

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Rillito Race Track Historic District

other names/site number Rillito Race Track, Rillito Park, Rillito Downs

2. Location

street & number 4502 N. First Avenue not for publication

city or town Tucson vicinity

state Arizona code AZ county Pima code 019 zip code 85718

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
___ national ___ statewide ___ local

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official _____ Date _____

Title _____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register ___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register ___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

Rillito Race Track
Name of Property

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
9	7	buildings
		sites
7		structures
		objects
16	7	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

AGRICULTURE/animal facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

NO STYLE

LATE 19th AND 20th CENTURY REVIVALS

OTHER: Sonoran Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE, EARTH

walls: CONCRETE, METAL, WOOD, BURNT ADOBE

roof: METAL/steel, aluminum, ASPHALT

other: Glass Block

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

Near the southeast corner of the intersection of First Avenue and River Road lies Tucson's unique Rillito Race Track, the birthplace of modern Quarter Horse racing and a continuing venue for both Quarter Horse and Thoroughbred racing. Originating on the Jelks Ranch in a natural desert clearing between the Rillito River and the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mountains, today's racetrack is part of a multi-use, public park that carves a refuge of relatively open land from a zone of high-density development. During two historic eras, the racetrack complex evolved to incorporate no-frills built features of earthen track, steel, concrete and block that remain in active use today, relatively unaltered, where horse races continue to be held. While the Track, co-joined Grandstand/Clubhouse and Barns are plain, utilitarian structures, the site remains a picturesque oasis at the base of the majestic Santa Catalina Mountains, in spite of nearby encroachment. Rillito Race Track has always enjoyed considerable popular support by attracting a broad cross section of Tucson's community. Its boisterous and colorful group of fans, horsemen and horses creates an incomparable Tucson tradition. On four-plus-acres just north of the race track stand the original Rukin Jelks House with attached stables, a guesthouse and a carport. In 1940 architect Frederic O. Knipe Sr. designed the buildings in the Sonoran Revival style. Forming a rectilinear-plan with enclosed courtyard, they are single-story with similar massing and burnt adobe construction. Currently, the Jelks property is a rental for Pima County and is off-limits to the public.

[In the early 1980s, as part of a citizens' effort to preserve Rillito Race Track from sale by the County, the Committee to Preserve Historic Rillito Race Track attempted to put the racetrack on the National Register. (At that time, most site improvements did not meet the fifty-year age criterion for listing.) In a process that lasted four years, Rillito's "Chute" was listed in 1986 at the national level of significance. Well-written and backed by extensive research, the nomination, however, contained a few inaccuracies that are being corrected in this submission.]

Narrative Description

Setting

The Rillito Race Track, 4502 N. First Avenue, is located on a level clearing near the banks of the Rillito River. Once within a zone of farmland and natural desert (Photo 1) today's open site is impacted by nearby commercial and high-density residential development (Photo 2). Development of this sort is rapidly encroaching all along both banks of the Rillito River and both sides of River Road, a major arterial to the north. The racetrack is no longer visible from River Road and its principal, vehicular access is from First Avenue to the west. A secondary, dirt access drive runs from River Road to the north, passing along the west side of the Jelks House/Stables complex. The racetrack facility is also accessible from a landscaped river walk to the south. The familiar burgundy and white Grandstand buildings rise up prominently against a backdrop of the majestic Santa Catalina Mountains. The visitor finds a racetrack here very little changed from its historic appearance.

Wedged between River Road and dense development on both sides, the secluded Jelks House/Stables complex is built near the north side of the racetrack. An asphalt drive on the east edge of the property serves both this complex and the Casitas Real Condominiums. There is a chain-link perimeter fence and just south of the gate, a high concrete wall along the east property line. Inside is a circular gravel driveway for access to the Jelks buildings. The property grounds are primarily earth with clusters of overgrown trees and shrubs – mostly palo verde and mesquite - and a dense growth of tamarisk trees along the south to buffer the property from the racetrack.

Current Appearance

No-frills buildings and structures of earth, steel, concrete and block appear by or near the earthen Track. Clustered on its southeastern edge is the compact, Grandstand/Clubhouse complex. To the east and west are the Barns. Outside the two major buildings are spectator circulation areas with asphalt drives and parking areas beyond. The Grandstand is joined to

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the Clubhouse by a second-level, enclosed Bridge beneath which is a divided Breezeway for public entry and an equine course that connects the Track to the saddling Paddock. Within the complex, the seating stands, the paved viewing space along the rail, plus the betting and food service counters are closely related and connected by good public circulation. The facility is built to ensure conviviality and clear visibility for approximately 7,500 spectators.

The Jelks House/Stables complex is currently occupied by a tenant and not accessible for observation.

Resource Count

The following major features comprise the Rillito Race Track Historic District. Dates have been determined from aerial photographs, title records and other reliable sources. See Historic District Resources Map (Map 3).

Track – includes Chute plus Oval (1943 or earlier; Oval enlarged at west end by 1954.)

Grandstand/Clubhouse (late 1953; early 1954).

Judge's Stand (late 1953/early 1954).

Paddock/Breezeway (late 1953/early 1954).

Jockey's Building ((late 1953/early 1954).

Permanent Barns: Barn D, Barn E, Barn F ((late 1953/early 1954 to 1960).

Pre-engineered Barns: Barn G, Barn I, Barn J, Barn K, Barn L, Barn M (1992 and post 2006).

Plaza/Concession Building (2006).

Camera Stands: Camera Stand A, Camera Stand B (probably (late 1953/early 1954 – too small to be visible on aerial).

Gatehouse ((late 1953/early 1954).

Jelks Courtyard (1940)

Jelks House (1940)

Jelks Stables (1940)

Jelks Guesthouse (c. 1950)

Jelks Carport (c. 1940)

There are sixteen (16) contributing buildings and structures in the Rillito Race Track Historic District. Contributing structures include the Track, Paddock/Breezeway, Judge's Stand, Camera Stand A, Camera Stand B, Jelks Courtyard and Jelks Carport. Contributing buildings include the Grandstand/Clubhouse, Jockeys' Building, Barn D, Barn E, Barn F, Gatehouse, Jelks House, Jelks Stables and Jelks Guesthouse. These features meet the age requirements for National Register listing (see Integrity).

There are seven (7) non-contributing buildings in the historic district including Barn G, Barn I, Barn J, Barn K, Barn L, Barn M and Plaza/Concession Building. These recently installed features do not meet the age requirement for National Register listing.

(1) Track: The Track (Chute plus Oval) has a special, prepared earth surface, carefully graded (Photo 3). The Chute is forty-five feet wide and 3/8 of a mile (660 yards) long with a level surface. The distance around the Oval is 5/8 mile and its surface is slightly banked on the turns. For Quarter Horse racing the Chute merges with the Oval on the straightaway up to the finish line in front of the Grandstand. The first curve of the Oval then functions as a "run-out" where the horses brake after the race (see Section 8).

There are three black and white striped distance markers along the Chute and ten furlong markers along the Oval. These posts are about 8" in diameter and about 8'-0" high, set back about 8'-0" from the inside rail. Originally horse pasture, today's infield contains the central Plaza/Concession Building and soccer fields.

White pipe rails with offset pipe posts line both sides of the Track. At the west end of the Chute is an open section with a removable wood rail for access. Simple and utilitarian, the Track's rail structure consists of horizontal steel pipe, 40" above grade, supported by steel posts in concrete. In 1988, Fontana Safety Rail was installed on the inside rail of the Oval. The safety cover, consisting of white, aluminum-based, rubberized wrapping, was screwed to the steel structure. The safety rail is covering and a necessary, compatible rehabilitation that does not detract from the integrity of the Track.

The Track (Chute plus Oval) was on site by 1943, converted from a stud-farm training track. During the historic era, the Oval was banked for safety reasons and also lengthened at the west end from its original 1/2 mile length (Haskell 1944) to its present length by February 1954 (Photo 15).

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(2) Grandstand/Clubhouse: The dual-level, co-joined Grandstand/Clubhouse building primarily serves spectators, with the Clubhouse providing more amenities. Built in late 1953 and early 1954, both the Grandstand and Clubhouse were connected sometime before 1960 by a second story, enclosed "Bridge" (Photo 4). Spectators enter the Grandstand, the largest feature on site, through a ticket booth on the south. The upper level contains tiered, wood bench seating for 3,000 spectators (Photo 5). The lower level has pari-mutuel betting windows, food and bar facilities, racetrack offices and storage spaces. There are timing and photo finish facilities in a removable tower attached to the north side of the Grandstand.

The exterior of the Grandstand is noteworthy for its imposing, corrugated-metal-clad, barrel-arched roof that appears to overhang on the north and south sides. Below is a plain, concrete block base. The open, tiered seating is visible from the outside. This functional building allows full spectator viewing of the Track through a glass and steel-tube, curtain-wall screen. Its open-frame, steel structural system supports seating tiers and the barrel roof. Non-bearing, concrete block walls and partitions partially close in the lower level which is about eleven feet above grade.

The arched, steel-truss roof is supported by three rows of steel columns placed at the rear of the Grandstand, in front of the seating tiers, and at the north edge where the roof overhangs. Wood purlins extend across the steel trusses to support the corrugated metal roof. Steel-plated risers and treads create tiers that rise up to the south, supported underneath by a system of steel girders and beams. Simple wood-plank seats with light steel supports are attached to the steel treads.

The Clubhouse can seat approximately 650 patrons comfortably at tables or on chairs which rent daily or seasonally. Here there is a full-service bar and kitchen and horse murals on the walls. There is an ample zone for four-seat table seating plus an individual seating area near the pari-mutuel counter at the west end (Photo 6). The lower level of the Clubhouse contains racetrack offices and storage facilities. The enclosed, connecting Bridge serves as a spectator lounge.

The two-story Clubhouse and second-story Bridge are supported by a system of steel columns, beams, bar-joists and steel decking. Concrete masonry units enclose exterior wall areas. Apparently the 1953 Clubhouse was modified on the north side by a faceted second-story extension sometime after 1960. The current viewing area is enclosed by an aluminum-frame, glass curtain wall system between steel columns. On the east end of the Clubhouse is a gabled, wood-framed, second-story extension supported below by steel pipe columns.

The Grandstand portion and the flat-roofed Bridge remain relatively unaltered. Initial glazing of the Grandstand occurred during the historic era but it has since been re-glazed. The more recent Clubhouse modification occurs on the north façade and is not visible from the south entry façade. Constituting a minor percentage of the co-joined building's envelope, this latter modification does not compromise integrity.

(3) Judge's Stand: Apparently installed around the end of 1953 or beginning of 1954, when many improvements appeared on site, this structure is aligned with the Track finish and the Chute (Photo 7). It is a two-person, corrugated metal enclosure about 20'-0" above grade supported on a light steel framework.

(4) Paddock/Breezeway: Also built during the late 1953/early 1954 time period, the Paddock is located just south of and between the Grandstand and the Clubhouse (Photo 8). Lining the south side of its earthen enclosure is a curved, open-front, concrete block shed containing eleven saddling stalls. The 16'-0" wide Breezeway extends under the Bridge and connects the Paddock to the Track. The Paddock/Breezeway is a contributing structure.

(5) Jockeys' Building: Also pertaining to the late 1953/early 1954 time period, this plain, 1890-square-foot, rectangular-plan building is located adjacent to and just west of the Paddock. This unaltered building contains showers, changing and toilet facilities for male and female jockeys plus an office and storage area.

(6) Permanent Barns: At present, three permanent barns, Barn D, Barn E and Barn F, remain on site. These Barns were built by February 1954 or shortly thereafter. While Barns E and F are in good condition, Barn D is in very poor condition. According to Assessors' Records, there were nine permanent barns in 1967. Grouped together on the western zone of the property, five of these were in place by 1960. In recent years six permanent barns have been demolished by the County.

The gabled, block buildings are typical, elongated, racetrack barns with canopies formed by the gable eaves on either longitudinal side. Each building is divided by a central, block, spine wall with stalls along both sides of the spine facing outward. The gable roofs extend beyond each end to enclose a breezeway and a tack room (called "bunk house" on assessors' records).

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Barn F typifies the permanent, back-to-back, racetrack barn found on site (Photo 9). It is a fifty-stall barn with twenty-five stalls on each side. The barn measures 22'-0" by 267'-0." It is built of concrete masonry units with two-by-four wood trusses, tongue-and-groove sheathing and corrugated metal roofing. Each eave overhangs to form a canopy over an eight-foot wide, open, dirt circulation path along each longitudinal side. Painted pipe columns support the outer edge of each canopy roof.

Under the same roof, separated from the stable block by a breezeway at each end is a 10'-6" by 38'- 0" block unit partitioned into four identical rooms by plywood-clad frame walls. The block units are wide enough to end the canopied circulation paths. The back-to-back organization of Barn F is provided by the central, longitudinal block wall capped by plywood-clad framing to the ridge. Separating the individual, 10'-0" by 10'-6" stalls is an array of identical block walls. The stall floors are earth.

Each longitudinal barn façade is punctuated by a row of identical, evenly-spaced, four-foot wide doors with three-foot high, wrought iron bar gates, painted red brown. The block walls are 8'-2 ½" high. Each end unit has flush panel doors that face inward along the breezeway. The gable ends are textured plywood painted red brown. The walls and undersides of the eaves are painted cream white. Barn F is in good condition and has been well maintained.

Barn E is also one of the earliest features on the site. It is in good condition. It has a somewhat different plan from Barn F by comprising two separated stall blocks and a small jockey-room block at the east end only, all under a common gabled roof. There are thirty-eight stalls in the major portion and eight stalls in the minor portion. Barn D is currently in very poor condition and fenced off by chain linking. It differs on its west end for it includes a larger, block room with a porch on posts. The trim of the building is painted blue, not burgundy.

(7) Pre-engineered Barns: Barns G, I, J, K, L and M are utilitarian buildings assembled on site from prefabricated components by Port-A-Stall of Arizona (see Section 8). Established in 1968, Port-A-Stall manufactures components for barns, stalls and other features for animal housing needs. Rillito's Port-A-Stall Barns were installed during two eras. Most appeared around October 1992 but extensions (to Barns G, I and J) or new buildings, Barn K, have been added since 2006 (White 2008.) (Photo 10.) The Pre-engineered Barns are non-contributors.

Typically, these gable-roofed, burgundy and white metal Barns are arranged in the "back-to-back" configuration characteristic of racetrack horse stall designs, without a central aisle or side porches. Barn L, however, has a flat, slightly sloped roof with eight stalls, each 12'-6" square, on either side of a 12'-0" wide central aisle. The two Barns located east of the Track are for veterinary purposes.

(8) Plaza/Concession Building: Of recent construction (built prior to June 2006) and therefore a non-contributor, is a concrete strip upon which sits a small, block concession building. Oriented on a northeast-southwest axis, the strip bisects the infield of the Track. These features are used for racetrack ceremonies and alternative uses.

(9) Camera Stands: Camera Stand A and Camera Stand B are identical, red, box-shaped features mounted on ten-foot-high pipe columns, spaced along the back stretch of the Track's Oval. During racing season these features hold photo flash race markers. Although their vintage cannot be verified, the stands appear to have been built during the 1953/1954 period and to meet the fifty-year age criterion for National Register listing. Thus they are contributing structures.

(10) Gatehouse: Also of the early 1950s era, this small building is located on the northwest corner of the First Avenue automobile access to the Rillito Race Track property. It is a ninety-six square-foot, nine foot high, rectangular-plan building, placed on skids. It is painted burgundy and white and has plywood siding, one door and aluminum sliding windows.

(11) Jelks Courtyard: Architect Frederick O. Knipe Sr. designed the cohesive, mortar-washed burnt-adobe complex in the Sonoran Revival style for the J. Rukin Jelks family and several prize horses about this central, rectilinear-plan courtyard. Built in 1940, the Jelks House embraced the southeast corner of the courtyard while the Jelks Stables enclosed the opposite corner. Just north of the residence, a walled service court bordered the east courtyard wall. The Jelks Guesthouse was added at the northeast end. The courtyard was not only an organizational feature but a tree-shaded oasis. Today several mature mesquites remain. The courtyard is a contributing structure. (Map 4.)

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(12) Jelks House: The 1940 residence is a simple Sonoran Revival style dwelling with low parapets and a compact form. The Jelks House is a contributing building. The footprint consists of rectangular, setback units that step around the southeast courtyard corner. The house is built of mortar-washed burnt adobe with low parapets capped by double brick. Metal roof drains (*canales*) penetrate the parapets. The main entry is at the southeast corner through a low-wall enclosed entry court. Just south of the entrance is a small, decorative-metal, hitching post and wrought iron lamp on a mesquite stump. A shade *ramada* stands adjacent to the rear façade of the house. Most windows are steel casements painted blue. The exterior doors are mostly dark-stained wood plank with wood lintels. The 1,850-square-foot residence contains a living room, dining room, kitchen, hallway, and two bedroom suites. Materials in the public areas include brick floors, plastered burnt adobe walls and saguaro rib ceilings above hewn beams.

(13) Jelks Stables: In keeping with the house, the 1940 stables building has a low compact form, mortar-washed burnt-adobe brick walls with brick-capped parapets and projecting log *vigas* and metal *canales*. This contributing building features six box-stalls, two feed storage rooms, an office and a tack room on either side of a wide central corridor. Each stall has an opening with a wood lintel, frame, and shutters. The interior walls are either painted plaster or painted burnt adobe. The stable floors are dirt with the exception of an office in the southeast corner, which has brick flooring. The ceiling is log beams supporting saguaro ribs. In the tack room are rustic, built-in log saddle-racks. A rectilinear space serving as living quarters for a groom projects from the southwest end of the stable.

(14) Jelks Guesthouse: The guesthouse is a small, contributing building located at the northeast end of the central courtyard, north of the service courtyard. It is similar in construction and appearance to the main house.

(15) Jelks Carport: The two-bay carport is located in the southeast corner of the property, outside of the courtyard and its buildings. This contributing carport structure is built of log posts and beams.

CURRENT FUNCTIONS

The total attendance for the ten-day 2011 race season was 46,384. The average daily attendance was 4,638. The total attendance for the nine-day 2010 season was 47,616 with the average daily being 5,291. On February 22, 2009, the last day of that year's season, 10,222 people came to watch the races at Rillito. The parking lots were jammed and the crowd was boisterous. On February 24, 2008, 9,300 people came to watch the horses run at Rillito. Elsewhere in Tucson, the Tucson Rodeo, the Gem and Mineral Show and the Tucson Golf Tournament were also held on that day. Much of Rillito's enthusiastic support comes from Tucson's Hispanic community whose members share horse racing as part of their cultural heritage. (Moore 2008.)

As well as horse racing, the Rillito Race Track is and has been an appropriate venue for alternative-use, community activities. Soccer fields are maintained within the infield of the Track Oval and in the northwest corner of the property. The University of Arizona's Spring Fling, Arts and Crafts Fairs, a Native American Inter-tribal Pow-Wow, the Tucson Celtic Festival and dog shows number among activities annually held at the site.

For example, on October 26, 2008, a noncompetitive walk, "2008 Making Strides Against Breast Cancer of Tucson!" was staged from the Track infield. Rillito's parking areas were filled to capacity and the infield teamed with pink balloons, live music, booths and activity. In December, 2008, when the nearby town of Marana, Arizona, suddenly had to cancel "Miracle in Marana," its annual toy-distribution event, Rillito Race Track provided the venue.

Integrity

The Rillito Race Track Historic District exhibits good integrity. The track layout and the contributing buildings and structures have experienced very few modifications throughout the years. The Jelks complex buildings and structures also appear to be intact. Non-contributing resources are non-major features that fit compatibly into the district. In its unique setting, the racetrack not only continues its historic function but retains the authenticity of its historic identity in spite of recent, nearby, commercial and high-density residential development. Changes since the period of significance (1943-1964), like alterations to buildings and the recent removal or addition of resources, have neither been extensive nor visually discordant. Integrity categories are as follows:

Location: Rillito Race Track has retained its integrity of location and racing continues where it began.

Design: Buildings and structures at Rillito are functionally designed and utilitarian. "Form follows function" is the rule. Except for the loss of Permanent Barns, the general design aspects in the historic district have remained intact. Building

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alterations comprise necessary rehabilitations or, like the glazed addition to the north façade of the Clubhouse, are not extensive enough to compromise integrity. The installation of the rubberized safety rail to the Track is also a necessary, compatible rehabilitation.

The removal or addition of elongated, gabled barns in areas where barns of this vernacular form have traditionally existed is not visually discordant. However removal of Permanent Barns certainly diminishes the integrity of the fringes of the racetrack complex.

Setting: The open, oasis-like setting of the racetrack between the Rillito River and the foothills of the Catalina Mountains retains its historic character. Likewise, the striking view of the Catalinas to the north remains to inspire all who participate in the sport of horseracing at Rillito Race Track.

Materials: The historic district has maintained good integrity of its original, basic materials: earth, concrete, concrete block, burnt adobe, steel and wood. Most repairs, like replacement glazing, are done using the same material. Aluminum has been introduced with some minor window installation.

Workmanship: The workmanship at Rillito is standard, utilitarian and sound. Everything from the Track surface and the Barns, with their back-to-back stalls, to the tier-seated Grandstand expresses functionality and standard-quality workmanship. The workmanship at the Jelks complex is architect-designed to look regionally rustic using local materials like burnt adobe and mesquite logs.

Feeling: Rillito Race Track certainly retains its historic feeling. Fans claim they much prefer the convivial atmosphere at this historic facility than at any upscale, modern racetrack. It is difficult to express in words the feeling when the parking lots overflow and the facility is filled to capacity with a boisterous, colorful, perpetually-moving crowd cheering horses across the finish line. At quieter times, on non-race days the visitor experiences the tranquility of the beautiful setting and feels at one with Tucson's history.

Association: With its remarkable setting and no-frills, intact structures and buildings plus its nearby residential complex, the Rillito Race Track retains a strong association with its historic past both for its initial association with Quarter Horse racing and its continuing association with Quarter Horse and Thoroughbred racing.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

AGRICULTURE

Period of Significance

1940-1964

Significant Dates

1940, 1943

1953/54

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance is 1940 to 1964. This time span includes the date J. Rukin Jelks built his house complex, the date Rillito opened for Quarter Horse racing and extends to the date that the facility suffered a four-year cessation of operation, one of several to occur during the blustering and very colorful history of the Rillito Race Track. (Other names given to the racetrack at various times were Rillito Park and Rillito Downs.)

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Tucson's Rillito Race Track Historic District is eligible for National Register listing at the local level under Criterion A for its initial association with modern, regulated Quarter Horse racing in the United States and for its continuing association with Quarter Horse and Thoroughbred racing. The Track includes an oval plus the Chute, the earliest feature and the one most closely associated with Quarter Horse racing. In 1986, the Chute was nominated to the National Register at the national level of significance. The intact Jelks House/Stables complex pre-dates the founding era. The race track buildings are associated with a somewhat later historic era. Rillito Race Track is the documented birthplace of organized Quarter Horse racing in the nation and, in fact, the world. Pioneer Tucson horse breeders and American Quarter Racing Association (AQRA) founders Mel Haskell, Bob Locke, J. Rukin Jelks, and Jake Meyer, immortalized as the "4 Horsemen," instituted the "chute" system at Rillito. This system, the template upon which all Quarter Horse racing is based, integrated a straightaway into an oval track with technical innovations to create a unique style of short distance racing for a uniquely American horse type. An unregistered breed until the 1940s, the robust Quarter Horse was and remains the fastest horse on earth for short-distance racing. Dedicated to the improvement of the Quarter Horse, Mel Haskell and company produced their own champion race horses by selective breeding, based on performance, and cross-breeding with Thoroughbred stock. From Rillito, regulated Quarter Horse racing rapidly evolved into a major regional, then national sport. Today, as in the past, Rillito Race Track holds both Quarter Horse and Thoroughbred races. The facility experiences considerable popular support and attracts a broad cross section of Tucson's community.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Introduction

Founded in 1943 by four wealthy horsemen who made Tucson their home, Rillito Race Track combined a straightaway with an oval to produce the ideal track for modern, short distance, Quarter Horse running. The "4 Horsemen" also perfected technical innovations like the photo finish device which became standards for modern Quarter Horse racing. They established the American Quarter Racing Association (AQRA) to serve as the "Jockey Club" for Quarter Horse racing. With modifications, the AQRA's rules and regulations are still in effect today under the Racing Division of the American Quarter Horse Association.

As horse breeders with stud farms, Tucson's 4-Horsemen bred their own Quarter Horses with emphasis on performance rather than conformation. In 1940, one of the four, J. Rukin Jelks, allowed racing at his stud farm on the training track that would become the Rillito Race Track. To these horsemen, a good Quarter Horse excelled at short-distance running, whether used in cutting, reining or racing. Early on, by cross-breeding Thoroughbreds with Quarter Horses [and thereby conflicting with the fledgling American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA)], they contributed to the improvement of the racing Quarter Horse.

American Quarter Horse Racing

While the breed association (AQHA) was not organized until 1940, there being no prior stud book or registry, the Quarter Horse itself represents an old type. The name originated from its speed in quarter mile races. The ancestry of the American Quarter Horse is predominantly a mix of the Spanish Horse and the British Thoroughbred.

Spaniards brought the Arab-Barb (predominantly Barb) into the New World. Beyond the earlier Roman influence that had introduced the Oriental horse into Spain, the Moorish invasion of A.D. 711 brought another influx. A flourishing horse culture developed in Andalusia that perfected the Spanish Horse. Due to the rigorous demands placed on this strain, by 1492 it was without peer in Europe. (Laune 1973.) Modern organized racing and the Thoroughbred originated in the British Isles and the British brought horse racing with them into the Colonies. Genealogically, all Thoroughbreds can be traced in male lineage from three Oriental stallions brought to England in the early 18th century: the Byerly Turk, the Darley Arabian and the Godolphin Barb. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* "Horse Racing..." 1969.)

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In the 1600s, eastern seaboard colonists began to cross imported English Thoroughbreds with Native American horses (descendants of the Spanish horse). One of the most famous sires was Janus, a Thoroughbred grandson of the Godolphin Barb foaled in 1746 and brought to colonial Virginia in 1756. The influence of Janus and others contributed genes crucial to the "Celebrated American Quarter Running Horse." The resulting horse was small, hardy and quick and was used as a work horse during the week and a race horse on the weekends.

Mel Haskell wrote his own eloquent version of the history of Quarter Horse Racing in the 1944 Year Book for the Southern Arizona Horse Breeders' Association:

Horse racing has been going on in America since soon after the first "Gentlemen" landed in the Colony of Virginia and set up their plantations. It started long before the first English "Thoroughbreds" were imported and long distance, oval tracks constructed. Saddle ponies were "matched" and raced down village streets, or on short straightaway courses laboriously chopped out of virgin forests, even before the forest trails were dignified by the name of roads.

Because of the conditions under which they were run, these races were seldom at distances beyond a quarter mile and came to be known as "Quarter Races." The top horses that competed in them were known as "Quarter Running Horses" or "Quarter Horses."

Because the Quarter Horse was used for work as well as sport – because he could be trained for a short race by his owner without expensive equipment or professional help – because, in short, he was the "poor man's race horse" and could be raced anywhere that a quarter mile of level open ground could be found, Quarter Racing has persisted throughout the history of America. As it lost popularity in the East it spread West with the frontier and gained a permanent foothold in the range country of the Southwest where the Quarter Horse was accepted as the ideal Cowhorse – the only type of saddle horse that still plays a vital part in our modern mechanical economy.

The Tradition of Quarter Racing is colorful – if not always honorable. Matches between famous racers in colonial Virginia attracted onlookers from miles around and were an excuse for a day of merry-making and sometimes rowdy celebration. In the crowd along the "paths" could be seen the Cavalier and his Negro slave, sporting Parson and Privateer, New England Puritan, New Amsterdam Hollander, wilderness Hunter in coon-skin cap and "Native American" in feathered head-dress. That picture has not changed much in nearly three centuries. A big match race in the Southwest today is often accompanied by a barbecue and all-day Fiesta. The crowd, with Ranchers and Farmers, city Sports and Cowboys, Mexicans and Indians, has not lost all of its color. Feeling has always run high – the stake might consist of everything an owner possessed – the public has always backed its favorites heavily.

The Quarter Horse has always excelled in two factors, utility and speed. The continued quality of the horse is founded in "early foot" (also called "quick burn" or "early speed") meaning the ability to run at full speed inside three jumps from a flat-footed start (Nye 1964). This ability is perpetuated through the skill of breeding bests to bests. A good Quarter Horse has attributes of consistent reproduction of ability and conformation resulting from focused selective breeding (Denhardt 1959). Some individuals have been clocked at up to fifty-five miles per hour (Wikipedia 2008). The holders of most short distance records have always been Quarter Horses with considerable Thoroughbred blood.

The Founding Years – Hacienda Moltacqua (1941-1943)

While unregulated Quarter Horse Racing had been popular in Tucson since cattle and cowhorses were first brought to Arizona, experimental attempts to formalize the sport were launched in 1941 at Hacienda Moltacqua in Tucson, Arizona, by the Southern Arizona Horse Breeders' Association (SAHBA). The most prominent members were the original "4 Horsemen," Melville H. Haskell, Robinson ("Bob") C. Locke, Jefferson Rukin Jelks, and A. M. "Jake" Meyer. The title "4 Horsemen" was granted to the founders by Nelson Nye, author and world authority on Quarter Horses (Nye 1973).

These four horsemen came to Tucson in the 1920s from wealthy, non-Arizona families that had been immersed in horse culture and racing. As health seekers (both young Haskell and Jelks came to Arizona to recover from tuberculosis), or for other reasons, the gentlemen bought farms and cattle ranches near Tucson where they began to breed fine horses.

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Southern Arizona was considered ideal horse country. Ranches located in the rough foothills had rocky, limestone pastures and strong native grasses, ideal conditions for producing cowhorses with strong bones and good feet (Haskell 1943).

In 1932 Tucson's first livestock show took place in a lot across from the prestigious Arizona Inn. There being no official Quarter Horse breed at that time, judges differed in which horses they thought should place (Wooddancer 1981). Informal challenge horse races had become very popular at Bob Locke's west-side ranch and participants like Haskell and Jelks were piqued that first prize winners in races did not place in shows. They believed that proper Quarter Horse conformation would come through breeding a horse that could also run.

[Haskell, for example, started crossing Thoroughbreds with Quarter Horses very early in his breeding program. He believed in cross-breeding and claimed that he fought for it for years although he was nearly run out of the American Quarter Horse Association for his views. By using top Thoroughbred sires and good mares, Haskell's Rincon Stock Farm, founded in 1937, became a premier horse operation. (Waldrup 1984). Ariel Lady was Haskell's pride when she ran at Rillito and afterwards became a considerably noted broodmare. She was possibly the greatest producer of outstanding running Quarter stock ever known up to the mid-1960s (Nye 1964). Rukin Jelks also bred champions from his stock farm including Queeny, Little Queeny, Piggin String and Rukin String. Quarter Horse literature abounds with data about such champions.]

In 1941, due to the popularity of informal racing at his Ajo Way property, Bob Locke decided to build a racetrack northeast of Tucson called Hacienda Moltacqua (Italian for "much water"). Primarily for harness racing, the one-half mile oval track was modified by the addition of one-eighth and one-quarter mile straightaway chutes to accommodate Quarter Horse racing. Longer races were run around one turn.

Participants who worked to make Quarter Horse racing an "ever more popular and sporting amateur pastime" included Haskell who, as Secretary, wrote the Association's first year book, *Racing Quarter Horses* (1943). Bob Locke was steward and starter, Rukin Jelks was track operator and Jake Meyer served as announcer, steward and starter. Ardent horseman C. C. (Clancy) Wollard became president of the SAHBA for 1943.

An SAHBA director and old-time cowboy, Joe Flieger, started the Quarter Horse Speed Trials when he said "Let's stop *talking* about how fast we *think* our horses can run and *find out* what they really can do!" Hence the motto of the SAHBA became "AN OUNCE OF PERFORMANCE IS WORTH A POUND OF HOT AIR" (Haskell 1943).

In 1941 there were nine race meetings at Moltacqua including the First Annual Quarter Horse Speed Trials. By 1943, there was racing nearly every Sunday afternoon, twenty-five meetings in all, with three races each meeting for Quarter Horses. Quarter Horse Speed Trials were held and the top Quarter Horses in the country could compete for title of "World's Champion Racing Quarter Horse." (Haskell 1943.)

Racehorses came from all over Arizona and out-of-state to earn track records at Moltacqua. The record winners had colorful names like Shue Fly, Nobodies Friend and Red Racer. Red Racer, a useful, racing cowhorse, was owned and bred by Mel Haskell at his Rincon Stock Farm. New Mexico-bred Shue Fly, a racing Quarter Horse of "classic quality," was the 1942 World's Champion.

Organized Racing at Rillito Race Track (1943-1949)

During the 1940s, Tucson became the Quarter Horse capital of the world. At the end of the 1943 racing season, Bob Locke sold the Moltacqua property and Rukin Jelks then offered the use of a training track at his stud farm north of the Rillito River. Adapted specially for the Quarter Horse, the new Rillito Track was operated by the Tucson Racing Association. Here the SAHBA and Tucson Racing Association organized the American Quarter Racing Association (AQRA), an association like the "Jockey Club" for Thoroughbred racing. The AQRA defined what a "Quarter Running Horse" was, promoted good sportsmanship, and tested and refined innovations that became standards for the sport. Under the aegis of the AQRA, Quarter Horse racing grew monumentally as member tracks sprang up throughout the Southwest and beyond.

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During the first season at Rillito (1943-1944) the Tucson Racing Association put on 125 races for Quarter Horses on twenty-four Sunday afternoons, in which 130 horses participated. A most popular venue from the start, Tucson's early Rillito Race Track featured very modest amenities (Photo 11). Improvements like a grandstand and clubhouse were promised as soon as World War II ended.

It was a pretty colorful track then with years old cottonwoods, benches, and a pasture in the middle where brood mares were grazing. All the big wig people were interested in horses. Easterners just loved it. Truck loads of dude ranchers would come in and get jolly kicks." (Smelker in Wooddancer 1981.)

Van Smelker worked as a steward at Rillito while attending the University of Arizona. He remembered the excitement of the early days. With a war going on, Rillito was something of a shoestrings operation.

We had a 660-yard straightaway and a half-mile oval track. The finish line was almost to the turn, and many horses jumped the rail instead of taking the turn" (Jennings 1973).

The track width on the straightaway was forty-five feet but narrowed to thirty feet on the turn. Smelker declared that "(i)t was pretty hair-raising to watch a group of horses go into that turn." The turns were eventually banked to encourage horses to stay on the ground and between the rails. (Chamberlain 2006.)

The 4 Horsemen were prime creators of the American Quarter Racing Association, formally organized February 1, 1945. Initial officers and directors included fifteen men and women representing breeders associations, owner/breeders and developing member tracks in California, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Oklahoma and as far away as Florida. The mission of the Association was to promote the racing of horses at the short distances traditional to the sport of Quarter Racing.

The goal of the AQRA was to promulgate uniform standards of competition and rules and regulations that could be enforced by member tracks. It was to distribute information to racing secretaries to promote a high standard of fairness and honesty in races run at recognized tracks, for previously the sport had been rife with "trickery, foul riding and ...race fixing" (Haskell 1944). Furthermore, it was to maintain a classified registry "for racing purposes" to insure positive identification of competing horses. (Nye 1973.)

Primarily written by Secretary Mel Haskell, the AQRA published an annual Year Book and Register of Merit to list all horses that earned the right to be known as "Quarter Running Horses." Perused today, these archival booklets are treasures of anecdotal information, meticulous documentation and amazing photography. Much of the following information is summarized from the Year Books, published from 1943 until 1949. By 1949, the AQRA had merged with and become the racing division of the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA).

The AQRA stipulated that all horses competing at member tracks be properly identified and registered. The registration certificate had no value except as a permit to start on a recognized track. There were no requirements in regard to breed, sex, age or color. Performance alone was the qualification of a Quarter Running Horse - any horse - irrespective of breeding - that could run a quarter mile fast enough to be worthy of the name. The AQRA stressed that the importance of pedigrees was greatly exaggerated compared to conformation and ability to get the job done.

[Until 1949, the AQRA did not always agree with the AQHA which had been organized in 1940 to make the "type" known as the Quarter Horse into a "breed" with a distinct utilitarian purpose. By experience, the AQRA believed that horses developed on tracks produced superior cowhorses when crossed with hardy native mares of the Southwest cattle country (Haskell 1946). Breeders like Haskell firmly believed in cross-breeding with Thoroughbred stock to produce racers. The AQRA wished not to conflict but to cooperate with the AQHA for the good of the sport and improvement of the Quarter Horse.]

To Haskell the Quarter Horse was the "poor man's race horse" since anyone who could afford to keep a saddle horse for pleasure riding could afford to race one. In addition, Quarter Horse racing was a sport conducted by amateurs. There were no professional race track employees at Rillito. Local horse breeders, cattlemen or sportsmen directed the races. An accountant employed elsewhere ran the pari-mutuel department in compliance with the State Tax Commission. Sellers and cashiers, men of "excellent reputation," were commonly employees of local banks and business houses. Most of the

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net derived from the mutuels was distributed in purses. Haskell considered this kind of racing a true sport with wide amateur appeal.

At Rillito, the straightaway “chute” system was perfected (Photo 12). Quarter Horse races took place on the specially designed Track in which the straight Chute merged with the straightaway of the Oval, the curve of which then served for “pulling up” or braking, after the race. On line from a true standing start in a closed mechanical gate, each Quarter Horse was required to run straight from the starting position so as not to bump or interfere with another horse. The finish line was located on the straightaway not far from the first turn at the east end, close to its current location. [Since Quarter Horses continue to run beyond the finish line, the Oval’s curve slows them because they must change leads in turning. At this point they start to “give up” mentally and slow down (Matthews 2009). The Oval has always been used before and after the race for assembly, warm-up, cool-down and for training and exercise during the week.]

To ensure closer matches in races, a system of graded handicaps was worked out. There were two weight-for-age scales, a lightweight gauge for race-bred horses and a heavyweight for stock-type horses. Since most Quarter Horses had a higher value as cow horses than they did as racehorses, “claiming races” wouldn’t work. (Chamberlain 2006.) A claiming race was a race in which the losing horse could be claimed afterward for a previously stated price, while the winner had to be auctioned off to the highest bidder (Laune 1973).

In 1946 Haskell portrayed a Tucson-centric view of Quarter Racing. Geographically located at the “center of interest,” Rillito was the “logical meeting place” for top horses from all over the Southwest (Photo 13). Here the dates of the World’s Championship Quarter Horse Speed Trials had been set to ensure the participation of all champions. One important function of the AQRA was to establish integrated “circuits” by cooperation between member tracks. The Texas-New Mexico circuit included Raton, Albuquerque, El Paso and Eagle Pass. The Nevada-California circuit included Reno, Salinas, King City and Corona.

By 1947, the following race tracks were affiliates of the AQRA: 1) Albuquerque NM (Fair Grounds), 2) Arrowhead Park, Houston TX, 3) Corona CA, 4) Cowboy Park, El Paso TX, 5) Del Rio TX, 6) Eagle Pass TX, 7) Hollywood Park, Ruidoso NM, 8) Inglewood CA 9) Raton NM, 10) Reno NV, 11) Rillito AZ, 12) Salinas CA and (13) Winkelman AZ. By this time, the AQRA had grown to include 446 members. Over 1,200 head of horses had been registered. Because of the admission of new tracks, competition now occurred on a year-round basis. (Haskell 1947.)

Drawing from coast to coast but primarily from the Southwest, the top Quarter Running Horses in the country raced at Rillito Race Track (Photo 14). Some outstanding mares and stallions included on the list were Stella Moore, Miss Panama, Hard Twist, Bart B S, Piggin String, Shue Fly, Queenie, Clabber, Joe Reed II, Squaw H, Barbara L, Joe Tom, Joe Hancock, Pelican, Waggoner’s Rainy Day and Nobodies Friend – just a few of the greats that came down the chute. “It was horses, not copper, that opened up Tucson and put its name in the sporting pages from one end of the country to the other” (Nye 1973).

Rillito was a testing ground for many ideas that became standard such as Quarter Horse futurities, derbies and stake races and was the first track to get pari-mutuel wagering (Jennings 1973.) During the 1947-1948 racing season, Rillito put to use the first photo-electric timer which, it was hoped, would be adopted by member tracks. Van Smelker explained how the photo-electric timer worked. A high-speed clock was placed next to the track, right on the finish line. A movie camera was mounted up in the judge’s stand. Smelker would switch on the clock when the horses started. When the horses got close to the finish line, he switched on the camera that was focused upon the clock and finish line. The camera kept running until all horses had crossed the line. Officials would then develop the film and look at it frame by frame. (Jennings n.d.)

By 1948, the AQRA boasted more than 700 members, over 2,100 registered horses and twenty-two member tracks in Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas. The AQRA dissolved in March 1950 and joined the newly formed Racing Division of the American Quarter Horse Association. Mel Haskell was now president of the Racing Division and Van Smelker, the Secretary-Treasurer. From this point on registration was handled by the AQHA in Amarillo, Texas. On March 5, 1950, the Board of Directors of the AQHA adopted the “Rules and Regulations of Quarter Racing” as published in the *1949 Year Book and Register of Merit*, prepared by Secretary Van Smelker.

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1953-1964 (The Era of Rillito Racetrack Inc.)

The history of the Rillito Race Track has always been colorful. If the 1940s marked the initial, flourishing era of clean racing and good sportsmanship for Quarter Horse racing, the tone changed dramatically in the early 1950s and, for a brief period, the racetrack got into the hands of people of questionable repute.

The Arizona Racing Commission had been pressuring Rukin Jelks to improve his site, a task he preferred not to undertake, so he decided to sell Rillito. When Tucson-based Detroit mobster and racehorse owner Peter Licavoli expressed an interest in buying the facility, Jelks exclaimed "Why Pete if I sold you this track, they'd run me out of town." (Wooddancer 1981.) In the 1950s, especially in resort towns across the country, organized crime was seriously infiltrating legitimate businesses like horse racing. Backed by Licavoli and company, imposters incorporated under the name Rillito Race Track Inc. On July 7, 1953, the sale of lots 21-31 (where the racetrack is located) from J. Rukin Jelks to Rillito Race Track Inc. was recorded (PCR 1953).

On November 11, 1953, Rillito Race Track Inc. obtained \$500,000 from Arizona Title and Trust for improvements (PCR 1953). No doubt Licavoli had set up the trust. The Grandstand, Clubhouse and other early site features were built between the mortgage date November 11, 1953, and February 17, 1954, the date of an aerial photograph showing said features (Photo 15). At the improved facility, Rillito's new owners intended to push Thoroughbred, not Quarter Horse racing (Cowgill 1975).

Apparently serious concern about Rillito's ownership soon surfaced. On March 19, 1954, a report written by County Attorney Morris K Udall, recommended to the Arizona Racing Commission that Rillito's racing permit not be renewed until questions about its ownership were resolved ("Commission..." 1954). The corporation took care to quickly divest itself of its criminal shareholders.

On November 21, 1954, Rillito Race Track Inc. opened its season under new ownership (Wooddancer 1981). Apparently, more than 116,000 townspeople and tourists took part during the 1954-1955 season. In response to this show of increased interest, Rillito officials promised to attract better horses for better racing by re-instituting Quarter Horse along with Thoroughbred racing. ("Rillito Park..." 1955.)

In November of 1955, it was announced that Rillito Park would open to a banner season (Rillito Park..." 1955). There would be a total of forty-six racing days, including one for charity. Quarter Horses and Thoroughbreds would share attention in the regular ten-race offerings. A four-member advisory board including J. Rukin Jelks had been appointed to help direct growth. ("Advisory Board..." 1955.) Well-qualified officials were hired to serve during the season, some of whom divided their time between the Rillito and summer duty elsewhere. (Officials..." 1955.)

Along with the existing Track, Rillito's recently-built facilities included a well-appointed Turf Club and a Grandstand capable of seating 3,000 people. The latest in equipment "for the protection of the racing fan" included an electrical starting gate that "assures every horse an equal chance." Photo finish cameras took the guesswork out of close races. Wagering was protected by the American Totalizator Company's "intricate selling and calculating machinery" which made possible a series of accurate odds postings on the infield tote boards and locked off betting the instant each race started. ("Rillito Has..." 1955.)

Rillito Park was run by Rillito Race Track Inc. until the early 1960s when, due to a tax default, Pima County Sheriff's Department had to take over the property. On February 19, 1965, a recorded Sheriff's Deed conveyed the property to Emprise Corporation, a New York Corporation (PCR 1965).

Apparently Rillito did not operate from 1964 to 1968. Closing of the racetrack for four years, from 1964 to 1968 slowed down interest in the racing there. Racing started again in 1968, but success came in spurts between closures. While Rillito became a less-prestigious Thoroughbred/Quarter Horse venue, upscale facilities like Los Alamitos in California and Ruidoso Downs in New Mexico became the nation's leading Quarter Horse racetracks.

Recent History

In 1971 the Emprise Corporation gifted the Rillito Race Track to Pima County (Jennings 1974). Over the years the County leased Rillito to various operators on condition that the latter maintain and improve the facility. Subsequently the racetrack

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experienced a checkered commercial history but came into its own as a County Fair racing venue. (The Arizona Department of Racing administers funding for a limited number of County Fair racing days for tracks throughout the state). As such, Rillito continues to race Quarter Horses and Thoroughbreds while experiencing considerable popular support from its *aficionados*. The racetrack has also survived largely due to the efforts of volunteers. Noteworthy events of the recent decades are as follows.

In 1982 the Pima County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to rezone and sell Rillito. Close to the Tucson Mall and valuable for development purposes, the Board had received requests to buy the property. A citizens' group and the public-at-large then fought to save Rillito by passing a 1984 ballot initiative that required twenty-five years of County Fair races and designated the facility as the official Pima County Horse Racing Track. It also mandated that the property be leased and used for other community activities like soccer, rugby, etc.

Another contingency plan of 1982 was the effort to put the racetrack on the National Register by the Committee to Preserve Historic Rillito Race Track under Joanne H. Vinik, Madeline Moore, Susan B. Brown, Gail Powers and Sally C. Wegner. (Wooddancer 1981, Chamberlain 2006). In a process that lasted four years, Rillito's "Chute" was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1986 (see Section 7 Summary).

Improvements still in place today appeared just before the 1988-1989 season. The five-person Rillito Park Raceway Limited Partnership had acquired the operating and concession rights and spent over \$500,000 in renovations of the facility (Palacios 1992). The opening day card included five live races and seven Breeder's Cup races simulcast from Churchill Downs in Kentucky. Bettors could watch the Kentucky races on forty new color television monitors installed throughout the Grandstand and Clubhouse. (Rickard 1988.)

The partners widened the entrance road and provided chip-and-seal, striped parking for 1,600 vehicles. Improvements also included a new racing surface for the Track plus new inside/outside "safety" railing. The new color scheme for the Grandstand/Clubhouse and Barns was burgundy and gray. Clubhouse renovations included all new chairs, tables, carpeting and paint. (Cowgill 1988.)

By 1992 the site became a multi-use, public park administered by Pima County's Parks and Recreation department. Athletic fields were built in the northwest corner of the parcel. Rillito Race Track held County Fair racing meets during the winter season and shared its site with soccer and other uses throughout the year (Bustamante 1992). Today under racetrack General Manager Patricia White, the Pima Horseman's Association has an operating contract from the Pima County Fair Horse Racing Commission for the annual winter race meet. SP Enterprises operates the concessions (White 2008).

In 2006 Pima County acquired the Jelks House/Stables property. The house serves as a rental today.

Unfortunately, Rillito Race Track faces an uncertain future. An influential community group hopes to end horse racing and turn the entire site into a soccer complex. If this happens, an important and irreplaceable Tucson historic landmark will be lost. In recent years, Rillito Race Track has proven that "it's small but it's also mighty, luring crowds of spectators that are the envy of much larger, much more extravagant facilities" (Ciarloni 2008). The racetrack fills to capacity on the closing day of each season. With ever-increasing restrictions, like a reduced number of racing days, an insufficient number of horse stalls and the demolition of several historic barns, the facility still attracts record numbers of people.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

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Vinik, Joanne Hamilton and Sally Calkins Wegner. *Rillito Racetrack Chute*. 1986.

Rillito Race Track

Name of Property

Pima County, Arizona

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Letters/Communications/Oral History Interviews

Buck, Trey. 2008. Executive Director of Racing, American Quarter Horse Association. Letter of support to Historic Rillito Racetrack Inc. Summer 2008.

Ciarloni, Diane M., *Speedhorse* editor 2008. "Rillito Downs...Moments in Time." Email typescript to Edwin Moore, November.

Goodman, John "Jack." 2008. Interview by Ralph Comey and Janet Parkhurst. Tape Recording. Tucson, AZ, 29 October.

Jelks, Jeffries Rukin and Carolyn G. "Keri" Jelks. 2008. Interview by Ralph Comey and Janet Parkhurst. Tape Recording. Tucson, AZ, 1 November.

Leonard, Kathryn. 2008. National Register Coordinator, State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). Email communication to Janet Parkhurst. Tucson, AZ, 2 December.

Moore, Edwin. 2008. Board Member of Historic Rillito Racetrack Inc. Various conversations with Ralph Comey and Janet Parkhurst. Tucson, AZ, Summer-December.

White, Patricia. 2008. General Manager of Track Operations and President of Pima County Horsemen's Association. Various conversations with Ralph Comey and Janet Parkhurst. Tucson, AZ, Summer-November.

Maps

2008 Assessor's Record Map. Pima County Assessor (PCA).

2008 Assessor's Map with Track (PCA).

1996 United States Geological Survey (USGS). Tucson North, AZ. Scale 1:24 000.

Aerial Photographs

1940s Oblique Aerial. Gene Magee Collection. PC 177/f 101/269. Arizona Historical Society Library (AHS).

1940s Oblique Aerial, Close-Up. Gene Magee Collection. PC 177/f 101/272. AHS.

1954 Aerial. Pima County Mapping & Records (PCM&R), 17 February.

1960 Aerial. Cooper Aerial Surveys Co., 21 March.

1983 Aerial. PCM&R, 3 October.

1998 Aerial. PCM&R, 14 October.

2006 Aerial. Cooper Aerial Surveys Co., 8 June.

Internet Sources

Harrison, Sally (www.sallyharrison.com), 2008, "Los Alamos Race Track."

Wikipedia, 2008, s.v. "Horse Racing."

Wikipedia, 2008, s.v. "Quarter Horse."

www.btkcasino.com, 2008, "Ruidoso Downs Race Track."

Rillito Race Track
Name of Property

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Name of repository: Historic Rillito Racetrack Inc., Archive

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 91.17
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundaries of the Rillito Race Track Historic District are as shown on Map 1.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The historic district is located on that property assigned Tax Parcel No. 108-19-004A comprising 87.02 acres of land (the Rillito Race Track) and Tax Parcel Nos. 108-19-013C-F totaling 4.15 acres of land (the Jelks House/Stables) in Section 19, Township 13S, Range 14E, Gila and Salt River Meridian. The total district measures 91.17 acres. The legal description of the larger parcel includes all except part in the northerly portion and part in the southwest corner of the W. H. Baker Subdivision (Map 2). Parcels 108-19-013C-F constitute a trapezoidal segment cut from Lots 20 through 24 of the Baker Subdivision. The race track property has been owned by Pima County since 1971 and occupies land annexed into the City of Tucson in 1982. Pima County acquired the Jelks House/Stables property in 2006.

(A gentleman about whom little information has been found, W. H. Baker had the unusual subdivision of elongated lots platted in 1908).

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ralph Comey and Janet H Parkhurst
organization Ralph Comey Architects and Janet H. Strittmatter Inc. date July 11, 2011
street & number 3834 E. Calle Cortez telephone 520-320-9043
city or town Tucson state AZ zip code 85716
e-mail comeyarchitects@cox.net

Rillito Race Track
Name of Property

Pima County, Arizona
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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Rillito Race Track Historic District

City or Vicinity: Tucson

County: Pima

State: Arizona

Photographer: Ralph Comey and Janet Parkhurst (when noted)

Date Photographed: Various dates in 2008

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of 17 1940s Oblique Aerial (AHS). Rillito Race Track, with its Oval and Chute shown in its original, natural-desert setting by the Rillito River, with the Catalina Mountain foothills rising up behind.

2 of 17 2006 Aerial (Cooper Aerial Surveys Co.) [Note that several features shown in this photograph were demolished later (see Resources Map, Map3).]

3 of 17 View down Track Chute to Grandstand. Shows north façade of Grandstand. November 2008, looking SE.

4 of 17 Grandstand/Clubhouse Building, South Façade. Note Catalina Mountains beyond. October 17, 2008, looking N.

5 of 17 Grandstand Interior, Tiered Seating. October 17, 2008, looking W.

6 of 17 Clubhouse Interior, Pari-mutuel Counter with Horse Mural. October 17, 2008, looking W.

7 of 17 Judge's Stand. December 2008, looking NW.

8 of 17 Paddock. November 2008, looking SW.

9 of 17 Permanent Barn F, east end. South and east facades. Janet Parkhurst. October 17, 2008, looking NW.

10 of 17 Pre-Engineered Barn (Port-A-Stall), east end. South and east facades. Janet Parkhurst. October 17, 2008, looking NW.

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11 of 17 1940s Oblique Aerial, Close-Up (AHS). Shows Track with straightaway Chute and Oval plus modest, open-bleacher seating and round, mesquite paddock.

12 of 17 The Straightaway Chute showing quarter horses racing onto the Oval (Haskell 1944).

13 of 17 American Quarter Racing Association Circuit Map showing Tucson at the center (Haskell 1946).

14 of 17 Quarter Race Horse stallions Pelican and Bull's Eye (Haskell 1947). Upper photograph shows 1947 Rillito Arizona Derby banner.

15 of 17 1954 Aerial (PCM&R). Shot on February 17, 1954, shortly after the site improvements were built. Clearly shown are the Grandstand, Clubhouse, Jockeys' Building and Paddock, plus two of the Permanent Barns.

16 of 17 Page 5 from the American Quarter Racing Association's 1944 Year Book showing, among other things, the Paddock plus a schematic map of Rillito Race Track showing both Chute and Oval (Haskell 1944).

17 of 17 1960 Aerial (Cooper Aerial Surveys Co.). Note Grandstand and Clubhouse have been joined by Bridge by 1960.

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.