

National Sprint Car Hall of Fame & Museum

ROY RICHWINE

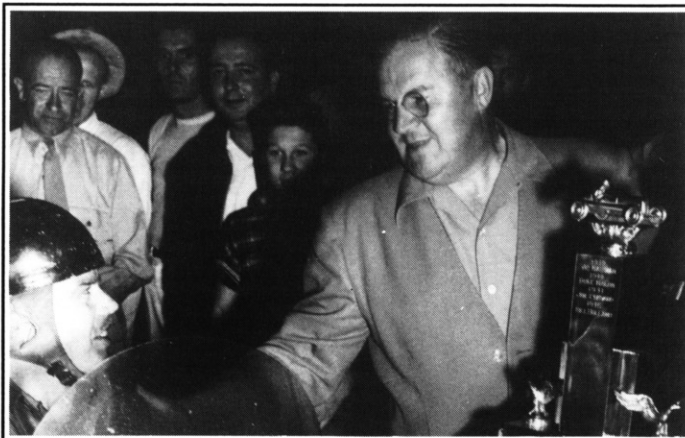
Roy E. Richwine (Sr.) was born in 1888. In 1928, Roy purchased the Grangers Picnic Fairgrounds, now known as the Williams Grove Park and Speedway. He built the half-mile dirt track in 1937-38, which was one of the first in the United States built primarily for automobile racing.

Originally set to open on May 14, 1939, the inaugural race at the new track did not take place until one week later, as work could not be completed in time. Because of the delay, Ralph "Pappy" Hankinson agreed to switch dates so the Richwine's facility could open on May 21 with the American Automobile Association (AAA) 'big cars', with a fifty-five cent admission charge. Otis Stine was credited with making the first lap around the now-historic speedway, while Joie Chitwood (Sr.) set fast time (26.03 seconds) and Tommy Hinnershitz won that day's \$400-to-win forty-lap feature. It is interesting to note that on May 19, 1989, Williams Grove hosted its 50th anniversary special with Dave Blaney setting quick time (18.83 seconds) and Steve Kinser scoring the \$15,000-to-win 50-lap feature. From the very beginning, Roy had a good nose for publicity, promoting such special events as a three-lap match race in '39 between rivals Chitwood and Vic Nauman.

In February of 1942, when AAA ceased sanctioning races in preparation for the wartime ban on racing, Hankinson and Richwine put together the Central Racing Association 'big car' circuit, combining Williams Grove with Hankinson's fair circuit tracks. Jimmy Wilburn won the inaugural

event. After Indy, Eastern standout Ted Horn joined the new trail. Sadly, Hankinson passed away on August 19th of that year, just days after the ban went into effect.

In 1947, lights were installed and Chitwood won the first night race there. Other improvements that Richwine made to the facility after the war included the backstretch crossover bridge which allows fans to move from the infield to the backstretch stands, and the first turn tunnel which provides infield access from the main grandstand.



Roy Richwine

(Bruce Craig Collection)

Williams Grove was the only 1/2-mile track in the United States permitted to run Indianapolis-type cars under the AAA banner. These special non-point races, there were eleven in all, were the brainchild of Emil Andres. Said Andres, "One day I got a look at one of Roy Richwine's payoff sheets for a AAA sprint race. He was paying more than we were making in some National Championship races. Why couldn't we run Indianapolis cars at the Grove for the same purse the sprinters got? He

was good to me through the years. He paid my expenses, gave me a guarantee, even loaned me a car so I could get around while I was there. I trusted him enough to discuss the idea and he was open to it right away."

During the Richwine era, special appearances by the AAA sprint cars were the main attraction until weekly flathead raing began in 1954 (the flatheads later evolved into the 30 x 90 supermodifieds or 'bugs' of the 1960s). In addition to AAA, the Grove also sanctioned events under the United States Auto Club (USAC) and National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing (NASCAR) sanctions. In October of 1948 and '49, Richwine even hosted the "National Roadster Championships" at Williams Grove, with Willy Sternquist and Ralph "Smokey" Stover winning both shows, respectively.

In addition to racing, Roy Richwine was very active in government as Deputy Secretary and Comptroller of the Pennsylvania Department of Highways for ten years, and served 25 years as a Special Deputy Sheriff of Cumberland County. He was also very active in other community services and organizations until his death in 1960, when his son J. Robert "Bob" Richwine succeeded him at the helm of Williams Grove. In 1967, Bob opened his weekly Friday night programs to unlimited winged sprint cars and one year later he turned over the promotional chores to his former announcer, Jack Gunn.

In 1980, Roy Richwine was posthumously inducted into the York County Racing Club (YCRC) Hall of Fame.