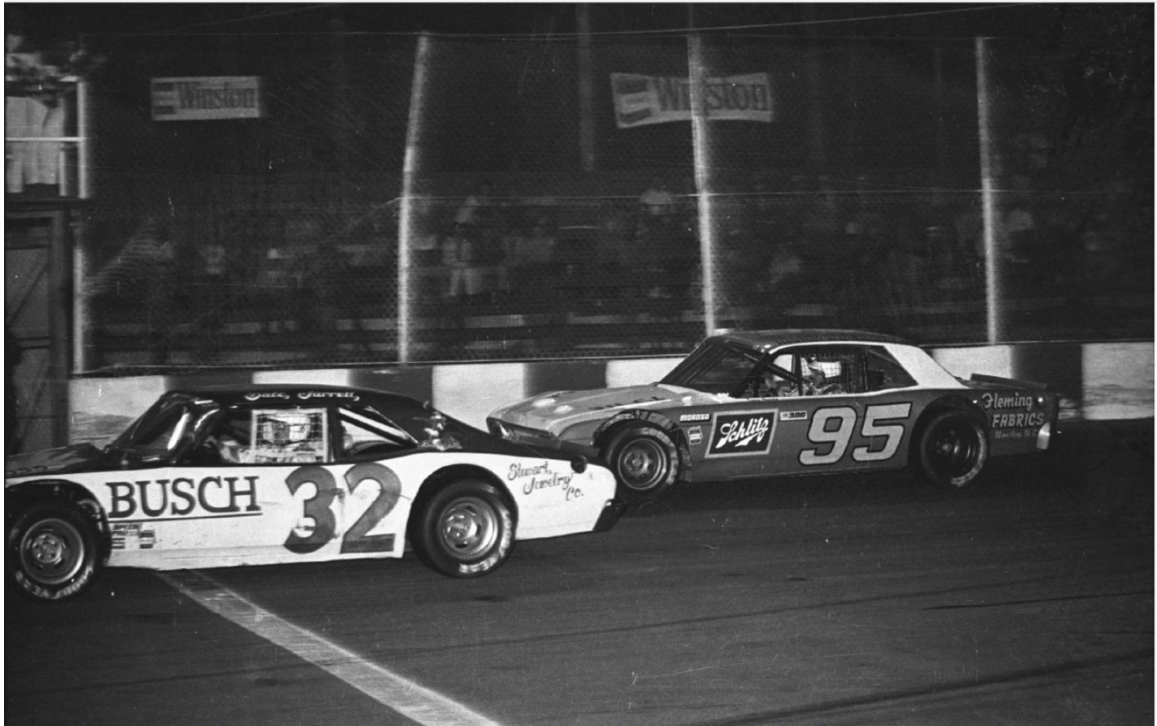


Figure 67. Dale Jarrett and Tommy Houston on the frontstretch, 1979. Concrete wall still visible. (http://racersreunion.com/robert-bob-dudley/gallery/15078/new-asheville-speedway-nc-1979#gallery_img)

“Bob Pressley”, New Asheville Speedway, NC 1979-1980, racersreunion.com, accessed February 6, 2019, <http://racersreunion.com/robert-bob-dudley/gallery/15042/new-asheville-speedway-nc-1979-1980>.

²⁵³ Bob Dudley, “Dale Jarrett # 32 and Tommy Houston # 95 a racin’ ”on the river”, racersreunion.com, accessed February 6, 2019, http://racersreunion.com/robert-bob-dudley/gallery/15094/new-asheville-speedway-nc-1979-1980#gallery_img.

²⁵⁴ Robert Dudley, “Bob Pressley”, New Asheville Speedway, NC 1979-1980, racersreunion.com, accessed February 6, 2019, <http://racersreunion.com/robert-bob-dudley/gallery/15042/new-asheville-speedway-nc-1979-1980>; TRLWNC1, “2017 11 09 Asheville Speedway Construction”, Filmed November 9, 2017, YouTube video, 1:08, Posted November 9, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=visi1NgYTzw>; WLOS News 13, “Garner Visited Asheville Motor Speedway”, Filmed 2014, YouTube video, 2:34, Posted September, 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2z3InlhWOCM>.



Figure 68. Asheville Motor Speedway circa 1980, guardrail on outside wall and metal grandstands visible. (<http://racersreunion.com/robert-bob-dudley/gallery/15042/new-asheville-speedway-nc-1979-1980>)

Existing Conditions

There are a number of racetrack features that still exist, despite the new use for this site. These remaining features will be discussed below.

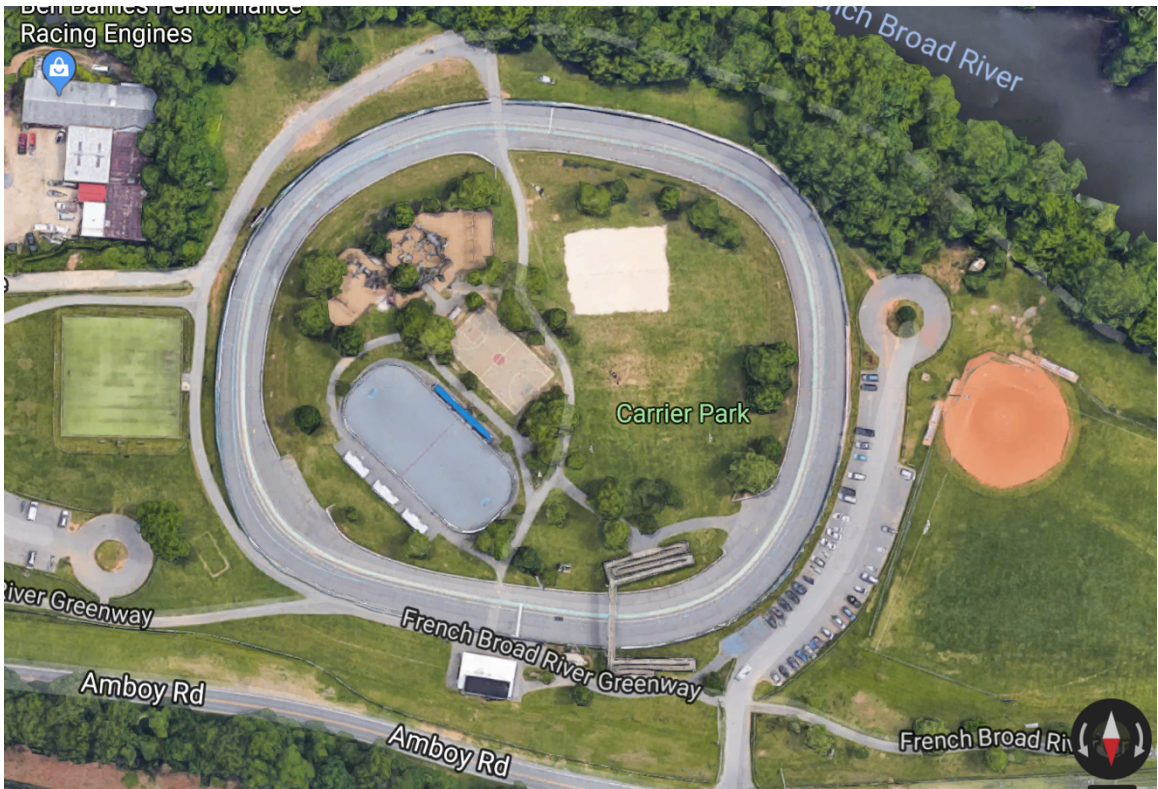


Figure 69. Aerial view of Asheville Motor Speedway, present day.
(<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Carrier+Park/@35.5657902,-82.5800456,642a,35y,180h/data=!3m1!1e3!4m5!3m4!1s0x88598cdca358fc15:0xac8a261a869741bf18m2!3d35.5659!4d-82.581714>)

Track and Track Surface

The 1/3-mile racetrack footprint and the banking is remarkably intact considering the changes that were made to the site. The track surface is now concrete. Lines are painted on the track for cycling.



Figure 70. 2017 concrete track surface looking from the start/finish line to turn 1. (Photo Credit Author)

Outside Concrete Wall

The outside concrete wall is intact although damaged in some areas. Cut-off I-beams are visible on top of the poured concrete wall where a guard rail was possibly attached on top of the wall during the track's operation. In addition, holes are visible in the top of the wall where poles for fencing would have been attached to the wall. Three rows of guardrail were also attached to the inside of the wall, likely to increase safety for drivers. It appears that a wall was poured in front of the original wall on the backstretch. It is unclear whether this additional wall on the backstretch was poured before or after the track ceased operation, however, it is unlikely it is historic fabric. Black chain link

fencing is now on top of the concrete wall around the entire track. Black diamond plate metal sheet lines the entire inside of the wall. The wall has been painted gray.



Figure 71. Outside wall, now painted gray with chain-link fencing on top. (Photo Credit Author)

Concession Stand/Press Box/ Restrooms

Aligned with the former start/finish line is a building, now used only for public restrooms, that historically served as the concession stand, press box, and restrooms. It is constructed primarily of wood and concrete masonry units. It retains the overall form and appearance of the building during the operation of the racetrack.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ National Motorsports 1, “Asheville Motor Speedway Through the Camera Lens of Barb Saunder”, YouTube video, 3:39, Posted October 26, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICavF4Knfuo>.



Figure 72. Building that served as the press box, concession stand, and restrooms, now concessions and restrooms for park visitors. (Photo Credit Author)

Entry Gate Remnants

Directly west of the center of turns three and four are remnants of the former entry gate to the racetrack. The remnants consist of corrugated sheet metal and wood, and they appear to have once formed a gate and fence to keep non-paying spectators out of the track. Considering the construction of other racetracks from the era, it was not uncommon that tracks had fences constructed of these materials. It is not common to find remnants of this type of fence.



Figure 73. Remnants of corrugated steel fence and gate. (Photo Credit Author)

Billboard

A large metal billboard is located in turn three outside of the wall. This is not historic, but is likely from the track's active period in the 1980s-1990s.



Figure 74. Billboard located outside of turns 3 and 4.

Park Features – Non-Historic

The inside wall of the racetrack, which appears from videos to have been concrete and later lined with guardrail similar to the outside wall, has been replaced by black chain-link fence. According to two YouTube videos, it can be deduced that this replacement took place when the track was paved with concrete during 2014.²⁵⁶ The track surface itself has been converted into a velodrome for cycling.

The infield of the track has been transformed into a multipurpose facility which includes a roller hockey rink with bleachers, a basketball court, a beach volleyball court,

²⁵⁶ TRLWNC1, “2017 11 09 Asheville Speedway Construction”, Filmed November 9, 2017, YouTube video, 1:08, Posted November 9, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=visi1NgYTzw>; WLOS News 13, “Garner Visited Asheville Motor Speedway”, Filmed 2014, YouTube video, 2:34, Posted September, 2, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2z3InlhWOCM>.

and a playground. To access the track and infield amenities, one must cross a large wooden bridge that was constructed at the entrance to turn one.



*Figure 75. Park features including roller hockey rink, and basketball courts on the former infield.
(Photo Credit Author)*



Figure 76. Basketball courts and playground on the former AMS infield. (Photo Credit Author)

Asheville Motor Speedway Memorial

The Asheville Motor Speedway Memorial consists of a concrete wall with photos of the track and four interpretive panels on pillars surrounding the wall, each with information pertaining to the history of the track and the history of racing in Buncombe County.



Figure 77. The Asheville Motor Speedway Memorial paying tribute to stock car racing at the track and in Western N.C. (Photo Credit Author)

Assessment

Asheville Motor Speedway is significant at the state level under Criterion A in the areas of Recreation and Entertainment and for its association with stock car racing in Western North Carolina. It is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Social History for its association with the working-class culture of the Asheville area, which has slowly been replaced by a new demographic of middle to upper class. This change in demographic led to the demise of the track and tension between the patrons of the race track and new residents of the area.

Asheville Motor Speedway retains a remarkable degree of integrity despite the fact that it has been converted into a multi-purpose recreational facility. It retains integrity of design in that the track layout and banking is the same as when it was constructed in 1960 and has never been reconfigured. The banking of the track is still intact despite its conversion to a velodrome for cycling. The spatial arrangement between the press box/concession stand/restrooms, the track and the French Broad River remains the same as it did at the time of construction. It retains integrity of location. Integrity of setting is debatable, as the surroundings have changed since the creation of the French Broad River Greenway and Carrier Park. It is still located next to the French Broad River which served as a natural feature complementing the track originally. The only intact materials are the concrete outside wall and the frame of the press box/concession stand/restrooms. The remnants of the spectator gate and walls and remnants of the track walls located to the west of the track do not hold any integrity. They are good indicators of the materials used on the track originally. While materials and use of the facility has changed, the site does retain a high degree of integrity based on the features listed above. Although this racetrack does not currently represent the appearance of a Piedmont racetrack built between 1940 and 1960, it does retain several important characteristics and features, such as its location next to a river and in a formerly rural area, track design via its length and banking, and spatial arrangement. Despite the controversial demise of this racetrack, this facility is a good example of how integrity can be retained while transforming the use and purpose of a historic racetrack.

Asheville Motor Speedway A/K/A New Asheville Speedway Asheville, NC 1960 Length: 1/3-mi. Surface: Concrete (Asphalt in 1962) Paved: 1962 Active: 1960-1999			
Historic Resources	Circa	Non-Historic Resources	Circa
Oval Racetrack	1960	Billboard	Unknown
Outside Concrete Wall	1960	Playground	2000
Entry Gate Remnants	1960	Hockey Rink and Stands	2000
Press Box/Concessions/Restrooms	1960	Basketball Courts	2000
		Volleyball Courts	2000
		Fencing	2018
		Bridge	2000
		Picnic Tables	2000
		Asheville Motor Speedway Memorial	2010

Table 6. Summary of key features at Asheville Motor Speedway. (Created by Author)

Summary

The case studies in this chapter have revealed the breadth of features racetracks had during the period of significance (1940-1960) and their condition. The features identified at each case study site will be used in the following chapter to determine which features are integral to historic NASCAR tracks from the Piedmont to Appalachian region of North Carolina. Findings from this chapter will also be used to determine strategies for preservation of these racetracks and generally inform the process by which historic race tracks in North Carolina can be documented and preserved. It is important to understand that though this chapter focused heavily on the physical aspects of these sites, the intangible aspects of Piedmont stock car tracks and what they mean economically and culturally to the communities around them can be just as important as the physical aspects.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This thesis has been answering the question: *How can the preservation of racetracks in the Piedmont region of North Carolina be used to interpret the cultural significance of stock car racing in the region?* The second chapter provided much of the justification for historic significance of NASCAR racetracks by divulging the history of the people involved and well as the NASCAR corporation and the physical racetracks themselves. The third chapter further provided insights into the diversity of remnants that exist of five case study racetracks during the period of significance 1940-1960 and how they might be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places This chapter will pull those threads together providing insights from the previous chapters and offering overarching findings from this comprehensive research effort.

Analysis

The case studies in the previous chapter revealed not only the breadth of functional features (buildings, race track banking and fencing, etc.) racetracks had during the 1940s-1960s, but also the physical condition of those features today. The following is a short analysis of the information gathered in chapter three:

All five of the racetracks were all constructed in the same period, in the same general region, and in the relatively early years of stock car racing and NASCAR. They were all constructed as dirt tracks with minimal features surrounding the actual oval

racetrack. Four of the five tracks were connected through either owners or builders, who were also involved in illegal liquor or moonshine business. They were all used by the NASCAR Grand National Series at some point during their existence. Four of the five sites are no longer used as stock car racetracks. All five of the tracks had an impact on the community which surrounded them and were an important part of the. Despite their similarities, the tracks now remain in a wide array of physical condition and have achieved different levels of notoriety among race fans. While a track like Hickory Motor Speedway still retains a great deal of integrity and continues to host racing, Asheville-Weaverville Speedway has almost completely vanished from the landscape. North Wilkesboro Speedway is remembered by race fans as a cornerstone of the sport, while Occoneechee-Orange Speedway is not in the collective memory among average NASCAR fans. These tracks also have differing numbers of resources and physical conditions of resources.

Findings

The remainder of this chapter consists of the author's findings from the case studies as they relate to the preservation concepts discussed in Chapter 2. The chapter is organized by the following preservation concepts: Identification and Documentation, Physical Preservation, and Interpretation. The Identification and Documentation section will focus primarily on the author's interpretation of key features to identify a stock car track and the National Register eligibility of those resources. The Physical Preservation section will discuss the author's ideas on overall physical preservation of stock car tracks, while focusing on land use proposals for each of the case studies. The final section will

discuss the author's thoughts on interpretation of stock car tracks, evaluating the interpretation present at some of the case study sites, as well as suggestions for interpretation at other sites where there is no current interpretation.

Identification and Documentation

There are few available reference materials solely focused on historic stock car racetracks and none on the identification and documentation of such resources. No National Register bulletin has been published concerning this type of historic resource. Through the research in this thesis, the historically significant features of an early NASCAR racetrack have been defined and identified. Stock car tracks in the Piedmont and Appalachian regions of North Carolina had similar characteristics and features that were present between 1940 and 1960. By identifying these features, one can use them to determine its potential National Register eligibility.

As is evident from the case studies, racetracks are not constructed as one group of structures and buildings that are meant to remain unchanged over time. They were often built as income-producing ventures by owners who did not necessarily have long term plans for the use or evolution of the track. It is important to keep in mind when looking for historic features at a racetrack that they can change dramatically over time and retain, what may appear to be, very few historic features that would contribute to the site's historic significance and integrity. Despite this, there are several features of a stock car track that can and should be preserved in order to retain historic significance and convey the historical integrity.

The physical features necessary to represent a historic stock car racetrack constructed between 1940 and 1960 in the Piedmont region of North Carolina are as follows:

1. *Oval Racetrack and associated banking:* The most important features of these sites are the racetrack and its associated banking. Piedmont racetracks, as with most stock car oval tracks, tended to be banked to allow cars to drive faster through the turns of the racetrack. For a track to retain integrity, this feature must exist. Although this study is focused on racetracks built between 1940-1960 as dirt tracks, the track can be paved. Paving the track often only changes the materials and rarely causes a change in the banking, length, or configuration of a racetrack. Banking is an important part of the racetrack that needs to be present for the track to retain its integrity. The banking in the turns of a racetrack was often a defining feature, especially in the Piedmont, where track builders who often owned, or knew someone with earth-moving equipment, would construct high dirt banks with a hard packed, red clay dirt surface.
2. *Spatial arrangement between spectators and the track:* Racetracks sometimes often started out with little to no purpose-built grandstands, however, the fans would congregate in one of two areas to watch the race. These two areas were the front stretch on the outside of the track and on the infield. In some cases, such as Asheville-Weaverville Speedway, fans would sit on the back stretch as well. In the Piedmont, where red clay and hills are prominent, there were often hills and banks around the tracks that provided an area for spectators to congregate. Concrete or wooden grandstands were added on these hills later, or at the time of construction. The physical material of the grandstands or spectator areas is not as

important as the spatial arrangement between the areas where the spectators watched races and where the track was located. Although some tracks have added seats in the turns and on the backstretch, the only spectator areas to be considered are those that would have existed during the period of significance.

3. *Dirt Embankment/Fence/Wall on Front Stretch:* Many early tracks did not have concrete walls to separate the cars from the fans, but often had dirt embankments with hog-wire fencing on top to prevent cars from entering the grandstands. Only one track in the case studies, North Wilkesboro Speedway, had a concrete wall at the first race. This wall had hog-wire fencing on top, however. The embankment or concrete wall provided not only a barrier for fan and driver safety, but also a line of demarcation for the racetrack. Concrete walls were often added later than dirt embankments, but during the period of significance. Concrete walls that were added from 1940 to 1960 will be considered among significant features.
4. *Infield:* The infield at most stock car tracks consisted of nothing more than a grassy or dirt area where race teams would park and work on their racecars, and fans would park to watch races. The infield often changed dramatically at tracks that remained successful and were on the Grand National schedule. Pit areas for in-race service developed and the pit roads were paved when the track was paved. Buildings such as tire facilities, concession stands, bathrooms, scoring towers, and garages were added as the track and stock car racing grew. In identifying a racetrack from 1940 to 1960, one would look for an infield that has little to no structures on it except for possibly a concession stand and the flag stand. Infield

areas that have been modernized with garage areas, pit stalls, tire buildings, etc., will not be considered among significant features.

5. *Concession Stands:* Concession stands were often built within the first few years of the track's existence. Although it is rare to find a concession stand from the original date of track construction, there are often concession stands extant from the period of significance. These can either be on the infield or behind the grandstands.
6. *Press Box/Announcer Stand/Scorer Stand:* These three buildings were sometimes constructed as one. Although it could be located on the infield, most often they were behind the grandstands on the front stretch. It was rare for these to be built at the time the track was constructed, however, they were often built during the period of significance. They can also be constructed with concession stands and/or bathrooms.
7. *Flag Stand:* Flag stands are often present at stock car tracks, but not in their original location. Most flag stands from the 1940s and early 1950s were located on the infield at the start/finish line. These were mostly constructed of wood. When a new flag stand was made of wood or metal, it would typically be relocated on the outside wall at the start/finish line. None of the case studies had an extant flag stand on the infield from the period of significance; however, some had a flag stand on the outside wall that was built during the period of significance.
8. *Spectator gate and fence:* Many early stock car racetracks constructed between 1940 and 1960 had a fence around the entire facility which kept non-paying

spectators out and helped delineate the boundaries of the site. These were often constructed of pressed or corrugated metal sheet on wood frames. It is rare to find an intact spectator fence or gate at a racetrack, as these were later replaced by concrete masonry unit walls or more modern fences. These concrete masonry unit walls or more modern fences will also be considered among significant features if they were constructed during between 1940 and 1960.

9. *Restrooms:* Restrooms were present at all tracks in some form or another. After considering the case studies, bathrooms are one of the few buildings that are at all racetracks at some point in time. Four of the case study sites have bathrooms, three of which have extant bathrooms from the period of significance.
10. *Ticket Office:* Ticket offices were often present in some form at racetracks from the date of construction. While these were sometimes ticket booths that were constructed as temporary buildings, some of them were constructed for long-term use and are still extant. These structures were most commonly constructed of wood and/or concrete masonry units.

The table below lists each of the case study sites and the breadth of possible features, as listed above, cross referencing to determine extant historic features at each track. If a date is unknown on a feature, an asterisk is placed beside it indicating that while it appears to have been constructed during the period of significance, the date of construction is not certain.

Extant Historic Track Features					
Track	Asheville Motor Speedway	Asheville-Weaverville Speedway	Hickory Motor Speedway	North Wilkesboro Speedway	Occoneechee-Orange Speedway
Track and Banking	X	X	X	X	X
Track/Spectator Spatial Arrangement		X	X	X	X
Front Stretch Embankment/Fence/Wall	X		X*	X*	X
Infield			X	X	X
Concessions	X		X*	X*	
Press Box/Announcer/Scorer Stand	X		X*		
Flag Stand			X*		
Spectator Gate/Fence	X				X
Restrooms	X		X*	X*	X
Ticket Office			X*	X	

*Table 7. Extant Historic Track Features. *Features likely existed prior to 1960, however, dates are not confirmed. (Created by Author)*

The features listed above can be used when evaluating a stock car track for National Register eligibility. The National Register also requires that the property nominated be at least fifty years of age, the significance defined at a local, state, or national level, it meets at least one of the four National Register criteria, and possesses aspects of integrity.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁷ For National Register Criteria and Aspects of Integrity, refer to the Preservation Concepts section of Chapter 2.

Per the earlier review of various racetrack National Register nominations in Chapter 2, the nominations for racing venues typically list Criterion A for association with important events in our history. However, Criterion B should also be considered as certain racetracks are associated with important people in the history of stock car racing and NASCAR. For example, North Wilkesboro Speedway is associated with founder, president, and owner, Enoch Staley, who made significant contributions to stock car racing and the founding of NASCAR. He later was involved with the development of several other tracks and the early success of NASCAR.

As a part of the process of nominating a historic property to the National Register, at least one Area of Significance (AoS) must be applicable. An AoS is an area of history or prehistory in which a property is considered to have made a significant contribution.²⁵⁸ Referencing the Chapter 2 review of National Register nominations for racing venues, many of the nominations listed the AoS as Recreation and Entertainment. While Recreation and Entertainment is the most prominent AoS used for nomination of racing venues, the nomination for Occoneechee-Orange Speedway nominates the track with an AoS in Social History as well as Recreation and Entertainment. Social History should be considered for the nomination of all Piedmont and Appalachian racetracks, as they were a representation of the culture of white, working-class Southerners in the 1940s and 1950s. Community Development should also be considered as an AoS as the racetracks in the region were often important places in the communities in which they existed and sometimes changed the dynamics of a community in terms of relations between the working-class and the religious community. Significance is often listed as local or state.

²⁵⁸ National Park Service, Secretary of the Interior, "Completing the National Register Registration Form", accessed March 15, 2019, https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/nrb16a_iii.htm#statement.

However, tracks that were significant in the history of NASCAR which became a nationalized sport in the mid to late 20th century should be considered for national significance as well.

In regard to aspects of integrity for racing venues, the nominations focus heavily on design and feeling. In terms of design, emphasis is on the footprint of the track and the spatial arrangement between the track, grandstands, concessions, nearby roads, and natural features. Integrity of materials relies heavily on the physical features previously identified. Feeling relies on the spatial arrangement and setting as this combination provides a unique experience for visitors. Integrity of setting is important as this is often a defining characteristic of a track. Workmanship is listed for one racetrack referring to the banking in the turns of the track. As the location of racing venues do not change, location should be listed. Association is listed in some cases, and should be considered if the track easily relays the history of the track to the visitor.

The following two tables summarize an evaluation of the case study sites National Register of Historic Places eligibility. Occoneechee-Orange Speedway is the only one of these tracks that is on the National Register of Historic Places. For Occoneechee-Orange, the information is a hybrid of the information in the present nomination, as well as, my own evaluation. Table 1 focuses on Age, Area of Significance, and Criteria while Table 2 emphasizes aspects of integrity.

Age, Area of Significance, and Criteria							
<i>Track Name</i>	<i>Date of Construction</i>	<i>Area of Significance</i>	<i>Level of Significance</i>	<i>Criterion A</i>	<i>Criterion B</i>	<i>Criterion C</i>	<i>Criterion D</i>
Asheville Motor Speedway	1960	Recreation and Entertainment; Social History	Local; State	X Association with stock car racing in Western NC			
Asheville-Weaverville Speedway	1950	Recreation and Entertainment; Social History	Local; State	X Association with stock car racing in Western NC and with the formative years of NASCAR			
Hickory Motor Speedway	1951	Recreation and Entertainment; Social History	Local, State, National	X Association with the formative years of NASCAR	X Association with Charlie Combs and Ned Jarrett	X Example of a track constructed of red clay and designed by Charlie Combs	
North Wilkesboro Speedway	1945	Recreation and Entertainment; Social History; Community Development	Local, State, National	X Association with the formative years of NASCAR and the expansion of NASCAR	X Association with Enoch Staley and Charlie Combs	X Example of a track constructed of red clay and designed by Enoch Staley and Charlie Combs	
Oconeechee-Orange Speedway	1948	Recreation and Entertainment; Social History; Community Development	Local, State	X Association with the formative years of NASCAR	X Association with France	X Example of a racetrack constructed of red clay and designed by Enoch Staley and Bill France	

Table 8. Age, Area of Significance, Criteria. (Created by Author)²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ Information for Oconeechee-Orange Speedway was informed by National Register nomination for this site; Jennifer Martin, Sarah Woodward, and Virginia Freeze, “National Register of Historic Places Registration Form” for Oconeechee Speedway, March 5, 2002.

In terms of age, any track in Piedmont to Appalachian North Carolina that was built between 1940 and 1960, and was used on the NASCAR circuit may be eligible for the NRHP. Areas of significance vary slightly, however, all of the case study sites are significant in the area of Recreation and Entertainment and Social History. Level of significance also varies. All tracks in the case study sites carried both local and state significance. Racetracks were important community gathering places for working-class white citizens of the Piedmont region of North Carolina. The state of North Carolina has benefitted economically and in terms of national recognition from stock car racing and the presence of NASCAR, naming stock car racing the official state sport in 2011. While stock car tracks in the Piedmont and Appalachian regions have distinct characteristics, and take on a different significance locally, they contribute to the history and significance of the stock car racing in the state as a whole. Two out of the case study sites have national significance. Hickory Motor Speedway should be considered nationally significant due to the fact that several NASCAR stars began their careers at Hickory or raced there frequently early in their careers. North Wilkesboro is nationally significant due to its long-term use on the NASCAR Grand National/Cup Series schedule and the fact that it is most often associated with the early years of a sport that became nationalized.

Stock car racetracks can be significant under Criterion A, B, C and in rare circumstances under Criterion D. Criterion A is often the most applicable because stock car racetracks are often associated with the pattern of racing in a specific area such as the Piedmont region of the Southeast. They are also representative of more broad patterns in of history such as the spread of stock car racing across the United States through

organizations such as NASCAR. Criterion B can often be applied when the racetrack was associated with an individual who contributed to the history of the sport in some significant way, such as Bill France who was the founder of NASCAR. Criterion C is given consideration for three of these tracks as they are examples of tracks that were constructed from the red clay of the region and developed using basic materials such as concrete masonry units and sheet metal. Stock car tracks were also often built by men such as Enoch Staley and Charlie Combs, who were involved in the building and promoting other tracks. It is possible that racetracks may be significant under Criterion D, however, this would be in the rare case that the track was constructed on a former battlefield, Native American site, etc. It is unlikely that the potential information on these sites available through archeology will be related to stock car racing.

The author evaluated each case study site by National Register criteria and found the following patterns across the case studies. Note that only one of these sites, Oconeechee-Orange Speedway has been nominated to the National Register. This is the author's evaluation of the sites by National Register criteria, which has been informed by the reviews of National Register nominations for racetracks which are located in Chapter 2. Evaluation of each case study shows that the most common criterion met by stock car tracks in the Piedmont region of North Carolina is Criterion A. All of these tracks, except for Asheville Motor Speedway are associated with the formative years of NASCAR. Asheville Motor Speedway was built at the end of the period of significance and did not contribute to the formative years of the sport as the other tracks did. It still should be considered under Criterion A, however, for its association with stock car racing in Western North Carolina. The association with the formative years of NASCAR should

hold true to many tracks in the Piedmont and Appalachian regions of North Carolina, however, not all of them contributed as significantly as the four listed in Table 1 above. Four of the five case study sites met Criterion B for their association with early promoters and track builders such as Bill France, Enoch Staley, and Charlie Combs. Bill France is known nationally as the founder of NASCAR, while Staley and Combs were instrumental in early track building and stock car racing in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. None of the case study sites met Criteria C or D.

Integrity							
Track Name	Location	Design	Setting	Materials	Workmanship	Feeling	Association
Asheville Motor Speedway	X	X		X			
Asheville-Weaverville Speedway	X						
Hickory Motor Speedway	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
North Wilkesboro Speedway	X	X	X		X	X	X
Occoneechee-Orange Speedway	X	X		X	X		X

Table 9. Evaluation of Integrity. (Created by Author)

The author’s assessment of integrity was based primarily on the retention of important features from the period of significance, although some of these features may have been changed over time. The evaluation of the case studies revealed the most common and important aspects of integrity among stock car tracks. The aspects of integrity that should be considered are as follows: location, design, materials, workmanship, and association. Setting should be considered on a case-by-case basis. Although only two of the tracks retained integrity of setting, setting can be important as

the absence of setting can hinder the site's ability to convey significance. This is not always true as Occoneechee-Orange Speedway no longer retains integrity of setting, but effectively conveys significance and the history of the site. Setting is not always necessary and should be included in evaluation on a case-by-case basis. While integrity of feeling is present at two of the tracks, it is not necessary to convey significance. Considering the nature of stock car racing and the scale of race tracks, it is often difficult to retain feeling, when a race track is rehabilitated for a different use.

Physical Preservation

As discussed in Chapter 2, the Secretary of Interior sets forth four Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Reconstruction.²⁶⁰ While it is important to identify and document existing conditions and important features of historic resources and to nominate properties to the National Register of Historic Places, it is also important to determine in what way the property will be physically preserved.

In determining how a site will be physically preserved, it is important to not only identify key features that must be preserved, but it is equally important to consider what the land use purpose for the site is currently and will be in the future, as that dictates how the site can be preserved (Preservation, Rehabilitation, Restoration, and Reconstruction).

For example, a racetrack such as North Wilkesboro would be most compatible with a rehabilitation treatment rather than any of the other three treatments. The nonprofit group Save the Speedway has advocated for several proposed uses for the

²⁶⁰ For definitions and explanations of the Secretary of Interior Standards, see Chapter 2.

racetrack in order to eventually generate enough revenue and interest to return racing to the venue. Due to the upgrades necessary to return racing to the facility, rehabilitation of the property would need to be undertaken. Steven Wilson of Save the Speedway stated that some of the uses that have been proposed by the organization are a go-kart track on the infield, flat track motorcycle racing on the infield, and using the facility for music festivals such as MerleFest.²⁶¹ MerleFest is held in adjacent Wilkesboro, North Carolina in April of each year and serves as a fundraiser for Wilkes Community College.²⁶² While this is proposed as a use to generate income and interest for the speedway and reviving stock car racing, the track could also be used for this festival each year.²⁶³ Rockingham Speedway, also known as North Carolina Speedway, located in Rockingham, North Carolina and no longer used for racing is now used for a music festival venue, previously for the Carolina Rebellion music festival and in the future as the site of the Epicenter Festival.²⁶⁴ Save the Speedway is also interested in creating a living history site that will convey the historical significance of the racetrack as well as afford fans the opportunity to learn about the history of the sport.²⁶⁵ In the case of North Wilkesboro, while the extant historic features need to be preserved, the facility can be rehabilitated to meet the needs of the proposed land use purposes.

Occoneechee-Orange Speedway has already defined its land use purpose for the site to serve as both a historic site and a walking trail. It has been rehabilitated into a walking trail, and the owners and volunteers have preserved several of the individual

²⁶¹ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

²⁶² “About MerleFest”, MerleFest.org, accessed March 2, 2019, <http://merlefest.org/about-merlefest/>.

²⁶³ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

²⁶⁴ “Epicenter Festival”, accessed March 2, 2019, <https://epicenterfestival.com>.

²⁶⁵ Wilson and Call, Interview by Author.

extant historic features of the track such as the banking and fencing. In addition, reconstructions of historic buildings on the property help convey significance and the history of the site.

Race tracks such as Asheville Motor Speedway have taken on completely different uses but have retained some features of the historic site. Asheville Motor Speedway was converted into a city park with the track becoming a cycling velodrome and the infield used for multiple recreational purposes. While the site has been rehabilitated into a completely different use, the track design is still visible along with the press box and concrete wall surrounding the track. The track is not intended to be a historic site, but is successful in retaining some important features while rehabilitating the site for a different purpose.

Some tracks may have already implemented a new land use and done so without regard for preservation of historic features. One example of this is the Asheville-Weaverville Speedway, current site of the athletic facilities of North Buncombe High School. While the hills which spectators occupied during races and one small portion of turn four exists, there is little else that can be done in terms of preservation. To create the current land use of high school athletic fields much was changed, and this land use is unlikely to change in the future. In cases such as these, the only option is to preserve the remains as best as possible and utilize interpretation to convey significance and history of the site.

Historic racetracks that are still in use as race tracks, have a pre-determined land use, but this does not mean that the standards of treatment should not be considered. In such a case, the site manager should be careful to preserve or rehabilitate significant

resources that are under threat from continued use and possible expansion by adhering to standards of treatment as closely as possible. Hickory Motor Speedway is an excellent example of a track still used for racing that has several important historic features and resources. Hickory Motor Speedway is a successful track that will likely continue to operate for many years in the future. It is important that characteristics such as spatial arrangement are retained when the track undergoes any future changes.

The following table lists each track and the author’s proposed treatment standard for each site. Some of the tracks have already implemented treatment standards by managing organizations such as Save the Speedway and North Wilkesboro or the Historic Speedway Group and Classical American Homes Trust at Occoneechee-Orange.

Standards of Treatment				
<i>Track Name</i>	<i>Preservation</i>	<i>Rehabilitation</i>	<i>Restoration</i>	<i>Reconstruction</i>
Asheville Motor Speedway*	X	X		
Asheville-Weaverville Speedway	X			
Hickory Motor Speedway	X			
North Wilkesboro Speedway	X	X	X	
Occoneechee-Orange Speedway*	X	X		X

Table 10. Standards of Treatment of Historic Properties Applied to Case Study Sites. (Created by Author)

Interpretation

Identification, documentation, and physical preservation are vital to the overall preservation of racetracks, yet interpretation must be considered to convey the significance of a site to visitors. As stated in Chapter 3, Freeman Tilden, who wrote extensively about on-site interpretation, defined interpretation as: “An educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by firsthand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information.”²⁶⁶

Several different forms of interpretation should be considered for racetracks. The most compatible forms of interpretation for racetracks overall are proposed and described below. Some of the interpretation types are applied directly to the case study sites as examples of how the interpretation may be implemented.

Highway Markers

Highway historical markers can be used to inform travelers of nearby historic sites. Though they may not be located at the exact location of the historic site, they can alert travelers that a site is nearby. Highway historical markers often give brief description of the site and relay its significance to the reader. In North Carolina, a program exists for the nomination and placement of highway historical markers. The

²⁶⁶ Tilden, *Interpreting Our Heritage*, 33; For Tilden’s principles of interpretation, see Chapter 2.

North Carolina Highway Historical Marker Program is one of the oldest highway historical marker programs in the United States. It was started in 1935, and built on the efforts of the North Carolina Historical Commission and other historical organizations which had erected a few markers and plaques before 1935. The program “was an effort to standardize the practice of marking sites of statewide historical significance.”²⁶⁷

Eligibility for the program is based on a set of criteria set forth by the Marker Advisory Committee. The following criteria are not exhaustive, but are applicable to nominating a property such as a racetrack.

1. All highway historical markers shall designate places, events, or persons of statewide historical significance. Historical Significance shall mean any person, place, or event of the past that has been recorded, documented, or recognized in a primary or secondary source, such as in books, diaries, journals, newspaper articles, speeches, documentaries, textbooks, artifacts, or other items, as having a lasting contribution to North Carolina history. Subjects of local or regional importance shall not be approved for highway historical markers. Statewide historical significance must be documented by the applicant. Applications shall be submitted to determine historical significance as set forth in this Rule.
2. An individual shall be eligible for consideration of a historical marker 25 years following his or her death.
3. Statewide historical significance shall be determined by the Highway Historical Marker Advisory Committee based on the following factors: the relationship of the subject to North Carolina’s history; the relationship of the subject to existing markers, such as whether the subject is included on an existing marker; the subject’s contributions to North Carolina; and consequence of the subject on North Carolina’s history.²⁶⁸

Requests for the historical markers can be submitted by anyone; however, they must include background research to support the argument for the significance and

²⁶⁷ “About the Program”, North Carolina Highway Historical Marker Program, accessed January 22, 2017, <https://www.ncmarkers.com/about.aspx>,

²⁶⁸ “Criteria for Historical Markers”, North Carolina Highway Historical Marker Program, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.ncmarkers.com/criteria.aspx>.

validity of the site.²⁶⁹ Two stock car tracks in North Carolina currently have a highway historical marker erected, those being North Wilkesboro Speedway and the State Fairgrounds Speedway in Raleigh. While all racetracks do not hold statewide significance, some tracks should be considered for a highway historical marker.²⁷⁰

Interpretive Panels

While interpretive panels can be used to supplement other forms of interpretation at a site, they may also be used as the sole interpretation method. Racetracks that have been rehabilitated, such as Asheville Motor Speedway would benefit from interpretive panels to inform visitors. Asheville Motor Speedway, now used as a multipurpose recreational facility, contains some interpretive panels that are part of a larger display. However, their single location is not optimal. The majority of visitors use the facility for its amenities such as a bicycle velodrome and are likely unaware of the Asheville Motor Speedway Memorial. Panels located at several locations around the facility would allow visitors to be more fully informed and to interact more effectively with the facility as a historic site. Another example in which interpretive panels would be beneficial is Asheville-Weaverville Speedway. The only remaining resources on site are a portion of turn four and the hillsides used by spectators. With the use of historic photographs of the site, interpretive panels could be placed around what is now the site of North Buncombe High School's athletic facilities. Interpretive panels would not only engage visitors on

²⁶⁹ "Requests...", North Carolina Highway Historical Marker Program, accessed January 22, 2019, <https://www.ncmarkers.com/requests.aspx>.

²⁷⁰ See Appendix B for a completed nomination form for North Wilkesboro Speedway and a blank nomination form.

site, but also engage the students who can learn more about the history of their hometown and school facilities.

Living History

Living History can take on many forms. Unfortunately, in auto racing, it is not possible to safely drive race cars from earlier eras and in the same way that they were driven in the 1940s and 1950s. However, it is possible to modify historic and antique race cars to race on current tracks. Vintage racing series exist all over the United States, however, these are often tailored to sports cars and not stock car racing. At Hickory Motor Speedway, the Classic Sportsman Racing Association (CSRA) created a division named the Hickory Vintage Racing Series, with the following purpose:

These rules and regulations are designed to promote fair and competitive vintage stock car racing events at Hickory Motor Speedway. The Classic Sportsman Racing Association is an unincorporated association devoted to keeping alive the colorful and exciting history of southern stock car racing through competitive and organized speed contests.²⁷¹

Drivers in the series race American-made cars with steel bodies produced between 1930 and 1970. It is required that they are representative of the cars raced during that period. The cars are, however, retrofitted with modern safety equipment to ensure driver safety.²⁷²

²⁷¹ Classic Sportsman Racing Association: Hickory Vintage Racing Series, “2019 Season Official Rule Book”, 2, accessed March 2, 2019,

http://www.hickorymotorspeedway.com/HMS_Rules/2018_Hickory_VintageRules_FINAL.pdf.

²⁷² Ibid, 6-8.

Racing vintage cars at historic racetracks that are still suitable or have been rehabilitated for racing is a unique way not only of using the track but also of preserving the history of stock car racing in general.

Living history can also take on the form of car shows and racing history days at which where drivers and fans meet to discuss and learn about the history of the sport. A similar event occurred at Occoneechee-Orange Speedway for several years but has ceased operation in recent years.²⁷³

Self-Guided Tour

A self-guided tour of a historic race track can occur at a track in almost any condition. This can be an effective way to generate revenue for tracks that wish to rehabilitate the site further in the future. A simple pamphlet and map, highlighting important elements could be a cost-effective way of conveying history and significance to visitors. Although some improvements may need to be made to the site to ensure safety of visitors, this would be a minimal investment compared to completely rehabilitating the site for racing or another use. North Wilkesboro Speedway is well-known among race fans and attracts visitors on a regular basis who wish to see the abandoned race track. As a result, trespassing and vandalism has become an issue on the property. If the site was better secured and safety measures implemented to ensure that no guest is injured, a self-guided walking tour would be an effective way of both reducing trespassing and vandalism and raising money in order to rehabilitate the property for racing or other uses.

²⁷³ Zachary, Interview by Author.

Interactive Museum

A later iteration of the self-guided walking tour could be a racing museum which highlights the history of the track and stock car racing in the region. This museum, however, should not be a traditional museum filled with artifacts in glass cases and informational panels. While artifacts and photos of the track are important and should be incorporated, it is important to allow the visitor to have a more interactive experience and explore the facility at their own pace. A facility as large as a racetrack has several possibilities. The museum should be built around a self-guided tour of the property as mentioned above, but should incorporate spaces that relay the history of the site. For example, virtual reality could be used to show guests a digital recreation of the track that shows how the track has evolved. Racing simulators could be installed in the museum to provide visitors with the chance to “drive” on the track. Video screens located around the track could show footage of race broadcasts from famous moments in the track’s history. North Wilkesboro is once again a good example of how this could be accomplished. Buildings at North Wilkesboro, such as the press box, could be opened and set up as it was during its peak use period. Visitors could sit in the press box where materials are provided for learning more about track history. The tour could start in the ticket office where a short video about the history of the track is shown. Buildings such as the multipurpose building on the infield, which partially served as a concession stand, could be used to serve refreshments and act as a gift shop.²⁷⁴ While these may not be perfectly suitable or achievable for all sites, they are ideas for tracks that may be able to be rehabilitated as a racing museum.

²⁷⁴ These proposals for a walking tour and interactive museum are a result of several conversations about possible interpretation with my major professor Cari Goetcheus and fellow classmate Savannah Young.

Digital Reconstruction

Advances in architecture and preservation technology have made it possible to digitally reconstruct buildings. One way of doing this is through scanning and photographing a building or site with LiDAR and photogrammetry. This information can be used to create a 3D map of the site.²⁷⁵ Other methods of digital recreation include using design software such as AutoCAD or Sketchup to create a drawing of the site. Historic photos can be used along with these programs to create a digital version of a track during specific periods throughout history. Digital recreations of the track can be incorporated in virtual reality to either give the visitor a view of a track that is no longer extant, or a view of the track as it was in the 1940s or 1950s, highlighting important features and characteristics. Digital recreations can also be used in racing simulators or racing games such as iRacing. iRacing is an online racing simulator game in which users compete for both recreation and developing driver skills. NASCAR recently sanctioned an online series known as the eNASCAR PEAK Antifreeze iRacing Series. Drivers are elite sim-racers who compete for a championship and money in the same format as the NASCAR Cup Series and are often sponsored by actual corporations. The races are now broadcast online.²⁷⁶ This would be an excellent opportunity for historic tracks to be featured on the game and give fans an opportunity to experience the track virtually.

²⁷⁵ Matt Kelly, “With Demolition Looming, University Hall Scanned, Photographed Into History”, *UVAToday*, accessed March 1, 2019, http://news.virginia.edu/content/demolition-looming-university-hall-scanned-photographed-history?utm_source=illimitable_email&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=illimitable_02-19.

²⁷⁶ “iRacing Is...”, iRacing.com, accessed March 2, 2019, <https://www.iracing.com/overview/>; “2019 eNASCAR PEAK Antifreeze iRacing Series”, iRacing.com, accessed March 2, 2019, <https://www.iracing.com/nascar-peak-antifreeze-series/>.

The above suggestions are only a few examples of how racetracks may be interpreted. Interpretation of stock car tracks will vary significantly depending on the land use purpose of the site. Some type of interpretation will be more suitable for some tracks than others.

Summary

Historic stock car tracks in the Piedmont and Appalachian regions of North Carolina vary significantly when considering historic significance and integrity of the sites. While there is no definitive guide or National Register bulletin concerning historic stock car tracks and their identification and documentation, the features identified above can be used to help evaluate the tracks for significance and integrity. Future physical preservation of the sites relies heavily on viable land use purposes and examples of how these types of resources have been used in the past. Interpretation of these resources varies widely depending on the remaining features, the current or proposed use, and the existing conditions of the track. Despite the wide diversity in existing conditions, uses, and possibilities of Piedmont North Carolina stock car tracks, it is possible to apply key preservation concepts in order to preserve the resource and in turn the heritage of stock car racing in the communities in which they existed.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Summary of Work

This thesis set out to answer the following question: *How can the preservation of racetracks in the Piedmont region of North Carolina be used to interpret the cultural significance of stock car racing in the region?* To begin to answer this question Chapter 2 provided background information on the social, economic and physical context of Piedmont North Carolina culture in the 1940s-1950s along with the history of both stock car racing in general and NASCAR. Through this research it was revealed that there were several connections between the beginning of stock car racing and the culture and people of the Piedmont region of North Carolina and that stock car racing was an important part of white, working-class culture in mid-century Piedmont and Appalachian communities. As a result, a number of racetracks were constructed in the Piedmont and Appalachian regions of North Carolina between 1940 and 1960. These tracks were later abandoned or left off of NASCAR's Grand National Division (Cup Series) schedule to make room for larger more modern superspeedways. The demise of those racetracks has caused a loss of Piedmont culture and heritage among a white, working-class culture, whose history is often not considered by many scholars, but is nonetheless a valid area of research. Chapter 2 also delved into some preservation foundational concepts that are important to understand when determining the best strategies for preservation. These concepts included Identification and Documentation of historic resources; Physical

Preservation of historic resources; and Interpretation of historic resources. In addition, National Register nominations for several racing venues were reviewed to determine what features and areas of significance have been used in the past to nominate racetracks.

Chapters 3 and 4 went on to answer the research question through case study research and presenting an analysis and the findings of that case study research. Chapter 3 contained case studies which included a history of each of the case study sites, evolution of the site over time, existing conditions, and an assessment of the historic significance and integrity of each site. Using the information gathered from the case studies, Chapter 4 analysis revealed the case study sites vary widely in historic significance, integrity, and physical status. The findings were revealed by applying the three preservation concepts discussed in Chapter 2 to the case study sites. Identification and Documentation focused on key features identified at historic stock car racetracks and the potential for a racetrack site to be nominated to the National Register. The National Register nomination for Occoneechee-Orange Speedway, written in 2003, was a good step forward in documenting stock car racetracks, specific historic features, and evaluating their significance and integrity. Through the research I determined that there are several features that should be extant, or at least discussed, when nominating stock car racetracks to the National Register. The features typical features to stock car tracks in the Piedmont to Appalachian regions of North Carolina constructed between 1940 and 1960 include: 1) the track and associated banking, reflecting spatial arrangement between the spectators and the track; 2) a dirt embankment, fence, or wall on the front stretch; 3) the infield area; 4) concession stands; 5) press box, announcer stand, scorer's stand; 6) flag stand; 7) spectator gate and fence; 8) restrooms; 9) ticket office. While the

presence of all of these features is not necessary for nominating the site to the National Register, they are important for evaluating site integrity. The findings evaluate each of the case study sites in regard to National Register criteria, areas of significance and aspects of integrity. These evaluations indicated that the majority of stock car racetracks from the Piedmont to Appalachian region built from 1940 to 1960 are significant under Criterion A and/or B because they represent broad patterns of North Carolina history from 1940s – 1960s, as well as influential people that either created NASCAR, built tracks or raced at the tracks. Very few racetracks are or will be significant under Criterion C or D because there are not perfect examples of a racetrack or craftsmen that design them and there is typically no potential information that can be uncovered at these sites unless it relates to a topic other than racing. The most important aspects of integrity that apply to these kinds of racetracks are location, design, materials, and association; sometimes setting may apply but in many cases, it is not intact. Evaluating these case study sites in this way revealed that there are often enough features, as well as historic significance and integrity to nominate Piedmont and Appalachian stock car racetracks to the National Register.

The findings also assessed each case study site through the lens of physical preservation determining which of the four Secretary of the Interior Treatments of Historic Properties (preservation, rehabilitation, restoration, or reconstruction) would be for each site, based on the possible or proposed land use purposes or the work that has already been done at the site. It was concluded that the physical preservation of racetracks is highly dependent on what the possible or proposed land use purposes are for the track and that multiple treatments may be used or necessary for certain sites.

Interpretation of each site was also discussed, and provided the strongest answer to the portion of the research question addressing how racetrack preservation can preserve cultural significance of stock car racing in the region. Several interpretation methods for stock car tracks were discussed, and applied to each of the case study sites as possible, including self-guided tours, interpretive panels, historical markers, interactive museums, revival of racing at the site, and digital re-creations. . Application of the interpretation examples showed how these methods applied at racetracks may be used to preserve the cultural significance of stock car racing in the region. If interpretation methods are not employed at these sites, then the preservation of those sites has failed to display the cultural significance of stock car racing in NC Piedmont from the 1940s-1960s.

Reflection

In reflecting on this thesis topic, my methodology, and chosen case study sites there are some changes that I would make in future iterations of my work. I believe that focusing on racetracks physically located in the Piedmont and some of the Appalachian region of North Carolina was good as many of the owners and builders of these racetracks were connected to this region in some way. It became clear during my research that my initial attempt to limit my boundary to the Piedmont region needed to be expanded to include portions of the Appalachian region because the culture surrounding the tracks was very similar to the culture in the Piedmont. When discussing culture, I mainly discussed culture of the working-class Piedmont people, which was very similar to the working-class of cities and towns like Asheville and Weaverville in that time

period. As such, in future research, I would like to include racetracks in the entire Piedmont and Appalachian region of the Southeast.

I would like to delve deeper into the cultural aspects of stock car racing in these areas and how it affected track construction and success. Although the Piedmont region was the focus of this thesis, stock car racing has a presence all over the Southeast. Further research on historic stock car tracks should also include tracks that were outside of the Piedmont and Appalachian regions.

While my research focused on racetracks that were used in the NASCAR Grand National Division, I came across several racetracks that fell within the period of significance I chose but were not used on the Grand National schedule. These undoubtedly hold cultural significance in the communities in which they are located and may also be worthy of preservation efforts.

In evaluating the case study sites, I used National Register criteria and aspects of integrity to help determine whether these sites would be eligible for listing. It might have been useful to consider National Register nominations of other sports venues, such as baseball parks which often hold a great deal of cultural significance, in order to better understand how the significance of those places might have guided me to evaluate and nominate racetracks. I would have liked to write nominations for the tracks that hold the greatest significance and integrity to see how well my thoughts on key features and applicable aspects would have been integrated into such nominations.

In future efforts, more time should be spent expanding on ideas for preservation and interpretation at historic racetracks. It would be interesting to draft individualized

proposals for each site that outlined future use, preservation strategies, and possible interpretation methods.

In reflecting on data collection, it is clear that contacting and speaking to people who were involved at these racetracks including fans, drivers, and others involved in stock car racing is critical. Even with my few and brief interactions, those opportunities provided more information in terms of the history and evolution of the sites, and the culture that surrounded the sport and the racetracks that the numerous readings I undertook.

Future Work and Research

Through my research, I have determined that there is great preservation potential for historic stock car racetracks. Further work should include more fully developing preservation strategies for these resources. These preservation strategies should expand on the ideas about important track features that were discussed in this work and consider which features can be added or removed. Period of significance should also be revisited in the future as the stories told by these sites change over time, and more features become historically significant. Interpretation and reuse strategies should be explored further in order for these sites to reach their full potential as historic resources that are important not only to NASCAR history, but also to the history of the communities in which they are located. Those interested in preserving these sites should consider attempting to nominate them to the National Register and nominate them for highway historical markers, if they do not already have them. National Register nominations should take

into account, not only the significant track features given in this thesis, but also additional features that may prove to have been significant in a later time period.

In future endeavors on this topic, there should be a heavy focus on oral histories from people who were involved in stock car racing either as a driver, fan, or track owner. Though I gave a cultural context of the Piedmont region and histories of each case study site, the cultural significance of these tracks would be more fully understood from oral histories tied to the people involved with these sites. As time goes on, oral histories will be less and less available, so it is critical to capture as many and as soon as possible.

Future work should include the preservation of stock car racing's intangible cultural heritage and how it relates to the physical preservation of these sites. While this thesis incorporated cultural aspects in terms of the culture of those participating in and surrounding the sport, there was little attention given to the literal practice of driving a stock car or the rituals associated with going to a stock car race. This should be considered as a part of further efforts in preserving the heritage of stock car racing.

Organizations such as Save the Speedway, Inc., the Historic Speedway Group, and the Classical American Homes Trust have done tremendous work in preserving the history of these sites and advocating for their physical preservation. Hickory Motor Speedway, as a business entity and its general manager Kevin Piercy, work hard to promote the history of the track and preserve the history of the site through their continuation of weekly racing. Anyone researching the preservation of these sites in the future should work closely with these organizations. Community members, fans, and preservationists should work together to form additional groups to advocate for the preservation of these sites. The majority of the work done in terms of preserving and

advocating for historic racetracks has been done by groups and organizations such as those listed above. In addition, if time and circumstances allow, it would be beneficial to have discussions with NASCAR about preserving and possibly reusing these tracks. NASCAR as an organization has, in recent years, renewed efforts to focus on the history of the sport and is recognizing that this is an important part of the sport which can be integrated into the fan experience. It would benefit NASCAR to have conversations with anyone advocating for the preservation of these sites, including historic preservationists, who have the expertise necessary. These discussions should also include local and state government officials who may be interested in helping fund preservation efforts which could generate income for the community and state.

Despite the fact that this thesis dealt exclusively with stock car racetracks, some of the information and ideas may be beneficial to those interested in preserving any type of auto racing venue. In the least, the idea of applying preservation concepts and practices to auto racing venues has been proposed.

In Conclusion

In conclusion, stock car racetracks in North Carolina have tremendous preservation potential. Although the history of NASCAR and stock car racing in general has been well-documented, the built heritage of the sport has often fallen into disrepair and been forgotten. The physical remains of the sport that once dominated the Piedmont region of the Southeast among the working-class are no longer considered among the region's significant sites. The preservation of racetracks in the Piedmont to Appalachian region should be taken seriously as sites that can help to preserve an important part of the

cultural heritage of the region. These racetracks can be sites of great opportunity for the communities in which they exist as well the region and state.

The potential of these sites has not gone completely unnoticed, however. Soon after the research for this thesis concluded, in March 2019, the governor of North Carolina, proposed an eight-million-dollar investment by the state into Rockingham Speedway in the south-central part of the state. This is in hopes that this racetrack can be used as an entertainment venue, with the possibility of returning racing to the track and boosting revenue from tourism.²⁷⁷ This effort by the State of North Carolina is important in that it may signal future efforts to invest in additional racetracks that are an important part of the state's heritage.

²⁷⁷ Jacob Seelman, "N.C. Governor Proposes State Funding for Rockingham", SpeedSport.com, accessed March 7, 2018, <https://speedsport.com/nascar/monster-nascar-cup/n-c-governor-state-funding-rockingham/>.

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APPENDIX A

TERMINOLOGY

Back stretch - straightaway opposite the start finish line

Banking - the grade of the turns or straightaways of a race track that allow cars to travel at faster speeds

Center of turns - between turns one and two or three and four

Checkered flag - the flag that an official waves to signal the end of the race

Entrance of a turn - where a driver begins to turn

Exit of a turn - where a driver straightens the wheel to prepare for a straightaway

Flag stand - a structure on which an official stands during the race to wave the green flag to start the race and checkered flag to end it

Front stretch - straightaway on which the start/finish line is located

Green flag - the flag that an official waves to signal the beginning of the race

Infield - area on the inside of the oval

Modified racing - racing between stock cars that have been heavily modified for racing and are often open wheeled.

NASCAR - National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing

Open-wheeled racing - racing between purpose-built race cars that do not have fenders covering the wheels and are not of a stock appearance

Pits or pit area - area inside of the oval in which cars stop during the race for fuel, tires, and other service

Road course - race track on which there are left and right turns; not an oval

Scoring stand - a building on or in which a team member stands to record the position of a particular driver during the race

Start/Finish line - where the cars start and end the race

Stock car racing - racing between automobiles that are comprised of stock parts from the auto manufacturer and have not been altered in any way or; any racing between cars that maintain a stock appearance but may not be made up of any actual stock parts

Straightaway - the long side of the oval

Strictly Stock Division (Grand National Division, Winston Cup Series, Nextel Cup Series, Sprint Cup Series, Monster Energy Cup Series) - the highest level of racing in NASCAR; began in 1949; originally true American stock cars with minimal modifications.

Superspeedway - originally an oval track one-mile or more in length; around 1960 the term came to mean an asphalt oval track typically one-and-a-half miles or more in length

Turns - curved parts of the track. There are four turns on an oval race track although drivers may actually only turn twice.

APPENDIX B

NORTH CAROLINA HIGHWAY HISTORICAL MARKER FORMS

Request Form for Highway Historical Marker

REQUEST FORM FOR A PROPOSAL TO BE PRESENTED TO THE NORTH CAROLINA HIGHWAY HISTORICAL MARKER COMMITTEE: *(Please provide the information requested. Include extra sheets if space provided on this form is inadequate.)*

- A. **SUBJECT OF PROPOSED MARKER:** The Save the Speedway Motorsports group is petitioning a historical marker to recognize the contributions to stock car racing that Wilkes County has made over the past 60+ years. Originally, we had hoped to get a historical marker for the historic North Wilkesboro Speedway, however due to your department's pessimism of such a marker being approved for the track alone, we decided to encompass the entire area of Wilkes County to prove once and for all that the sport of auto racing would be totally different if it were not for this rural North Carolina area.
- B. **SITE TO BE MARKED:** We wish to mark the entire community of Wilkes County and accredit its contributions to motorsports. From the closed North Wilkesboro Speedway to the Hotel Wilkes, where the idea of an organized sanctioning body for racing was conceived, to the famous Ingle Hollow... all have made Wilkes rich in history. Sadly, outside from a brief exhibit in the local museum, and photos in the local Brushy Mountain Steak House, the contributions have gone without recognition.
- C. **PROPOSED LOCATION OF MARKER ON NUMBERED, STATE-MAINTAINED HIGHWAY:** We believe the best location for such a marker would be off highway 421 near the site of North Wilkesboro Speedway, located about 5 miles outside of Wilkesboro. There is already wide shoulders present here from the old tailgating days so construction should be minimal.



The ideal site would be located on this stretch of highway 421 west-bound going towards Wilkesboro's commercial district.

- D. DISTANCE AND DIRECTION FROM THE PROPOSED LOCATION TO THE SITE TO BE MARKED:** North Wilkesboro Speedway is located about 100 yards north of the proposed marker site...Ingle Hollow about 5 miles SE, 4.3 miles NW to North Wilkesboro
- E. HISTORICAL SKETCH:** Wilkes County has been a "place to gas up your car on your way to the ski slopes" for several years now. A rural place where chicken farms in the foothills are commonplace. For those passer-bys to bigger and more exciting things, Wilkes County is merely another one of those "middle of nowhere" places often forgotten by the average person.

If only those average persons knew what truly happened within these county lines not so long ago...for what the dusty sandlots of Cooperstown did for Major League Baseball and what the frozen ponds of the great white north did for the National Hockey League, these windy-mountain back roads, the fields, and the residents of this county did for Stock Car Racing.

As the story goes which has been told many times before, the period from 1922-1930 in this country saw the movement of Prohibition come into reality. Alcohol was outlawed and soon became America's favorite taboo...seen clearly by the boom in moonshining, rum running and countless Speakeasies which operated during this time.

Wilkes County was not immune, in fact in some circles it was labled as the "Moonshine Capital of America". Several of its citizens crafted their art of fermenting mash and creating illegal, untaxed alcohol by the glow of the moon (Hence the moonshining term being coined) Being located in a mountainous, wooded area made it easy to hide stills from the authorities. Many of the moonshiners enlisted the help of several young men (or family members) to "run" their weekly load of liquor to the nearby cities such as Winston-Salem and Charlotte. (Northeast Georgia also had this occurring with runs to Atlanta [Dawsonville, Georgia is another racing pioneering town which holds a festival every October celebrating its racing heritage) And as the story goes, the runners had regular cars which were equipped with modified engines, springs, breaks, and enough power to reach 115mph.

After a while, the moonshiners began to talk about their runners and eventually started holding races to see which driver was indeed the fastest, fiercest, overall best driver out of the bunch. Soon they would be racing each other for large cash purses in front of large crowds. Many of these races were unorganized, and corrupt promoters were rampant. Efforts were made to create a sanctioning body which would ensure the integrity of the purses and rules. And the rest is history.

Included in this package is a CD with a thesis on it that was given to our group by Andrew J. Baker who was a student at The Ohio State University. Andrew had performed extensive research into the racing culture of Wilkes County (With help from Suzanne Wise, Curiator of the Racing Collection at Appalachian State University) and its impact on how the sport is today. I encourage you to read this thesis to get a better understanding of what it is we are trying to get recognized and it gives more clout to our petitioning. In a nutshell, I have highlighted some of the more important pieces of the thesis below:

THE BIRTH OF NASCAR:

During the 1930's and 1940's, Bill France recognized that stock car racing lacked regulation and uniformly enforced rulebook, yet had much potential as a spectator sport. In 1947, France created the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing, NASCAR, in hopes of bringing a uniform, sanctioning body to the sport. France, along with Enoch Staley and other early promoters, including Paul Sawyer (Richmond International Raceway), Alvin Hawkins (Darlington Raceway), Clay Earles (Martinsville Speedway), and Joe Little john (Spartanburg, SC) met at the Hotel Wilkes in downtown North Wilkesboro after the fall 1947 race to draft plans for a meeting to establish a sanctioning body (Wise, 2004). These early track builders and promoters of the sport were dedicated to turning the rural, Southern style of auto racing into a proper, viable sport. In late 1947, France officially founded NASCAR at a gathering at the Streamline Hotel in Daytona Beach, FL. Staley was ill and unable to attend, but was firmly behind the new organization (Wise, 2004).

From: When The Engines No Longer Roar: A Case Study of North Wilkesboro, NC and The North Wilkesboro Speedway.

A Thesis By: Andrew J. Baker
2005. All Rights Reserved.

Please also note that the creation of the NASCAR Baby Grand (Later named the Goody's Dash Series and now currently known as ISCARS) was created and founded in Wilkesboro, NC. Below is an excerpt from an article from StockCarRacing.com

The Goody's Dash Series traces its roots to North Wilkesboro, North Carolina, in 1973 when a group of local racers, led by Charlie Triplett, J.V. Reins, and Roger Hamby, began racing on a road course owned by former Grand National (now Winston Cup) team owner Bill Ellis. Ellis, a Wilkes County businessman who fielded a car for Marvin Panch and others in the '60s, was the proprietor of a drag strip and an adjacent road course near North Wilkesboro and is credited with promoting the first unofficial races of the series.

I have also included this article in its entirety on the enclosed CD.

NORTH WILKESBORO SPEEDWAY:

Recent research by Suzanne Wise, director of the Stock Car Racing Collection at Appalachian State University's Belk Library, has examined the early history of the North Wilkesboro Speedway. She states, "[I]n 1945, Wilkes County resident Enoch Staley attended stock car races presented by William Henry Getty France, Sr. known as Big Bill, one of the top race promoters in the Southeast. Staley was excited by the sport and decided to build a track in his native Wilkes County, North Carolina. France promised to promote the races and help run them for part of the proceeds." (Wise, 2004 1). Staley, with partners Lawson Curry and Jack and Charlie Combs, purchased farmland near North Wilkesboro and began excavating and construction an oval racetrack ("Grand Finale," 1996). However, the group's initial investment of \$1,500 ran out, causing the .625-mile track to be shorter and more undulating than planned (Wise 2004). The track was not a perfect, symmetrical oval and took on a very distinctive shape as the frontstretch sloped downhill while the backstretch sloped uphill.

Upon completion of the speedway in 1946, one news reporter suggested, "North Wilkesboro Speedway is the racing Mecca for Northwestern North Carolina. The five-eight-mile oval is nationally recognized as one of the fastest dirt tracks in automobile racing (Anderson, 1990, 149). Robert Glenn "Junior" Johnson, a local racing legend, stated that the first race ran at the speedway was an unscheduled, unofficial race organized by local bootleggers (Anderson, 1990, 237).

The track's first "official" event was a Modified race on May 18, 1947. The race included the running of heat races and a feature race primarily involving 1939 and 1940 modified Ford coupes. This inaugural event was deemed a major success as thousands filled the grandstands, infield, and even the trees just outside the track. (Anderson, 1990, 236). Although the grandstands held over 3,000 spectators, it was estimated that over 10,000 race fans paid admission to watch this inaugural event (Helyer, 1996).

It is also noted to point out that North Wilkesboro Speedway was one of NASCAR's charter tracks for its first year's inception in 1949 and held the season finale race, the Wilkes 200 on

October 16, 1949 (www.racing-reference.info) This was also the site of the crowning of the first NASCAR Strictly Stock Champion, Red Byron who won the championship over Lee Petty by 99.5 points.

RACING PERSONAS FROM WILKES COUNTY: *(there are many more we are sure)*

Junior Johnson: Ronda, NC- *"The Last Great American Hero", 6-time Champion Car Owner, 50 wins. NASCAR Legend. One of the 50 greatest drivers of all time.*

Benny Parsons: Wilkes County, NC- *1973 Winston Cup Champion, 1968-69 ARCA Champion, Reportedly looking to return to Wilkes County in the near future.*

Enoch Staley: Call, NC- *Considered a Racing Pioneer, Owner/Promoter of North Wilkesboro Speedway, Oconeechee Speedway, and Asheville-Weaverville Speedway. Operated North Wilkesboro Speedway until his death in 1995.*

Gwyn Staley: Call, NC- *Brother of Enoch Staley, Racer, won 3 races in 1957. Killed at a race in Richmond 1959. The Spring race at North Wilkesboro Speedway was renamed the Gwyn Staley 400 up to 1978*

J.D. McDuffie: Elkin, NC- *One of the last independent drivers, Raced the #70 Rumble Furniture Pontiac (Another Wilkes County Connection) Record holder for most starts in NASCAR's top touring series without recording a win. His 653 starts ranks him 14th in all-time starts (as of May 7, 2006 McDuffie was killed at Watkins Glen in 1991.*

Dean Combs: Wilkesboro, NC – *15-time Goody's Dash Winner at North Wilkesboro Speedway, 60 wins, 5 Goody's Dash Championships.*

**WILKES COUNTY DEPICTED IN RACING
ARTICLES/MOVIES/DOCUMENTARIES:**

Thunder Road (1958): *Story of a Korean War Veteran coming home to run the family moonshine business.*

The Last American Hero is Junior Johnson. Yes! (1964): *Short story written by Thomas Wolfe for Esquire Magazine, March 1965.*

Days of Thunder (1990): *Depicts a race scene at North Wilkesboro Speedway.*

Rumrunners, Moonshiners, and Bootleggers (2001, History Channel): *Documentary Examines how Wilkes County and Moonshining evolved into Stock Car Racing, Junior Johnson is interviewed as well.*

NASCAR: The Imax Experience (2004): *Opening scene has cameos of drivers Jimmie Johnson and Ryan Newman racing in a 1930's coupe on the back roads of Wilkes County running moonshine.*

Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby (2006): *Cal Naughton (John C. Reilly) is introduced as hailing from Wilkesboro, NC.*

HISTORICAL FIRSTS IN RACING REGARDING WILKES COUNTY:

- Idea of an organized, sanctioned body to oversee stock car racing is conceived at the Hotel Wilkes, 1947.
 - First NASCAR Points Champion, Red Byron is crowned at North Wilkesboro Speedway 1949.
 - North Wilkesboro Speedway was the final stop on the inaugural NASCAR season.
 - The NASCAR Baby Grand/Goody's Dash series was created in Wilkesboro in 1973.
-

In conclusion, we hope we have made a strong enough argument for why Wilkes County deserves to be recognized for its contributions to our nation's second most popular sport. We know you have stacked the odds against us by saying only a handful of sports-related markers have ever been erected. However we see that the importance which this county, it's communities, and it's citizens have made. If it were not for those backwoods moon shiners and their runners with nerves of steel...there is a good chance that household names such as Richard Petty, Dale Earnhardt, and Dale Jarrett would have never accomplished the fame and fortune they have gotten.

Our state is a racing state, there is no doubt about it. The NASCAR Hall of Fame bid that was awarded to Charlotte earlier this year was testament to that (Did you know that North Wilkesboro attempted to put in a bid for it?) It's past is located here as much as it's present. And although NASCAR and its associates have gone to big city markets and Fortune 500 sponsorships, its humble beginnings remain just west of I-77 in the mountains which make up Wilkes County.

We hope you will do which for the past decade everyone else has neglected to do...give Wilkes County their identity back and let them know, embossed in metal for all to see, that they ARE where stock car racing originated...and that although Junior Johnson retired and sold his team years ago, the North Wilkesboro Speedway lays silent since 1996, and the new 4-lane 421 has overshadows those old windy mountain roads which they ran, that their county is where this state's and nation's (and growing the world's) beloved sport was born.

For a decade they have had this taken away from them...it's time to give something back.

Upon approval for a historical marker, we wish to have written about the contributions to the sport of auto racing which Wilkes County has given since the 1940's. Upon approval, we (or you) will write a proper inscription.

F. SUPPLEMENTARY BIBLIOGRAPHY: *(secondary sources may be included)*

When The Engines No Longer Roar: A Case Study of North Wilkesboro, NC and The North Wilkesboro Speedway.

A Thesis By: Andrew J. Baker

REPORT ON CD INCLUDED WITH THIS APPLICATION

*Humble Beginnings for a Dying Series: NASCAR Touring Series
A 30-year-old NASCAR touring series is being left behind as the sanctioning body moves forward.*

By Jesse Miles, Jr.

Photography: Sam Sharpe

INCLUDED ON THE DISC ALSO

www.savethespeedway.net

Save the Speedway Motorsports, Inc. official website.

Included on it contains several articles and facts collected in the past two years regarding Wilkes County and it's contributions.

G. SUBMITTED BY:

_____ **Todd Knaperek** _____
(name)

_____ **PO Box 518** _____
(address)

_____ **Skyland, NC 28776** _____
(city) (state) (zip code)

_____ **(828) 674-0893** _____ Date: **10/24/06** _____
(daytime phone number)

RETURN ADDRESS:

*Research Branch
Office of Archives and History
4610 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-46101*

FOR APPLICATIONS SENT BY UPS OR FedEx PLEASE USE THE STREET ADDRESS BELOW:

*Research Branch
Office of Archives and History
109 East Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27601-2807*

Application for North Carolina Highway Historical Marker

Applications must be complete, clear, and organized. All facts and statements must be documented with primary sources that were written at the time of the event and secondary sources that put the subject in context. Primary sources include letters, deeds, newspaper articles, or meeting minutes that might substantiate the historical information in the application. In addition, the applicant needs to locate secondary sources, such as published scholarly articles or books. Photocopies must include citations: the title, author, and date of publication.

Photocopies of all documentation, primary and secondary, must be submitted with the application. For scanning purposes, please use paperclips rather than staples. Scanned applications and documentation are welcome and appreciated.

A. Subject of proposed marker and (rough) proposed inscription:

B. Site to be marked (such as home, birthplace, grave, event site):

C. Proposed location of marker on numbered, state-maintained highway: (Be specific. Please provide street address or closest intersection. Note whether the site lies within the corporate limits of a city or town. An attached map of the location would be useful.)

D. Distance and direction from the proposed location to the site to be marked: (for example, 100 yards S.E.)

E. Historical essay (use this space to help us understand the subject and the context, you may also write a proposed marker text):

F. Bibliography: (primary and secondary sources)

G. SUBMITTED BY:

(name) (email address)

(address)

(city) (state) (zip code)

_____ Date: _____

(daytime phone number)

Return address:

Research Branch

Office of Archives and History

4610 Mail Service Center

Raleigh, NC 27699-46101

To email application, please submit to: ansley.wegner@ncdcr.gov

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Raleigh, NC 27601-2807

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