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Article Summary: From 1924 to 1930 the quest for an airport adequate for the limited air travel of the time was a preoccupation of many business and political leaders, who wished to develop Omaha into a hub of Midwest air activity. The first step was when the city was selected as a station along the transcontinental airmail route.

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Photographs / Images: Map showing relative locations of Omaha Municipal Airfield, Aksarben Airfield, an Fort Crook Airfield; cartoon "The Eagle in Pin Feathers," 1928; area north of the Omaha-Legion Airport Hangar, 128; area north of the Boeing (United) hangar, 1980



Pilots, city officials, and spectators prepare for first All-Nebraska Air Tour, September 9, 1929. . . .(Below) A plane in the air tour featured an ad for Skelly Oil Company, which provided oil and gas for tour planes. Photos courtesy of Bostwick-Frohardt Collection, owned by KMTV and on permanent loan to Western Heritage Museum, Omaha.



THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OMAHA MUNICIPAL AIRFIELD, 1924-1930

By Leslie R. Valentine

In the 1920s every aspect of aviation was still in its infancy. The airplanes of this period were delicate, curious contraptions. Still these fragile craft, dwarfed by the magnitude of today's ships, were amazingly efficient, agile, and thrilling vehicles of transportation.¹ The airplane remained an oddity throughout the decade, and public reaction to this new method of transportation was not always positive. If airports were to be improved and advances made in air-travel efficiency, the support and confidence of civic organizations—and the general public—were imperative. At this early stage of development many persons considered aviation little more than the passing fancy of the affluent and a sport or hobby of the barnstorming aeronaut.² The average Omahan of the 1920s, not too comfortable with the automobile, found it difficult to identify with the elitists of the aviation industry. From 1924 to 1930 the quest for an airport adequate for the limited air travel of the time was a preoccupation of many business and political leaders, who wished to develop Omaha into a hub of Midwest air activity.

The first step in Omaha's rise as an aviation center came at the beginning of the decade when the United States government selected the city as a station along the transcontinental airmail route. Service from the city commenced on May 15, 1920.³ Offices for the mail service were in downtown Omaha and the airmail planes operated from the Omaha Chamber of Commerce hangar at Ak-Sar-Ben Field, on the southwest outskirts of the city. The Chamber of Commerce, through the auspices of its Aerial Transportation Committee, built the \$30,000 hangar and oversaw operations at the field.⁴ With this background and experience, the members of the Chamber's aviation committee became the leading proponents of Omaha aviation for the re-

mainder of the decade. Because aviation in Omaha was primarily under the control of business interests from 1920 to 1924, an understandable belief arose that air travel had an upper-class connotation. The Aerial Transportation Committee, though, handled operations at Ak-Sar-Ben efficiently and Chamber of Commerce authorities seemed satisfied with the Airmail Service and the status of Omaha aviation in general.

In 1924 several events destroyed their contentment. Early in that year, the Ak-Sar-Ben Exposition Company, a public enterprise organization "for the promotion of the civic and commercial interests of Omaha," gave notice that it wished its property vacated by July 1. In addition, postal authorities ruled the field at Ak-Sar-Ben too small for night flying, which was then coming into general acceptance. The Airmail Service decided to retain its offices in downtown Omaha but planned to move the airmail planes to Fort Crook, a military installation south of Omaha which was considerably larger and possessed much-needed lighting facilities.⁵

The Aerial Transportation Committee was understandably concerned about these events. In the spring of 1924, the committee clung to the meager hope that it could persuade the Postal Service to move its operations to a completely undeveloped location nearer Omaha. The committee began a search for an appropriate field and planned to move the Chamber of Commerce hangar to the new site.⁶ The Postal Service could not be convinced, and the chamber looked to the July 1 lease expiration with dismay.

In a prophetic stroke of misfortune on June 22, 1924; a tornado destroyed the hangar at Ak-Sar-Ben and seven of the planes it sheltered.⁷ The consequences for the airmail were surprisingly minor. Fortunately, the Postal Service had an airmail hangar at Fort Crook nearly completed and the transfer of operations underway when the storm occurred.⁸ The ease with which the mail service handled the situation contrasted sharply with the feeble attempts of Omaha to reestablish itself as an airmail and aviation center. Authorities in Omaha viewed the retention of airmail facilities as directly related to the community's importance in aviation. But it would be over six years before airmail operations were officially reestablished in the city. The failure of exhaustive attempts by influential business and civic groups to establish and equip an airfield near Omaha

quickly can only be explained by the initial disorganization of Omaha aviation proponents and by a public that was at times openly recalcitrant. However, in 1924 the attitudes of Omahans toward aviation did not matter—they would not be given an opportunity to express their views on aviation until 1928.

The events of 1924 were disastrous for Omaha's immediate future in aviation, but they served as the catalyst by which the Chamber of Commerce Aerial Transportation Committee took complete responsibility for most aspects of the city's aviation growth—a responsibility it held until 1929. The committee members did not want to fall behind in the air race, and immediately following the loss of the airmail hangar and the expiration of the lease at Ak-Sar-Ben, they began the search for a suitable field.⁹ After much deliberation a level expanse of land east of Carter Lake, Iowa, and southeast of Florence Lake received the approval of the Aerial Transportation Committee.¹⁰

Authorities from the Army and the Airmail Service agreed upon the worthiness of the Carter Lake location.¹¹ By spring, 1925, the Omaha City Council was also convinced and on May 5 adopted an ordinance acquiring as park property a 198-acre tract destined to become the Omaha Municipal Airfield.¹² The City Council with the consultation of the Aerial Transportation Committee had decided to ignore a 1921 Nebraska statute which allowed a municipality to vote bonds for the purchase and improvement of an airfield and instead attempted to acquire the property under the guise of a potential expansion of Omaha's park system.¹³ Chamber of Commerce officials were convinced that the electorate was not as yet suitably air-minded and felt that any aviation bond measure would certainly be defeated.¹⁴

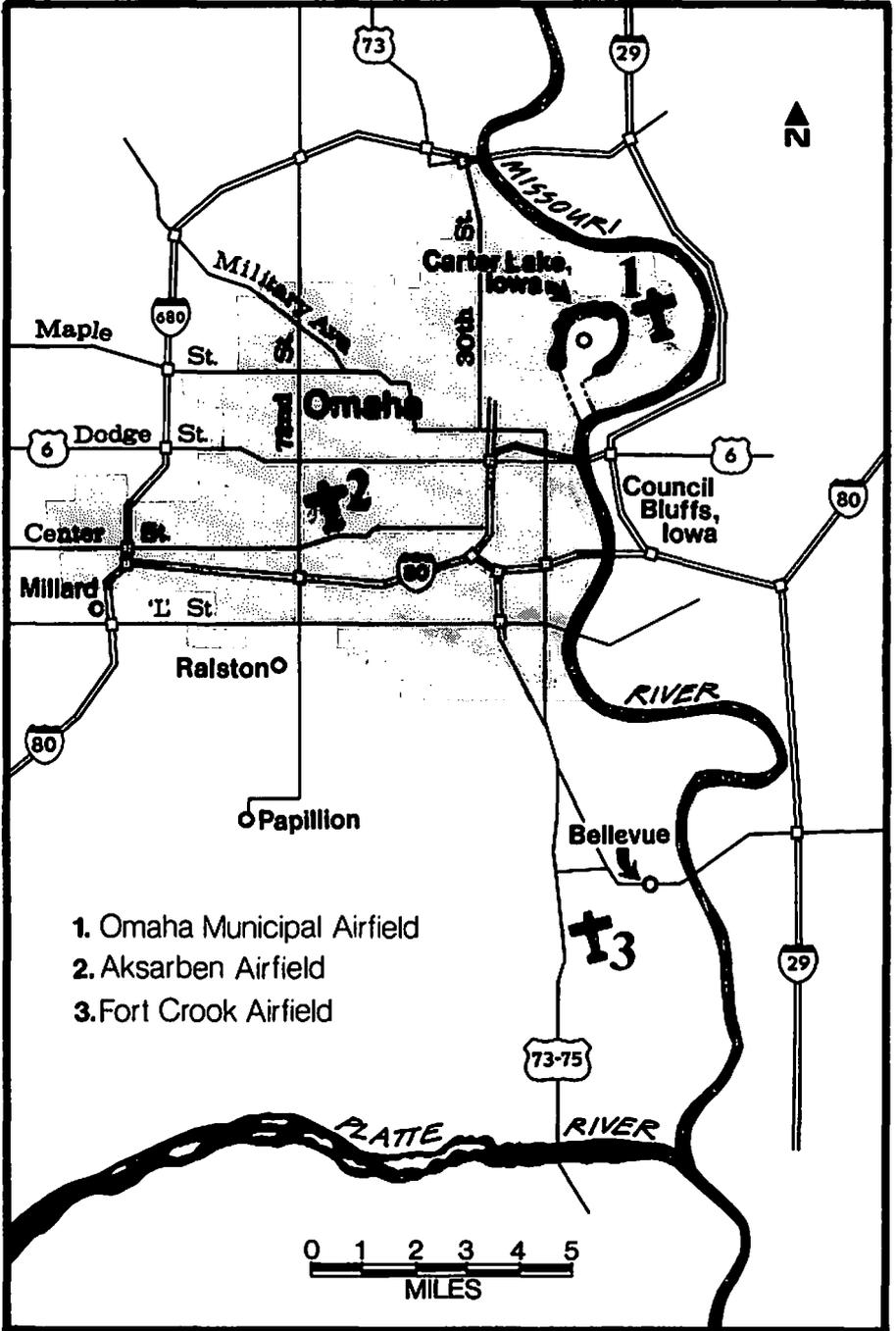
The lack of belief in the importance of aviation and its growth was a problem for the Aerial Transportation Committee, and its members had little assistance from city government in formulating field policy in the months following the purchase of the Carter Lake site. From 1925 to 1927 confusion and disorganization characterized the handling of the airfield. In these months the goals of the committee were very high, but it failed to develop a basic plan of field improvement. Among the objectives of the committee were the immediate grading and leveling of the field, construction or acquisition of a hangar,

and the transfer of airmail facilities from Fort Crook as soon as possible.¹⁵ The members of the Aerial Transportation Committee were optimistic, but they should have realized that these goals were impossible. The Omaha field had no public funding, and the naive belief that a complicated series of field improvements could be completed with no financial backing or plan of organization marked a low point in Omaha aviation.

Near the end of 1926, several factors began to end this confusion and firmly set Omaha toward aviation development. Most importantly, the Aerial Transportation Committee realized its lack of planning over the months since the purchase of the airfield. The committee admitted that few concrete improvements had been made at the airport and decided that it needed a more organized approach.¹⁶ Debate had been renewed among civic leaders over the transfer of the airmail, and although nothing came of this rhetoric, the chamber's aviation proponents began to organize their actions.¹⁷

Another significant factor came in October, 1926, when the City Council gave Commissioner Dean Noyes of the Street Cleaning and Maintenance Department complete responsibility over field improvement.¹⁸ Noyes possessed a positive attitude toward aviation's future and was convinced of the importance a well-equipped airfield could have to a community.¹⁹ This promised to be especially true of the Carter Lake location, a mere 10 minutes from Omaha. The Omaha Municipal Airfield was now under the direct supervision of someone who believed in the future of aviation and could provide the leadership necessary to see that improvements were made. The airfield still had no municipal funding, but in March, 1928, the City Council agreed to transfer the field to Commissioner Noyes' department, and the commissioner saw that improvements were continued—financed out of the money he could salvage from the Street Cleaning and Maintenance budget.²⁰

Under Noyes' direction the airfield was improved greatly during the first months of 1927. As a result, the Aerial Transportation Committee decided to renew efforts to secure an airplane hangar.²¹ After the committee discovered that the estimated \$30,000 needed to build such a structure could not be obtained from the city budget, its members decided upon another course of action. It was agreed to solicit the aid of a private organization, which would raise the necessary funds and lend



the city the money upon promise of repayment.²² The committee felt that improvements to the field were proceeding adequately and expected that the acquisition of a hangar would convince the government that the airmail facilities should be transferred to the new site.

Amidst much civic-minded rhetoric, the Aerial Transportation Committee made its plan public and Omaha Post No. 1 of the American Legion volunteered to raise sufficient funds for the hangar. The Legion-Airport Corporation was organized to control the subscription drive and oversee the future of the hangar. Groups of legionnaires assembled and sold shares of stock in the corporation at \$1.00 each. The Legion expected a successful conclusion to the drive by September and concentrated most of its efforts on business interests because they stood to prosper greatly by an improved airfield.²³ After a good start in late July, 1927, the Legion drive bogged down in August. The people of Omaha, it seemed, were still not convinced of aviation's importance. Yet, timely visits to Omaha by two world-renowned transatlantic aviators, Clarence Chamberlain and Charles Lindbergh, and the frenzied air-mindedness they generated greatly facilitated the Legion drive. By September, 1927, a Legion-Airport hangar was a certainty.²⁴

Rather than initiating a new phase of aviation progress in Omaha, the successful hangar drive served only to highlight the field's lack of general financial backing. The Legion-Airport hangar was not completed until the spring of 1928, and over the winter the slow progress at the field received much criticism. Behind these renewed calls for rapid improvement were the desires of the Aerial Transportation Committee and other aviation proponents to achieve an A-1-A rating for the Omaha Municipal Airfield. The Air Commerce Act of 1926 authorized the Department of Commerce to rate all airfields in the United States and the A-1-A designation constituted the highest possible rating.²⁵ In 1928, and indeed for the remainder of the decade, the Omaha field did not achieve an A-1-A rating, and the desire for such superiority prompted many to speak out over the months for increased expenditure at the airfield.

With the realization that airfield improvements were slow, money scarce, and an A-1-A rating impossible, the Aerial Transportation Committee in 1928 looked for ways to divert attention from airfield problems and generate positive publicity

about Omaha's aerial growth. One plan was to discuss an Omaha-to-Winnipeg, Manitoba, airmail and passenger route calculated to open upper Midwestern communities to aviation and bring substantial aviation prominence to Omaha. Assistant Postmaster General W. Irving Glover, however, declared there would not be "enough business to warrant" this proposition, and the plan failed.²⁶ A more successful distraction occurred in September, 1928, with the arrival of the International Air Race pilots from Windsor, Ontario, on their way to Los Angeles. Due to lack of funds, Dean Noyes had a difficult time preparing the field for the pilots' arrival. After much strenuous work and some donated labor, Noyes' street crews barely completed work by the September 9 arrival date. The Canadian pilots, though, found that the field was more than adequate.²⁷

The events between September, 1927, and September, 1928, proved the necessity of a properly financed airport, and the Aerial Transportation Committee heard much debate on how to secure funds. Airport promoters in Omaha had previously considered soliciting the opinion of the electorate, but fear of defeat had prompted other courses of action. By the fall of 1928, a bond issue to insure funding for airfield improvements was needed. Upon the advice of the Aerial Transportation Committee, the Omaha City Council placed an aviation bond charter amendment on the November ballot.²⁸ An amendment of this sort required only a simple majority to pass and authorized the issuance of \$50,000 per year of general obligation bonds for five years, with the revenue designated for airfield improvement. The Chamber of Commerce, concerned that the electorate might react adversely to such a proposal, prepared for an uphill battle to secure its passage.²⁹

Many groups in Omaha supported this amendment and only one minor source of opposition appeared. One week before the election, the *Omaha Bee-News* announced in a single short editorial that it supported the movement to place the airport under control of the city's public gas and water utility—the Metropolitan Utilities District Board. To place the airfield in the hands of the city, the *Bee-News* argued, would be a burden to the taxpayer and a hindrance to Omaha aviation.³⁰ Other than this the newspaper offered little coverage of the aviation bond charter amendment. The Chamber of Commerce considered the *Bee-News* editorial irresponsible, and the Aerial Transportation Committee did not alter its campaign.³¹

The November, 1928, aviation bond charter proposal became the most important event in early Omaha aviation. The massive pro-aviation campaign undertaken by the Aerial Transportation Committee was proof of its vigorous dedication and organizational ability. The committee embarked upon a program of sheer propaganda entitled the Manly Plan, after committee member Robert H. Manly. Omahans "were not air-minded," the committee reasoned, and the "division between classes of voters" in the city would prompt the electorate to vote against any increased expenditure, particularly that for aviation facilities. The Manly Plan, therefore, was designed to solicit votes by impulse rather than logic.³²

The Aerial Transportation Committee created a subcommittee, or "strategy board," to coordinate all aspects of the campaign. The subcommittee chose October 29, 1928, as the target date of an "Aviation Week" campaign. No mention of the charter amendment would be made until two or three days before the November 5 election. But the week before election day the subcommittee planned to deluge the city with general aviation publicity. Included in the campaign were abundant use of public speakers, posters, radio advertisements, and the dropping of free airplane ride tickets from the air. As a suitable finish to Aviation Week, the subcommittee hoped to bring Charles Lindbergh to Omaha to call for the amendment's passage. Lindbergh was unavailable, but seven Army pilots from Fort Riley, Kansas, gave an aerial display at the airfield on the day before the election. Chamber of Commerce authorities believed that the events of Aviation Week and a "short, quick demonstration and publicity campaign" just before the election would "put over the charter amendment."³³

The outcome of the election proved the caution of the Aerial Transportation Committee well-founded and its descriptions of the Omaha electorate accurate. A close examination of returns shows an obvious geographic polarization of the Omaha voting population on the subject of aviation advancement. The northern and southern sections of the city were largely composed of working class citizens and included wards 1, 11, and 12 north of Charles Street; and 5, 6, 7, and 8 south of Pacific.³⁴ These areas voted solidly against the measure. Of the 43,156 votes cast on the proposition in these wards, the amendment failed by a 57 percent to 43 percent margin. The precinct vote

also proved decisive as 74 out of the 90 precincts that made up these wards voted against the issue.³⁵

The opposite situation existed in wards 2, 3, 4, 9, and 10, comprising the downtown business area along Dodge and Pacific Streets—the political heart of the community—and the relatively affluent residential sections directly to the west.³⁶ In these five wards the amendment passed by a 60 percent to 40 percent margin. In another one-sided precinct vote, 71 out of 80 precincts in these wards voted in favor of the aviation bonds. When all election-day ballots were counted, the amendment apparently had been defeated by 212 votes.³⁷ The *Omaha World-Herald* criticized the city for its lack of air and civic-mindedness.³⁸

The newspaper's remarks were premature because a later count of the 1,383 absentee ballots showed an 875 to 508 advantage in favor of the amendment. Consequently, the official count showed the charter amendment passing by 155 votes or .002 percent of the total.³⁹ The *World-Herald*, now greatly relieved, said the absentee ballots, which represented those who traveled frequently, had saved the aviation bonds, like "the heroine in a movie thriller."⁴⁰

The success of the aviation bond issue initiated a change in the outlook of the *World-Herald* and other pro-aviation groups. Because no revenue from the sale of bonds would be available until March, 1929, aviation advocates in Omaha began to call for a methodical approach to airfield development.⁴¹ In January, 1928, as a response to the calls for organization, Omaha Mayor James Dahlman appointed an Airport Advisory Board designed to coordinate airport matters and advise the City Council on aviation. Commissioner Dean Noyes served as chairman of the board and its six members were all prominent business and professional men.⁴² The city now began to increase its role in airfield matters, and the belief that aviation was a plaything for the upper class was not refuted by the affluence of members of the Airport Advisory Board.

Regardless of the occupations of its members, the board secured many improvements for the airfield. Beginning shortly after its appointment, the board obtained the approval of the airfield's location from William Centner, airport specialist from the Department of Commerce.⁴³ Within the next few months the board appointed a permanent field superintendent, agreed



THE EAGLE IN PIN FEATHERS

Omaha World-Herald cartoonist Guy Spencer supported further development of the Omaha Airfield during the summer of 1928. Omaha World-Herald, July 29, 1928.

upon a series of field ordinances, and secured the transfer to Omaha of the Midwest Aviation Corporation owned by well-known aviator Lawrence Enzminger.⁴⁴ Perhaps the most important accomplishment of the board came when it hired the Austin Company, a Cleveland, Ohio, engineering firm, to survey the airfield and formulate plans for its development.⁴⁵ The slow, organized approach of the Austin engineers toward airfield development caused much dissatisfaction among city officials, who possessed little of the Austin Company's aviation knowledge or experience. The city eventually ceased meddling in the affairs of its own experts and by the middle of 1930 Omaha had a level, graded, and drained airfield which compared favorably with any in the Midwest.⁴⁶

The appointment of the Airport Advisory Board assured the eventual improvement of the Omaha Municipal Airfield. In the summer of 1929, though, enthusiasm for the field lessened and the Aerial Transportation Committee of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce searched for a method to rekindle aviation interest. The answer came in September with the first All-Nebraska Air Tour. The committee organized the six-day event to promote "a greater interest in air transportation and to encourage various cities to develop their air terminals."⁴⁷ Support for the tour came from all over Nebraska. Lincoln, McCook, Grand Island, North Platte, and other cities took part and volunteered to absorb the cost of meals and hotel bills for the pilots.⁴⁸ The committee believed the tour would increase aviation awareness in Omaha, from which the tour began, and illustrate to other cities the necessity of a properly equipped airfield. The All-Nebraska Air Tour accomplished its purpose, according to the Aerial Transportation Committee. Over 2,500 persons throughout the state received airplane rides, the cities in Nebraska seemed closer together, and public spiritedness in favor of Omaha aviation was at a peak.⁴⁹

The success of the tour proved the importance of maintaining an active Aerial Transportation Committee. In 1930 the committee directed the passage of two additional aviation bond charter amendments. It was obvious that the improvements planned by the Austin Company necessitated more of an expenditure than the \$50,000 provided by the 1928 bond issue.⁵⁰ The City Council placed a charter amendment proposal on the May 6, 1930, ballot allowing the sale of the fourth and fifth year's

allotment of bonds during 1930 to facilitate airfield improvements. Again, the Aerial Transportation Committee organized a special subcommittee to supervise the campaign in favor of the amendment. The biggest problem facing the subcommittee was to convince the voters that this measure was not a new bond issue but merely approved the early expenditure of funds already authorized.⁵¹

The Omaha electorate recognized the uniqueness of this measure and the May 6, 1930, aviation amendment passed by 55 percent to 45 percent, a considerably wider victory margin than its predecessor. The 56,480 votes cast on this issue was much lower than the 74,473 amendment votes cast in November, 1928, a presidential election year. Still, the geographic polarization on the subject of aviation advancement remained distinct, if less obvious. The base of the opposition to the 1928 amendment, wards 5, 6, and 7 in South Omaha, overwhelmingly disapproved early expenditure of the aviation bonds. In these wards the measure failed in 38 out of 43 precincts and by a 59 percent to 41 percent margin in the popular vote.⁵²

Ward 8 and every ward north of Pacific Street approved this bond issue—although by lessened majorities in wards far away from the middle of the city. The voters in ward 8, where the bonds had barely failed in 1928, supported the May, 1930, measure by a 53 percent to 47 percent margin. Similarly, wards 1, 11, and 12, in the north and northwestern areas of the city, reversed their 1928 position and approved this measure by a 55 percent to 45 percent majority and with the approval of 40 out of 53 precincts.⁵³

Voters in central and west central Omaha did not alter their position from 1928 and in fact increased their approval percentage. Wards 2, 3, 4, 9, and 10 supported the bond issue by a 64 percent to 36 percent margin and an 86 to 4 precinct vote.⁵⁴ The success of the May, 1930, aviation bond charter amendment did not signify that Omaha had become air-minded. Rather, it showed that pro-amendment campaigners convinced the electorate of the difference between the November, 1928, and May, 1930, measures.

Aviation authorities were pleased with the outcome but additional money failed to solve all their problems. Airfield improvements were expensive and by October the city had budgeted the entire \$250,000 allotted in 1928. Important items

were necessarily deleted from the budget due to fund shortages, including an administration building, additional runways, and a depot. The inability to provide these facilities with the money available reflected the lack of planning so evident throughout aviation development in Omaha. The City Council decided to submit a third aviation bond charter proposal in the November 4, 1930, election. This measure, if approved, would authorize the issuance of \$100,000 per year of general obligation aviation bonds for the next five years.⁵⁵

As it had in the previous two elections, the Aerial Transportation Committee took charge of the campaign. Although the committee was more confident of victory than previously, it feared South Omaha opposition.⁵⁶ The committee was correct both in its expectation of a wide victory margin and in the fear of South Omaha recalcitrance. The November, 1930, issue passed by a 52 percent to 48 percent margin and the 52,215 votes cast on the amendment continued the voter disinterest shown in May. In other respects the similarity to the 1928 election was apparent. Ward 8 rejoined the anti-aviation block south of Pacific Street, and wards 5, 6, 7, and 8 voted against the measure 58 percent to 42 percent and by a 48 to 13 precinct margin. Wards 11 and 12, in the northwest, returned to an anti-aviation position by a 53 percent to 47 percent margin with 26 of 31 precincts disapproving.⁵⁷

Ward 1 in the northeast altered its stance from 1928, joining central and west central Omaha in approval. Wards 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, and 10 approved by a 60 percent to 40 percent majority and a 92 to 16 precinct vote.⁵⁸ No organized opposition surfaced either in May or November, 1930, but the results were reminiscent of the 1928 campaign. Each issue passed by a slim margin with an obvious geographic polarization of the electorate on the subject of aviation advancement. A 2 percent increase in the victory margin by 1930 was hardly indicative of a pro-aviation trend in Omaha; air-mindedness had changed little since 1928.

The approval of the November, 1930, amendment did not mark the end of the early development of the airfield. The loss of the airmail planes had haunted Omaha aviation officials, and the chance that the airmail would return underscored every aviation controversy from 1924 through 1930. In June, 1930, this problem ended when the Boeing Air Transport Company, which had taken over operation of the airmail at Fort Crook on

July 1, 1927, agreed to move its facilities to the Omaha Municipal Airfield.⁵⁹ This decision brought to an end three years of controversy, during which Omaha authorities had tried to convince Boeing to move its airmail operations to the Carter Lake field. Such a move, argued Omaha officials, was logical due to the proximity of the post office and transcontinental airmail offices in the downtown area. Boeing consistently met these proposals with vacillation due to what it considered a lack of support for aviation in Omaha.

Negotiations with Boeing began in March, 1927, when Edward Hubbard, vice president of the Boeing Air Transport Company, visited Omaha and met with the Chamber of Commerce. Hubbard's presence was "for the purpose of arranging with the city for the use of the field" at Carter Lake. His inspection of the field proved to Hubbard that a move from Fort Crook to the virtually unequipped Omaha field would be folly. The Omaha location had potential, thought Hubbard, but could hardly "be considered an airport without hangars, lighting facilities, shops, etc." In a statement that bordered upon sarcasm, Hubbard told officials that if the Omaha field were completely prepared by July his company would consider the city's request.⁶⁰ The embarrassing meeting with Hubbard exemplified the gap between Omaha's enthusiasm for aviation and its actual accomplishments. Omaha failed to regain the airmail planes and aviation officials were again confronted with the necessity of maintaining a well-equipped landing field.

One of the objectives of the American Legion, which sponsored the \$30,000 hangar subscription drive in 1927, was to satisfy Boeing requirements. Hubbard had stated that his company did not plan to build a hangar in Omaha but would lease one from the city.⁶¹ Rather than support the efforts of Omaha to improve its position, Boeing officials began to talk of a move to Lincoln or Bellevue, knowing that discussion of a move to a location other than Omaha could hinder American Legion subscription efforts.⁶² Near the end of July, 1927, during the hangar drive, Boeing decided "to lease for 10 years a proposed 160 acre field near Bellevue" for use by the company's airmail planes. Uninformed officials in Omaha had to discover the reasons for Boeing's abandonment of the Carter Lake location from the *World-Herald*. Boeing argued that "a low hanging layer of fog," which might occur due to proximity to the



The area north of the Omaha-Legion Airport Hangar, 1928, included the hangar erected by Lawrence Enzminger of the Midwest Aviation Corporation. . . .(Below) Area north of the Boeing (United) hangar, 1980.



Missouri River, posed a serious threat at the field and made it impossible to fly safely, especially at night.⁶³

Edward Hubbard had said nothing about fog in March, and Omaha officials were upset by Boeing's sudden introduction of the fog factor. The Aerial Transportation Committee decided to halt airfield improvements until the fog controversy could be resolved.⁶⁴ Although the American Legion hangar drive succeeded, and the planned Bellevue airport failed due to a lack of funding, the fog *bete noir* gave Omaha officials little reason for optimism.⁶⁵

The biggest setback came in November, 1927, when Boeing announced that it had been granted a "revokable license" to operate from Fort Crook. Now Boeing possessed a definite base and city officials feared that the Municipal Field would be ignored by Boeing. The *Bee News* reported that the Fort Crook location was superior to the Omaha Municipal Airfield, "particularly in foggy weather."⁶⁶ Many in the city saw the Boeing acquisition as a reason to reevaluate Omaha aviation plans and thought that if Boeing had a "permanent license" to operate from Fort Crook, there was no reason to further improve the Municipal Airfield. Others, including the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, remained confident of the site's viability and continued to encourage its expansion and development.⁶⁷

The preliminary results of the fog tests taken at the Municipal Airfield support the Chamber's contention that fog was no overriding issue. On January 6, 1928, the Aerial Transportation Committee learned that there had been only one "light fog of about an hour's duration" at the field since December 2, 1927.⁶⁸ Fort Crook, however, endured at least one serious fog during that period and one of the Boeing transcontinental air-mail planes was forced down by fog on the way to Des Moines, Iowa.⁶⁹ Reports of dense fog at Fort Crook and along the air-mail route did little to gain Boeing support for the Omaha airport but seemed to add credence to the view that "while there had been some fog [in Omaha], it was invariably foggy over a wide territory and the conditions were no worse at the Municipal Field than other places."⁷⁰ The announcement of these findings enabled the fog controversy to remain submerged throughout most of 1928.

With the fog contentions seemingly refuted, the Aerial Transportation Committee deemed the passage of the

November, 1928, charter amendment instrumental to gaining Boeing's transfer to Omaha. To the dismay of committee members, the success of the aviation measure and the certainty of future improvements to the airfield did not impress Boeing officials. After the election Frank Caldwell of Boeing's Omaha offices said his company refused to consider the Carter Lake location, still maintaining that "the lowlands near the river [were] susceptible to fog conditions,"⁷¹ despite fog surveys to the contrary. Aviation officials in the city resented the haughty attitude of Boeing negotiators, which became increasingly obvious in the months ahead. Omaha aviation proponents decided to ignore Boeing but nevertheless proceed with field improvement.⁷²

In March, 1929, a report of Airport Specialist William Centner agreed with earlier findings and strengthened the newly acquired independence of the Aerial Transportation Committee. Centner found that the fog did not pose a major problem and that "fog conditions when they [did] occur [were] general throughout this section of the country and not localized."⁷³ The Aerial Transportation Committee also discovered that certain airmail pilots were beginning to approve of the Omaha field. From two veteran aviators the committee members learned that the fog objections were purely selfish propaganda and that the pilots would not hesitate to use the Omaha field.⁷⁴ The fog allegations of Boeing had been countered twice, and the city seemed assured of an improved airport.

Regardless of the progress at the Omaha Municipal Airfield, the eventual transfer of Boeing was prompted by the United States Army. In June, 1929, the Army, anxious to transfer airmail planes from Fort Crook, stated it "would probably require this if another field were available."⁷⁵ At this time the Omaha field was the only suitable alternative. Finally the city had Boeing "over a barrel." On July 24, 1929, with improvement of the Municipal Airfield imminent and airmail operations at Fort Crook undermined by the Army, Boeing agreed to relocate at Carter Lake as soon as the field was prepared for day and night flying.⁷⁶

Hopes for a smooth ending to the Boeing matter were not realized. After installation of boundary and field lighting at the Municipal Airfield in November, 1929, Boeing developed another excuse for objecting to the Carter Lake location. Boe-

ing now requested the removal of trees that supposedly obstructed approaches to the airfield.⁷⁷ Why had Boeing not mentioned the tree problem years earlier, or at least during the summer when it gave verbal assurance of the transfer? The opening of the "cottonwood controversy" began a six-month quest by the city to secure the removal of the trees and satisfy still another objection of Boeing. After many difficulties and legal delays, by May, 1930, all obstructing trees to the north and south of the airport were eliminated, and the city met what it hoped would be the last condition of Boeing.⁷⁸

In June, 1930, the Aerial Transportation Committee announced that the city had entered into an agreement with Boeing for a 50-year lease at the Municipal Airfield. Boeing officially celebrated its arrival on November 30, 1930, with the dedication of a new \$60,000 hangar-terminal building and an open house attended by thousands of Omahans. The main attraction at the open house was a Boeing tri-motor airplane. Another crowd pleaser was Marcelle Folda, queen of the Ak-Sar-Ben, who released four balloons, "each with a small vial of air attached." The balloons carried atmosphere from New York City, San Francisco, Dallas, and Montreal. All four containers had been delivered by air mail in Omaha one day after they had been posted, signifying "Omaha's accessibility via the aerial route."⁷⁹ After six years of difficulty the city possessed a well-financed, improved, and prestigious airport that promised further development.

NOTES

1. Raymond Fahrlander, private interview held in Plattsmouth, Nebraska, November 30, 1978.

2. *Omaha World-Herald*, April 18, 1943, 2C.

3. George H. Tweney, "Air Transportation and the American West," *Montana, The Magazine of Western History*, XIX (October, 1969), 70; hereafter cited as Tweney, "Air Transportation."

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5. *Ibid.*

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7. *Omaha Daily News*, June 23, 1924, 1.

8. *Post Office and Post Roads Subcommittee Hearing*, 25.

9. *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal*, XIII, August 30, 1924, 5; hereafter cited as *Chamber Journal*.
10. *Ibid.*, February 28, 1925, 11; Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Aerial Transportation Committee Minutes, March 23, 1925, 59-66; hereafter cited as ATC Minutes.
11. ATC Minutes, March 23, 1925, 59-60.
12. Omaha City Council, Chamber Journal Minutes, May 5, 1925, 5,255.
13. *Session Laws Passed by the Legislature of the State of Nebraska*, 40th sess., H.R. 206, "An Act to authorize cities. . .to acquire lands for the purpose of establishing an aviation field," March 15, 1921 (Lincoln: Kline Publishing Company, 1921), 658.
14. ATC Minutes, March 23, 1925, 58.
15. *Ibid.*, September 24, 1925, 62-63; October 28, 1925, 65-68; January 28, 1926, 33-34; February 4, 1926, 36-38; September 3, 1926, 52-54; September 30, 1926, 55-57.
16. *Ibid.*, September 3, 1926, 53.
17. *Ibid.*, September 30, 1926, 56.
18. *Ibid.*, October 11, 1926, 59.
19. William Dean Noyes, private interview, Omaha, Nebraska, April 3, 1979.
20. *Ibid.*, ATC Minutes, January 6, 1928, 11; *Omaha World-Herald*, March 13, 1928, 15.
21. ATC Minutes, February 4, 1927, 20.
22. *Ibid.*, 21.
23. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 27, 1927, 14.
24. *Ibid.*, August 19, 1927, 1; August 31, 1927, 2; *Chamber Journal*, XVI (August 27, 1927), 3.
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27. *Omaha World-Herald*, August 23, 1928, 6; *Omaha Bee-News*, September 9, 1928, 3A; *Omaha Bee-News*, September 10, 1928, 1, 3.
28. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 4, 1928, 1.
29. ATC Minutes, October 9, 1928, 62-63.
30. *Omaha Bee-News*, October 25, 1928, 26.
31. ATC Minutes October 24, 1928, 76.
32. *Ibid.*, October 15, 1928, 67-68; October 19, 1928, 73-74.
33. *Ibid.*, October 15, 1928, 66-74; *Omaha Bee-News*, October 28, 1928, 3A; *Omaha Bee-News*, October 29, 1928, 3; October 30, 1928, 2; November 5, 1928, 11; November 6, 1928, 4; *Omaha World-Herald*, October 28, 1928, 2A.
34. T. Earl Sullenger, *Studies in Urban Sociology* (New York: The Survey, for the Bureau of Social Research, Municipal University of Omaha, 1933), 119-157; Howard Chudacoff, *Mobile Americans, Residential and Social Mobility in Omaha, 1880-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 61-83. Sullenger and Chudacoff discuss the effects of immigration and the working class ethnic background of South Omaha from 1880 to 1920; *Omaha World-Herald*, April 18, 1943, 2C; Raymond Fahrlander, private interview, Plattsmouth, Nebraska, April 30, 1978; William Dean Noyes, private interview, Omaha, April 3, 1979.
35. Results of the election taken from Douglas County Election Returns, November 6, 1928, Office of Election Commissioner, Omaha-Douglas Civic Center, Omaha, Nebraska; hereafter cited as Douglas County Election Returns.
36. Margaret Patricia Killian, *Born Rich: A Historical Book of Omaha* (Omaha: Assistance League of Omaha, 1978), 41-51.

37. Douglas County Election Returns, November 6, 1928.
38. *Omaha World-Herald*, November 9, 1928, 24.
39. Douglas County Election Returns, November 6, 1928.
40. *Omaha World-Herald*, November 12, 1928, 16.
41. *Ibid.*, November 19, 1928, 2.
42. *Ibid.*, January 14, 1929, 1.
43. *Ibid.*, March 7, 1929, 11.
44. *Ibid.*, January 14, 1929, 1; January 18, 1929, 8; March 7, 1929, 11; *Sunday World-Herald*, November 24, 1929, 7C.
45. *Omaha World-Herald*, March 9, 1929, 3.
46. Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Public Finance Committee Minutes, January 10, 1930, 1-2; Dean Noyes, "The City of Omaha and Aviation," Official Souvenir Program of the Omaha Air Races, May 15-18, 1931, 25.
47. ATC Minutes, August 1, 1929, 13.
48. *Ibid.*, August 19, 1929, 16.
49. *Ibid.*, September 27, 1929, 17-18; *Omaha World-Herald*, September 10, 1929, 10.
50. Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Executive Committee Minutes, December 17, 1929, 10; hereafter cited as Executive Minutes.
51. ATC Minutes, April 15, 1930, 22; *Omaha Bee-News*, May 3, 1930, 22.
52. Douglas County Election Returns, May 6, 1930.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*
55. ATC Minutes, October 3, 1930, 44.
56. *Ibid.*, October 31, 1930, 55-56.
57. Douglas County Election Returns, November 4, 1930.
58. *Ibid.*
59. ATC Minutes, July 3, 1930, 34; Tweney, "Air Transportation," 74; *Omaha World-Herald*, March 18, 1930, 4; March 20, 1930, 8.
60. Executive Minutes, March 29, 1927, 94-95; ATC Minutes, April 8, 1927, 29-30.
61. ATC Minutes April 8, 1927, 29.
62. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 17, 1927, 6; July 25, 1927, 1.
63. *Ibid.*, July 26, 1927, 1.
64. ATC Minutes, October 7, 1927, 56.
65. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 25, 1927, 1; August 26, 1929, 1.
66. *Omaha Bee-News*, November 29, 1927, 5.
67. Executive Minutes, December 6, 1927, 333.
68. ATC Minutes, January 6, 1928, 8.
69. *Omaha World-Herald*, December 12, 1927, 1.
70. ATC Minutes, February 12, 1928, 14.
71. *Omaha World-Herald*, November 11, 1928, 13A; *Omaha World-Herald*, November 13, 1928, 2.
72. An example of this came in October, 1929, when Hird Stryker of the Legion-Airport Corporation became upset with the Boeing negotiations. Omaha, said Stryker, "must treat this company like any other. It has waited upon it long enough." *Omaha World-Herald*, October 7, 1929, 2.
73. *Omaha World-Herald*, March 7, 1929, 1, 11; Milton Wuerth, chief of operations, Omaha Airport Authority, to author, October 20, 1978.
74. ATC Minutes, February 15, 1929, 9.
75. *Omaha World-Herald*, June 10, 1929, 12; June 26, 1929, 1; July 9, 1929, 1.
76. *Ibid.*, July 24, 1929, 1, 2.
77. ATC Minutes, October 11, 1929, 12; December 27, 1929, 27.
78. *Ibid.*, April 10, 1930, 21; *Omaha World-Herald*, March 23, 1930, 1A.
79. *Omaha Bee-News*, September 21, 1930, 4A; *Omaha Bee-News*, November 29, 1930, 2; *Omaha World-Herald*, December 1, 1930, 6; ATC Minutes, November 29, 1930, 58.