

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Keeneland; Keeneland Racetrack

and/or common Same

2. Location

street & number Off Versailles and Rice Roads _____ not for publication

city, town Lexington _____ vicinity of

state Kentucky code _____ county Fayette code _____

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Racetrack

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. James Bassett, III, President, The Keeneland Association

street & number P.O. Box 1690

city, town Lexington _____ vicinity of state Kentucky 40592

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Fayette County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Lexington _____ state Kentucky

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title NONE has this property been determined eligible? _____ yes _____ no

date _____ federal _____ state _____ county _____ local

depository for survey records

city, town _____ state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Summary

Keeneland's key features are its 1-1/16-mile main track, laid out by Jack Keene in 1916; the grandstand, the original portion of which was constructed in 1936; the stone clubhouse, to its southeast (rebuilt in the late 1930s in a conversion of Keene's earlier multipurpose structure), and subsequently joined to the grandstand by a connecting addition; and the sales pavilion (1970). The larger training track and the extensive grouping of stables to the north and east of the historic core complete the complex. The main track and the grandstand-clubhouse complex contribute to the significance of the nominated property; the stables and sales pavilion do not.

Keeneland Clubhouse

The structure that became the Keeneland Clubhouse began as Jack Keene's combination mansion and training center, designed with living quarters on the first floor and a large "clubroom" and stalls also on the first floor.¹ An indoor racing track, to be used for training, was to be attached to the structure with the 1-1/16 mile main outdoor track laid out to the west. Only a low stone wall surrounding the proposed indoor track was completed; and the outdoor track was roughly laid out. Thus when the Keeneland Association acquired the property in 1936, it acquired an unfinished training-racing complex and the roughly laid out track.

Keene's building, of Kentucky limestone quarried on his farm, faced south. It had a large square center section of two stories joined by stone arcades to 3-story wings on the east and west. The roofs were flat and the upper walls of the main building were crenelated.

When architect Robert W. McMeekin took charge of the project for the Keeneland Association he put a slate gable roof over the center section and added a portico to its south-facing front.² He also added a large bilevel wooden porch, or miniature "grandstand," on the west side of the building facing the track. Keene's incomplete quarter-mile closed training track, adjacent to the clubhouse on the northeast, became an outdoor saddling paddock or walking ring.

Grandstand

McMeekin erected a 2,500-seat grandstand in stone and wood in a design similar to the clubhouse, but separated from it by open space. The grandstand was extended with a 1,542-seat steel and concrete addition in 1953.

The gap between the grandstand and the clubhouse was closed in 1963, adding still more seats. In 1974, offices were added on the east side of the paddock and a clubhouse dining room erected overlooking the walking ring. Also that year, a new building was erected at the north end of the grandstand to serve Keeneland officials. Finally, in 1976, the wooden portions of the 300-foot center section were dismantled and rebuilt in concrete and steel. The stonework was retained.

An extension of the grandstand to the north, which should be completed in 1987, will further expand seating capacity, by about 5,000.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
prehistoric	archeology-prehistoric	community planning	landscape architecture	religion
1400-1499	archeology-historic	conservation	law	science
1500-1599	agriculture	economics	literature	sculpture
1600-1699	architecture	education	military	social/
1700-1799	art	engineering	music	humanitarian
1800-1899	commerce	exploration/settlement	philosophy	theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	communications	industry	politics government	transportation
		invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
				Recreation (horse racing)
Specific dates 1936 - date	Builder/Architect Robert W. McMeekin; Arthur Froehlich			(alterations)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Summary

Keeneland Racetrack, shortly after the track's completion in 1936, became the most conspicuous manifestation of the horse raising and horse racing for which Lexington, the heart of the Kentucky "bluegrass," has been renowned for two centuries. The property's earlier association with Jack Keene, an extraordinary figure in American racing, lengthens and strengthens its claims to historic recognition.

The course is particularly noted for its "Blue Grass Stakes," a race of major stature that ranks with the Kentucky Derby, to which it serves as a prelude, and the "Phoenix Handicap," the oldest stakes race in the United States. Both have been run at Keeneland since the opening season. Keeneland is also preeminent in its influence on the sport of racing through its annual sales, which features the best horseflesh from around the world, and which attract -- quite literally -- "the crowned heads of Europe."

Although it has been improved and altered since the 1930s, the changes have harmonized with its original structures. Keeneland retains the key features and facilities completed in the late 1930s and maintains the flavor of that era.

Historical Background

Racing in Lexington began in 1787. The Kentucky Association track, on 5th Street, was constructed in 1826, and was the focus of the city's racing into the 20th century. It was the original site of the Phoenix Handicap.

John Oliver (Jack) Keene, and his brother G.H. ("Ham"), scions of a family distinguished in Lexington's affairs from the 1780s when Patrick Henry granted a choice Bluegrass tract to a kinsman of his, their great-grandfather, enjoyed notable careers in the "sport of kings."¹ Jack became an internationally known trainer after he trained horses in the great stables of Henri Block and Michael Lazereff in Russia in 1902-03. For Lazereff, with "Irish Lad," he won the Russian "Triple Crown" of that era (Warsaw, Moscow, and St. Petersburg). After his Russian stint, he raced the Oakland-Emeryville circuit in California and then swept 17 races in Japan with American thoroughbreds.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 198

Quadrangle name Lexington

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	6	7	1	0	0	3	0	4	2	1	4	1	4	5
Zone	Easting						Northing							

B

1	6	7	1	0	3	6	0	4	2	1	4	1	4	5
Zone	Easting						Northing							

C

1	6	7	1	0	3	6	0	4	2	1	3	0	4	5
Zone	Easting						Northing							

D

1	6	7	0	9	4	6	0	4	2	1	4	1	5	0
Zone	Easting						Northing							

E

Zone	Easting						Northing							

F

Zone	Easting						Northing							

G

Zone	Easting						Northing							

H

Zone	Easting						Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

A tract bounded by Versailles Road on the south, Rice Road on the west, and Bosworth Road extended on the north and east to the main entrance on Versailles Road.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James H. Charleton

History Division

organization National Park Service date July 8, 1986

street & number 1100 "L" Street, NW telephone (202)343-8165

city or town Washington state DC 20013-7127

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title _____ date _____

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date _____

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration

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The Track

Keene planned the track with generous width and ample curves. The track itself has been refinished but retains its original configuration and length. The infield has not been substantially modified. The starting line and starting chutes have been moved, however.

Keene's placement of the structures, to the east of the track was novel. His successors chose not to change it. Keeneland is probably the only major racetrack in America where the grandstand faces west with the clubhouse at the head of the stretch rather than its first turn.

Footnotes

¹Keene's building projects are described in Keeneland (Opening 1936, Deluxe Souvenir), 60, and Charles P. Koch, "Brass Rings and Leather Binding," Keeneland, 1, 2 (Fall/Winter 1979), 49-57.

²Changes over time are described in Bill Christine, "Keeneland Was and Is An Original," Keeneland, 7, 2 (Fall/Winter 1985), 78-92, and Dan Mearns, "Something Rare and Very Special," Keeneland, 1, 1 (Spring/Summer 1979), 43-52.

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By 1909, Keene was back in Kentucky. That year was momentous for horse racing because legislation in New York virtually destroyed the sport in that State, which had been one of the bulwarks of the circuit. In Kentucky, Keene trained his horses at the Kentucky Association track in Lexington, a course then nearly 100 years old. He felt it did not meet his standards. As he later recalled:

I had no heirs and I wanted to do something really worthwhile for racing. It is such a grand sport. I dreamed of a race track that would not emphasize profit. I dreamed of building a race track which I could will to Lexington and Fayette county, entailing it in such manner that it would never be used for anything else but a race track and possibly a public park.²

By 1916, Keene was ready to fulfill his dream. He called in surveyors to lay out a track of 1-1/16 miles in circumference. He also soon laid out a limestone fence around the property and entrance gates of similar material taken from a quarry on his farm. Keene did not stop there, however. He envisioned a great racing complex alongside the track. It would include a great barn, but also living quarters and club facilities for Keene's friends who would be invited to train their horses free of charge.

Keene's financial situation which went through great vicissitudes, was not adequate to this great project. By 1935, after nearly 20 years and an expenditure of nearly \$200,000 on the "barn" alone, his private racing complex was still not complete.

The mid-1930s ironically were witnessing a revival in the prosperity of horse racing with many States reauthorizing the sport. Lexington's storied old Kentucky Association course had closed in 1933, however. Surrounded by the city and in dilapidated condition, its closing fulfilled Keene's earlier judgment of its inadequacies.

Many of Lexington's city fathers favored reviving racing in the city. They felt the extinction of racing in the heart of thoroughbred racing country was unconscionable. Maj. Louie A. Beard, Jack Young, Hal Price Headley, and James Bassett, Jr., were leading figures. They envisioned a new kind of track, to be operated by a non-profit association, with racing conducted for the benefit of those most concerned, the horsemen, and with the profits to be turned back into the track and good works for the community.

Keene's private racing complex was chosen as the site of the new venture. Recognizing, in the character of the new venture, a "kinship of ideas," Keene sold the property to the newly formed Keeneland Association at a bargain price.

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Hal Price Headley became the first president of the Association when it selected officers in April 1935. Improvements to the track, including a grandstand, were put up. Racing was inaugurated on October 15, 1936.

Within 5 years of the inaugural meet, Keeneland had become one of the most successful tracks in the country. Growth was rapid. Additional acreage was added in 1948, 1950, 1958, and 1970, bringing the total holdings of the Association to more than 300 acres. The track facilities were also enlarged and expanded over the years.

The Blue Grass Stakes, inaugurated in 1937, has been an important race in its own right, as well as serving as an important preparatory race for the Kentucky Derby. Shut Out, Tomy Lee, Chateaugay, Northern Dancer, Lucky Debonair, Dust Commander, and Riva Ridge all won the Blue Grass before the Derby.

Footnotes

¹This biographical sketch of Keene is largely derived from Neville Dunn, "Destiny and A Stone Fence," Turf and Sport Digest (January 1940), 19-21, 55-57.

²Dunn, op. cit., p. 57.

³Dan Mearns, "Something Rare and Very Special," Keeneland, 1, 1 (Spring/Summer 1979), 28-52, contains a sketch of Keeneland's history upon which this summary of its history since 1936 is based.

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Bibliography

Christine, Bill. "Keeneland Was and Is An Original," Keeneland, 7, 2 (Fall/Winter 1978), 78-92.

Dunn, Neville. "Destiny and A Stone Fence," Turf and Sport Digest (January 1940), 19-57.

Hirsch, Joe. "The Path to The Derby Runs Through the Blue Grass Stakes," Keeneland 1, 1 (Spring/Summer 1979), 18-27.

"Keeneland in Pictures," Keeneland 5, 1 (Spring/Summer 1983), 74-89.

Mearns, Dan. "Something Rare and Very Special," Keeneland 1, 1 (Spring/Summer 1979), 28-38.

"Site of Model Track Was Originally Land Grant by Patrick Henry," Keeneland. 1936 Deluxe Souvenir Opening Program.