



Your life. Your neighborhood.

SIGN IN OR BECOME A MEMBER

Submit Content Buy Content Our Writers

You are here: Iowa Life > Century of Flight – Part III

Posted July 19, 2010

# Century of Flight – Part III

No comments [Dave Rasdal](#)

*NOTE: This is the third of 10 Ramblin' columns I'm writing from July 5 to Sept. 6 about the first 100 years of flight in Iowa.*

Once "The Great War" ended, aviation took off in Iowa. If the 1910s were known as the decade of experimentation, the 1920s became the decade of enhancement.

Airplanes became larger and could carry passengers or freight. They were somewhat more reliable, faster and capable of longer distances. They began to serve a purpose other than simply being "thrills" for spectators and "spills" for pilots.

An Iowan first flew a heavier-than-air craft a century ago when Art Hartman took off from the Burlington Country Club. That's why Iowa aviation fans are celebrating 100 years of flight this year and why I'm writing about it Mondays from July 5 through Sept. 6.

Certainly the skies of the '20s were filled with barnstormers and flying circuses. A lot of folks paid \$5 or \$10 to ride in an aeroplane. Performers made fancy flight maneuvers, sometimes with fireworks on their wingtips. They walked on wings, swung from trapezes and even raced cars on the ground in front of thousands of spectators from Sioux City to Dubuque.

But, behind the scenes, airplanes became beasts of burden, carrying mail and passengers to prove the efficiency of flight.

And, Iowa City was in the middle of it.

While mail had been carried in Iowa in a haphazard manner before Jan. 8, 1920, that's the date history assigns to the state's first commercial air route. Pilot Walter J. Smith took off from Chicago that morning with 499 pounds of mail and cargo, landing in Iowa City at 10:17 a.m. Cold from the flight (he had an open cockpit), Smith warmed up next to a fire, ate lunch, then completed his journey to Omaha.



On his return trip to Chicago, Smith once again landed in Iowa City to pick up its first airmail shipment and cargo, a 10-pound pig for the manager of the Congress Hotel. (Smith would die five months later in an airplane crash.)

By May, the first regular consignment of airmail reached Iowa City — a motion picture destined for Maquoketa. That September, the transcontinental route was complete when the Omaha to San Francisco leg began operation.

Commercial passengers in Iowa wouldn't take to the air for another seven years. That's when Jane Eads, a Chicago Herald reporter, arrived in Iowa City on a single-engine Boeing mail plane.

Of course, May of 1927 marked Charles Lindbergh's historic flight across the Atlantic Ocean in his Spirit of St. Louis. That Aug. 19 he flew over Iowa City on his



Tweet 1 Share

PRINT EMAIL

Tags

[Century of Flight](#), [eastern iowa](#), [Iowa City](#), [Ramblin'](#), [The Gazette](#)

From the community



Mount Mercy announces Visiting Writers Series for spring 2012

Related

January 20, 2012 Renting Rooms has Given Center Point Woman Plenty of Company

January 19, 2012 Seriously funny: Political satirist John Oliver bringing his standup show to I.C.

Local Life



GET INVOLVED Submit your story now ATTACH IMAGE FULL FORM SUBMIT STORY

The Gazette Breaking news and sports KCRG News and weather source

- Business The speed of business
Life Quality of life news
Government Eastern Iowa government issues
Crime and Courts Breaking crime and courts news
Higher Education Higher education in Eastern Iowa
Health Health news all the time
Outdoors Hunting, fishing, canoeing, etc
Weather Share your weather conditions with us
Prep Sports Complete high school sports coverage
Schools Covering K-12 education in Eastern Iowa
Sports & Rec Smorgasbord of Eastern Iowa sports

Follow Eastern Iowa Life

Eastern Iowa Life on Facebook Like Confirm 528 people like Eastern Iowa Life. 527 people like Eastern Iowa Life. Jacki Duane

EIowaLife EIowaLife EIowaLife Renting Rooms has Given Center Point Woman Plenty of Company: CENTER POINT — Behind the front door and in the li... bit.ly/xnMbt1 3 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite EIowaLife 22 Jan 2012 19:00 : Auditions for "Leaving Iowa": Continue reading bit.ly/xblcuu 9 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite



U.S. tour to promote aviation. (I had the pleasure of flying in a Spirit of St. Louis replica 75 years later at the Iowa City airport.)

Lindbergh, however, was no stranger to Iowa. In 1923 he gave flying lessons in St. Louis to Francis Stimson and sold him a Curtiss Jenny which they flew to Oelwein.

After Stimson cracked up the plane and replaced a damaged strut, this Jenny was sold to Douglas Harris of Sumner, then to Paul Shaw of Iowa City and finally to Ernest LeClerc of Coggon. In 1957, Lindbergh confirmed it had been his plane.

The deal is, each owner had crashed the plane, selling it to the next purchaser to repair. (Shaw, for instance, who would open a flying school in Iowa City, had crashed two other Jennys before this one.)

While flying has become one of the safest modes of transportation since the '20s, it still has its inherent dangers.

Unfortunately, Iowa has a few airplane crashes of note, the most famous being on Feb. 3, 1959, "the day the music died," when Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson were killed in an accident near Mason City.

A decade later Rocky Marciano, a former heavyweight boxing champ, died in an aircraft accident near Newton the day before his 46th birthday.

And two decades after that, on July 19, 1989, United Airlines Flight 232 crashed in Sioux City, killing 112 people. But miraculously, like so many people did in crashes in aviation's early days, 184 people on that flight survived. And the rest of us continued to fly.

Comments: (319) 398-8323; [dave.rasdal@gazcomm.com](mailto:dave.rasdal@gazcomm.com)



### Leave a Reply

You must be [logged in](#) to post a comment.

ElowaLife 23 Jan 2012 19:00 : Auditions for "Leaving Iowa": Continue reading [bit.ly/zk3sHV](http://bit.ly/zk3sHV)  
9 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite



Join the conversation

#### Follow Our Writers on Twitter

Cindy Hadish: [HomegrownIA](#)

Diana Nollen: [diananollen](#)

▶ Latest Posts

Most Commented

- [Renting Rooms has Given Center Point Woman Plenty of Company](#)  
0 comments
- [22 Jan 2012 19:00 : Auditions for "Leaving Iowa"](#)  
0 comments
- [23 Jan 2012 19:00 : Auditions for "Leaving Iowa"](#)  
0 comments
- [Kingsley Man Wins \\$10,000 Lottery Prize](#)  
0 comments
- [Altoona Man Wins \\$10,000 Lottery Prize](#)  
0 comments
- [Mount Mercy announces Visiting Writers Series for spring 2012](#)  
0 comments
- [Southeast Asia comes to Coe Thursday Forum](#)  
0 comments
- [Yard and Garden: Cherry Trees](#)  
0 comments
- [Iowa City Weekender: January 19-21](#)  
0 comments
- [Talking With: Small Business Owners Endangered by Over-Development](#)  
0 comments

#### Seeking A Job?

Customer Support Representative

IA-Cedar Rapids | SecurityCoverage

Bookkeeper/Admin Position

IA-Cedar Rapids | Mediaquest Signs

Financial Aid Advisor

IA-Cedar Rapids | Kirkwood Community College

GO



[more job listings](#)



