

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

FRANK FUNK

Frank Funk, born on January 23, 1888, was probably one of auto racing's most beloved promoters. The respect that he acquired from the drivers, owners and fans who flocked to the Winchester (Ind.) Speedway was due, no doubt, to the quiet, country charm that he possessed as a typical, turn-of-the-century midwestern farmer. He was honest and true to his word, qualities not often associated with racing promoters in the early 1900's.

In 1914, Frank was farming his father's corn acreage west of Winchester when a man suggested that his property might make a good local recreational area. Funk agreed, as the land had a little spring-fed lake on it surrounded by a few trees. Soon, local youth were coming to the Funk homestead for roller skating in a newly-constructed rink and boating on Funk's Lake. It wasn't long before another Muncie resident suggested that an auto race track on the property might bring additional revenue to the lake, which by now had included carnival rides. Afternoon motorcycle and automobile races on the flat half-mile oval followed shortly thereafter.

Around World War I, Funk erected a grandstand at Winchester. While it is said to have looked like a covered bridge (minus one side), the Funk-built structure did keep the hot sun off the many fans and it even served as a model grandstand for other racing facilities. Soon an addition to the

grandstand was needed and also a wooden footbridge to the infield (formerly cornfield) was constructed. It is said he even built wooden platforms from which the neighboring Orphan's Home children could watch the races for free.

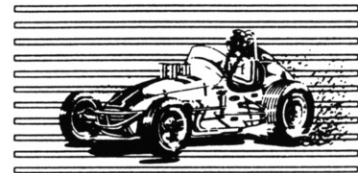


Frank Funk
Bruce Craig Collection

Over the years, as the open wheeled vehicles wore in the lower groove, banking on the Funk's Motor Speedway soon developed. Speeds increased as the banking did, and it wasn't long before Funk boasted of having the fastest half-mile dirt track in the country. Frank even provided \$500 incentive money for new track records. By the late 1930's, Winchester Speedway was a half-mile, high-banked oiled dirt oval which was feared by drivers from coast to coast (it wouldn't be paved until the 1952 season).

As Winchester's success grew, Frank Funk began building and promoting more half-mile facilities, such as the banked track in Dayton and Fort Wayne and the tree-lined Jungle Park at the edge of famous Turkey Run Park. Frank, inducted into the Hoosier Auto Racing Fans (HARF) Hall of Fame in 1956, was always assisted by his wife Etta and track announcer Harold "Dutch" Hurst. Funk was known to always take care of his racers, so that nobody left the track empty-handed. This combined with his gentle, quiet nature and his good business sense made Frank Funk one of America's most successful sprint car racing promoters until his death on March 30, 1963. Frank and Etta, who passed away in 1975, are survived by daughters Jeanette Durbin and Maxine Kritsch (who still lives in Winchester).

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