



Nebraska History posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

Article Title: Development of Aviation and Air Facilities in Nebraska

Full Citation: William R Milner, "Development of Aviation and Air Facilities in Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 26 (1945): 221-225

URL of article: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH1945AirFacilities.pdf>

Date: 8/04/2017

Article Summary: The story of Nebraska aviation began with a 1910 air show. By 1945 the state had 65 civilian airports. (Milner read this paper at the 1945 meeting of the Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska.)

Scroll Down for complete article.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Orville and Wilbur Wright, Glen H Curtis, J C Marrs, Gould Dietz, Jack Knight

Nebraska Place Names: Omaha

Keywords: Aero Club, Nebraska Aeronautical Commission, feeder line service

Development of Aviation and Air Facilities in Nebraska*

WILLIAM R. MILNER

Practically from the beginning of time man has attempted various ways to emulate a bird, to take wings and soar through the heavens with lightning speed.

The early attempts of mankind to master the air were made in various crude devices of mechanical wings, in which the learned men of those days of old hoped to fly to the moon, the stars and through space, to penetrate the heavens. They studied the flight of birds, measured wing spreads, calculated comparative body weights and measurements, wing manipulation and flying balance.

Thus these scientists and inventors learned many important things about aerial locomotion. In a ceaseless struggle for centuries to achieve human flight, man did discover the basic principles of aviation, but utterly failed in his principal experiment to put these principles into practical application. But today, man is no longer a slave to the earth. The fight to fly has finally been won.

The victory of man over air was accomplished by Orville and Wilbur Wright on December 14, 1903. Man actually flew through space in a heavier-than-air, power-driven craft. This was one of the most eventful days of our civilization. The press and public refused to believe the report was true. Two determined American youths had actually made a successful flight in a man-carrying airplane. This spectacular historic feat was accomplished at Kitty Hawk, in the state of North Carolina.

Orville and Wilbur Wright sought not fame or wealth in their conquest of air. They had an unshaken belief that air travel

*Paper read before the annual meeting of the Native Sons and Daughters of Nebraska, October 13, 1945.

was possible and that they could accomplish this objective.

On December 14, 1903, Wilbur Wright actually rose from the ground for 3 1/2 seconds in the first flying machine in history to rise above the earth while carrying a human passenger. Three days later, on December 17, Orville Wright flew 120 feet in 12 seconds. The weight of the plane and the man was 750 pounds.

In 1910 an air show was held by Glen H. Curtis and J. C. Marrs. This show was sponsored by the Aero Club and billed as the first air show in the west. One of your members was in charge of the Aero Club. His name is Gould Dietz and, in my opinion, he is the father of aviation in our state. So our state, even in those early days, showed that we were air-minded almost from the start of aviation.

During the years of 1918-19, there were 11 Nebraska cities that had landing fields. Then in 1919, at the close of World War I, the United States government made a survey of our country for a possible airway. The airway was chosen to follow the old Overland Trail across our great state, the same trail that had been used by the pioneers over a century ago. This survey was accepted as the No. 1 air mail route of America; and Omaha, Grand Island, and North Platte were designated as the Nebraska ports.

On February 22, 1921, the first night air mail was flown across our state by Captain Jack Knight. In 1935, our Nebraska Legislature created an agency known as the Nebraska Aeronautical Commission. This Commission was created to provide for the collection and disbursement of a fund from a tax levied on gasoline used in aircraft; to provide for acquiring, using, and disposing of aircraft and equipment; to protect the rights of the State of Nebraska to the air for flight; and regulate the use thereof; to provide for enforcement of rules and regulations adopted by the Civil Aeronautics Administration. A greater portion of the moneys collected by this agency is used to help the cities and counties build airports.

Our Nebraska Aeronautical Commission has been a great help to aviation in our state. The men composing this commission are:

Harold Jessen	Ainsworth
Max Kier	Lincoln
Donald Mapes	Norfolk
W. W. Cook	Beatrice
Clyde Sharrar	Omaha

Secretary, Paul Kitrell

At the start of the war in 1941, Nebraska had 55 airports. For national security following Pearl Harbor, there was a drastic reduction and the number dropped to 13. The restrictions have gradually been lifted, and on January 1, 1945, we again are on the up-swing and have 65 civilian airports. There are 93 counties in the State of Nebraska; and we in aviation hope that every county will have at least one landing field. During World War II, there were over 3 1/3 million boys and girls in our armed flying forces, and we believe that many of them will continue with their desire to fly.

It is our opinion that all cities in Nebraska *must* have an airport inasmuch as we have 19 applications from airline companies for feeder line service into 51 cities in our state. These airports will not only serve the flying public at these cities and the communities surrounding them, but will also render airline passenger service together with airmail service.

The latter two items will be of particular advantage to commercial industries now located or proposing to locate in these communities. These feeder lines will also permit speedy shipments of express which is an advantage especially during periods of emergency.

These 19 applications for feeder line service will service 51 cities on the present proposed air routes. It is anticipated, in order that no city will be at the end of a circuit, flights will be flown in both directions through these cities.

In this manner people will be able to commute between cities on the route in a manner identical to those cities on the trans-continental routes. These feeder flights will feed into major terminals such as Omaha and will be closely affiliated with the 44 trans-continental flights now serving the city of Omaha. By this method of transportation, the distance between any one of these cities and the costal cities will be materially shortened.

Since the city of Omaha is one of Nebraska's leading airport terminals, it is at the crossroads of intersecting air routes and is served by United Air Lines and Mid-Continent Airlines. United Air Lines serves the cities from New York to California while Mid-Continent flies from sixty miles south of the Canadian border to New Orleans.

At present these airlines are using Douglas DC-3's and Lockheed Lodestars for their flight equipment. However, it is planned that later four-motored planes will in the near future be placed into service.

The city of Omaha, in order to remain abreast with the progress of aviation, is now increasing its airport facilities. The present runways and administration building are still able to handle the traffic, but due to the proposed increase, new runways and administration buildings will be required. The airlines are anticipating a 300 per cent increase in air transportation within the next year. United Air Lines have ordered Douglas DC-N planes which will be used on their non-stop transcontinental flights. The use of this equipment will reduce the flying time between San Francisco and New York from 19 hours to 8 1/2 hours. This will be possible due to the increased speed of the planes and fewer stops.

In order for the city of Omaha to be one of these stops, new runways are under construction. These runways will be more than a mile long and will consist of twelve inches of concrete. These runways will have a load bearing of 320,000 pounds or 160 tons. The present DC-3 fully loaded weighs only 13 tons.

It can be readily seen that the entire State of Nebraska, with proper development in the smaller cities in proportion to the lead that Omaha, Lincoln, Grand Island, and North Platte have taken, will be adequately served by air carrier operations. However, these cities cannot be expected to bear the brunt of the entire burden of making the State of Nebraska an outstanding aeronautical center. Assistance by the rest of the cities will also be required.

The City of Lincoln now owns one of the finest airports in our country. Soon you will enjoy United Air Lines service again. The cities which are named by air feeder lines in applica-

tions now before the the Civil Aeronautics Board are as follows:

Auburn	Omaha	Chadron	West Point
Beatrice	Plattsmouth	Hebron	Pender
Columbus	Superior	Sidney	Pierce
Fairbury	York	Ogallala	Madison
Falls City	Alliance	North Platte	David City
Fremont	Scottsbluff	Grand Island	Seward
Hastings	Oshkosh	Kearney	Aurora
Lincoln	Mitchell	Wayne	Pawnee City
McCook	Valentine	Holdrege	Humboldt
Nebraska City	Ainsworth	Tekamah	Peru
Norfolk	Gordon	Oakland	Wahoo
Ashland	Wilber	Crete	Valley
			Louisville

Omaha's Municipal Airport is operated under Finance Commissioner Carl W. Jensen and seven air-minded civic leaders who are appointed by our mayor, Charles W. Leeman. They are Gould Dietz, Frank Lepinski, Val Peter, Sam Reynolds, Lyle Remde, Jesse Schroeder, and Lawrence Youngman. It is their duty to set the policy of Omaha's needs in aviation and present same to our city commissioners for approval.

This, in my opinion, is a plan that all aviation-minded communities should follow.