Aviation in Tippecanoe County

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Like all research, this is a work in progress. Any additional information that you might have regarding these airports would be most appreciated and can be sent to me at swschrec@purdue.edu
Transportation industry in Tippecanoe County

• The mid to late 1800s had a curious synergy of enthusiasm, resources, and regional collaboration for transportation.

• A large portion of the population had traveled, attended travel lectures or viewed motion pictures, received news reports from exotic places, and were excited about the future.

• Schools and industry were working to develop new manufacturing techniques, and many youth had experience of “tinkering” with models, motors, new gas engines and technology.

• They were ready to convert futuristic novelties into reality.
First US Balloon Airmail Service was from Lafayette on August 17, 1859
Not a complete success

- The Juniper carried a precious cargo of 123 letters. John Wise piloted the Jupiter from the Lafayette town square headed to New York City.
- Unfortunately, due to wind and weather conditions, the balloon drifted to Crawfordsville, where the letters were put on the railroad for their continued trip to New York.
- John attempted the flight again about a month later and made it 800 miles to Henderson, New York where he crashed due to weather.
- The Chicago Aerial Navigation Exposition of 1893 further promoted the aeronautical industry.
Early aviation efforts in Indiana

• The Wright family moved from Indiana to Ohio in the 1870s; but the brothers returned to Indianapolis for aerial exhibitions in 1905.

• On June 13, 1911 the Purdue Aero Club sponsored its 1\textsuperscript{st} Aviation Day.

• Significant collaboration between French and Indiana automobile developers – set the stage for WWI aviation collaboration.

• 1919 the first aviation course at Purdue was started by Major William Bevan (US Army) along with significant US Navy donations of Liberty V-12 and Packard engines and aircraft equipment.

• \textit{How you going to keep them down on the farm} ...
  • https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2URLyxcdpgA
Further post WWI development

• In 1922 there were 8 major airfields in Indiana with about 25 emergency fields for *private pleasure landings*. This doubled by 1923.

• Air Commerce Act of 1926 established new aviation safety standards.

• In 1928 the Frankfurt Aero Club was the largest in the world!
  • Almost every city had an aero club with some type of aviation development and these were often associated with auto racing, and airmail services.

• Captain Lawrence Aretz was a WWI Army flight instructor and helped to establish Kokomo (1919) , Shambaugh (1922), Purdue (1928) and Aretz (1930) airports. Instrumental in the 1929 Lafayette Air Show.

• The 1929 US Air Commerce Bulletin listed Shambaugh airport as the only airport in Tippecanoe County.
Shambaugh Airport (1928)

• Charlie Shambaugh founded the first commercial airport in the county in the summer of 1928, near the site of the Lafayette Life Insurance Building near the intersection of 18th St and Teal Rd.

• At that time, Purdue offered courses in aeronautics through Mechanical Engineering. Aspiring pilots drove from campus to Shambaugh Airport for flight lessons.

• The airport was managed by Lawrence “Cap” Aretz. He had been a flight instructor in WWI and had been the manager of Kokomo airport.

• Shambaugh developed the airport with financial help from Dr. A. C. Arnett, co-founder of Arnett Clinic.

• Unfortunately Dr Arnett and Frank Ball of Muncie (Ball Jars) were killed in an aircraft accident in 1937.
Shambaugh Ford and Buick Garage 1924
His obituary: "mechanical genius" — "pioneer auto dealer" — "founder of Lafayette Airport. race car designer, builder and driver.‘ 62, died on June 4, 1940 in a tractor accident. It occurred on farmland where the former Lafayette Life Insurance home office stands at 18th and Teal. Shambaugh bought the 80-acre field for use as Shambaugh Airport during 1928-1934.
Stuart Field

• On May 17, 1911, the Lafayette Morning Journal announced that, in cooperation with the Purdue Alumni Association, it would sponsor Greater Lafayette's first aviation exhibit at 3 p.m. on Tuesday, June 13, 1911.

• The site for the show was Stuart Field, an area in West Lafayette bounded today by Stadium and Northwestern avenues, University St. and Purdue Mall. In 1911, and until 1924 when Ross-Ade Stadium opened, Stuart Field was the football home for the Boilermaker teams and was equipped with grandstands.

• Aviation Day was an enormous success. Newspapers called it the greatest crowd in Lafayette history. There were traffic jams on West Lafayette streets, not unlike a home football Saturday today.
1911 Lincoln Beachey at Stuart Field Purdue

Courtesy Purdue University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections
• An estimated 17,000 persons crowded about Stuart Field, with about 7,500 persons in the stadium itself, overflowing bleachers built for 5,000. About 250 spectators parked automobiles at the field.

• The aviators flew over, landed, exhibited their planes, took off and carried out a few simple aerial maneuvers in their flimsy planes.

• The plane being flown by C.C. Witmer made an unscheduled forced landing about a mile west of the field, on what was then a university-owned farm, when the aircraft engine malfunctioned.

• Otherwise the day was a magnificent moment in the history of the community. And in retrospect, it seems even more extraordinary today because it was so early in the history of American aviation.

• Scarcely seven years had passed between the Wright Brothers 1903 flight and the first local air show.
Purdue Airport (LAF)

- Opened in 1930
- Now the second busiest airport in Indiana.

1936 - Amelia Earhart with President Elliott and Captain Aretz
• The Purdue Airport made history upon opening in 1930, becoming the first university-owned and -operated airport in the country.

• Aviation provided a great opportunity in the field of education; and on January 28, 1931, industrialist David E. Ross (PU Mechanical Eng graduate & Development of Football, PMU, and several other university buildings and Trustee + 88 patents) announced he would give Purdue University 157 acres southwest of the campus for an airport and for aeronautical research and instruction.

• Shortly after that the federal government selected Purdue and five other schools for aeronautical research and instruction.

• In January 1934, the nation was plunged into economic depression, but development of a Purdue University Airport was underway.

• On January 2, the Federal Civil Works Administration said it would help develop a land package now totaling 340 acres southwest of the campus for a university airport with "Cap" Aretz in charge.
• Ross donated 360 acres of land south of the Purdue campus to be used for the construction of the airport. Initially the airport was rarely used, consisting of a windsock and an emergency landing area. Funds from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and additional funding from Ross allowed renovations to be made.

• On September 4, 1934, Purdue Airport opened and Shambaugh Airport closed, marking yet another chapter in local aviation history.

• In more than 80 years of operations, Purdue Airport has been the visible center of local aviation. Famous people have learned there; famous people have visited; experimental planes were built.

• Several airlines have conducted commercial services including Lake Central Airlines who had 6 flights each day in 1955/56.
George Palmer Putnam, Captain L. I. Aretz (operator and lessee of Purdue Airport), Amelia Earhart, G. Stanley Meikle, and Edward C. Elliott (President of Purdue University) at the Purdue Airport, April 1936
• Purdue has trained and graduated many aviators. This established Purdue in the 1960s and 1970s as the "cradle of astronauts."

• Purdue Airport had been used heavily for training over 500 military pilots in WWII with the help of many civilian and military instructors including the Halsmer brothers.

• "Cap" Aretz left the university to set up his own airport northeast of Lafayette.

• The Halsmer Flying Service attempted to purchase the Purdue Airport in the 1950s, but Indiana Legislation did not allow this.
Purdue Airport in 1934 and 1953
Purdue Airport in 1964 and from 1968-71
Playboy DC-9 operated from Purdue
Aviation provided a chance for adventure. Three Tippecanoe County brothers, Joe, Francis and John Halsmer, were tinkering with home-made gliders, balloons and airplanes, using parts from their dairy farm and even an a Model T engine.

The brothers built several gliders starting in the late 1920s with wings covered with flour sacks and pulled by a motor cycle and later a car. Joe was the oldest and the leader of the flight team. By 1933 they gained enough experience and resources to by a WWI surplus Jenny. Joe got 45 minutes of instruction and then began to train his brothers. They operated an aviation business with several aircraft on their private field east of Lafayette.

All three brothers were in WWII as pilots and saw action mostly in the Asia-Pacific region flying all types of cargo aircraft. After the war they returned home and established the Halsmer Flying Service, became a fixed base operator and Cessna aircraft distributor.

The brothers also became airline pilots. With expansion of Purdue and Aretz airports they finally sold their farm and airfield to SIA in 1987.
Halsmer Field 1943ish

By 1955 the airport had a 4000 ft paved runway and a turf runway. The airport was a full service facility with aircraft services, repairs, manufacturing, flight instruction, aircraft sales, and instrument approach procedures.

It remained a family owned and operated airfield and held many exhibitions and civic activities.
On 29/6/74 I flew with Mr Halsmer in his ~1935 French Stampe SV4C N12426. It has since been deregistered and was sent to the UK in 1998.
Joe Halsmer with his aero car was only one of their activities.
Marine emergency landing at Halsmer Airport

Halsmer Flying Service, Rural Route No. 5, Lafayette, Ind., 47901. On October 11, 1964, a Marine ferry aircraft bureau number 131679, while being operated by a qualified aviator on a duly authorized flight, made an emergency landing at Halsmer Airport. On two subsequent occasions other naval aircraft bringing a replacement engine and personnel to install it landed and departed at the Halsmer Airport. The emergency landing and subsequent landings caused damage to the runway and ramp areas of the airport, which is owned by the Halsmer Flying Service. The property damage is considered incident to the noncombat activities of the Navy. The claimant submitted a proper and timely claim in the amount of $38,725 and subsequently agreed to accept $5,600 in full satisfaction and final settlement. Payment in the amount of $5,000 has already been effected administratively to the claimant by the Department of the Navy.

Amount claimed, $38,725; amount reported, $600.

Sincerely yours,

Robert H. B. Baldwin,
Under Secretary of the Navy.
Evidence of the Halsmer runway about 2015

SIA

Lafayette fire station
Aretz Airport (3AR)

• Captain L. I. Aretz founded the airport after leaving Purdue Airport.
• It opened with a 3200 ft unpaved runway. A second unpaved runway was added in the 1960s. Eventually a paved runway was added along with many aviation services.
• Closed in late 2006.
I took my first solo cross country flight from SBN to here on 4/24/73 and it looked about like this.
One of the last charts showing the airport with a paved 2900 ft runway. When it closed, Paul Harvey on his national radio show said it was a sad day for private aviation. Halsmer airport is also just southeast of the city.
By 2006 the airport was closed but many of the hangars were converted to other use.

Some older flight instructors still use the VOR instrument approach to the field for student practice.
Timber House Airport (31IN)

- Open since 1977!
- 3000 x 100 lighted runway 9/27
- A flying neighborhood with many homes having hangars and aircraft.
- The local chapter of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) holds meetings here.
Timber House Airport (31IN)

DAVID E. GEVERS
2251 STAGGERWING LANE
LAFAYETTE, IN 47909
Phone 765-404-6736

Lots for sale.
Felix Airport (37IN)

- This is a private airport that opened in 1989 by owner Larry Felix. It is a grass strip about ½ mile northwest of Stockwell, and northeast of Cole Elementary School.
- Runway 18-36 is 1900’x150’.
Sutton Airport (IN00)

• Opened in 1966, by V. C. Sutton. This private airport has 4 single engine and 2 multi-engine aircraft.

• The airport is 1 mile southwest of the Boiler VOR (BVT) with grass runway 09-27 that is approximately 2400’ x 100’.

Major airframe and engine repairs are available.
Dahnke Airport (51IN)

• The airport opened in 1980s and closed about 2018.
• It was operated by Robert Dahnke. It was approximately 3 miles north of West Lafayette. Grass runway 18-36 that was 2600’ x 50’.
• A new housing development was just south of the runway threshold and could have been one of the reasons to close the airport.
Wyandotte Air Park (6IN3)

• This private airport opened in 2000.
• It is located approximately 8 miles southeast of Lafayette.
• Grass Runway 09-27 that is about 2600’ x 80’.
• Operated by Alice Abbott. Might still be a lot available?
Ratcliff Field Airport (IG02)

- This private airport opened in 1996 by Gary Radcliff.
- The grass runway was listed as 09-27 and 1800’ x 75’.
- Not shown on VFR chart and probably no longer in use. It was located about 3 miles southwest of Timber House airport.
Wildcat Air Landing Area (IN12)

• Operated from about 1958 to 2005.
• Halsmer Crazy 8 amateur built aircraft suffered a fatal accident in 2000 due to engine failure.
• “WILDCAT AIR LANDING AREA is the most important airport of Lafayette, Indiana, United States. It is modern and one of the largest airport of the North America. WILDCAT AIR LANDING AREA is important for people and government of United States.” A quote from the internet!
Etter Field Airport (II19)

- This airport opened in 1960s and was operated by Leonard Etter.
- Runway 09-27 that was listed as 1500’ x 100’.
- The airport appears to have closed around March 2011.
Other historical airports

• Over the years a number of airports and private runways have opened and closed. Not much information is available and if you have any stories or photos about these airports please send them to me:

• Rush Stol Airport closed in about December 2008.
• Ultra Air Park closed in about February 1985.
• Grimes Farm Strip closed in about December 1983.
• Summer Airport closed in about June 1999.
• Miller Airport closed in about April 1988.
Rush Stol Airport (44IN)
Ultra Air Park (now in Prophetstown Park)
Grimes Farm Strip
Summer Airport (Old coordinates place it in the center of the town?)
Miller Airport

[Google Earth map of Miller Airport]
Thanks to all the resources for this presentation.

• Tippecanoe County Historical Society
• Purdue University Library
• Indiana Department of Transportation, Aviation Division
• Halsmer archive
• Federal Aviation Administration
• Lafayette Journal and Courier
• Various internet articles
• Stewart Schreckengast’s flight log book.