

“THE CROSSROADS OF THE AIR”:  
BOOSTERISM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE  
INDIANAPOLIS MUNICIPAL AIRPORT, 1925-1939

Christine Crosby

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Master's Thesis Committee

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Elizabeth Brand Monroe, Ph.D., J.D., Chair

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Robert G. Barrows, Ph.D.

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Richard A. Gantz, Ph.D.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1. Paving the Way: Booster Rhetoric and the Mars Hill Airport, 1925-1927 .....	25
<i>Promotion and Rhetoric</i> .....	36
<i>A Change in Attitude</i> .....	46
Chapter 2. The Dream Continues: Constructing the Municipal Airport, 1927-1930 .....	52
<i>Decision to Build</i> .....	53
<i>The Role of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce</i> .....	71
<i>Design and Construction</i> .....	78
Chapter 3. Attracting Attention: Opening the Indianapolis Municipal Airport, 1929-1931 ..	91
<i>Publicity</i> .....	98
<i>Dedication</i> .....	104
Epilogue. Try, Try, Again: National Experiments, 1935-1939 .....	115
<i>An Airport at the Crossroads</i> .....	135
A Note on Primary Sources .....	139
Bibliography .....	142
Curriculum Vitae	

## Introduction

Indianapolis made aviation history in June 1910 when the first licensed aviation meet in America took place at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. During the week-long exhibition, 35 different events took place and pilots broke several aviation records. Noted achievements included: the largest number of planes in the air at the same time, 8; longest time aloft for a plane carrying two men, 12 minutes; and the world altitude record, 4,384.5 feet by Walter Brookins.<sup>1</sup> Famous attendee Wilbur Wright declared: “This meeting has been the greatest success of any [aviation meet] ever held.”<sup>2</sup> The event occurred in Indianapolis after local businessmen promoted advantages of the city and Speedway to program organizers. The *Indianapolis Star* reported that, “The local boosters declare that they have a better site for such events than any other city on the continent and have already made plans to expend thousands of dollars to make it ideal for all such maneuvers.”<sup>3</sup> These boosters—or citizens who promoted the city to attract businesses—ensured that Indianapolis had the best location by removing telephone poles and leveling the ground.<sup>4</sup> They saw the benefits of hosting a national competition, and they drove the successful selection of Indianapolis for the location of this pioneering meet.<sup>5</sup>

Receiving national aviation attention aligned with the goals of Indianapolis boosters. In June 1910, the newly formed Indianapolis Trade Association partnered with

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<sup>1</sup> Brookins was the Wright brothers’ demonstration pilot and was flying their biplane. Jerry Marlette, “Aviation,” in *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 280.

<sup>2</sup> “Aviation Meeting Artistic Success,” *Indianapolis Star*, June 20, 1910.

<sup>3</sup> “Speedway to Bid for Aviation Meet,” *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 11, 1909.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> For two images of this event, see C. F. Bretzman, “1st Nat’l Aviation Meet, Indianapolis Motor Speedway, June 13-18, 1910,” Still images, 1910. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2007663643> (accessed January 16, 2015).

the Speedway to provide free event tickets to any business or trades person who patronized Indianapolis stores during the week of festivities.<sup>6</sup> According to the *Star*: “Indianapolis hopes to attract trade which chiefly goes outside of the state to the big industrial centers. By keeping this tremendous amount of money within the boundaries of the state the movement will do much to advance the interest of all Indiana as well as Indianapolis. Moreover, it is expected to build up a stronger state spirit.”<sup>7</sup> By encouraging businessmen to attend this event, non-local businesses would see Indianapolis as “the center of interest for lovers of aviation the world around” and would be attracted to relocating to the area.<sup>8</sup> On the opening day of the event—June 13—the *Star* reported that many thousands of people were expected to attend from around the nation, “to form the biggest crowd that ever attended an aerial contest.”<sup>9</sup> The city had high expectations that publicity from the aviation meet would lead to added investments for the city.

In what would become a recurring trend for Indianapolis aviation, the promised return on investment to the city never fully materialized. Following the event the newspaper reported that the aviation meet “spelled complete success for the Wright biplane as well as the Indianapolis Motor Speedway.”<sup>10</sup> Despite this claim of complete success, the article admitted one failure: “The only regret is that there was not more interest in the varied programs. The crowds were disappointing.”<sup>11</sup> Speculations varied as

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<sup>6</sup> The Indianapolis Trade Association eventually merged with other booster-minded city organizations to form the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce. “Indorses Union of Civic Bodies,” *Indianapolis Star*, May 15, 1912.

<sup>7</sup> “Free Aero Tickets Out,” *Indianapolis Star*, June 5, 1910.

<sup>8</sup> “Speedway Mecca for Air Wizards,” *Indianapolis Star*, June 13, 1910.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> “Aviation Meeting Artistic Success,” *Indianapolis Star*, June 20, 1910.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

to the causes.<sup>12</sup> Due to lack of attendance, the Speedway management did not pursue another national aviation meet. Indianapolis boosters would not attempt to capture the nation's attention through aviation for another fifteen years. The Speedway aviation meet became a part of Indianapolis lore, and led to a cycle of aviation-centered boosterism that on the surface was an apparent success, but ultimately failed to completely fulfill promises.<sup>13</sup>

This work will explore the relationship from 1925 to 1939 between the business and government leaders of Indianapolis and the development of a municipal airport for the city.<sup>14</sup> Beginning in 1925, local leaders worked to provide the city with a public airport.<sup>15</sup> The initiation of three distinct and consecutive airport projects during this period closely tied development of a public airport with the commercial future of

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<sup>12</sup> After the event, the article, "Aviation Meeting Artistic Success," *Indianapolis Star*, June 20, 1910, reported that some people did not come because of the lack of competition to the Wright brothers. Audience members wanted to see action such as a crash or near collision instead of the measured flight of expert pilots. Wilbur Wright suggested that Americans failed to appreciate the scientific aspects of flights: "Over there they don't look at the art of flying from the standpoint of sensationalism as people do here." "Aviation Meeting Artistic Success," *Indianapolis Star*, June 20, 1910.

<sup>13</sup> Although the owners talked of hosting more aviation races at the Speedway, the event lacked the appeal of having planes race against each other. In addition, only a small portion of the crowd paid the admission fees—the rest stood outside the gate and just looked up without paying. The following year, the Memorial Day Indianapolis 500 automobile race started, becoming the Speedway's signature event. "Listen Lindy, You Should Have Been Here for the Aviation Meet of 1910, When Brookins Up-Ended His Plane and Beachey Hopped Over the Treetops," *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 6, 1927; "The Week Speedway Introduced the Air Age," *Indianapolis Star Magazine*, May 15, 1977; "City Once Held Reputation as 'Flying Capital,'" *Indianapolis Star Magazine*, Dec. 5, 1971; "On the Wing 50 Years," *Indianapolis News*, Sept. 20, 1981.

<sup>14</sup> In 1919 when cities first built air facilities for the U.S. Post Office no standard term identified these depots. Air port, airdrome, airfield, landing field, aviation field, and eventually airport were all used interchangeably. Janet Bednarek argues in *America's Airports: Airfield Development, 1918-1947* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), that airport gradually became the most commonly used term in the second half of the 1920s. For this study, I will use the terms interchangeably. I define a municipal airport as an airport that a city government has built and operates for public use.

<sup>15</sup> My study focuses on commercial and public aviation. Specifically I am interested in the evolution of the Indianapolis municipal airport. General and military aviation falls outside the scope of this study.

Indianapolis. The Chamber of Commerce led the first project, which established a public airport shared with the Indiana National Guard. Soon after this airport opened, the City of Indianapolis, with the cooperation of the Chamber of Commerce, undertook the development of a larger municipal airport in Indianapolis that opened in 1931. Finally, in 1938 the city government cooperated with the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) to build a national aviation experimental station at the Indianapolis Municipal Airport.

Local leaders—businessmen associated with the Chamber of Commerce, city employees, and the mayor—saw an airport as an opportunity to boost the economic growth of Indianapolis. These boosters wanted to market the city as the center of aviation.<sup>16</sup> In order to attract airplane manufacturers, the city needed an airport. Boosters therefore targeted two groups. First, to drive local support of airport construction, boosters used rhetoric that connected airport projects with Indianapolis’s transformation into the center of American aviation. Second, as the airport developed, boosters used the airport improvements to entice businesses whose presence in the city would create an aviation center. For each of Indianapolis’s three major airport developments from 1925 to 1939—the Mars Hill airport, the Indianapolis Municipal Airport, and the Civil Aeronautics Authority Experimental Station—boosters used the same promise and rhetorical themes to gain local support. The repeated promise that Indianapolis would become the center of American aviation indicated that the three airport projects never delivered on the city leaders’ dreams.<sup>17</sup> While the boosters failed to entice the aviation

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<sup>16</sup> I use the term boosters to describe those who use promotion to support growth and development of their city. This term has traditionally been used by historians of urban history such as Daniel Boorstin. “Boosting” and “boosters” were contemporary terms used during the 1920s and 1930s by boosters to describe themselves or their peers.

<sup>17</sup> I use the term “city leaders” to refer to the combination of Chamber of Commerce members, high-ranking businessmen, and City of Indianapolis employees. The term “city” only refers to



industry, the boosters' appeals to local citizens from 1925 to 1928 resulted in the development of the Indianapolis Municipal Airport and a closely entwined relationship between the City of Indianapolis and its public airport.

Indianapolis boosters promoted airport development in order to cultivate a strong, competitive city that would draw more businesses and residents. The multifaceted relationship between airport development and city boosterism led to the creation of a promotional strategy that used rhetorical devices repeatedly with each development. I define promotion as the act of encouraging support to further a goal. Indianapolis boosters used writings, visuals, and actions (such as events and programs) to promote city and airport development. Throughout my thesis I use the word "rhetoric" to describe the way boosters persuaded both citizens and outsiders.

For both local and national audiences boosters composed thematic messages that accompanied a series of activities intended to win over citizens and the nation alike. Within the city, boosters employed rhetorical themes based on the city's transportation history, city competition, and geographic location. They used testimonies by national aviators, banquets, and celebrations to promote the facility. National rhetoric focused on the city's geographic location and promotion focused on lobbying for national recognition through rankings of the airport and spots on airline routes. Although these techniques evolved over time, the rhetoric of Indianapolis boosters remained consistent for each airport development.

Indianapolis aviation in the 1910s and 1920s closely mirrored national developments. After the Wright brothers' first flight in 1903, American aviation grew

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Indianapolis municipal government when specified, such as: "city government," "City of Indianapolis," or "city officials."

slowly until World War I forced the country to adapt quickly to Europe's superior aviation technology.<sup>18</sup> Following the war, air mail prompted the first national organization of non-military aviation.<sup>19</sup> Both the military and Post Office pushed cities to develop landing fields by suggesting that airports would be essential to "any city's ability to grow and to compete with urban rivals."<sup>20</sup> The 1920s were a period of discovery and advancement that formed the basis of modern-day aviation structures.<sup>21</sup> The Air Mail Act of 1925— also known as the Kelly Act—signaled the beginning of commercial aviation by allowing private airlines to contract to carry mail for the Post Office Department.<sup>22</sup> Commercial airlines originally formed to secure the new mail contracts slowly started to offer passenger service for two to four people along with the mail. Until airplane technology improved and demand for air travel increased, companies relied on postal contracts to stay in business. Passenger airline services developed in the mid-1920s, and in 1929 the first regularly scheduled transcontinental passenger route began.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Bilstein surveys almost every aspect of aviation history from 1900 to 1983 in *Flight in America, 1900-1983*. His focus on American aviation advancements and technological changes provides national context to my study. Roger E. Bilstein, *Flight in America, 1900-1983: From the Wrights to the Astronauts* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 30–31.

<sup>19</sup> The U.S. Air Mail Service formally organized in 1918. *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>20</sup> Bednarek provides an in-depth study of municipal airports and argues that during this period the standard of cities owning and operating airports grew to be the norm. Bednarek, 14.

<sup>21</sup> Bilstein argues that when the Kelly Act of 1925 transferred air mail routes to private contractors, the airline industry began to flourish. (Bilstein, 41-53). Bednarek argues that the period prior to 1945 was when relationships between cities, states, the federal government, and airports were established. Bilstein, 49; Bednarek, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Ladd Smith, *Airways: The History of Commercial Aviation in the United States* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944.), 94; Bilstein, 51.

<sup>23</sup> The majority of passengers at this time were wealthy businessmen. Passenger air travel was uncomfortable in the mid-1920s. Most new airlines used planes that could also carry two to four passengers, but passengers could be dropped off at any point on the route "if the company could pick up a more lucrative cargo of correspondence." On more popular routes, larger transport planes could carry 8 to 16 passengers. From 1926 to 1929 the number of airline passengers rose from 5,782 to 173,405. Bilstein, 55-57.

The year following the Kelly Act, the Air Commerce Act of 1926 created an Aeronautics Branch within the Department of Commerce.<sup>24</sup> Most historians view the Air Commerce Act of 1926 as a major turning point for the American aviation system and the development of airports.<sup>25</sup> This act established what historians refer to as the “dock concept,” which modeled airports and airways on the maritime transportation system. Just as the federal government regulated the waters and the local government regulated the ports, the federal government monitored the skies while the responsibility for financing and designing the air “ports” lay with local governments.<sup>26</sup> Historian David Brodherson argues that this act led to the legal foundation for the development of airports. Aviation historians Janet Bednarek and Deborah Douglas both qualify that the Air Commerce Act only formalized the practice of local establishment of airports that had already evolved.<sup>27</sup>

Charles Lindbergh’s successful 1927 solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean also aided local construction of airports. His accomplishment stirred the nation into a frenzy of support for aviation and provided popular backing that strengthened the power of local governments to build airports. Lindbergh’s achievement and subsequent national tour “fanned the flames of aviation enthusiasm all over the United States.”<sup>28</sup> Prompted by his popularity, cities, including Indianapolis, rushed to join the aviation movement.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>25</sup> For example, see Deborah G. Douglas, “The Invention of Airports: A Political, Economic and Technological History of Airports in the United States, 1919-1939” (diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996), 4; David Philip Brodherson, “What Can’t Go up Can’t Come Down: The History of American Airport Policy, Planning and Design,” (diss., Cornell University, 1993), 52; Bilstein, 58.

<sup>26</sup> Brodherson, 52.

<sup>27</sup> Bednarek, 6; Douglas, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Bednarek, 41.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 41.

The national growth of aviation systems affected Indianapolis aviation. Following the 1910 aviation meet at the Speedway, little aviation development occurred before 1917 when the United States entered World War I. During the war, the U.S. Army built a facility near the Speedway to repair all aircraft and engines east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio rivers. The shop primarily repaired Liberty aircraft engines and worked with Allison Engineering Company located across the street. The Indianapolis Aerial Association opened the city's first public landing field in July of 1920 but the venture quickly failed. A handful of other small airports opened during the next two decades but were intended for general aviation or private fliers.<sup>30</sup> The Kelly Act prompted increased aviation activities and airport construction in Indianapolis. In 1925, with the possibility of a newly privatized air mail line stopping in Indianapolis, the city rallied around aviation development for the first time.<sup>31</sup> The lure of a national air-mail stop galvanized the process that would eventually lead to the establishment of the Indianapolis Municipal Airport and a vision for the future with the nation's aviation centered on the city.

Boosters led this movement to build a public airport in Indianapolis. Nationally, boosters have been active throughout history and are often tied to the development of transportation systems.<sup>32</sup> As was the case in Indianapolis with the 1910 aerial meet at the Speedway, boosters promoted their city to aid economic growth. In addition, competition with other cities also characterizes boosterism. City leaders who attracted outside businesses and residents competed with comparable cities for their attention. In the quest to out-do each other, city leaders viewed certain aspects of city life as a "metropolitan

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<sup>30</sup> Marlette, 280.

<sup>31</sup> The first air mail arrived in the city in 1922. Regularly scheduled air service did not begin until 1927. Ibid., 281.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Daniel Boorstin does so in his work *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Random House, 1965), 61-68.

hallmark,” essential to having a competitive city.<sup>33</sup> As aviation developed in the 1920s, airports became one of the staples necessary for a city to remain competitive.<sup>34</sup>

In his analysis of nineteenth-century boosterism literature, Carl Abbott asserts that Indianapolis boosters focused their promotion of the city on its geographic centrality.<sup>35</sup> Indianapolis and other Midwestern cities continued to use geographic attributes into the twentieth century. Cities in “the Heartland” experienced a golden age during a 1920s boom in the auto industry as they capitalized on their central positions in terms of the nation’s resources and markets.<sup>36</sup>

During this period of stability, the most influential booster group in Indianapolis was the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber had formed in 1912 when several organizations with similar missions merged with the goal of attracting business and industry to Indianapolis.<sup>37</sup> In the 1920s the Indianapolis Chamber shared in the national popularity and influence of Chambers of Commerce. The Indianapolis Chamber’s monthly serial between the two World Wars—titled alternately *Activities* and *The Bulletin*— documents its work and motivation to boost Indianapolis businesses. In

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 153.

<sup>34</sup> Bednarek, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Abbott writes about boosterism one hundred years before my period. However, his work is useful because he includes a chapter specifically about Indianapolis. Abbott’s characterization of Indianapolis boosterism as modest promotion based on the city’s central location continues to hold true in the 1920 and 1930s. Carl Abbott, *Boosters and Businessmen: Popular Economic Thought and Urban Growth in the Antebellum Middle West* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981).

<sup>36</sup> Teaford’s study of the regional characteristics of boosterism provides an important analysis of how geography influenced Midwest boosters. Jon C. Teaford, *Cities of the Heartland: The Rise and Fall of the Industrial Midwest* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), ix.

<sup>37</sup> Geib, a long-time faculty member at Butler University, wrote the history of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce for the one hundredth anniversary of the Chamber. George W. Geib and Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, *Indianapolis First* (Indianapolis, IN: Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, 1990), 7.

addition to the Chamber, the Indianapolis city government and individuals from other local organizations promoted the city and specifically the development of an airport.

For my interpretation of the messages and motivation of Indianapolis boosters I also rely on newspapers, airport documents, and city government records. The bulk of my sources are housed at the Indiana State Library, the Indiana Historical Society, the Indiana State Archives, and the Indianapolis Public Library.<sup>38</sup> In my search I looked for institutional documents of the airports; city government records; local booster organizations' records; newspapers accounts; and personal opinions of residents. With the exception of newspapers, these categories of records pertaining to the airport are sparse. Unfortunately, many city records from this period of Indianapolis history have been lost over the years and are incomplete.<sup>39</sup> Most of the institutional documents for the airport are from the period after 1945, when the mayor of Indianapolis first appointed an airport board to oversee operations. I found only a handful of these institutional

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<sup>38</sup> Other repositories and local institutions I searched for resources include: the IUPUI University Library, including the Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives; all units in the Indiana University system of libraries; the Institute for Civic Leadership and Mayoral Archives at the University of Indianapolis; the Purdue Aviation Technology Library; the National Archives and Records Administration and the National Archives Regional Archives at Chicago; the Center for the Study of History and Memory at Indiana University; the Indianapolis Airport; the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce; the Indianapolis Department of Public Works; the Indiana National Guard; the Weir Cook Memorial Project; the Indianapolis Motor Speedway; the Indiana Military Museum; the Atterbury-Bakalar Air Museum; the Hoosier Air Museum; the City-County Council of Indianapolis; the Indiana Commission on Public Records; the Butler University Library; and WorldCat system of libraries and repositories. For more information about my research at these locations, please see "A Note on Primary Sources" at the end of the work (page 139).

<sup>39</sup> None of the repositories knew of any records from the Indianapolis mayors during these three development projects. From 1928 to 1931 the Indianapolis City Council and the Indianapolis Department of Public Works both controlled the Indianapolis Municipal Airport. In 1931, the control of the airport shifted with the Department of Public Works having primary decision-making powers and the City Council controlling appropriations. The *Proceedings of the Common Council of Indianapolis* are accessible through IUPUI University Library. The *Minutes of the Department of Public Works* are located at the Indiana State Archives. Both the records of the City Council and the Department of Public Works only provide a summary of the decisions made at meetings and are limited in their details on opinions and what issues were debated.

documents from 1925 to 1940 that pertained to the development of the airport and city boosterism.<sup>40</sup> My understanding of booster organizations' relationships with the airport comes from publications of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce.<sup>41</sup> With the exception of what is recounted in the media, I was unable to locate documentation of the opinions of Indianapolis residents during these developments.

As a result of the scarcity of sources, I rely primarily on local publications, particularly newspapers. Although limited in their perspective, newspapers are a source of booster rhetoric. At the heart of boosterism is promotion, and articles reporting on the development of the airport and activities of boosters often supported their cause by spreading awareness. I have used articles from the *Indianapolis Star*, *Indianapolis Times*, and *Indianapolis News* to understand the written rhetoric employed by city boosters in conjunction with airport activities.<sup>42</sup> Historian Daniel Boorstin demonstrates that local

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<sup>40</sup> Airport documents can be found at four locations. The Indiana Historical Society processed the Indianapolis Airport Authority Collection in 2014. The Indianapolis Airport Authority gave the bulk of this collection to the Historical Society when the Airport Authority prepared to build a new terminal set to open in 2008. The Indiana State Archives has six unprocessed boxes of papers from the Indianapolis Airport Authority. The bulk of this collection is from the 1950s and 1970s and contains leases, contracts, correspondence, and some financial documents. The Indiana State Library Rare Book and Manuscript Collection houses scrapbooks of photographs and newspaper clippings attributed to the first airport manager, Paul H. Moore, and the third, I.J. "Nish" Dienhart. Finally, the Indianapolis Airport Authority holds the board minutes beginning in 1945 at the current Indianapolis International Airport.

<sup>41</sup> I also searched for records of other local organizations at the time that may have been involved with airport development and was not able to find record of significant involvement of another organization. See "A Note on Primary Sources" (page 139) for a list of where I looked.

<sup>42</sup> Early Indianapolis historian, Jacob Piatt Dunn, notes city newspapers changed beginning in the 1870s. The *Indianapolis News* stood out when it started in 1870 as a paper that did not support a specific political party and strived for clarity and excellence in writing. The *News* demonstrated that readers would support an unaffiliated paper, and other papers soon followed its lead. After a series of mergers, the *Indianapolis News*, the *Indianapolis Star*, and the *Indianapolis Times* were the three principal local papers in the 1910s. The *Times*, which had started as an independent Democratic Party paper, was sold to Roy W. Howard. During the period of airport development, editors included Boyd Gurley (1925, who won a Pulitzer Prize for opposition to the Ku Klux Klan in 1927), Talcott Powell (1933), and Ludwell Denny (1935). The *Indianapolis Star* began as an independent publication that supported the Republican Party. John C. Shaffer was the owner,

citizens started publishing newspapers for booster purposes. Although often future-focused and overly positive, newspaper articles helped me understand how city leaders promoted airport development. Similarly, the serial of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce proved an invaluable source of booster rhetoric. I balanced these optimistic accounts with *Proceedings of the Common Council*, *Minutes of the Department of Public Works*, the few remaining airport records from this period, and secondary literature.<sup>43</sup>

The history of aviation and airports in Indianapolis has received little scholarly attention. In general, the field of aviation history includes very few histories of airports and few scholarly, place-based aviation studies. An airport has a functional role in Americans' lives, and scholars often bypass this mundane topic for the popular appeal of the pilots, airlines, and technology of aviation. A slowly growing body of scholarship acknowledges the role airports have played in our nation. My work draws upon these recent airport studies as well as works on aviation history.

The field of aviation history, although more popular than airport history, suffers from a narrow range of topics. James Hansen's 1989 review essay in *Technology and Culture* testifies to the lack of variety in the field.<sup>44</sup> Hansen notes that the discipline needs

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B.F. Lawrence was editor, and James A. Stuart was managing editor. In the 1920s, Warren C. Fairbanks served as publisher and corporation president of the *News*. During this time, Louis Howland served as editor, won a Pulitzer Prize in 1933 for exposing waste in city management, and was known for his "case and comment" editorials. After Howland's death in 1924, Stephen C. Noland served as editor in the 1930s. Ann Mauger Colbert and David G. Vanderstel, "Journalism," in the *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 95-100; John W. Miller, ed., *Indiana Newspaper Bibliography: Historical Accounts of All Indiana Newspapers Published from 1804 to 1980 and Locational Information for All Available Copies, Both Original and Microfilm* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1982), 265, 281, 287; Jacob Piatt Dunn, *Greater Indianapolis: The History, the Industries, the Institutions, and the People of a City of Homes*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1910), 399-403.

<sup>43</sup> The City Council at this time was officially named the Common Council. Contemporary sources also called it the City Council. I use the term City Council.

<sup>44</sup> The remarks Hansen makes in his article were inspired by a discussion of the aviation history advisory board of the Smithsonian Institution Press (SIP) formed in 1988.



“more attention to the social and cultural ramifications of aviation history.”<sup>45</sup> Many of the writers in the field are aviation “enthusiasts” whose focus on the technical details of aviation is tedious for the non-specialist. In 2003, history professor Guillaume de Syon followed-up on Hansen’s call for more breadth of subject matter in aviation history. While he notes some expansion, de Syon contends that “‘the wider view’ is not yet so wide.”<sup>46</sup> Essays in recent anthologies such as *Reconsidering a Century of Flight*, edited by Roger Launius and Janet R. Daly Bednarek, advance the field by placing aviation in its cultural and social context. This shift in perspective provides a starting point for more robust aviation history. Aviation historian William Trimble suggested in 1990 that more studies on the history of the airport “could help move aerospace history in the right direction.”<sup>47</sup> By researching the history of the Indianapolis airport in the context of national aviation development and the identity of the City of Indianapolis, I believe this thesis will contribute to the expansion of the aviation history genre.

Several aviation histories informed my study of the Indianapolis airport. These works provide the context of national aviation while Indianapolis built its municipal airport. Roger Bilstein’s, *Flight in America 1900-1983: From the Wrights to the Astronauts*, surveys almost every aspect of aviation history from 1900 to 1983.<sup>48</sup> According to Joseph Corn in a review of the book, Bilstein fails to deliver a strong and convincing argument in his attempt to cover this broad subject over an eighty-year span.

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<sup>45</sup> James R. Hansen, “Aviation History in the Wider View,” *Technology and Culture* 30, no. 3 (July, 1989): 647.

<sup>46</sup> Guillaume de Syon, “What the Wrights Wrought: The Centennial of Flight in Recent Literature,” *Technology and Culture* 45, no. 2 (Apr., 2004): 356.

<sup>47</sup> William F. Trimble, review of *A Dream Takes Flight* by Betsy Braden and Paul Hagan, *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 74, no. 3 (October 1, 1990): 552.

<sup>48</sup> A former history professor, Bilstein occupied the position of Charles Lindbergh Professor of Aerospace History at the National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, while revising this book. Bilstein, xii.

His thesis that aviation reached maturity by the end of the 1920s and continued to grow in subsequent years oversimplifies the complex history of aviation. Despite this generalization, *Flight in America* provides an unmatched overview of all aspects of aviation.<sup>49</sup> I find Bilstein's analysis of national advancements particularly valuable. He provides the context of technological changes and federal laws and regulations for localized studies such as mine.<sup>50</sup> *Flight in America* aided me in grounding the history of Indianapolis's public airport development in the larger national aviation context.

Joseph Corn's *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation*—first published in 1985 and updated in 2002—augments Bilstein's work with a social history of aviation.<sup>51</sup> Whereas Bilstein focuses on the regulatory, technological, and military aspects, Corn explores aviation's relationship with Americans.<sup>52</sup> Corn convincingly argues that during the earliest years of airplane flights, Americans' reactions to the new technology resembled a religious movement that “influenced the course of history.”<sup>53</sup> He draws this argument from his study of technological utopianism: the optimistic trust that technology would bring about social reform in America. Believers in the “winged gospel” saw airplanes transforming American society for the peace and prosperity of

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<sup>49</sup> Joseph Corn labels the book as “the most comprehensive survey of the history of American aeronautics and space flight yet published.” Joseph J. Corn, review of *America's Airports* by Janet R. Daly Bednarek, *Technology and Culture* 26, no. 4 (October 1, 1985): 871.

<sup>50</sup> Bilstein's notes section, written as mini-historiographies, also adds to the usefulness of his overview. For every topic he touches, he annotates the resources available.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, rev. ed., 2002).

<sup>52</sup> Braeman suggests the pairing of these two books in his review in *American Studies* of Bilstein: “His work, therefore, makes an invaluable complement to Joseph J. Corn's *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation, 1900-1950* (1983).” John Braeman, review of *Flight in America, 1900-1983* by Roger Bilstein, *American Studies* 26, no. 1 (Apr., 1985): 45.

<sup>53</sup> Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, xiv.

all.<sup>54</sup> World War II, says Corn, brought disillusionment in the social benefit of airplanes, and the end of the winged gospel.<sup>55</sup>

The style of *The Winged Gospel*—brief, focused, and emotional—effectively conveys the exciting hopefulness of adherents of this cultural movement. In his focused brevity Corn misses some relevant facts and fails to consider those who were not caught up in the pseudo-religion. But his strengths outweigh this weakness. He brings to light a significant cultural phenomenon which—although not as prevalent as Corn implies—influenced Americans. Capturing the motivation of historical characters often presents a challenge to historians. Corn relies on national journals and newspapers to capture the mood and feelings of his subjects. This methodology influenced my approach to uncovering the motivations of Indianapolis’s city leaders to build a municipal airport. Like Corn, I relied on newspapers and local publications to glimpse the thoughts of local aviation supporters.<sup>56</sup> Corn’s secondary sources on the relationship between technology and society also influenced my methodology.<sup>57</sup>

Corn’s description of America’s “love affair” with aviation and the hope placed in this new technology is crucial to understanding the motivations behind local leaders investing in an airport. In trying to capture the relationship between the city of Indianapolis and its municipal airport, understanding how the public reacted to aviation at

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<sup>54</sup> Similar to Americans’ faith in other new technologies during this time, their faith in aviation offered a new world of equality and freedom. Corn acknowledges in his 2002 revision that airplanes were one of a number of new technologies (i.e., telegraph, radio, x-ray technology) that Americans viewed as redeemers of society. Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>56</sup> In addition, my use of images to support my understanding of the boosters is influenced by Corn. Both Pursell and Lewis praise Corn’s inclusion of images in their reviews. Carroll W. Pursell Jr., review of *The Winged Gospel* by Joseph Corn, *The Public Historian* 6, no. 2 (Apr., 1984): 134; W. David Lewis, review of *The Winged Gospel* by Joseph Corn, *Technology and Culture* 26, no. 4 (October 1, 1985): 875.

<sup>57</sup> Most notably Daniel Boorstin who will be further discussed below.

the time is vital. The utopian optimism chronicled by Corn has close parallels to the hopeful enthusiasm of the rhetoric of boosters. In *America's Airports*, Janet Bednarek connects city-level interest in airports and the nationwide enthusiasm that Corn documents. Bednarek asserts that "A close examination of the history of local action on airports, as well as policies dealing with aviation in general and airports in particular, revealed both the influence of the winged gospel and the real limits to its reach."<sup>58</sup> In *The Winged Gospel* Corn falls short of proving the effect of the movement. Bednarek's argument that the winged gospel influenced local airport construction enhances Corn's work by showing one lasting result.

In the more specific field of airport history, most works fall within three areas: studies of single airports, architectural histories, and scholarship on airport public policy.<sup>59</sup> The majority of single airport studies commemorate the history of a specific airport. These studies fail to place the airports' histories within the wider context of national aviation development; each airport is presented as having a unique story independent of the parallels that exist with other airports. *A Dream Takes Flight: Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport and Aviation in Atlanta* by journalists Betsy Braden and Paul Hagen stands out.<sup>60</sup> In his review, Paul Friedman, says the book ". . . is

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<sup>58</sup> Bednarek, 8.

<sup>59</sup> Douglas describes these three categories in her 1996 dissertation: "single airport studies (almost all commemorative histories); architectural histories of various airport buildings (mainly the terminal); or public policy histories (largely of federal airport legislation)." I found these categories to still hold true despite new scholarship since Douglas' research, although some diversity and expansion of the field has occurred. Douglas, 15.

<sup>60</sup> Braden and Hagan.

a good example of how to write an airport history and should be emulated by those who seek to chronicle the story of other metropolitan fields.”<sup>61</sup>

Braden and Hagen conducted their research for celebratory purposes, and the work suffers some from their limited recognition of the national perspective.<sup>62</sup> Their success derives from their meticulous and expansive research. Over a period of eight years, the two authors documented the history they found in city governmental records, institutional documents of airlines and the airport, local newspaper articles, and interviews with aviation pioneers and civic and business leaders. Although I have a narrower focus, Braden’s and Hagan’s broad range of sources inspired my research.<sup>63</sup> Braden and Hagen argue that the hard work and perseverance of a few business and local government leaders in Atlanta elevated the unpromising early airport into a successful and vital part of the community. The authors’ exploration of the relationship between Atlanta and its airport served as a model for my study of Indianapolis. *A Dream Takes Flight* provided an important comparison to Indianapolis because of the early similarities between the cities’ aviation efforts which led to drastically different modern day airports.

In the category of airport architectural histories, two dissertations stand out as important for understanding airports during the first half of the twentieth century: David Brodherson’s “What Can’t Go Up Can’t Come Down: The History of American Airport Policy, Planning and Design” (1993), and Deborah Douglas’ “The Invention of Airports:

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<sup>61</sup> For other opinions that note that *A Dream Takes Flight* stands out as one of the few widely available scholarly works on a single airport see, Douglas, 15; Bednarek, 5; Trimble, “Review,” 552; Paul D. Friedman, review of *A Dream Takes Flight* by Betsy Braden and Paul Hagan, *The Public Historian* 13, no. 4 (October 1, 1991): 63.

<sup>62</sup> See Douglas, 16; Trimble, “Review,” 553; Friedman, 62.

<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, the impressive amount of research bogs down the narrative with a plethora of details. In his review, Friedman agrees with Braden and Hagan’s own assessment that “the presentation of their data is rather ‘dry.’” Friedman, 62.

A Political, Economic and Technological History of Airports in the United States, 1919-1939” (1996). Brodherson traces the development of the architectural features commonly used in modern day airports. He argues that during the 1920s and 1930s basic airport design coalesced from the initial variety of forms. While architectural details of early airports are beyond the scope of this study, Brodherson’s conclusions about public and federal influences on airport design contextualize Indianapolis’s airport architectural plans. The strength of Brodherson’s analysis comes from his rich source base of popular and professional periodicals available to airport architects in the 1920s and 1930s. Through his analysis of both utopian fantasies and airport systems, Brodherson reveals the priority given to integrating an airport with the urban center. While Brodherson fails to apply his conclusions to examples of early airports, I have found his interpretation true for Indianapolis.

Deborah Douglas builds on Brodherson’s argument by adopting his view of the airport as a system and supporting his thesis that the formative period of the airport system occurred in the 1920s and 1930s. Douglas wrote her dissertation in the fields of “History and Sociology of Science,” and she approaches airports from a unique technological history viewpoint.<sup>64</sup> She divides her work based on three forces she identifies that drive airport design: political, economic, and technological. Douglas argues that today’s standards and practices for airport design were established by the end of the 1930s. Throughout the three sections, Douglas incorporates the influence of culture, local and federal authorities, engineers, architects, and city planners. This dissertation’s strength comes from Douglas’ in-depth treatment of her topics.

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<sup>64</sup> Douglas labels her work “the first technological history of airports.” Douglas, 1.

“The Invention of Airports” offers my study of Indianapolis’ municipal airport important insights into the forces shaping airport development and covers my period of interest. Douglas’ work provides the national context to the turbulent changes in aviation laws, trends in trade periodicals, and the dynamics of airport funding during the period. Her source base matches the impressive coverage of her topic. She deftly weaves together aviation, engineering, and planning journals; congressional publications; reports from the Department of Commerce; and personal collections of significant leaders in aviation. While she misses some important discussions of secondary sources such as Corn’s *The Winged Gospel* in her arguments about influential “cultural characteristics,” her detailed analysis of airports on a national level provided vital material for my analysis of Indianapolis in comparison with other cities.<sup>65</sup>

Janet R. Daly Bednarek’s analysis in *America’s Airports: Airfield Development, 1918-1947* expands on Douglas’ section on the politics of airport development. This book stands out in the category of public policy analysis regarding airports and was invaluable to my study of Indianapolis’ early airport efforts. Bednarek began her research with the question, “Why municipal airports?”<sup>66</sup> Throughout the book she uncovers why cities own and operate airports and why the federal government eventually regulated and funded them. Bednarek concludes that from 1918 to 1947 a combination of local and federal actions and policies, urban boosterism and aviation enthusiasm, and the realities of airport operations, established the concept of a municipal airport.<sup>67</sup> Bednarek builds on the airport studies of Brodherson and Douglas and analyzes local policy through sources like early aviation journals and periodicals. Bednarek’s concentrated approach lacks case

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>66</sup> Bednarek, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 1.

studies of airports to support her points. In his review of the book, Joseph Corn notes that “The specifics regarding how local leaders, business leaders, politicians, and others interacted with higher government officials and the aviation community seldom enter her analysis.” He follows with the hope that “her work will stimulate more in-depth studies of particular cities and their struggle.”<sup>68</sup> In building on Bednarek’s broad study of early municipal airports, my research on Indianapolis serves as one case study.

I use Bednarek’s arguments about urban boosterism and Corn’s concept of the “winged gospel” to support my interpretation of the development of the Indianapolis airport. Bednarek defines urban boosterism as, “the effort to promote the growth and development of one’s city, one that often included a sense of competition with rival cities.”<sup>69</sup> She maintains that city boosters viewed airports as “one of *the* facilities that a city had to have in order to achieve its ‘destined’ growth and development and to match or, better, overwhelm its urban rivals.”<sup>70</sup> This conclusion informs the foundation for my interpretation of the connection between Indianapolis leaders and the construction of the municipal airport. In addition, Bednarek argues that Corn’s thesis of “the winged gospel” coupled with “booster instincts” led to a push for an airport by the business elite of a city.<sup>71</sup> Bednarek expands on Corn’s work by demonstrating the limits to the power that aviation enthusiasts had in changing society. While the winged gospel motivated change, it also faced resistance in class differences, legal battles, and lack of support in

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<sup>68</sup> Corn, “Review,” 895.

<sup>69</sup> Bednarek, 7.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 8.



Congress.<sup>72</sup> I model Bednarek's joining of urban history with the history of aviation through my use of boosterism and the winged gospel.

Several sources outside of aviation history aided my understanding of Indianapolis boosterism. Daniel Boorstin's analysis of early American booster culture in his influential series, *The Americans*, shaped my understanding of this type of city promotion.<sup>73</sup> Although Boorstin writes about the early nineteenth century, long before aviation entered American society, his work has important implications for studies of the growth of aviation in American cities during the 1920s. Both Corn and Bednarek cite Boorstin as key to their understandings of city leaders and their inter-urban rivalries. In his section "The Upstarts: Boosters," Boorstin notes that as new cities formed, city leaders needed to focus completely on growth to sustain their communities. These new cities had uncertain futures unless they attracted businesses and residents.<sup>74</sup> The desire to entice people to call a city home led to competition between cities and promotion of the communities' attractions.<sup>75</sup>

Like Bednarek in her national study of airports, I found this competitive city spirit to be a driving factor in Indianapolis during the 1920s. Boorstin argues that a city had to have certain "metropolitan hallmarks" to prove its strength.<sup>76</sup> As Bednarek demonstrates, in the early twentieth century airports became one of the key institutions for city survival. Although she does not reference Boorstin, Douglas also notes the necessity of an airport for a city to attract new industries.<sup>77</sup> Boorstin draws his arguments from early histories of

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>73</sup> Boorstin, 153.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-114.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 161-168.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>77</sup> Douglas, 281.

cities ranging from Chicago to Kansas City, and secondary analysis of county-seat wars in states ranging from Ohio to California. His characterization of businessmen and their self-identifying role in cities helped me to understand the members of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce and other leaders in local airport development.

Two authors strengthened my understanding of boosterism specifically in the Midwest and Indianapolis. In *Boosters and Businessmen: Popular Economic Thought and Urban Growth in the Antebellum Middle West* (1981), Carl Abbott addresses many of the themes developed by Boorstin, and includes a chapter specifically on Indianapolis. Abbot maintains that booster writings from around 1830 to 1860 accurately described the economic potential of cities and affected development in those cities. Abbot takes boosters seriously and carefully compares booster literature with city statistics.<sup>78</sup> His sources include newspapers, guidebooks, Chamber of Commerce publications, and local demographics. Abbot fails to define who the boosters were and to consider non-economic aspects of boosterism like political affiliation. The decision to highlight Indianapolis as one of his four case studies makes this work valuable to my study, despite his antebellum focus. Abbot characterizes Indianapolis boosterism as modest promotion based on the city's central location. This type of promotion continued to hold true in the 1920s and 1930s when local leaders showcased Indianapolis as a center for transportation and conventions because of location and terrain. These early themes of transportation and centrality in the promotion of Indianapolis can still be seen in the boosterism of the twentieth century.

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<sup>78</sup> “Abbot thus takes boosters seriously when most other historians have portrayed them as local businessmen whose overblown rhetoric was a device to protect their own investments.” John Haeger, “Review,” *Journal of Economic History* 42, no. 2 (June, 1982): 468.

Jon C. Teaford's *Cities of the Heartland: The Rise and Fall of the Industrial Midwest* offers insights into the regional characteristics of boosterism. Teaford argues that cities in the Midwest shared social, political, economic, cultural, and ethnic characteristics that set them apart from cities in other regions.<sup>79</sup> These Midwest cities—including Indianapolis—shared a “heartland consciousness” based on cultural isolation. Teaford tells of the rise of the region to its “golden age” in the first decades of the twentieth century and its subsequent decline into the “rust belt.” Both primary accounts of businesses and local histories from an impressive number of midwestern cities support this familiar argument. By crafting his narrative from the perspective of urban businessmen, Teaford provides an in-depth glimpse into the forces of change that shaped boosters. During the early twentieth century, city leaders spun their defining isolation in the center of the country into an asset of accessibility. Teaford's insights into the relationship between the Midwest and the auto industry also informed my understanding of Indianapolis in the 1920s. He demonstrates that the dependence on the auto industry made cities of the Midwest vulnerable to the boom and bust of the volatile auto market.<sup>80</sup> This industrial context frames my understanding of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce's efforts to expand its foothold in the transportation industry by attracting aviation manufacturers. Teaford's biography of a region offers a noteworthy interpretation of the influence of geography on Indianapolis boosterism.

This study of the relationship between Indianapolis boosterism and local public airport development will contribute to the limited historical scholarship on airports. Scholars can use my study on the origin of the Indianapolis Municipal Airport to compare

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<sup>79</sup> Teaford defines the Midwest as the area included in the Old Northwest Territory and Saint Louis. Teaford, vii.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

with other airports' beginnings. I reveal that the Indianapolis airport developed from the interlocking relationship between city boosters, local newspapers, and the institution of the airport. This symbiotic relationship is missing in the current understanding of Indianapolis's history. In addition, this work serves as a case study to the sparse literature on boosterism and airport development.

Today the Indianapolis International Airport is a top-ranking facility, but not a nucleus of American aviation.<sup>81</sup> In 2014, the Airports Council International named the Indianapolis Airport "Best Airport in North America" for the second year in a row.<sup>82</sup> A new terminal that opened in 2008 was designed as a symbolic gateway for visitors to Indianapolis.<sup>83</sup> The connection between the airport and the city, as well as the focus on being the best in the country, began in the 1920s and 1930s. My study demonstrates that the initial development of a commercial airport for Indianapolis forged this connection through the aspirations of city boosters.

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<sup>81</sup> The Indianapolis Municipal Airport changed its name to Weir Cook Airport after World War II and then to Indianapolis International Airport in the 1970s. The terminal remained in the same spot with numerous additions and renovations until 2008 when a new midfield terminal was opened. After failing to secure a tenant for the old building, the Indianapolis Airport Authority demolished the old terminal in 2013.

<sup>82</sup> "IND recognized as among world's best airports, to be presented with Best Airport in North America Award by Airports Council International Director General Angela Gittens," Indianapolis Airport Authority, June 26, 2014, <http://www.indianapolisairport.com/admin/uploads/999/6.26.14ASQ.pdf> (accessed December 20, 2014).

<sup>83</sup> IND Foundation, Inc., *IND The Art of It All: Art, Architecture, and Cuisine at the Indianapolis International Airport* (Indianapolis: Emmis Publishing, 2009), 6.

## Chapter One. Paving the Way: Booster Rhetoric and the Mars Hill Airport, 1925-1927

The 1925 privatization of air mail transport inspired Indianapolis boosters to build an airport in the hope it would bring aviation businesses to the city. The potential to have regular air mail service in Indianapolis sparked a rush to provide a commercial airport for the city.<sup>84</sup> Led by the Chamber of Commerce, local boosters formulated a plan to establish an airport used jointly by city residents and the Indiana Air National Guard. Original plans to locate the airport at the infield of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway fell through, and the airport was constructed on the southwest side of the city in an area known as Mars Hill.<sup>85</sup> To gather support for the airport, the boosters used rhetoric that tied the success of the project to Indianapolis's future as an aviation center. Boosters promoted the need for an airport to local citizens and then used the new airport to promote the city to the aviation industry. Through the development of the Mars Hill airport, boosters associated with the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce created

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<sup>84</sup> At this time, commercial airlines mainly carried air mail with a few spots for passengers on occasion. As the decade progressed, passenger transport grew more popular. Most airlines carried both air mail and some passengers. Air mail began with letters and small packages. The Post Office had always intended air mail to be used by businesses. Business use of air mail gradually increased with the realization that the old maxim "time is money" proved true. Other customers included advertising agencies and motion-picture companies. Roger E. Bilstein, *Flight in America, 1900-1983: From the Wrights to the Astronauts* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 55-57; Deborah G. Douglas, "The Invention of Airports: A Political, Economic and Technological History of Airports in the United States, 1919-1939" (diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996), 277.

<sup>85</sup> I refer to the airport built by the Indianapolis Airport Corporation in 1926 and used by the Indiana National Guard as the Mars Hill airport. This reference of the airport by its location is the term most often used by contemporary sources. However, the airport was officially named Cox Field in 1927 and later was called Stout Field, first informally and later formally. Robert T. Fischer, "Stout Field," in *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 1301.

rhetorical themes that linked the city's airport with the city's future as a prominent center of aviation.

The 1925 passage of the first Air Mail Act in the United States, also known as the Kelly Act, had a ripple effect that transformed the American aviation industry.<sup>86</sup> The title of the act made clear the purpose: "An act to encourage commercial aviation and to authorize the Postmaster General to contract for Air Mail Service."<sup>87</sup> The Kelly Act privatized air mail transport by opening bidding to private operators for routes formerly operated by the federal government. By allowing commercial interests to run existing national aviation routes and start new ones, the Kelly Act led to a series of expansions throughout the aviation industry. According to historian Deborah Douglas, "it heralded a significant turnaround in the attitudes of investors and marked the beginning of significant capital investment."<sup>88</sup> New funding in the fledgling aeronautics community buoyed the spirits of aviation supporters and the American aviation industry flourished.<sup>89</sup>

New commercial carriers had to ensure that the necessary infrastructure, including airports, was in place along their routes in order to be eligible to carry mail. The Kelly Act signaled a boom period in airport construction: "Now . . . it was not just Uncle Sam trying to cajole communities into building airports—but the airline companies as well."<sup>90</sup> The Post Office had previously spurred airport and landing field construction.<sup>91</sup> At least sixty cities and towns had established air mail stops by 1925 when the Kelly Act

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<sup>86</sup> Some historians, like Roger Bilstein, refer to it as the Kelly Bill. See Bilstein, 41.

<sup>87</sup> The Kelly Act (H.R. 7064) is reprinted in Henry Ladd Smith, "Appendix I: The First Air-Mail Law (Kelly Act) and Amendments," *Airways: The History of Commercial Aviation in the United States* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1944).

<sup>88</sup> Douglas, 50.

<sup>89</sup> Bilstein, 41.

<sup>90</sup> Douglas, 260.

<sup>91</sup> Janet R. Daly Bednarek, *America's Airports: Airfield Development, 1918-1947* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 6.

passed.<sup>92</sup> Forward-looking cities such as Atlanta established air fields in the hope that a mail route would follow.<sup>93</sup> The Kelly Act encouraged additional cities to establish permanent landing fields to secure a spot on one of the new routes.

A combination of factors motivated those who responded to both the Post Office's push for airports and the Kelly Act by establishing an airport. Joseph Corn argues that Americans believed in "the winged gospel." Adherents believed aviation held promises for the future and that the airplane could usher in a utopian society. These "airminded men and women sought ways to demonstrate their faith in the airplane, to convert others to that faith, and to promote aeronautics in whatever way possible."<sup>94</sup> In addition to this idealistic hope placed in aviation, the desire to be a forward-looking city motivated airport supporters. The Post Office's campaign for air fields "emphasized particularly the idea that airports were going to be essential to any city's ability to continue to grow and to compete with urban rivals."<sup>95</sup> City leaders, to secure the business and traffic that accompanied an air mail route, pushed to establish an airport in their city first.

Indianapolis city boosters started the process toward a public airport soon after the Kelly Act passed. In June of 1925, the *Indianapolis Star* announced that eight new routes would feed into the current system, and one of those routes would include an Indianapolis stop.<sup>96</sup> Directly below this announcement, another article reported that the Indianapolis

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<sup>92</sup> Douglas, 260.

<sup>93</sup> Betsy Braden and Paul Hagan, *A Dream Takes Flight: Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport and Aviation in Atlanta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press for Atlanta Historical Society, 1989), 27; Bednarek, 27.

<sup>94</sup> Joseph J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, rev. ed., 2002), 50.

<sup>95</sup> Bednarek, 10.

<sup>96</sup> "Post Office," *Indianapolis Star*, June 30, 1925.

Real Estate Board of Directors planned to raise \$25,000 for the establishment of an airport in Indianapolis.<sup>97</sup> The article drew on the competitive nature of cities by noting that several cities had already established airports, and an airport would connect Indianapolis to these locations. In the article, Henry T. Hottel, the executive secretary of the board, urged “all commercial and civic organizations to join [it] in backing the airport project.”<sup>98</sup> The Real Estate Board felt that an airport would support this cause and as a result increase its business.

The article suggested that the Real Estate Board’s call for a unified movement would be followed with creation of “a committee representative of commercial interests of the city.”<sup>99</sup> Several months later, the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce moved to take action on the issue of an airport. The Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce worked at the center of the business community and local clubs. When the Chamber had formed in 1912, it strived to “create a community that would be attractive to current and future business ventures.”<sup>100</sup> A membership campaign in the early 1920s led to a high of 6,000 individual members in the fall of 1926.<sup>101</sup> The Indianapolis Chamber ranked in the top ten chambers nationally in number of members and first in members per capita for the rest of the decade.<sup>102</sup> George Geib, in his history of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce’s first hundred years, notes that Chambers across the country experienced a golden age in the 1920s, when they received widespread support, respect, and

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<sup>97</sup> “Planning,” *Indianapolis Star*, June 30, 1925.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> Bednarek argues that while the earliest municipal airports came about by a variety of means, it was most commonly a local civic group or private individual acting in the city’s name. Bednarek, 30; “Planning,” *Indianapolis Star*, June 30, 1925.

<sup>100</sup> George W. Geib and Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, *Indianapolis First* (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, 1990), 7.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*



effectiveness. The Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce shared in this popularity and influenced changes in the city during the decade.<sup>103</sup> Its focus was not entirely on commercial promotion. The members of the Chamber saw civic boosterism as working in tandem with attracting businesses. According to Geib, “. . . the Chamber’s publications and programs were rich with the evidence of civic achievement.”<sup>104</sup>

The Chamber championed many transportation-related causes. In particular, the organization marketed and supported the use of the automobile.<sup>105</sup> Indianapolis prided itself on its rich history in transportation manufacturing. The city’s history as a transportation center began in the 1850s. Indianapolis became known as a hub for transportation as roads, railroads, and a canal converged in the city. When the first Union Station opened in Indianapolis, the city earned the nickname, “the Railroad City.”<sup>106</sup> This tradition continued at the turn of the century when a large number of interurbans transformed the city into the “Interurban Capital of the World.”<sup>107</sup> Like much of the Midwest, the city gravitated towards automobiles, and Indianapolis became a leader in automotive manufacturing in the 1920s.<sup>108</sup> The opportunity for an air mail route through the city presented an incentive to continue in this transportation tradition.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>106</sup> Ralph D. Gray, a professor of history and historian of early nineteenth century transportation history in Indiana, wrote the overview essay on transportation in the *Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*. Ralph D. Gray, “Transportation,” in *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 191.

<sup>107</sup> Interurbans were electric streetcars that were adapted to travel between cities. Ibid., 192.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>109</sup> John C. Teaford argues in his study of the American Midwest that dependence on the auto industry made cities of the Midwest vulnerable to the boom and bust of the volatile auto market. In this context, the Chamber’s effort to expand into a new field of transportation manufacturing perhaps was an attempt to diversify the city economy. Jon C. Teaford, *Cities of the Heartland: The Rise and Fall of the Industrial Midwest* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 81.

The Chamber's push to establish an airport presented itself as a logical next step in the city's history of transportation success.<sup>110</sup> On March 25, 1926, the Civic Affairs Committee of the Chamber met to hear from Felix M. McWhirter. McWhirter had been the president of the Peoples State Bank since 1915, a former Chamber of Commerce president, and member of the United States and International Chambers of Commerce.<sup>111</sup> He stated the need "for immediate action in securing a suitable landing field for the use of commercial and mailplanes which may be induced to include Indianapolis on their regularly scheduled routes."<sup>112</sup> The committee members planned to follow McWhirter's suggestion to use the infield of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway property as an airport under the supervision of the air squadron of the Indiana National Guard.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>The Chamber of Commerce argues that the city's past success in railroads and automobiles should transition easily into the next major transportation technology, aviation. For example, "Indianapolis On The Air Map," in the May 1926 Chamber of Commerce publication parallels Indianapolis's history as a rail transportation center with the development of an airport that would make aviation just as important to the city. The article also mentions the growing fame of the Indianapolis Speedway. Another article in the *Indianapolis Star* declared that Indianapolis "must have an airport in keeping with its importance as a transportation center." "Indianapolis on the Air Map," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 5 (May, 1926), 11; "Indiana Aviation," *Indianapolis Star*, Jan., 20, 1926.

<sup>111</sup> "Summer Lulls Lures Local Lads to Government," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 6 (June, 1927), 8; Paul Donald Brown, *Indianapolis Men of Affairs, 1923* (Indianapolis: American Biographical Society, 1923), s.v "Felix Marcus McWhirter," 433; *Indiana Biographical Series* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Commission on Public Records, 1996), s.v. "Felix M. McWhirter," 93: 86-87.

<sup>112</sup> Carl Fisher organized the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Company and completed the construction of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in 1909. In 1918, the U.S. Army built an aviation repair shop south of the track to repair all aircraft and engines east of the Mississippi and north of the Ohio rivers. The infield of the track served as an aviation field for the military during World War I. In 1920 the repair station was moved to Fairfield, Ohio, and merged with the Wilbur Wright repair depot. Donald Davidson, "Indianapolis Motor Speedway," in *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 793; Jerry Marlette, "Aviation," in *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, 280; "Aviation Depot Ordered Moved," *Indianapolis Star*, July 7, 1920; "Civic Affairs Committee, 1926," Mar. 25, 1926, Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce Collection, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>113</sup> "Civic Affairs Committee, 1926," Mar. 25, 1926, Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce Collection, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

The committee “was of one mind” that a landing field should be secured “with the least possible delay.”<sup>114</sup> They agreed that Indianapolis was long overdue for an airport and suggested that the Chamber of Commerce call together a meeting of the Board of Directors to consider the matter and form a special committee to carry forward the project. The committee’s minutes refer to a new Chamber of Commerce administration, with Nicholas Noyes as president, as an opportunity to move forward on this long-delayed issue.<sup>115</sup> Noyes was the president of the Creative Packaging Company, a division of the Eli Lilly & Company, and a director of Fletcher Trust Company and the Indianapolis Community Fund.<sup>116</sup> The Civic Affairs Committee took advantage of the Chamber’s change of leadership to push forward the time-sensitive need for an airport.

The Chamber of Commerce quickly took action on recommendations of the Civic Affairs Committee. President Noyes made clear that establishing an airport was “one of the most important tasks confronting the Chamber” due to the possibility of a commercial air stop in Indianapolis.<sup>117</sup> He quickly named a permanent Airport Committee and appointed Robert H. Bryson, Indianapolis Postmaster, as the head.<sup>118</sup> The close

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> “Nicholas H. Noyes is elected President for the year 1926,” Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 1 (Jan., 1926), 1; “Civic Affairs Committee, 1926,” Mar. 25, 1926, Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce Collection, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>116</sup> In 1909, Noyes married the niece of Col. Eli Lilly, founder of the Lilly firm. He began as a clerk and accountant for the Lilly Company, and in 1913 he became purchasing agent. In 1919, Noyes recommended that Lilly Company buy a paper company, and he was elected the first president of Creative Packaging Company, a division of Lilly. He also served on the board of directors of Eli Lilly & Co. beginning in 1913. Noyes was a director of the Fletcher Trust Company from 1921 to 1933. He also directed the Indianapolis United Way Fund for twenty years beginning in 1923. *Indiana Biographical Series*, s.v. “Nicholas Noyes,” 87: 14-15.

<sup>117</sup> “President Names Bryson Head of Airport Group,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 4 (Apr., 1926): 19.

<sup>118</sup> Bryson was the city’s postmaster from 1908 until 1913 and served again from 1922 to 1932. His father and grandfather had been steamboat captains, and Bryson began his career from 1883 to 1908 working as agent for transportation companies. He also served on the Indianapolis Board

relationship between the post office and aviation at the time gave Bryson an interest in the development of an airport.<sup>119</sup> The committee included: J.A. Goodman, the founder of Real Silk Hosiery Mills in 1920; Robert H. Hassler, the president and manager of one of the largest manufacturers of automobile shock absorbers; L.C. Huesmann, the former vice president of the Chamber and the president of the Central Supply Company, a plumbing supply company that he founded in 1902; Joseph C. Schaf, whose career included running brewing companies and Indianapolis hotels; and Elmer W. Stout, a graduate of Harvard Law School and the president of Fletcher American National Bank.<sup>120</sup> Also named to the committee as ex officio members were: William Fortune, the chairman of the Civic Affairs Committee who had led several successful movements to improve transportation in Indiana; G. M. Williams, the chairman of the Manufacturers Committee; and Harry Reid, the chairman of the New Industries Committee and the president of the Interstate Public Service Company.<sup>121</sup> These men served on the boards and as members of numerous organizations throughout the city, state, and country. Their influence extended from bowling leagues to children's hospitals and religious

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of Public Safety (1901-1903), deputy sheriff of Marion County (1905-1918), and City Controller of Indianapolis (1918-1922). "President Names Bryson Head of Airport Group," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 4 (Apr., 1926): 19; Brown, s.v. "Robert Hamilton Bryson," 87.

<sup>119</sup> The article announcing his appointment states that Bryson had long been interested in the establishment of an air mail landing field. "President Names Bryson Head of Airport Group," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 4 (Apr., 1926): 19.

<sup>120</sup> *Indiana Biography Series*, s.v. "J.A. Goodman" 34: 96, 105; Brown, s.v. "Robert Hassler," 265; *Indiana Biography Series* "L.C. Huesmann" 2:175-176; Brown, s.v. "Joseph Schaf," 543; *Indiana Biography Series*, s.v. "Joespeh Schaf" 12: 118; Brown, s.v. "Elmer Stout," 589; *Indiana Biography Series*, "Elmer Stout," 55: 55; "President Names Bryson Head of Airport Group," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 4 (Apr., 1926): 19.

<sup>121</sup> "President Names Bryson Head of Airport Group," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 4 (Apr., 1926): 19; Brown, s.v. "William Fortune," 207; *Indianapolis Biography Series*, s.v. "William Fortune," 2: 188-191; Brown, s.v. "Harry Reid," 522.

organizations. They all had significant interest and investment in Indianapolis businesses and several, like Hassler, Fortune, and Reid, had close ties with transportation industries.

The newly formed committee quickly followed up on McWhirter's suggestion of using the infield of Indianapolis Motor Speedway. This plan appealed to the Speedway owners who would gain the revenue for land otherwise unused for much of the year.<sup>122</sup> Other airports in the country were already located within racetracks.<sup>123</sup> The first major published work on aviation public policy and the design of ground facilities, *Municipal Landing Fields and Airports* (1920), noted that many cities had converted racetracks into landing fields.<sup>124</sup> The Indianapolis Motor Speedway had served as a military testing and landing site during World War I.<sup>125</sup> When approached about the possibility of again using the Speedway for aviation, majority owners, Carl G. Fisher and James A. Allison, agreed that the Chamber could establish an airport on the northeast portion of the infield of the famous racetrack as long as it ceased operation once a year for the annual Memorial Day races.<sup>126</sup> To lease the property the Airport Committee formed the non-profit Indianapolis Airport Corporation primarily made up of the members of the Airport Committee.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> "President Names Bryson Head of Airport Group," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 4 (Apr., 1926): 19.

<sup>123</sup> For example, in New York, Belmont Park racetrack served as an airport beginning in 1918 and Atlanta's airport began on the grounds of a racetrack. Douglas, 216; Braden and Hagan, 5.

<sup>124</sup> Airport historian David Brodherson notes the significance of this work in "What Can't Go Up Can't Come Down: The History of American Airport Policy, Planning and Design" (diss., Cornell University, 1993), 210. The chapter in *Municipal Landing Fields* on "How to Construct a Field" was written by Lieutenant F. O. Carroll, Landing Field Officer, Army Air Service. George Seay Wheat, *Municipal Landing Fields and Air Ports; with Chapters by the Chief of the Army Air Service, the Director of Naval Aviation, and Their Officers in Charge of Landing Field Operations* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1920), 10.

<sup>125</sup> "Motor Speedway Use for Airport Assured," *Indianapolis News*, Apr. 13, 1926.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> The Indianapolis Airport Corporation incorporated on April 20, 1926. The Articles of Incorporation laid out their purpose to ". . . encourage, aid and procure the establishment of the city of Indianapolis as a regular airport on an established transport and communication line, by air . . ." In order to fulfill this goal, the corporation could borrow money, secure payment on

With a commitment for the land, the Airport Corporation next sought a user and manager of the field. They negotiated with the 113th Observation Squadron of the Indiana National Guard to relocate from their base in Kokomo to the planned airport.<sup>128</sup> The Guard would control and manage the new airport, and in return would gain better access to local resources, such as personnel.<sup>129</sup> In addition, the Guard's equipment and hangers would be moved to the new airport. The Corporation believed that with the Guard in control of the airport, expenditures would not exceed revenue.<sup>130</sup> Within a matter of months the Chamber of Commerce had secured a location—the Speedway—and a manager—the National Guard. Still, funds needed to be raised to move the National Guard's equipment. The Airport Corporation sold shares of \$10 in order to raise the

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property, to gain funds for the purpose of the organization, to rent, lease, purchase, hold, and sell property, and to erect buildings. According to the *Indianapolis News* this nonprofit was “Formed solely for the purpose of taking advantage of an offer of free use of the Speedway . . . .” The initial corporation dissolved just two months later. Most likely the corporation reincorporated immediately after with new terms. However, the Indiana State Archives does not have record of another corporation with that name. The Airport Corporation continues to be referenced in publications through 1927. At the time of initial incorporation, the Indianapolis Airport Corporation included all of the members of the Airport Committee and Felix McWhirter, Nicholas Noyes, Harry E. Daugherty, and T.E. Myers. This group altered slightly after the initial corporation dissolved. A piece of letterhead for the corporation located in the Chamber of Commerce Collection at the Indiana Historical Society lists the directors as Samuel Ashby, Robert Bryson, J.A. Goodman, Leonard V. Harrison, Felix McWhirter, Nicholas Noyes, and Elmer Stout. J.A. Goodman was the president, Robert Bryson was the vice-president, Elmer Stout was the treasurer, Leonard Harrison was the secretary, and Paul H. Moore was the assistant secretary. “Articles of Incorporation of Indianapolis Airport Corporation,” April 20, 1926, Indianapolis Airport Corporation, Incorporation Files, Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis, Indiana; “Certificate of Final Dissolution of Indianapolis Airport Corporation,” June 11, 1926, Indianapolis Airport Corporation, Incorporation Files, Indiana State Archives, Indianapolis, Indiana; Letterhead “Indianapolis Airport Corporation, Chamber of Commerce Building, Indianapolis,” Chamber of Commerce Collection, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>128</sup> “Incorporation Papers for Airport are Filed,” *Indianapolis News*, Apr. 20, 1926. In 1921, the squadron had been established in Kokomo. See “Indiana’s Squadron of Soldiers of the Sky to Have Headquarters at Kokomo Flying Field,” *Indianapolis News*, Jan. 22, 1921.

<sup>129</sup> “Incorporation Papers for Airport are Filed,” *Indianapolis News*, Apr. 20, 1926.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

\$20,000 needed.<sup>131</sup> Local organizations and individuals purchased the stock with the understanding that the money was to be used by the Corporation for an airport “and that the stock was valueless, but in case any revenue was derived from the field in the future, the Corporation would pay stockholders dividends up to the amount of their stock.”<sup>132</sup> The Corporation planned a dedication ceremony once the deals had been finalized. The admission fee for the event would “be applied toward the repayment of advances of interested citizens who have subscribed to airport common stock, the remainder to be paid back out of earnings from the operation of the port.”<sup>133</sup>

Before the plans for the dedication could be carried out, negotiations with the owners of the Speedway fell through. The lease offered by the owners of the Speedway included a clause that required the airport to vacate the Speedway on six months’ notice. In addition, the Airport Corporation had struggled to find indemnity insurance that would protect the Speedway owners.<sup>134</sup> Despite the hype that the Chamber had already built around the Speedway, the Airport Corporation quickly changed plans and switched the location for the new air field.<sup>135</sup> In October 1926 the Airport Corporation leased 234

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<sup>131</sup> “‘Airplane Cross-Roads of Nation’ Is Workers’ Slogan,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 6 (June, 1926): 5; “Airport Workers Are Rewarded with Success,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 7 (July, 1926): 5.

<sup>132</sup> “Aviation Committee,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 12 (Dec., 1927): 15.

<sup>133</sup> “Airport Workers Are Rewarded with Success,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 7 (July, 1926): 5.

<sup>134</sup> “City Airport will be established at once,” *Indianapolis News*, Oct. 2, 1926.

<sup>135</sup> The last mention of the Speedway airport being constructed is in “Airport Workers Are Rewarded with Success,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 7 (July, 1926): 5. The airport project is not mentioned again until October: “Airport Corporation Leases Tract for Landing Field,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 10 (Oct., 1926): 10. Most likely in August and September the negotiations with the Speedway owners fell through, and the Airport Corporation chose the new location.

acres in an area on the southwest side of Indianapolis known as Mars Hill.<sup>136</sup> The National Guard and all of its equipment would still relocate to manage the Mars Hill airport, and the stock proceeds went toward the lease, development, and relocation of equipment.<sup>137</sup> Despite the kink in the original plans, the Airport Corporation and the Chamber of Commerce pushed forward quickly and began developing the field in November 1926.<sup>138</sup> The Airport Corporation intended both the planned Speedway airport and the new Mars Hill airport to fulfill the Chamber members' goals of boosting Indianapolis.

### *Promotion and Rhetoric*

To gather support for the new airport, the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce and the Airport Corporation used rhetoric that connected the airport with the city. Their promotional efforts occurred while they planned the Speedway airport and continued to be applied when they built the airport at Mars Hill instead. Keeping with the Chamber's underlying goal of boosting Indianapolis nationally, the promotion of the proposed

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<sup>136</sup> The farmland was 234 acres and was bordered on the east by Holt Avenue and on the north by Minnesota Street. The land was leased for ten years with a ten-year option to buy "at a price which was considered very reasonable." James W. Hurt of the Industrial Development Company negotiated with the Airport Corporation for the lease of 142.157 acres. Hurt also helped with the leasing of 42.6 acres from Mr. and Mrs. Charles Shafhauser and 50 acres from Medora Hoover and Alma Hoover Negley. "City Airport will be established at once," *Indianapolis News*, Oct. 2, 1926; "Aviation Committee," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 12 (Dec., 1927): 15; "Airport Corporation Leases Tract for Landing Field," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 10 (Oct., 1926): 23.

<sup>137</sup> I did not find any descriptions of the plans for the proposed Speedway airport or Mars Hill airport beyond the relocation of the National Guard equipment. The only change I noted in their plans with the new location was the need to clear and prepare the Mars Hill land. "Airport Corporation Leases Tract for Landing Field," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 10 (Oct., 1926): 10; "Aviation Committee," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 12 (Dec., 1927): 15.

<sup>138</sup> "Aviation Committee," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 12 (Dec., 1927): 15.



airport drew from traditional booster rhetoric; city competition and Indianapolis superiority formed the foundation of the three interconnected messages I identify in the Chamber's promotion to Indianapolis citizens. These three thematic messages influenced all of the Chamber's promotion, from speeches to cartoons to events. First, the boosters used Indianapolis's history as a transportation hub to argue that it was the city's destiny or rightful place to be a center of aviation. Second, boosters argued that an airport was necessary to advance as a city and remain competitive with other cities. This theme implied that "no better" city than Indianapolis existed for an aviation center. Third, boosters argued that Indianapolis's geographical location made it the "crossroads of the air." Indianapolis boosters used these three themes to drive airport development.

The Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce's monthly publication clearly presents the three themes.<sup>139</sup> The city's history of transportation industries is connected repeatedly with the city's future relationship with aviation. A June 1926 article on the progress of the airport demonstrates the typical language: "The city of Indianapolis, which has grown to a position of preeminence in railroad transportation, will take its rightful place in the 'air' if the present plans of the airport committee of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce are successfully carried out."<sup>140</sup> By presenting the airport as an extension of

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<sup>139</sup> The monthly publication of the Chamber of Commerce was geared toward local businessmen and businesses. A letter by Chamber President Noyes in the January 1926 issue chides businesses which "are willing to accept the benefits which come from the work being done by the Chamber of Commerce without becoming members." However, he says that he believes the number of non-member businesses in the city is very small: "The average man wants to pay his way." In addition, the January issue lists new members who work at local companies. See "Statement by Nicholas H. Noyes, President, Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 1 (Jan., 1926): 11.

<sup>140</sup> "'Airplane Cross-Roads of Nation' Is Workers' Slogan," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 6 (June, 1926): 5.

the success of Indianapolis's railroad development, the Chamber equated continued transportation excellence with a city airport.

In addition to the first theme of transportation history, the Chamber appealed to the competitive nature of American cities.<sup>141</sup> An airport stock advertisement in the June issue of the *Activities* illustrates this recurring rhetorical message. The ad begins in a large font declaring, "We Must Not Fail!" The text repeatedly emphasizes that the \$20,000 required is only a small portion of what other cities are spending for airports. In addition, it implies that without an airport, Indianapolis will be stuck in the past: "Cities which HAVE accredited airports are BOUND to be favored by the government in mapping out its air mail routes. Are we to be included, or is our city to be regarded as just another stop on the railroad?"<sup>142</sup> An article written by Chamber member and local attorney Harvey Hartsock on the merits of Indianapolis as an aviation center ends with a call to action centered on city competition: "Indianapolis should awaken to her opportunities in aviation while it is yet time, Detroit and Dayton already are striving to gain mastery in this field. Within the next few months other cities will, by organized effort, be trying to attract or create aviation companies. It is high time that all those interested in the new era should have their attention drawn to Indianapolis, and be

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<sup>141</sup> Daniel Boorstin argues that in boosters' quests to attract businesses and residents, competition rose with comparable cities for their attention. Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Random House, 1965), 161-168.

<sup>142</sup> I found no reference in my primary or secondary sources to an "accredited" airport. For example, the *Aircraft Year Book* for 1926, published yearly by the Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce — the "national trade organization for all the activities of the aircraft industry"— makes no mention in 1926 in the chapter on airports of an accreditation system. "We Must Not Fail!," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 6 (June, 1926): 12-13; Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce of America, Inc., *Aircraft Year Book 1926* (New York, 1926), 67-70.

furnished with information as to its advantages.”<sup>143</sup> The opportunity to be a leading city in aviation served as a primary motivation for the boosters’ push to establish an airport and a key component of their rhetoric.

The third theme I identify in the Chamber’s promotion of the airport emphasizes the centrality of Indianapolis in the nation. This geographic theme built on the previous two themes of rightful place and city superiority. The campaign to establish an airport at the Speedway coincided with the marketing of Indianapolis as “The Cross-roads of America.” In mid-1926, the Publicity Committee of the Chamber of Commerce chose this phrase as the slogan for Indianapolis and planned to use it in national advertising.<sup>144</sup> The choice of this slogan built on the boosters’ long-time promotion of the centrality of Indianapolis to road and rail service and represented what the city wished to become.<sup>145</sup> The Chamber considered aviation to be another way in which the city would fulfill its slogan. Establishment of an airport was the first step in that process. “Indianapolis has added another claim to this distinction, for the city is ideally located for air traffic and boasts a position excellent for air depot maintenance, since the east-and-west and the

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<sup>143</sup> Local lawyer Harvey Hartsock was an active member of the Chamber of Commerce. Hartsock was on the New Industries Committee in 1926. “City’s Advantages in Air Travel Development Are Cited,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 6 (June, 1926): 17; “Committee Members for 1926,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 2 (Feb. 1926): 23.

<sup>144</sup> “Slogan for City Chosen by Publicity Committee,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 7 (July, 1926): 19. Eleven years later the state government adopted “The Crossroads of America” as the slogan for the entire state. See Deborah B. Markisohn, “Slogans and Nicknames,” in *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 1267.

<sup>145</sup> In Carl Abbott’s work on boosters of the antebellum Midwest, he argues that Indianapolis boosters traditionally promoted the city based on Indianapolis’s central location. Carl Abbott, *Boosters and Businessmen: Popular Economic Thought and Urban Growth in the Antebellum Middle West* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 172.

north-south lanes of air travel naturally will converge in the Hoosier capital.”<sup>146</sup> Hartsock also pointed to the centrality of Indianapolis to justify his vision of Indianapolis as an air center. “Indianapolis is centrally situated with respect to the entire nation as it is with respect to the state, and this is the fact that should be most widely published. As a station in the line of transcontinental air traffic, Indianapolis has been most fortunately placed.”<sup>147</sup> In the eyes of boosters, Indianapolis’s central position would make it an ideal location for aviation related industries as well as a stop for commercial routes.

The airport boosters’ campaign also included planned events in addition to published articles. These events drew attendees with the appeal of celebrity or adventure and then shared the core themes based on transportation history, competition, and geographic location. For example, in order to sell the stock for the National Guard move to the Speedway airport, the Chamber hosted a series of lunches and dinners.<sup>148</sup> The sale of stock to 143 men and 104 businesses brought in \$20,000. The four largest supporters were the Merchant’s Association, the Indianapolis Clearing House Association, Eli Lilly & Company, and Real Silk Hosiery Mills.<sup>149</sup> As was the case around the nation, the infant nature of aviation in Indianapolis made this local support crucial to the success of an airport project.

The Chamber also promised an elaborate dedication to commemorate the “opening of the cross-roads airport of America” that they hoped would attract both locals

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<sup>146</sup> “Slogan for City Chosen by Publicity Committee,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 7 (July, 1926): 19.

<sup>147</sup> “City’s Advantages in Air Travel Development Are Cited,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 6 (June, 1926): 14.

<sup>148</sup> “Airport Workers Are Rewarded with Success,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 7 (July, 1926): 5.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

and outsiders.<sup>150</sup> The plans included inviting notable national guests, featuring aviation displays, and firing the governor's salute. The ticket sales of the dedication would help to pay back the airport stockholders. Dedications were one of the few times airports could capture newspaper headlines.<sup>151</sup> An elaborate dedication ceremony would attract the attention of Indianapolis citizens and the nation to the aviation advantages of the city. Although this dedication never took place, the initial plans reveal the boosters' strategy of using events to attract attention.

While the Chamber solicited local support for the airport, the organization also marketed the city to the nation as an emerging aviation center. As the promotional activities of the Chamber led to airport development, the Chamber started to boost the city to the aviation industry. I argue that this boosterism aimed beyond the city also had three central themes. First, the location of the airport to the city and terrain made it an ideal spot for aviation activities. Second, the new development at the Mars Hill airport was an ideal center for aviation industries. Finally, the third theme echoed the third argument to citizens: Indianapolis's central location at the crossroads of America made it an ideal location. While at times the arguments overlapped, these three themes used the airport developments to boost Indianapolis to national aviation companies.<sup>152</sup>

The Chamber's transformation of Indianapolis into a center of aviation began with landing a spot on a commercial aviation route. The Airport Corporation strove to develop an airport that a new commercial carrier would find attractive. The hasty first attempt to please these airlines faltered when the Airport Corporation recognized that the

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Bednarek, 71.

<sup>152</sup> The three themes used to appeal to outside investors did not develop until the construction of the Municipal Airport from 1929 to 1931. Hints of this national promotion are present during the Mars Hill development.

Speedway airport would not appeal to their target audience. The Speedway owners' condition of six months' notice to leave failed a necessary requirement of an air mail stop: its airport had to be permanent.<sup>153</sup> In addition, an airport at the Speedway would have had no room to expand, and it could not operate on race day. The decision not to lease the infield of the Speedway demonstrated one of the ways the Corporation catered to this national audience. Both the hasty plan to build at the Speedway and the quick decision to build at Mars Hill demonstrated the boosters' desire to attract national airlines.

Indianapolis boosters' theme of an excellent location of the airport in the metropolitan area hit on one of the national trends in airport development. Nationally, airports located closer to the city and with a connection to its business district had more value. David Brodherson demonstrates that many early airport designers and planners envisioned an airport integrated into the heart of a city. He shows that manuals and guides that appeared in the late 1920s took this utopian dream and applied it practically by urging connection to the center of town via other forms of transportation.<sup>154</sup> Deborah Douglas also notes the nationwide requirement of a successful airport to be near the center of a city: "This fact was known to airport planners as was evidenced by the nearly ubiquitous reference to the number of minutes a given airport was from the city's post office. As airlines expanded their operations to include carrying passengers, that statistic was generalized to 'minutes from the business district or city hall.'"<sup>155</sup> Donald Duke's 1927 manual, *Airports and Airways: Cost, Operation and Maintenance*, shows the

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<sup>153</sup> "Airport Corporation Leases Tract for Landing Field," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 10 (Oct., 1926): 10.

<sup>154</sup> Brodherson, 122.

<sup>155</sup> Douglas, 285.

importance given to airport location: "The location of an airport, to a great extent, determines its value--convenience and accessibility to the business district being the governing factors."<sup>156</sup>

When the Real Estate Board in Indianapolis initially declared its intentions to support an airport, the Board made it clear that, "An airport field to be of most value should be located as close to the city as possible and in reach of adequate surface transportation facilities."<sup>157</sup> The Mars Hill location met the criteria of being closely connected to the heart of the city; the plot was located near city streetcar lines, the Pennsylvania Railroad, and bus and truck routes. With these connections, the Chamber declared, "[The airport's] accessibility to the city places it in a foremost position among leading airports of the country."<sup>158</sup> The location of the Mars Hill airport positioned Indianapolis to have a highly regarded airport because of its accessibility to and from the city center. Boosters hoped this convenience would appeal to their national audience.

The airport boosters also solicited positive opinions beyond Indianapolis to support both their promotion to citizens and the aviation industry. At the time of the lease of the Mars Hill property, Floyd Bennett visited as part of the Guggenheim Fund for the Promotion of Aviation. Bennett had piloted the plane, *Josephine Ford*, with explorer Richard Byrd to the North Pole.<sup>159</sup> This celebrated feat of aviation made Bennett an authority on aviation in the eyes of the public. Joseph Corn demonstrates how Americans

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<sup>156</sup> Donald G. Duke, *Airports and Airways: Cost, Operation and Maintenance* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1927), 12.

<sup>157</sup> "Planning," *Indianapolis Star*, June 20, 1925.

<sup>158</sup> "Airport Corporation Leases Tract for Landing Field," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 10 (Oct., 1926): 10; "Postmaster Bryson Cites Postal Advantages of City," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 10 (Oct., 1926): 20.

<sup>159</sup> "City's Welcome Is Extended Polar Flyers," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 10 (Oct., 1926): 23.

revered “each ‘first’ or record [that] confirmed the seeming miraculousness of flight and inspired greater awe and wonder.”<sup>160</sup> Support of a national figure like Bennett would impress local citizens and had the potential to bring the airport and Indianapolis to the attention of the nation. As construction got under way on the Mars Hill field, the Chamber quoted Bennett in an article explaining progress on the new airport. According to this article, the famous pilot said “this will be one of the few best airports in the United States.”<sup>161</sup> Bennett’s praise of the airport supported the second theme to the national audience that used the airport development to attract businesses. Having a nationally known aviator declare that Indianapolis would have one of the best airports in the nation lent credibility to the boosters’ promise of Indianapolis’s aviation superiority.

The press release following the lease of the Mars Hill property exhibits the interconnected promotional messages aimed at the Indianapolis population and the national airlines. Printed in both the October 1926 *Activities of the Chamber of Commerce* and in the October 2 *Indianapolis News*, the article featured several city leaders reassuring readers that the new airport would still accomplish all that they had promised of the Speedway airport.<sup>162</sup> J. A. Goodman, the president of the Airport Corporation, explained the need to switch from the Speedway to Mars Hill: “We must make our Indianapolis Airport a permanent institution.”<sup>163</sup> Robert Bryson, postmaster and the chairman of the Chamber’s Airport Committee, drew on the crossroads theme and the

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<sup>160</sup> Corn, *Winged Gospel*, 10.

<sup>161</sup> “Airport Hangars to Be Finished December Thirty-First,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 12 (Dec., 1926): 10.

<sup>162</sup> “Airport Corporation Leases Tract for Landing Field,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 10 (Oct., 1926): 10; “City Airport Will Be Established At Once,” *Indianapolis News*, Oct. 2, 1926

<sup>163</sup> “Airport Corporation Leases Tract for Landing Field,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 10 (Oct., 1926): 10.



desire to attract commercial aviation: “At the Cross Roads of America, our city commands a location which will render our airport invaluable in the establishment of mail and commercial air routes throughout the United States . . . we shall soon find ourselves in a most commanding position on the nation’s air line.”<sup>164</sup> Chamber President Nicholas Noyes also weighed in and drew on transportation history and the competition between cities: “Already a leading rail and traction center, as well as a growing center for bus and automobile traffic, Indianapolis has added a new link which will bring distinction and airplane facilities equal to the best and far superior to those of any city of equal size.”<sup>165</sup> The rhetoric of these local boosters promoted the Indianapolis airport to both the city and the nation and promised a future for the city as an aviation center.

While the boosters succeeded in promoting the airport to Indianapolis and carried through with their plans, their appeal to national airlines fell short. Development of the land for the airport began in November 1926. By the end of the year, the National Guard had moved its hangars and equipment from Kokomo, and the airport was in use.<sup>166</sup> The Chamber article reporting on airport progress at the end of the year mentions plans for building a radio station, a floodlight system, and a joint hospital, office, and ambulance garage in the future.<sup>167</sup> In December 1926, when the airport was taking shape, the Chamber had alluded to staging the promised formal dedication in the spring. However, the first several issues of the *Activities* in 1927 made no mention of a dedication and

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> “Airport Hangars to Be Finished December Thirty-First,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 39, no. 12 (Dec. 1926): 10.

<sup>167</sup> In February 1927, the Airport Corporation formally named the flying field Linton J. Cox, Jr. Field in honor of a member of the Aero Pursuit Squadron who had helped locate a field for Indianapolis before his death in 1925. After this dedication the airport at times was referred to as “Cox Field” but most often was still referred to as the Mars Hill airport. Ibid.; “Air Field Name,” *Indianapolis News*, Feb. 1, 1927.

barely mentioned the airport. Only a passing mention that the Chamber saw the potential for the field to “materially boost the city as an air center,” indicated the Chamber’s continued interest.<sup>168</sup>

In contrast to the elaborate dedication ceremony promised when the stock was sold during the summer of 1926, the establishment of Cox Field passed with little fanfare. There is no indication in the pages of the *Activities* as to why the dedication plans were dropped. Most likely political upheaval during the end of 1926 and beginning of 1927 contributed to the lack of fanfare. After receiving a life sentence for second degree murder in November 1925, Ku Klux Klan leader D.C. Stephenson exposed political corruption in Indianapolis city government during 1926. By fall 1927, Indianapolis Mayor John L. Duvall was convicted for taking bribes, and six city councilmen were also ousted.<sup>169</sup> The failure to celebrate the opening of the first commercial airport in Indianapolis foreshadowed changes in the city following this political turmoil.

### *A Change in Attitude*

In May of 1927, Indianapolis citizens suddenly grew much more interested in aviation and the future of their city as an aviation hub. On May 20, 1927, Charles Lindbergh took off on a solo flight from Long Island, New York, and landed 33 hours later in France. This solo flight threw the American public into an aviation frenzy: “That the aviation world was ecstatic is not surprising but the phenomenal public adulation

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<sup>168</sup> “How the Program Will Operate,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 40, no. 4 (Apr., 1927): 6.

<sup>169</sup> M. William Lutholtz, *Grand Dragon: D.C. Stephenson and the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1991), 306-307.

which followed exceeded every hyperbole.”<sup>170</sup> Previous records had been celebrated, but the response to Lindbergh’s flight prompted an extraordinary reaction in every aspect of American culture.<sup>171</sup> Americans saw this pioneering flight as a symbol of the progress and promise of aviation.<sup>172</sup> The response to Lindbergh’s flight has fascinated scholars ever since. Aviation historians such as Bilstein and Douglas credit Lindbergh’s popular achievement with convincing Americans of aviation’s success.<sup>173</sup> Other historians dispute this claim. In his account of the religious attitude Americans had toward aviation, Joseph Corn asserts that “Lindbergh’s flight did not create air-mindedness, nor did it significantly alter the way Americans thought about flying.”<sup>174</sup> My interpretation parallels Janet Bednarek’s: “Lindbergh’s feat fanned the flames of aviation enthusiasm all over the United States.”<sup>175</sup> The famous flight reinvigorated and widened the wonder and excitement of Indianapolis citizens for the future of aviation. This fervor prompted investments and aviation developments across the country. In particular, the number of cities building airports rapidly increased. Douglas demonstrates how Lindbergh’s popularity sparked an explosive growth in airport construction.<sup>176</sup> Bednarek agrees that

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<sup>170</sup> Douglas, 97.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.; Corn, *Winged Gospel*, 22. Joseph Corn describes what made America’s reaction to Lindbergh extraordinary: “Previous aeronautical achievement had prompted similar ones [responses]. What distinguished the response to Lindbergh were its scope and intensity—and its persistence. Other fliers became heroes for a day so to speak but then faded from popular memory.”

<sup>172</sup> Bilstein, 49.

<sup>173</sup> Douglas, 98; Bilstein, 49.

<sup>174</sup> Karsner counters Corn’s argument: “Historians like Joseph Corn and Richard Smith who assert that Lindbergh’s influence is overrated forget that the Lone Eagle did more than make a dramatic solo flight across the Atlantic in 1928.” Corn, *The Winged Gospel*, 26; Douglas G. Karsner, “Leaving on a Jet Plane: Commercial Aviation, Airports and Post-Industrial American Society, 1933-1970” (diss., Temple University, 1993), 10.

<sup>175</sup> Bednarek, 8.

<sup>176</sup> Douglas, 292.

Lindbergh's popularity significantly spurred the establishment of municipal airports.<sup>177</sup>

The solitary flight of Charles Lindbergh catalyzed the aviation industry with consequences that echoed for years to come.

In contrast to the scant aviation coverage during the first half of the year, the June 1927 edition of the *Activities* began with four pages of articles about aviation in Indianapolis.<sup>178</sup> This sudden increase in interest in aviation came as a direct result of Lindbergh's successful flight and the resulting popularity of aviation in American culture. In addition to the articles about the city's aviation efforts, two Indianapolis aviation companies incorporated in the months following Lindbergh's flight.<sup>179</sup> The Chamber article introducing these new companies credits the Lindbergh craze with inspiring these new developments: "In the great wave of enthusiasm for aerial transportation following the world famous flight by Colonel Lindbergh, numerous aviation projects have sprung up over night."<sup>180</sup> The legendary flight of Charles Lindbergh served as a sign to Indianapolis, and to the nation, that aviation had a strong and vibrant future.

The renewed interest in establishing aviation superiority thrust the Mars Hill airport back into the spotlight. While boosters who had led the campaign to build the airport took pride in the fact that Indianapolis had an airport, the renewed discussion of

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<sup>177</sup> Bednarek, 41–42.

<sup>178</sup> Prior to June, the May 1927 *Activities* included the most coverage of aviation of any issue that year with a half page article on aviation out of 22 pages. The June 1927 issue devoted four pages and photographs to discussing aviation in the city.

<sup>179</sup> Central Airways filed for incorporation on June 23 and planned to transport passengers, freight, and mail between Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis, Cleveland, and Louisville. Of the seven directors of Central Airways, six were directors of the Chamber of Commerce and three of them had formerly served as the president of the Chamber. In addition, Midwest Aircraft Company formed to serve between Indianapolis and Detroit. See "Definite Progress Already Made Here in Aerial Promotion," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 7 (June, 1927): 7.

<sup>180</sup> "Definite Progress Already Made Here in Aerial Promotion," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 7 (June, 1927): 7.

the new field found it wanting. Articles in the Chamber's June 1927 publication reveal the tension between this pride and the reality of the airport. Paul Moore, the secretary of the Airport Corporation, asserted that "Indianapolis finally has been recognized as having one of the best airports in the United States."<sup>181</sup> However, he hinted that without additional attention given to aviation in the city, "Indianapolis will find itself entirely off future routes."<sup>182</sup> Another article in the same issue of the Chamber periodical argued the airport required "considerable and immediate investment of time and money on the part of Indianapolis business men" to furnish the airport with additional hangars, a machine shop and infrastructure to make it useful for commercial aviation.<sup>183</sup>

National personalities who visited the city added weight to this acknowledgment that the Mars Hill airport would not propel Indianapolis to aviation stardom without significant investment. In June, Major Herbert Dargue, "commander of the recent good will flight to Latin-American countries," visited the city and inspected the airport. Although the major praised the airport's location, his evaluation "contained elements of condemnation and rebuke."<sup>184</sup> While the airport made "an ideal landing field," it did not have facilities for handling commercial planes, despite the boosters' original intentions.

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<sup>181</sup> Paul Moore became very active in the establishment of an airport in Indianapolis at this time. An article from 1928 notes that he had researched equipment and sites for the Mars Hill airport in his role as secretary of the Indianapolis Airport Corporation. His scrapbook at the Indiana State Library Rare Book and Manuscript Collection includes pictures of the construction of the Mars Hill airport (Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection, L456, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana). Paul H. Moore, "Indianapolis as An Air Center: Local Advantages Undisputed— Development Assured," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 8 (June, 1927): 6; "Airport Finance Body Appointed," *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 18, 1928;

<sup>182</sup> Paul H. Moore, "Indianapolis as An Air Center: Local Advantages Undisputed— Development Assured," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 8 (June 1927): 6.

<sup>183</sup> No author is listed for this article. "Definite Progress Already Made Here in Aerial Promotion," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 7 (June, 1927): 7.

<sup>184</sup> "The Indianapolis Airport," *Indianapolis Star*, June 15, 1927.

The *Indianapolis Star* added that this criticism, “coming from a flier of such prominence” should encourage businessmen to make added investments in the field.<sup>185</sup> William P. MacCracken, Aeronautical Secretary of the United States Department of Commerce, echoed the call for added interest and investment to turn Indianapolis into “one of the future air centers of the country.”<sup>186</sup> The praise of both men on the ideal central location and landing conditions in Indianapolis provided hope that with more investment the city could be an aviation center.

All of the aviation articles at this time appealed to local businessmen. The original boosters of the airport had found that their initial hopes of an aviation center would require much more investment than the \$20,000 raised to establish the Mars Hill field. Airports across the country faced the problem of funding: “Cities needed more than boosterism and advice to build airports.”<sup>187</sup> In their urgency and enthusiasm, Indianapolis boosters had underestimated the costs associated with a first-class airport. Although there had been some planning and consideration, most boosters had wanted Indianapolis to be known as one of the first cities to have a commercial aviation stop. The process of selecting a site and developing the airport had taken place within a year. Long-term use of the airport and consideration of the future needs of the city did not often factor into the process. If Indianapolis boosters wanted to deliver on their promise of aviation superiority, a new wave of development had to be undertaken.

The process of building the first commercial airport in Indianapolis connected the future of the airport with city boosters’ hopes for the city. The Chamber of Commerce

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Paul H. Moore, “Indianapolis as An Air Center: Local Advantages Undisputed—Development Assured,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 8 (June, 1927): 6.

<sup>187</sup> Douglas, 73.

responded to privatization of air mail by boosting the city through development of an airport. To raise support the boosters successfully promoted the project to Chamber members using rhetorical themes based on the city's transportation history, competition with other cities, and its central location. This promotion resulted in the Mars Hill airport. Boosters used the new airport's location and superiority, as well as the city's central location, to boost the city to aviation industries. Although this external promotion yielded few initial results, it paved the way for future developments. The rhetoric used by the Chamber of Commerce boosters would continue to drive airport projects and tied their success to Indianapolis.

## **Chapter Two. The Dream Continues: Constructing the Municipal Airport, 1927-1930**

Between 1927 and 1930 the City of Indianapolis decided to build a municipal airport to attract aviation businesses and transform the city into the crossroads of the air. The decision launched two years of financing, development, construction, and boosterism leading to the dedication of the airport. This process closely intertwined the airport with city boosterism. I argue that the boosters' motivations, messages, and techniques used for the Mars Hill airport were repeated and expanded when the city government built the Indianapolis Municipal Airport. The Chamber of Commerce, as well as city government leaders, again promised that the airport would allow Indianapolis to take its rightful place at the center of aviation in America. A specific set of actions, images, and messages promoted the airport to both the citizens of Indianapolis and the rest of the country. The renewed goal attached to a new project indicates the failure of the Chamber of Commerce to attract national aviation business to Indianapolis with the Mars Hill airport. The Indianapolis Municipal Airport was a second attempt by boosters to draw airlines and aviation manufacturers to the city. I will follow the development progress from boosting in the city, to deciding to build, to changes in leadership and to the start of construction. Through each stage, the focus remained on transforming Indianapolis into an aviation center.

The boosters' goal of aviation superiority tied success of the municipal airport to their success in satisfying their two target audiences. First, boosters promoted the need for a municipal airport to local citizens. Only after the city agreed to build an airport could it serve as a marketing tool. Indianapolis boosters convinced the City of



Indianapolis that a municipal airport was the incentive needed to attract the businesses that they viewed as logically belonging in Indianapolis. Boosters again used the themes of transportation history, city competition, and central location to appeal to local decision makers.

Second, as the city government began to develop the airport, boosters considered their national audience in their careful design of an excellent airport. In order to become the center of aviation in the nation, Indianapolis needed to convince aeronautical companies to relocate to the city. In attracting this industry, national airlines and Indianapolis citizens also needed to be satisfied. Businesses needed regular airline stops for reliable transportation of goods, mail, and passengers. In order to satisfy airlines, Indianapolis citizens had to support the airport and use the air mail and passenger services. Throughout the two years of municipal airport development, the actions of city leaders reflected their main goal of enticing the aviation industry and their sub-goals of attracting airlines and citizens.

### *Decision to Build*

Following the spark of aviation interest prompted by Charles Lindbergh's historic May 1927 flight, Indianapolis boosters pushed for a better-equipped airport. Although interest in aviation had increased, local boosters lacked funding to provide Indianapolis with the necessary aviation improvements. During the second half of 1927 and the beginning of 1928, aviation boosters educated the Indianapolis public on why the city needed an improved airport and established enough support to either improve Mars Hill or build a new airport.

In July 1927, local papers announced that national bids would be opened for a new route connecting Cincinnati and Chicago via Indianapolis.<sup>188</sup> With the announcement of a possible aerial route through the city, the Chamber began a campaign aimed at both the city and aviation manufacturers. The theme of transportation history again appealed to the city. The *News* announced that the Chamber's campaign would position the city "in the field as a contender for its rightful share of airplane manufacturing."<sup>189</sup> As the "home of some of the finest motor cars made anywhere," the *News* argued that the city was already known in airplane and motor accessory manufacturing. The city had plenty of "material for a campaign to interest airplane manufacturers in its superior advantages."<sup>190</sup> Despite this optimism concerning Indianapolis's chances of attracting airplane manufacturers, the *News* was clear that the Mars Hill airport lacked basic necessities: "Its flying field should be properly equipped, it should by all means have the conveniences of air mail service, and it should be established on the air map as a transportation center."<sup>191</sup>

As they gathered support locally, the boosters also promoted Indianapolis to the aviation industry. The Chamber of Commerce announced that it hoped to transform the city into an aviation center, echoing the rhetoric associated with the Mars Hill airport development. To the boosters, success would mean transforming Indianapolis into the center of aviation-related manufactures: "There will be general satisfaction that the Chamber of Commerce has seen the possibilities of a campaign to make the city the

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<sup>188</sup> "Air Mail for Indianapolis," *Indianapolis News*, July 22, 1927; "Airport Center in City is Plan," *Indianapolis Star*, July 22, 1927.

<sup>189</sup> "Airplane Prospects," *Indianapolis News*, July 22, 1927.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

center of the industry in this country, which means in the world.”<sup>192</sup> The economic benefits of additional industries motivated the Chamber’s campaign.<sup>193</sup>

A visit to Indianapolis by Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh in August 1927 added fuel to the aviation fervor that had started with his historic flight and spurred the movement to encourage investment in better aviation facilities. After his famous flight, Lindbergh toured the country promoting aviation for the Guggenheim Fund for the Promotion of Aeronautics with support from the Aeronautics Branch of the Department of Commerce.<sup>194</sup> During a three-month period, beginning in July 1927, Lindbergh traveled to 82 cities in all 48 states.<sup>195</sup> The goals of the tour were to increase aviation enthusiasm generally and more specifically to “urge local people to build airports and patronize the air mail.”<sup>196</sup> At every stop, Lindbergh echoed the same message of the need for well equipped, well visited, and locally run city airports.<sup>197</sup> Aviation historian Douglas Karsner argues that Lindbergh’s trip significantly impacted the development of airports across the nation. Lindbergh connected the traditional American value of

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Promoting Indianapolis to airplane manufacturers was in accordance with the Chamber's efforts to obtain greater payrolls for Indianapolis, a point in the Chamber’s 1927 program. “Chamber makes early bid to obtain aviation industries for the city,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no.8 (Aug., 1927): 8.

<sup>194</sup> The Guggenheim Fund began in 1926. Deborah G. Douglas, “The Invention of Airports: A Political, Economic and Technological History of Airports in the United States, 1919-1939” (diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996), 97–98; Joseph J. Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America’s Romance with Aviation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, rev. ed., 2002), 22.

<sup>195</sup> Douglas, 98.

<sup>196</sup> This quote is from William P. MacCracken, the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Aeronautics. Michael Osborn and Joseph Riggs's book, *Mr. Mac: William P. MacCracken, Jr. on Aviation, Law, Optometry*, is based on oral interviews they conducted with the aviation pioneer. Michael Osborn and Joseph Riggs, *Mr. Mac: William P. MacCracken, Jr. on Aviation, Law, Optometry* (Memphis, TN: Southern College of Optometry, 1970), 95.

<sup>197</sup> Douglas, 98.

individualism with aviation in the minds of Americans, inspiring them to support and contribute to the industry.<sup>198</sup>

In Indianapolis, Lindbergh's visit fueled the boosters' work to gain support for a better-equipped airport. While in Indianapolis, Lindbergh spoke twice at meetings and also held a private press conference.<sup>199</sup> In addition to these public remarks, the editor of *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* published a private interview with the famous aviator in the August 1927 issue.<sup>200</sup> Lindbergh validated the Chamber's aviation promotion and proposed airport. He stated that civic organizations like the Chamber of Commerce should take the lead in developing an airport. He also stressed the importance of having a fully equipped airport: "Lines of air travel will deflect sometimes many miles out of their straight-line route to land at a fully equipped landing field. I have done this myself in flying between distant points."<sup>201</sup> Lindbergh called on the core members of the Chamber to "do their part in placing their cities on the air map of the United States."<sup>202</sup> Lindbergh's celebrity prompted an immediate response; at a banquet at the Columbia Club, the 600 attendees stood and pledged to support an air program as described by Lindbergh.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> Although Douglas Karsner primarily focuses on 1933 to 1970, he offers valuable interpretations of early airport construction. Karsner provides a social history approach to the development of airports that many other historians lack. His interpretation of Lindbergh's famous flight and tour fit with my research on Indianapolis. Douglas G. Karsner, "Leaving on a Jet Plane: Commercial Aviation, Airports and Post-Industrial American Society, 1933-1970" (diss., Temple University, 1993), 10.

<sup>199</sup> "Chamber, Logical Body to Push Air Program — Lindbergh," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no.8 (Aug., 1927): 7.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

The Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce used Lindbergh's visit to Indianapolis as one part of its promotional activities in the city. The Aviation Committee of the Chamber coordinated the Colonel's visit and advertised with posters, newspapers, and reduced prices for tickets on all traction lines for the day of his visit. These efforts educated Indianapolis residents and gained more local aviation supporters. In addition to Lindbergh, the Chamber made arrangements for other notable aviators to visit and speak in the city. They included Arthur Goebel, who flew from San Francisco to Hawaii, and Eddie Stinson, the president of the Stinson-Detroit Airplane Company.<sup>204</sup> Another promotional effort provided several hundred Indianapolis citizens with the chance to take their first airplane flight: "No case is known in which the person, after riding the Stanolind, was not an air enthusiast. This, in itself, was a great boost for commercial aviation in Indianapolis."<sup>205</sup>

The aviation boosters also saw the value in providing as much information about aviation as possible. Through the work of Paul H. Moore, the secretary of the Aviation Committee who had played an active role in building the Mars Hill airport, the Chamber started an Aeronautical Bureau to share knowledge and resources about aviation with the public.<sup>206</sup> These resources included lists of registered airports; passenger, mail, and express rates; mail schedules; and "a vast amount of other information covering

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<sup>204</sup> "Aviation Committee," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 12 (Dec., 1927): 17.

<sup>205</sup> This effort was in cooperation with the Standard Oil Company that provided the Stanolind, its flagship airplane. "Aviation Committee," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 12 (Dec., 1927): 17.

<sup>206</sup> Hardly mentioned at all during the Mars Hill airport development, Moore played an increasingly visible role as the Municipal Airport progressed. As he gained prominence, newspapers mentioned his long-time role in Indianapolis aviation.

practically every phase of aircraft and aeronautics in general.”<sup>207</sup> By educating the public through speakers, flights, and literature, the Chamber hoped to demystify aviation and enlist additional support for future airport projects.

The work of the Chamber of Commerce began to show results in late 1927. On December 17, the first regularly scheduled air mail delivery landed in Indianapolis. In November, the U.S. Post Office Department awarded John P. Riddle of Cincinnati the Chicago-Cincinnati route that had been announced in July.<sup>208</sup> The reaction to this inaugural event highlights the important relationships between national airlines, the city airport, and the public. On the day of the inaugural stop, the *Indianapolis News* ran a cartoon entitled, “The First One Landed Today.” (See Figure 1). This cartoon draws on the contemporary connection between human flight and birds by depicting the airport as a birdhouse.<sup>209</sup> Building an airport was the key to getting national lines to stop in Indianapolis. The arrival of air mail to the city following the building of the Mars Hill airport would justify further aviation developments.<sup>210</sup> By March 1928, the Chamber declared “Air Mail Demonstrates Usefulness - Is Asset to Indianapolis Commerce.”<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> “Aero Bureau Adds to City’s Aviation Promotion Program,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 10 (Oct., 1927): 17; “Aviation Committee,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 12 (Dec., 1927): 17.

<sup>208</sup> Unfortunately for Indianapolis, no one waited at the field to greet the first plane that landed at 9:00 A.M. from Chicago. A misunderstanding related to the time difference between Chicago and Indianapolis led to the unfortunate oversight. The newspaper later quoted the pilot: “‘Isn’t there any one here from the postoffice to receive this mail?’ he inquired anxiously of attendants at the airport.” The return flight from Cincinnati that would land later that day had a better reception with a band, parade, and speeches. “Plane Brings City First Mail by Air,” *Indianapolis News*, Dec. 17, 1927; “Contract for Air Mail here is Let,” *Indianapolis Star*, Nov. 16, 1927.

<sup>209</sup> Donald Duke’s 1927 airport manual begins with an example of the use of birdhouses to represent airports: “Put up the bird house and the birds are sure to come.” Donald G. Duke, *Airports and Airways: Cost, Operation and Maintenance* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1927), 3.

<sup>210</sup> “Plane Brings City First Mail by Air,” *Indianapolis News*, Dec. 17, 1927.

<sup>211</sup> “Air Mail Demonstrates Usefulness - Is Asset to Indianapolis Commerce,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 42, no. 3 (Mar., 1928): 11.

With a hint of success from the Mars Hill airport, the Chamber had more fuel to convince the city to invest in an improved facility.



Figure 1. "The First One Landed Today," *Indianapolis News*, Dec. 17, 1927, p. 1.

In 1928, the opportunity to be a stop on the new commercial Transcontinental Air Transport (TAT) route inspired a response from Indianapolis citizens. This hybrid train-plane route promised to cut coast-to-coast travel time in half.<sup>212</sup> The large planes that would fly these routes needed longer landing strips for safe take-offs and landings. Without longer runways, TAT and similar carriers would not come to Indianapolis. The announcement that Indianapolis was a potential stop on the new route changed the Chamber's attitude towards the Mars Hill airport. In the August 1928 issue of the *Activities*, Editor Harmon E. Snoke wrote a plea to the readers. Instead of praising the Mars Hill airport and the work of the Aviation Committee, Snoke stated that an airport "is one of the outstanding needs of Indianapolis today."<sup>213</sup> Snoke accurately predicted that the TAT announcement would spur the city into a unified effort for "an adequate airport" to capitalize on the rapidly growing aviation industry.<sup>214</sup> The Chamber's new tone represents what would soon be a sudden, city-wide urgency for an improved airport. Following the TAT announcement, Mayor Ert Slack appointed an Airport Committee to work with the Industrial Commission of the Chamber of Commerce to form an Airport Board tasked with determining the best course of action for the city. (See Figure 2.)<sup>215</sup>

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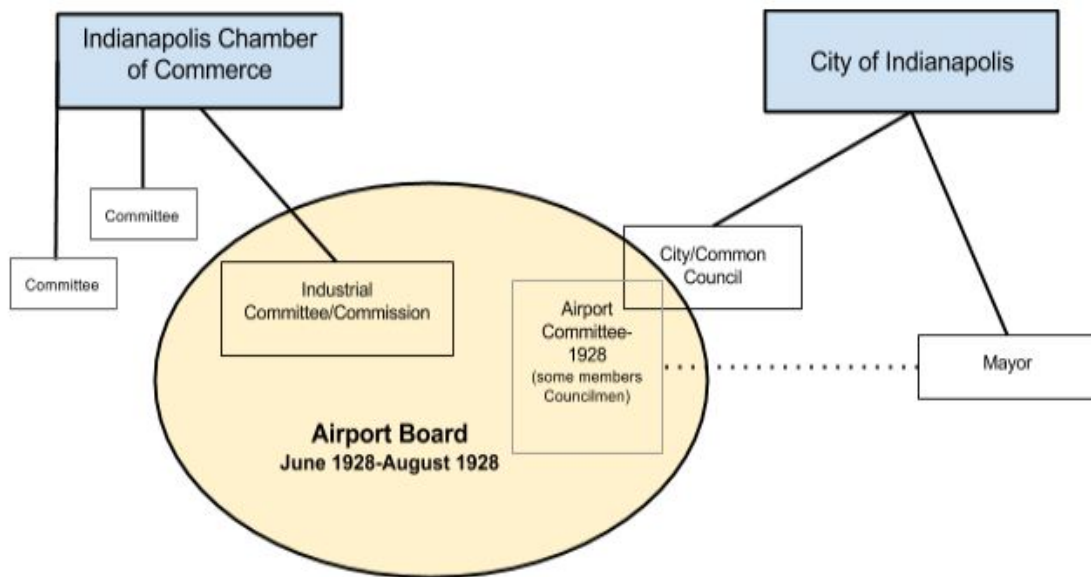
<sup>212</sup> TAT formed in 1928 and promised to use a combination of air and rail to cut the four-day trip from New York to Los Angeles to two days. The new company was especially appealing because legendary pilot Charles Lindbergh served as the technical advisor. Janet R. Daly Bednarek, *America's Airports: Airfield Development, 1918-1947* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 55.

<sup>213</sup> Harmon E. Snoke, "Airport- - A Harbor," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 8 (Aug. 1928): 5.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> In November 1927, the Indianapolis City Council had elected Slack to finish the term of Mayor Duvall, who had been convicted on a criminal charge. Mayor John Duvall, elected in 1926 with the support of the then widely popular Ku Klux Klan, was convicted for trading jobs for votes during his campaign. (See M. William Lutholtz, *Grand Dragon: D.C. Stephenson and the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana* [West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1991], 306-307.) In April of 1928 the continuing investigations led to resignations from the Council. Slack, along with seven newly appointed and two existing councilmen, governed until the term expired January 6,





**Figure 2.** Airport board membership. Produced by author.

1930. During this time they frequently consulted with civic organizations and made several improvements to the city. Slack had practiced law in the city and had previously served as United States District Attorney in Indiana. Charles Johnson Taggart, "Slack, L. Ert," in *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 1265; Justin E. Walsh, ed., *A Biographical Directory of the Indiana General Assembly, Vol. 2, 1900-1984* (Indianapolis: Select Committee on the Centennial History of the Indiana General Assembly and Indiana Historical Bureau, 1984), s.v. "Slack, Lemuel Ertus;" Indianapolis Common Council, "November 8, 1927: Special Session," *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana; Indiana Biographical Series* (Indianapolis, IN: Commission on Public Records, 1996), s.v. "Slack, L. Ert," 37: 92; "Airport for the Future," *Indianapolis Star*, July 28, 1928; "Data on Airport to Be Presented," *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 8, 1928.

On August 10, 1928 the city received an added push from TAT to consider a new airport when Lindbergh—the company’s technical advisor—briefly stopped in Indianapolis.<sup>216</sup> During his hour-and-a-half stop he briefly talked with airport leaders and assessed the city’s future as part of the TAT route. Lindbergh dashed city leaders’ hopes of the city being a terminal where the route transferred from train to airplane. Indianapolis would be an air stop, and Columbus, Ohio would be the air-rail terminal. He pacified the disappointed boosters by assuring them that contrary to their belief, Indianapolis’s role as an air stop would be more important than an air-rail junction.<sup>217</sup> Lindbergh ignited action on the airport by qualifying that the city’s position on the route “was contingent on the proposition that Indianapolis will provide larger airport facilities by October 1,” the day TAT promised to begin coast-to-coast service.<sup>218</sup> As a local headline proclaimed, this visit served as a “Tonic to Advocates of New Airport.”<sup>219</sup> The famous aviator’s words carried weight, and within days the city started the decision-making process on whether to build a municipal airport.

Aviation boosters faced an urgent problem: Indianapolis needed a larger airport in order to become a stop on the new TAT route, and a larger airport meant new funding. Some city leaders suggested that a municipally owned airport provided the solution. A municipal airport guaranteed continuous funding through city taxes and bond issues—

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<sup>216</sup> Lindbergh arrived unexpectedly and those who could join him at the airport included local businessman Norman Perry, engineer Clifford Harrod, and real estate appraiser George Wheldon. All three were members of the Airport Committee formed by Mayor Slack. “Lindy Visits Here, Inspecting Local Sites,” *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 11, 1928.

<sup>217</sup> “Junction for Nation’s Two Big Sky Lines,” *Indianapolis Times*, Aug. 10, 1928.

<sup>218</sup> “Lindbergh’s Brief Visit Tonic to Advocates of New Airport,” “Clippings, 1928-29,” box 1, folder 6, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>219</sup> “Clippings, 1928-29,” box 1, folder 6, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

support that the Mars Hill airport lacked. However, it was not clear if a municipality in Indiana could own an airport, and some believed special legislation would be necessary.<sup>220</sup> If the local government built a municipal airport, the *Indianapolis News* questioned, “How far can the city go toward supporting a municipal airport?”<sup>221</sup> Residents saw the city as “taxed to the point many believe should be the limit and outright purchase of an airport is regarded as out of the question.”<sup>222</sup> Whatever the solution, all sources agreed it had to be determined quickly: “Early action is regarded as imperative.”<sup>223</sup> Indianapolis faced three interconnected issues: Could the city government legally build and operate a municipal airport? How much money would be needed for an airport, and where would it come from? And finally, should Indianapolis build a municipal airport? With the potential for a regular stop in Indianapolis by a major airline, the city acted quickly to answer these questions.

The solution to these questions grew out of cooperation from the Chamber of Commerce, Mayor Slack, councilmen, and local businessmen. Slack directed the decision-making process, although eventually the City Council and the Board of Public Works would vote on his recommendations. Slack saw the need for the airport because of the approaching start of the TAT line and the “growth of air commerce.”<sup>224</sup> However, he had to work hard to prevent the corruption within city government that had occurred

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<sup>220</sup> Earl Mushlitz, “State Law gives City Power to Buy Airport,” *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 11, 1928.

<sup>221</sup> “Airport Aid Goal At Home, Abroad,” *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 14, 1928.

<sup>222</sup> “Lindbergh’s Brief Visit Tonic to Advocates of New Airport,” “Clippings, 1928-29,” box 1, folder 6, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>223</sup> Earl Mushlitz, “State Law gives City Power to Buy Airport,” *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 11, 1928.

<sup>224</sup> “Airport Aid Goal At Home, Abroad,” *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 14, 1928.

under his predecessor, as well as please a public wary of government spending.<sup>225</sup> An airport could only be undertaken with widespread public support.<sup>226</sup>

The new Airport Board researched the question of whether Indianapolis needed a municipal airport and provided its recommendation to the mayor. The members of the Airport Board included some of the most prominent and influential businessmen in the city. These men had a vested interest in the future of Indianapolis and had the power and resources to shape that future. Half of the members belonged to the Industrial Commission of the Chamber of Commerce and included: A. Kiefer Mayer, a director of Merchants National Bank; A.L. Block, president of L. Strauss & Company; Fred C.

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<sup>225</sup> An example of this wariness appeared as an editorial in the August 11, 1928 *Indianapolis News*. The author supports the need for a larger airport and notes the similarities between railroad stations and airports. Ultimately, he calls for caution and careful research before any taxpayer money is spent. A similar sentiment is expressed in the same paper on August 15, 1928: "Further doubts as to the city's ability to operate an airport on a business basis spring from other recent confirmations of dishonesty and incompetence." However, the author ultimately feels the airport is a "transportation necessity." "Airport Subsidy," *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 11, 1928; "City Airport Operation," *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 15, 1928.

<sup>226</sup> Slack, who initially thought the city had enough problems to deal with, grew convinced that the airport issue was an "emergency." Councilman Lieber, speaking on behalf of the mayor, said "This is our opportunity to put ourselves on the map and start the foundation necessary for industry to follow. There is not a man here who does not agree that the time to start is now." Slack was rarely quoted as the voice of the aviation boosters, although he appeared to support the process. One of his few quotes on the airport in a newspaper, while drawing on the theme of Indianapolis's centrality, highlights the negative side of Indianapolis more than the positive: "Indianapolis is in the great circle of large cities, Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Kansas City, Saint Louis, Louisville, Toledo, Pittsburgh and others. Criminals work mostly in the large cities in the ring, and many of them, when they find things hot for them in these cities, come to Indianapolis to hide. We are not proud of this floating population, but they come here, fortunately only temporarily, to hide because Indianapolis is centrally located in relation to the larger cities. Aviation will center about these large cities and Indianapolis, being in the center of the circle, will be an air terminal. Many large transport lines which will be operated in the future between these cities will pass through this city."

Slack's comparison of criminals and aviation is an interesting choice, but there is some truth to his logic. His reasoning that aviation would center about the other large cities proved to be accurate. Unfortunately for Indianapolis, aviation technology advanced to the point that a middle terminal would not be needed. Planes could easily cross the country with no need to stop in Indianapolis. Earl Mushlitz, "State Law gives City Power to Buy Airport," *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 11, 1928; "Rush Study of Plans for New City Airport," July 22, 1928, box 1, folder 6, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Gardner, treasurer of E.C. Atkins & Company; Irving W. Lemaux, president of Security Trust Company; Dick Miller, president of City Trust Company, Miller Reality Company, and Warehouse Reality Company; Nicholas H. Noyes, recent president of the Chamber of Commerce; Frank D. Stalnaker, president of Indiana National Bank; Elmer W. Stout, the president of Fletcher American National Bank; George T. Wheldon, real estate appraiser; and Clifford L. Harrod, engineer for the Indiana Coal Operators Association.<sup>227</sup> The remainder of the Airport Board was made up of Mayor Slack's appointed Airport Committee comprised of Councilmen Herman P. Lieber, E. Harris, and Edward B. Raub Jr.; Norman A. Perry, attorney for the park department; Frank H. Sparks, co-founder of an automobile accessory manufacturing company; and Capt. H. Weir Cook, the current manager of Mars Hill airport.<sup>228</sup>

The Airport Board members answered the city's three major questions concerning an airport: Was it legal? Was it financially viable? Was it needed?<sup>229</sup> First the Airport Board determined that a 1920 state law gave power to municipalities to buy or lease aviation fields.<sup>230</sup> Legally the City of Indianapolis could build, own, and operate a

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<sup>227</sup> L. Strauss & Company was an Indianapolis based upscale department store. *Indiana Biographical Series*, s.v. "A. Kiefer," 84: 20; Paul Donald Brown, *Indianapolis Men of Affairs, 1923* (Indianapolis: American Biographical Society, 1923), s.v. "Block, A.L.," 61; *Indiana Biographical Series*, s.v. "Fred C. Gardner," 20: 28; *Indiana Biographical Series*, s.v. "Irving W. Lemaux," 37, 94; Brown, s.v. "Miller, Dick," 441; *Indiana Biographical Series*, s.v. "Frank D. Stalnaker," 10: 77; Brown, s.v. "Stout, Elmer W.," 589; *Indiana Biographical Series*, s.v. "George Wheldon," 79:12; *Indiana Biographical Series*, s.v. "Clifford L. Harrod," 39:79.

<sup>228</sup> *Indiana Biographical Series*, s.v. "Frank H. Sparks," 22:18-19; "Airport Action Expected Today," *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 15, 1928; "Cook May Stay As Indiana Air Officer," *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 14, 1928.

<sup>229</sup> "Airport Aid Goal At Home, Abroad," *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 14, 1928.

<sup>230</sup> Indiana had passed the first general airport enabling act in the country in 1920. (Bednarek, 28) George Wheldon of the Chamber of Commerce uncovered the law that had previously been unknown to the Airport Board. The Airport Board wanted absolute assurance that this law would apply to a large city like Indianapolis. Attorney Edward B. Raub, Jr., a member of the Airport Board, determined that the law was "sufficiently broad" that it would cover the Indianapolis situation. Chapter 53 Counties-County Government, Article 5 Public Buildings, Section 5917v1

municipal airport. The Board still needed to determine if the local government could finance a new airport. The city still faced fallout from recent upheaval in local government, and city government finances were “greatly confused.”<sup>231</sup> In addition, experience with the Mars Hill site had shown that an airport would “yield so little in the way of storage and service charges that no one can be expected to enlarge a port without the help of capital willing to wait some time for a return on the investment.”<sup>232</sup> The Board had to decide if the city government should purchase land and build the facilities or if a better solution with less cost to the city existed.<sup>233</sup> To gain more information on how much an airport would cost, A. Kiefer Mayer, the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce’s Industrial Commission, headed an air expedition of businessmen to Detroit.<sup>234</sup> This visit, along with other research conducted by the board members, led to

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Aviation Fields, Harrison Burns and Samuel Grant Gifford, *Burns' Annotated Indiana Statutes Supplement of 1921 containing the General Statutes Enacted at the Legislative Sessions of 1915, 1917, 1919, 1920, 1921, together with Notes of the Decisions of the Highest Courts* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1921), 666-669; Earl Mushlitz, “State Law gives City Power to Buy Airport,” *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 11, 1928; “Airport Aid Goal At Home, Abroad,” *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 14, 1928; Earl Mushlitz, “Airport Action Expected Today,” *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 15, 1928.

<sup>231</sup> “Airport Subsidy,” *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 15, 1928.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Members of the Board proposed several ways to finance the airport. Although these options had advantages, the Airport Board discussed the problem with others who urged city officials to release a bond issue to buy an airport outright. According to Bednarek, during the period from 1926 to 1933— when Indianapolis developed a municipal airport— the federal government strengthened the arguments for local, publicly owned airports. In 1928 the Aeronautics Branch of the Department of Commerce stated in *Aeronautics Bulletin 2* that, “The airport should be a municipal enterprise, just as the maintenance of city docks and public highways is generally recognized as being within the province of the municipality.” “\$500,000 For City Airport Proposed,” *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 15, 1928; Bednarek, 38; Department of Commerce Aeronautics Branch, “Construction of Airports,” *Aeronautics Bulletin 2* (Apr., 1928): 2.

<sup>234</sup> Mayer, along with ten businessmen, visited Ford airport to collect information about the equipment and facilities there. The other members of the trip included: Henry L. Dithmer, former president and a director of the Chamber of Commerce; Norman A. Perry of the Airport Committee; J. Harvey Wheeler, insurance agent; Walter Kuhn of the Guarantee Tire and Rubber Company; and Harry D. Hartley, the president of the Turner Glass Company. Hartley also brought along officials of his company. “Airport Aid Goal At Home, Abroad,” *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 14, 1928.

the conclusion that city officials would need to seek a \$500,000 bond issue in order to establish a municipal airport.

Finally, the Airport Board had to determine, and prove to Mayor Slack, that there was a general consensus of need and support for an airport. Newspapers referred to the path toward a municipal airport as a “citizens movement,” but there are no records of how Indianapolis citizens beyond this core group of businessmen greeted the possibility of a new municipal airport.<sup>235</sup> Whenever the media mentioned the approval of Indianapolis citizens, leading businessmen close to the project served as examples, often referred to as “representative businessmen.”<sup>236</sup> The opinion of less public or influential figures rarely factored into the narrative. During the decision-making process, the Board compiled “a study of the public attitude and taxpayer comment on the subject.”<sup>237</sup> The conclusions were favorable, but the Board made no mention of citizens outside of high-ranking men: “Leading taxpayers and business men, leaders of the movement said, have been enthusiastic over the suggestion that the city establish a large airport immediately.”<sup>238</sup> Whatever the opinion of the general public, the airport boosters clearly viewed the airport as “important to the prosperity of all the people.”<sup>239</sup> The Airport Board’s findings convinced Slack that enough public demand existed to warrant the cost to the city.<sup>240</sup>

On August 15, 1928, the Airport Board, along with other businessmen and City Councilmen, recommended that the city government should move forward with building

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<sup>235</sup> “Airport Finance Body Appointed,” *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 18, 1928.

<sup>236</sup> “Airport Aid Goal At Home, Abroad,” *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 14, 1928.

<sup>237</sup> “\$500,000 for City Airport Proposed,” *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 15, 1928.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> “Airport Subsidy,” *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 14, 1928.

<sup>240</sup> “\$500,000 for City Airport Proposed,” *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 15, 1928.

a municipal airport. (See Figure 3.)<sup>241</sup> At the meeting, the group recommended that the City Council issue bonds to buy the site for the airport.<sup>242</sup> More research was needed before the City Council and Board of Public Works could vote to purchase a site. The Airport Board decided to create three committees: one to pursue a site, one to investigate the best equipment; and one to research methods of financing for the airport. (See Figure 4.)<sup>243</sup> “Citizen members” volunteered to lead the committees to combat potential corruption and avoid inflated prices on land.<sup>244</sup> Feeling that the “public demand ha[d] indorsed such a move,” Mayor Slack and the City Council expressed support for the plan.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> Also expected to attend the meetings: J.A. Goodman, founder and the president of the Real Silk Hosiery Mills; Samuel E. Rauh, the president of the Belt Railroad and Stockyard Company; Frederic M. Ayres, the president of department store L.S. Ayres & Co.; G.A. Efrogmson, the president of Citizens Gas Co.; J.C. Marshall, the vice president of the Indianapolis Chapter of the National Aeronautic Association; and C.H. Rottger, the president of the Indiana Bell Telephone Company. “Airport Action Expected Today,” *Indianapolis Star*, August 15, 1928; “Airport Aid Goal At Home, Abroad,” *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 14, 1928.

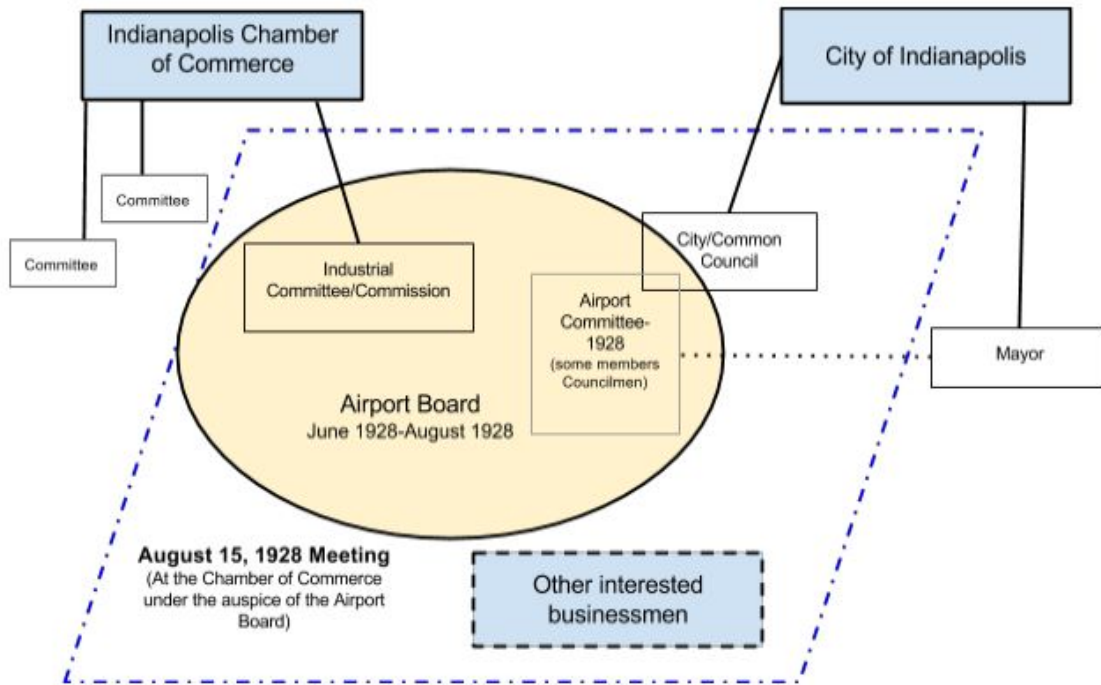
<sup>242</sup> Issuing city bonds for municipal airports had grown increasingly accepted and popular in the nation. A March 1928 *New York Times* article states, “The widespread public interest in aviation in general and the rapid progress made by commercial air lines in particular is receiving recognition in the municipal bond market, since several cities already have issued bonds for airport purposes and many others are considering the placing of issues for similar purposes before the voters at their next Spring or Fall elections.” “City Airport Bonds to Develop Market,” *New York Times*, Mar. 24, 1928.

<sup>243</sup> Herman Lieber of the City Council moved that A. Kiefer Mayer, the chairman of the Industrial Commission of the Chamber of Commerce, appoint the members of the three committees. Airport Site Committee, “Final Report,” November 1, 1928, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

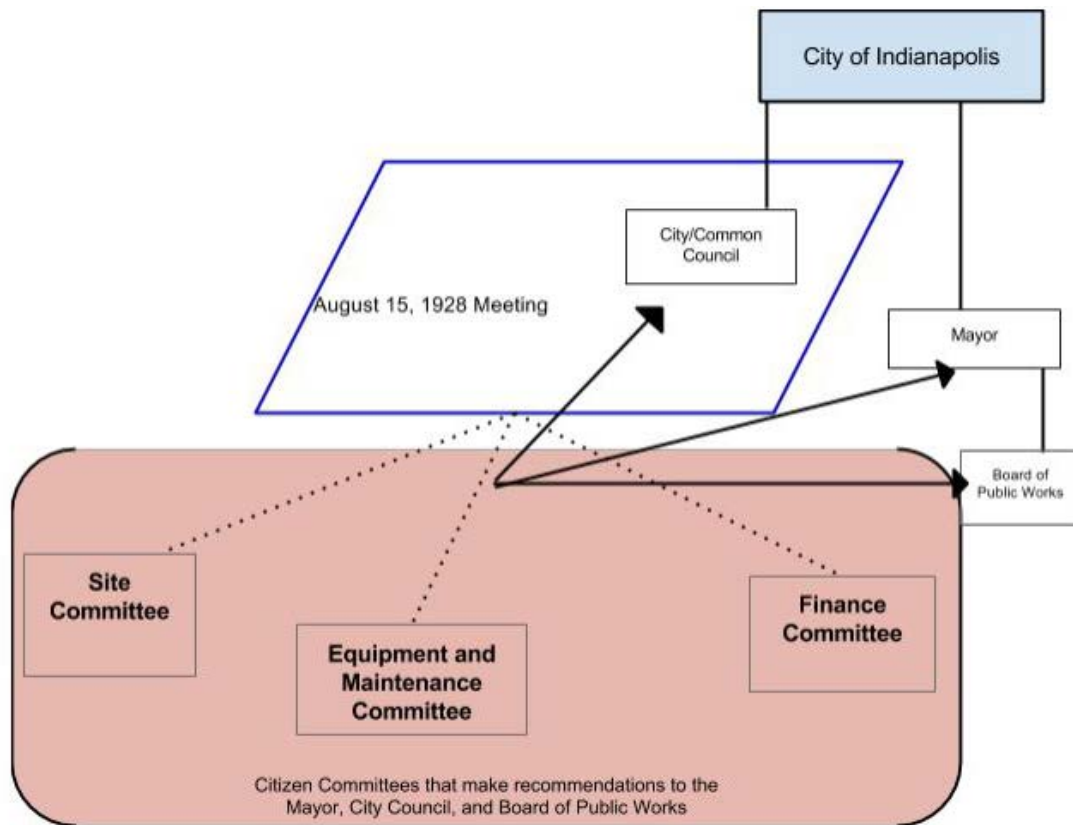
<sup>244</sup> After the Airport Board created these three committees, I found no other mention of the Airport Board. *The Proceedings of the Common Council of Indianapolis* for 1928 does not list the Airport Board or an Airport Committee in its list of city departments. The papers emphasize that the committees were not affiliated with the city government. It is my interpretation that the original Airport Committee appointed by Mayor Slack that worked with the Chamber of Commerce to form the Airport Board was an unofficial group. The Airport Board researched and advised the Mayor that the city government should build a municipal airport. The Airport Board then created the three committees to research specifics of the municipal airport and advise the Mayor, City Council, and Board of Public Works.

<sup>245</sup> “\$500,000 For City Airport Proposed,” *Indianapolis News*, Aug. 15, 1928.





**Figure 3.** August 15, 1928 meeting attendees. Produced by author



**Figure 4.** Committees formed at the August 15 meeting. Produced by author.

Only five days passed between Lindbergh's visit and city leaders' decision that Indianapolis would build a municipal airport funded by a bond issue.<sup>246</sup> This quick process demonstrated the urgency that the proposed TAT stop instilled in the aviation boosters. A municipal airport would provide the city with a new connection to the rest of the country and receive national attention. Despite the hurried decision, Indianapolis leaders learned from the mistakes of the Mars Hill airport and deliberately researched several aspects of the issue. The research of the legal, political, and economic feasibility of the project demonstrates that these leaders recognized that a municipal airport would need positive publicity to capture the attention of the nation and encourage industrial development.

#### *The Role of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce*

The nomination of the aviation committees' members signaled a shift in the Chamber of Commerce's role in the development of the airport. In contrast to the 1926 campaign for an airport led by the Chamber, in 1928 businessmen led committees which made recommendations to the mayor, Board of Public Works, and City Council. Therefore, government leaders had primary decision-making power, reflecting the municipal nature of the new airport. The Industrial Commission of the Chamber

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<sup>246</sup> The City Council and the Board of Public Works would not vote to issue a bond until after the committees had presented their findings to the city government. However, the Council and the Mayor had made the unofficial decision to construct a municipal airport, and this approval justified the three committees' in-depth work to recommend the best location, equipment, and funding.

supported the process by focusing on boosting the city to attract national businesses.<sup>247</sup>

An editorial that appeared in the *News* later in the process described this relationship:

It is gratifying to note the co-operation between the industrial commission of the Chamber of Commerce and the city of Indianapolis in connection with the municipal airport. The city's task is to carry out the approved plans and specifications . . . . The city, however, can not well go beyond the task of locating and equipping an airport . . . . At this point the industrial commission of the Chamber of Commerce takes up the work of providing aviation interests with complete information about the suitability of industrial sites near the airport.<sup>248</sup>

Chamber members served on the committees, but the Chamber as an organization no longer led the initiative.

Several cartoons published in the *Activities* of the Chamber illustrated the Chamber's newly narrowed function. The first cartoon, published in July of 1929, "With the Right Bait and a Little Patience We're Sure to Land Something," depicts the boosterism mindset of the organization. (See Figure 5.) The cartoon portrays the Chamber as a fisherman working to catch the fish labeled "new industries" with bait labeled "the right inducements." Just like the fisherman, the Chamber worked to attract new commerce through its promotional efforts. An adjacent article in the same issue described the airport as a special "inducement" to attract the aviation industry "fish."<sup>249</sup> The Chamber worked with the city government to plan the municipal airport because an excellent airport was necessary bait for the industries the Chamber wanted to attract. Later that year the cartoon "And Headed Right Our Way" illustrated the Chamber's reaction to the announcement that a new St. Louis to New York air-mail route would pass

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<sup>247</sup> "Many New Industries Brought to Indianapolis During Year," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 11 (Nov., 1928): 8.

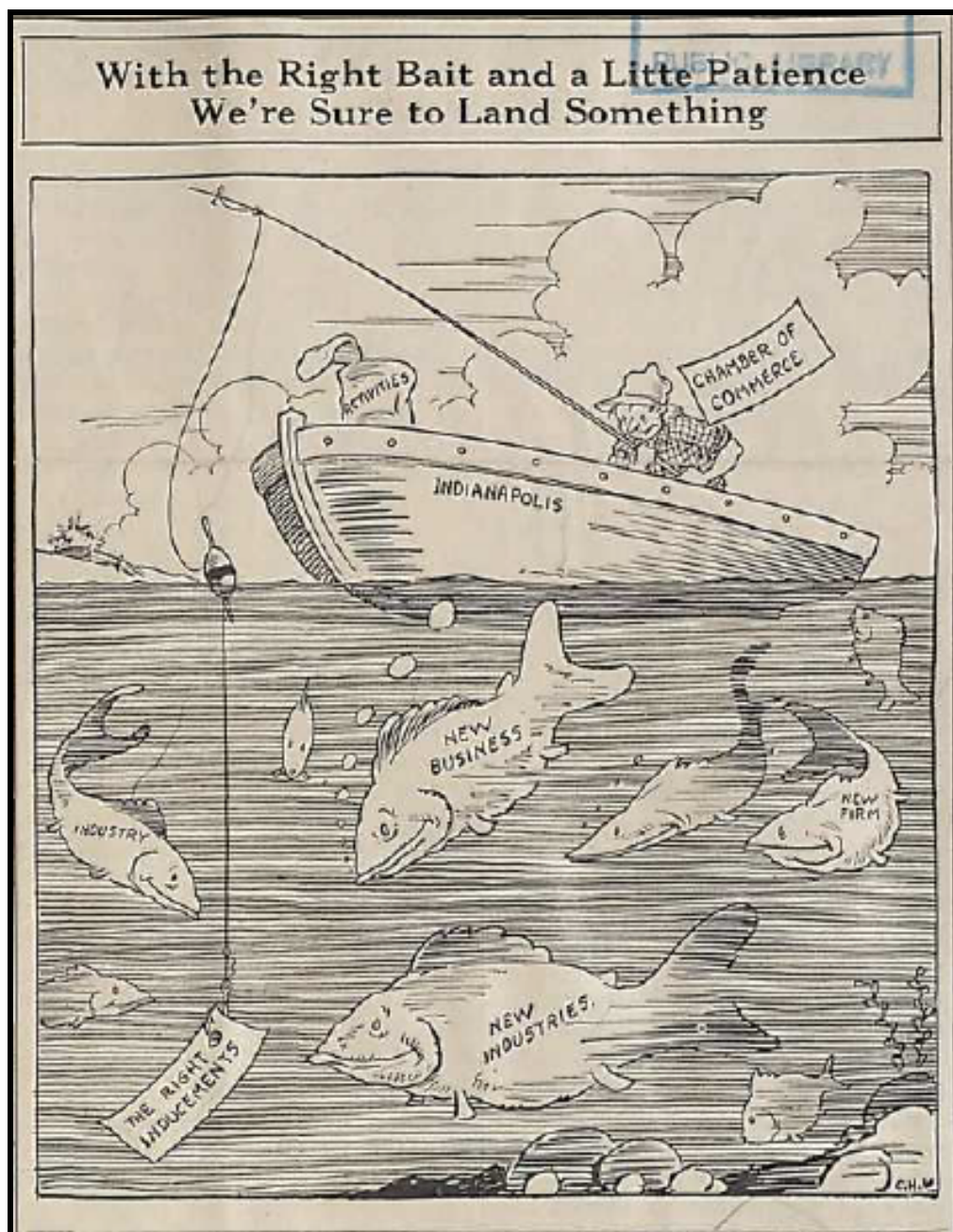
<sup>248</sup> "The City Airport," *Indianapolis News*, July 8, 1930.

<sup>249</sup> "With the Right Bait and a Little Patience We're Sure to Land Something," *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 44, no. 1 (July, 1929): 1.

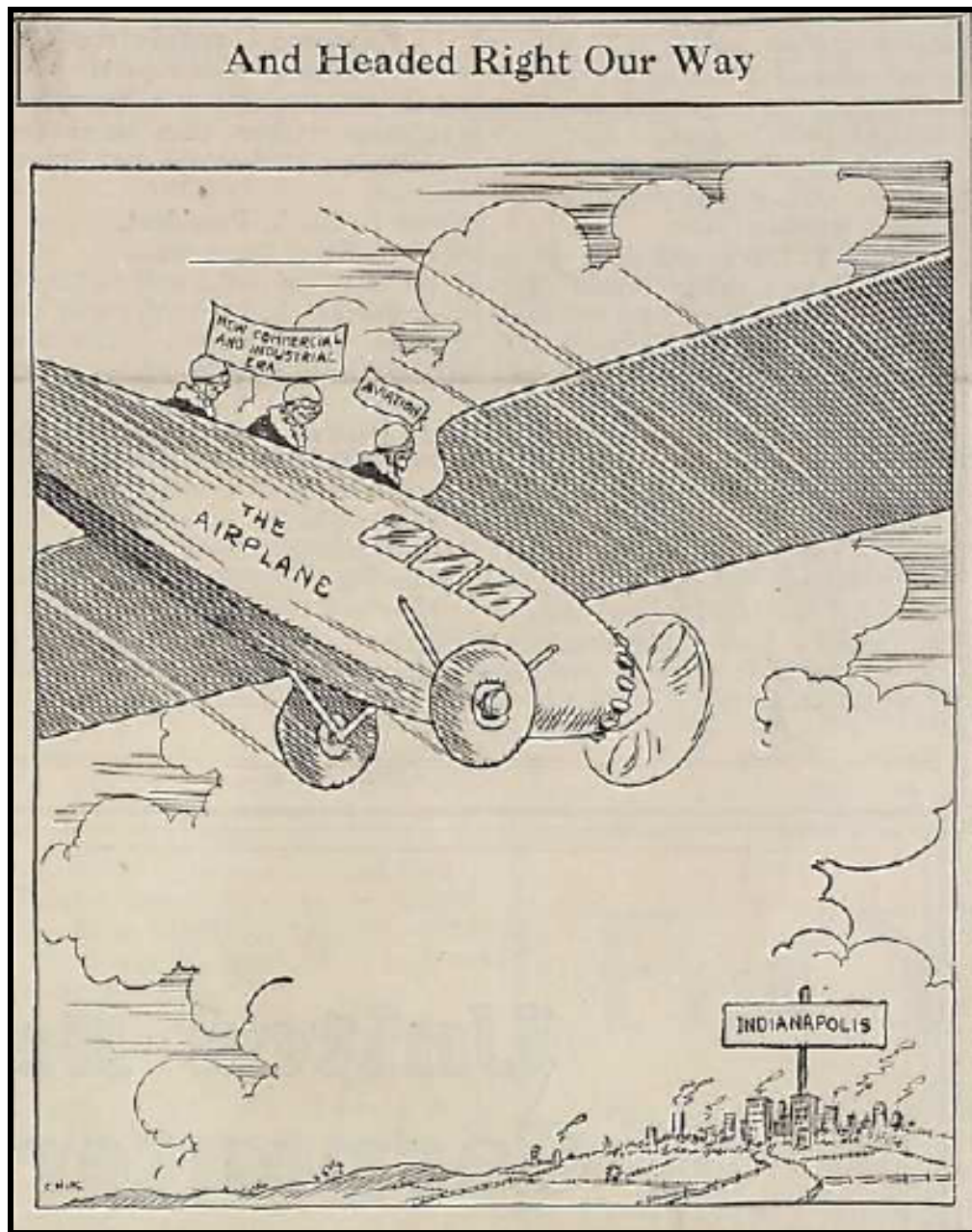
through Indianapolis. (See Figure 6.) An airplane, piloted by “aviation,” carries passengers labeled “new commercial and industrial era.” This cartoon draws on the competitive theme of the Chamber’s rhetoric aimed at the city. In order to stay competitive, the city had to adapt to the “new commercial and industrial era.” A new airport would help the city welcome the new air mail line and the new era. Again, an adjacent article highlighted the role the new airport would play in attracting aviation activity that in turn would bring new and added industry and prosperity to the city.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> “And Headed Right Our Way,” *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 44, no. 6 (Dec., 1929): 1.



**Figure 5.** "With the Right Bait and a Little Patience We're Sure to Land Something," *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 44, no. 1 (July, 1929): 1.



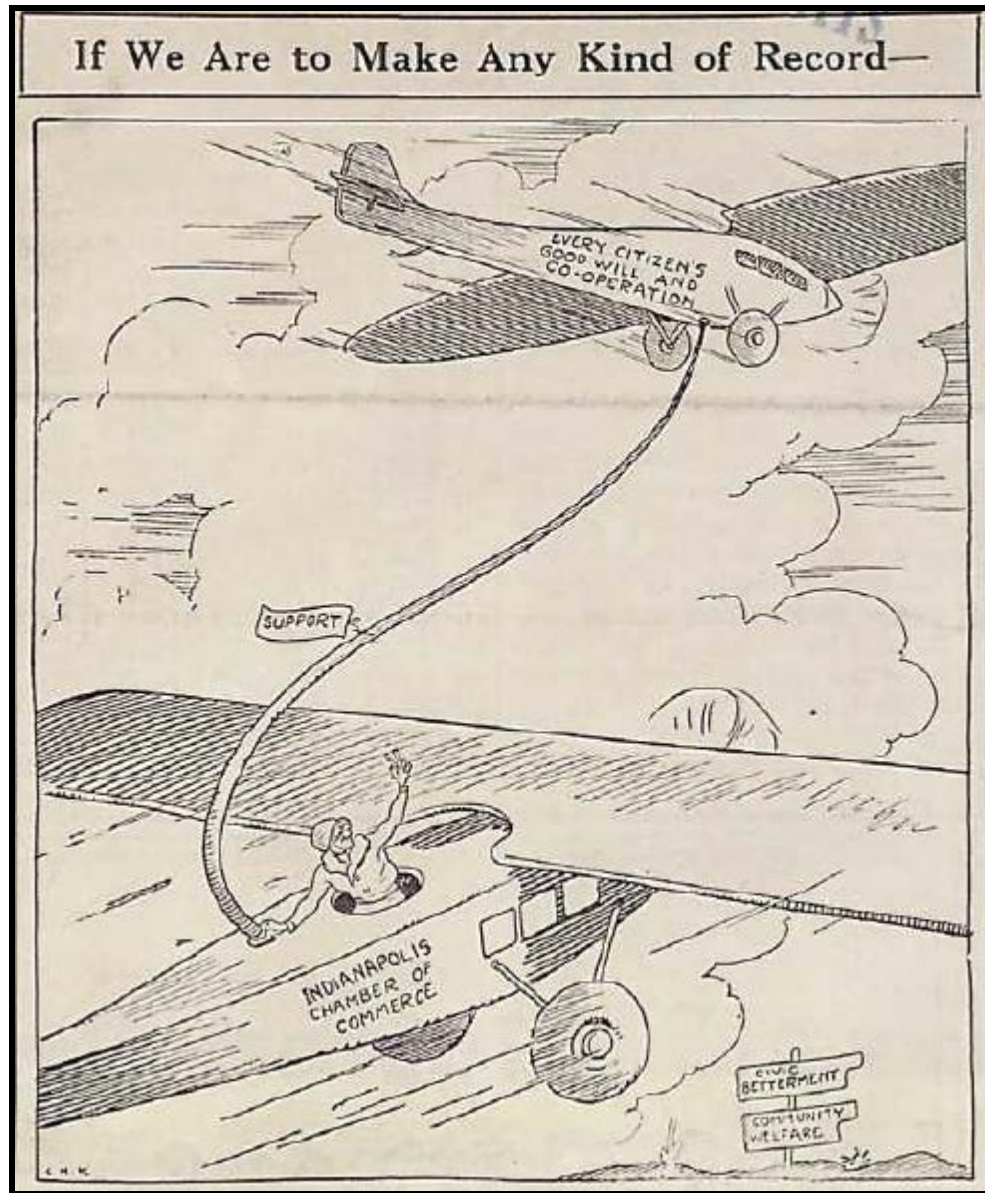
**Figure 6.** "And Headed Right Our Way," *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 44, no. 6 (Dec., 1929): 1.

Most telling of the Chamber's changing role was the cartoon "If We Are to Make Any Kind of Record—" published the following month. This January 1930 cartoon shows that the Chamber had fueled the aviation movement in the city. (See Figure 7.) The "good will and co-operation" of Indianapolis's citizens was headed toward "civic betterment" and "community welfare" and no longer needed the fuel the Chamber provided. Although the cartoon does not specifically mention aviation and most likely refers to a wider range of community activities, the image of airplanes subtly connects the cartoon to the aviation development efforts the Chamber had initiated and previously led with the Mars Hill airport. It was time for the Chamber to take the supporting role and focus on boosterism while government leaders took charge of the planning process.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> "And Headed Right Our Way," *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 44, no. 6 (Dec., 1929): 1.





**Figure 7.** "If We Are to Make Any Kind of Record—," *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 45, no. 1 (Jan., 1930): 1.

## *Design and Construction*

Airport boosters strove to develop the best municipal airport possible to satisfy their target markets. During the late 1920s, the nation still worked to solidify the characteristics of an ideal municipal airport. Janet Bednarek argues in *America's Airports* that the definition of "municipal airport" evolved between 1919 and the late 1930s.<sup>252</sup> Deborah Douglas also analyzes the formation of the municipal airport during this period and argues that with the creation of the Aeronautics Branch of the Department of Commerce following the 1926 Air Commerce Act, the federal government had a significant impact on airport development in the nation. In contrast, Bednarek claims that the federal government had a limited ability to control airport construction, and significant variation in airport design, construction, and management arose around the country during this period.<sup>253</sup> My research suggests that while instructions on airport construction from the Aeronautics Branch influenced Indianapolis, the city ultimately made its own decisions on the financing, architecture, and administration of the municipal airport. Leaders of the Indianapolis movement probably read and referenced the Aeronautics Branch's bulletins while planning the airport. The bulletins would have served as guidelines and reference for airport leaders, architects, and engineers.

After deciding to build a municipal airport, Indianapolis city leaders had to select a location.<sup>254</sup> In a questionnaire published in the *Indianapolis Times*, *Indianapolis News*,

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<sup>252</sup> Bednarek, 6-7.

<sup>253</sup> For more on the difference between Bednarek's and Douglas' interpretations, see Bednarek, 189n8.

<sup>254</sup> The first meeting of the Site Committee was held August 20, 1928. The members of the Site Committee included: Fred C. Gardner (chairman), Arthur R. Baxter, Fred C. Dickson, G. A. Efrogmson, Edward A. Kahn, James W. Noel, Fred Hoke, and C.L. Harrod (secretary). Airport Site Committee, "Final Report," November 1, 1928, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1.

and *Indianapolis Star*, the Site Committee asked for submissions of descriptions of potential properties of 450 to 640 acres.<sup>255</sup> Experts and community members also submitted their opinions on nominated sites and the final committee report included twenty letters on the site selection.<sup>256</sup> The committee based its final decision on proximity to transportation lines, distance from the center of the city, the extent of land and road improvements needed, growth potential, and price.<sup>257</sup> These selection criteria reflected the city leaders' intentions for the airport to serve the future needs of the city as well as

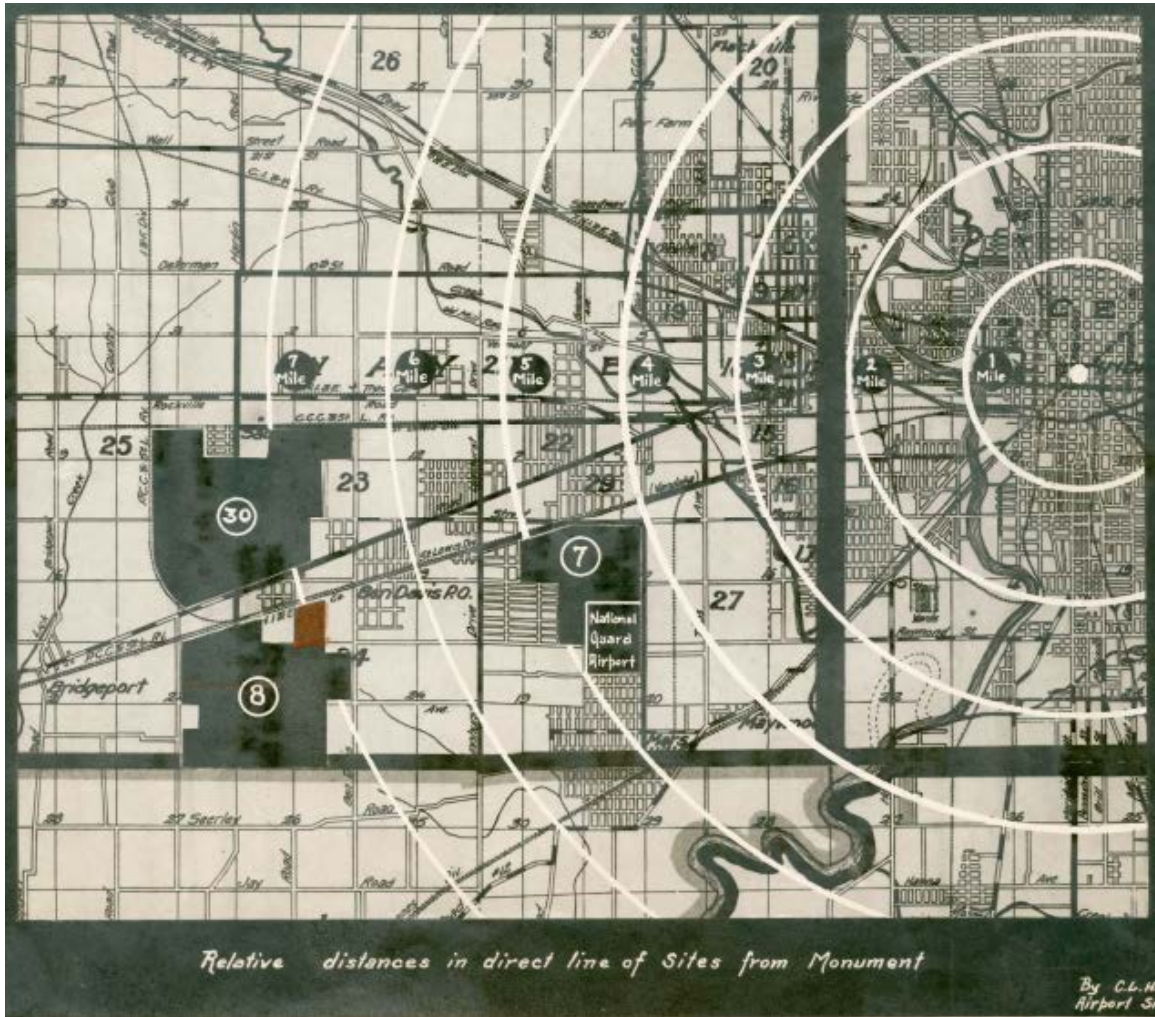
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<sup>255</sup> The committee accepted submissions through September 10, 1928. Keeping with the desire to appeal to national airlines, the committee asked questions about the nature of the ground, the distance to Monument Circle, and the distance to other transportation lines. The Site Committee searched for 450 to 640 acres of well-drained, level land for runways that would be 3,000 or 4,000 feet in length, much larger than the minimum requirements for the Department of Commerce's first-class rating. Airport Site Committee, "Final Report," November 1, 1928, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1; "Airport Action Expected Today," *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 15, 1928; "Airport Finance Body Appointed," *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 18, 1928.

<sup>256</sup> The documented opinions were from: A. P. Taliaferro, Jr., Department of Commerce; the Transcontinental Air Transport; Philip T. White, general superintendent of the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago, and Saint Louis Railroad (Big Four Railroad); United States Weather Bureau (about the prevailing winds); Obie J. Smith of the O.J. Smith Realty Company; Matt G. Carpenter, lieutenant in the Indiana National Guard, Mars Hill airport manager; Donald A. McConnell, local representative of the Embry-Riddle Company; Major Richard F. Taylor, commanding officer, Indiana National Guard Air Corps; Elmer W. Stout, president of Fletcher American National Bank; Franklin Vonnegut of the Vonnegut Hardware Company; Bob Shank, H.C. Brooks, O. L. Grimes, and E.W. Sweeney of the Hoosier Airport; William H. Kerschner, adjutant general, State of Indiana; M.G. Johnson, senior assistant city engineer; Charles H. Vance, principal of the Ben Davis High School; Mrs. H. F. Goll of the Parent Teachers Association of Ben Davis Schools; Lee E. Swails, superintendent, Marion County Schools; Edward W. Pierson, Fletcher Savings and Trust Company; Appraisal Committee of the Indianapolis Real Estate Board (George T. Wheldon, chairman); additional reports given verbally by employees of the Transcontinental Air Transport Company (including Colonel Charles A. Lindbergh); Appraisal Committee verbal report. Airport Site Committee, "Final Report," November 1, 1928, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>257</sup> These qualifications closely match how cities around the country evaluated potential airport locations. An airport location search in Austin, Texas around the same time looked at the accessibility, size, soil, topography of the field, location, and cost. Airport Site Committee, "Final Report," November 1, 1928, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana, 9; Kenneth B. Ragsdale, "Barnstormers, Businessmen, and High Hopes for the Future: Austin, Texas, Enters the Modern Air Age," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 107, no. 4 (Apr., 2004): 553.

attract outside investment. Of the forty-three proposed sites submitted, the committee decided on site 30, a 930-acre site near Ben Davis, a small community on the western edge of the city. (See Figure 8.)<sup>258</sup>



**Figure 8.** Airport Site Committee, “Final Report,” Nov. 1, 1928, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>258</sup>Sources differ between 920 and 940 acres. Mostly likely separate negotiations with the various land owners made it unclear how much land would eventually be bought. “920-Acre Tract Is Recommended for City Airport,” *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 18, 1928; Airport Site Committee, “Final Report,” November 1, 1928, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana, 9.

A letter by L. J. McMaster— a local real estate agent who had submitted site 8— to the City Council prompted the city officials to change course and choose site 8 for purchase.<sup>259</sup> Site 8 had been the committee’s second choice. The roughly 1,000-acre site 8 was located adjacent to and just south of site 30.<sup>260</sup> Although site 30 seemed all but certain, McMaster complained in his letter to the Council that site 8 featured comparable characteristics to site 30 but was far cheaper.<sup>261</sup> They only differed in the proximity to the Big 4 Railroad: “Therefore the matter resolves itself down to the city's willingness to pay approximately \$300,000 for the privilege of favoring one railroad.”<sup>262</sup> A.H. Moore, the city engineer, had highly recommended site 8 and found it “far superior to 30” in his

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<sup>259</sup> McMaster’s letter can be found in Indianapolis Common Council, “November 5, 1928: Regular Session,” *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*: 842. The December 17, 1928 *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana* notes that the options to buy the properties were provided by L.J. McMaster Realty Company. Besides McMaster’s protest of the selection of site 30, the only published comments I found against the airport location selection came from a local farmer. D.A. Mitt wrote a note to the *Times* about his displeasure in how city officials priced the land: “We farmers get it in the neck, both coming and going, and are supposed to accept any price for our properties that a few city chaps offer us, and offer never a word of protest.” “*Times* Readers Voice Views,” “Clippings, 1928-29,” box 1, folder 6, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>260</sup> Indianapolis Common Council, “November 5, 1928: Regular Session,” *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*: 842.

<sup>261</sup> McMaster had secured prices lower than the original offering for the land. Indianapolis Common Council, “November 5, 1928: Regular Session,” *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*: 842.

<sup>262</sup> My sources do not make clear the reason for the committee’s initial selection of site 30 over site 8 and the City Council’s subsequent decision to purchase site 8. The committee may have taken into consideration a letter from Edward Pierson and Asa Mathis. Parents of Ben Davis students had protested building on site 30 because of its proximity to Ben Davis School. Pierson and Mathis imply that the complaints were at the prompting of a school official who owned land in Site 8 which he wished to sell. It would also appear the letters from the Embry-Riddle Company, recommending site 30, and a letter from the Big Four Railroad asking for an airport near their tracks, probably influenced the initial choice of site 30 over site 8. Indianapolis Common Council, “November 5, 1928: Regular Session,” *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*: 842; Airport Site Committee, “Final Report,” November 1, 1928, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

report to the committee of citizens.<sup>263</sup> The decision to purchase site 8 would benefit the airport and the city for years to come because of the large size and flat land. On December 17, Mayor Slack requested that the Council move forward with the steps necessary to purchase land and build the airport. Both the City Council and Board of Public Works unanimously adopted a resolution to purchase site 8 because “it [the airport] is advisable and necessary and of great benefit to the city of Indianapolis.”<sup>264</sup> The city government had officially acted to build a municipal airport on a site that would appeal to national airlines and fit with the realities of the city budget.

After the site committee had prepared its initial report for the City Council, the finance committee met to determine how to finance the airport.<sup>265</sup> The committee had decided that the city should fund the airport through municipal bonds. Following site

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<sup>263</sup> Airport Site Committee, “Final Report,” November 1, 1928, Collection 1080, Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana, 23.

<sup>264</sup> Although the 1920 law gave authority to the City Council to administer an airport, the mayor—advised by city attorneys—recommended that the Department of Public Works adopt the resolution first. During the next fifteen years the Department of Public Works and City Council both oversaw parts of the airport. Indianapolis Common Council, “January 7, 1929: Special Session,” *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*; City of Indianapolis, “Declaratory Resolution No. 14053,” *Minutes of the Department of Public Works*, Jan. 2, 1929, vol. JJ, 262-263; Chapter 53 Counties-County Government, Article 5 Public Buildings, Section 5917v1 to 5917a2 Aviation Fields, Harrison Burns and Samuel Grant Gifford, *Burns' Annotated Indiana Statutes Supplement of 1921 containing the General Statutes Enacted at the Legislative Sessions of 1915, 1917, 1919, 1920, 1921, together with Notes of the Decisions of the Highest Courts* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1921), 668; “Airport Finance Body Appointed,” *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 18, 1928; “Site for Airport is Agreed Upon,” *Indianapolis Star*, Jan. 3, 1929.

<sup>265</sup> The members of the finance committee were: Alfred M. Glossbrenner, president of the Levey Printing Company and chairman of the committee; Henry C. Atkins, president of E.C. Atikins & Co.; Arthur V. Brown, president of the Union Trust Company; H. Foster Clippiner, vice president of the Fletcher American Company; John J. Madden, president of the John J. Madden Manufacturing Company; Gavin L. Payne, president of Gavin L. Payne & Co.; Norman A. Perry, president of the Indianapolis Power and Light Company; and Carl H. Weyl, attorney of the firm of Elliott, Weyl & Jewett. William H. Book, secretary of the Chamber’s civic affairs committee, served as the secretary for the airport finance committee. The committee members were charged with deciding whether the city would issue a bond for purchase of the site or whether the airport would be funded by a private loan that would be paid back by the city. “Airport Finance Body Appointed,” *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 18, 1928.

selection, the Council published in local newspapers an intention to purchase the land and gave sufficient time for the public to file remonstrances. By March 19, 1929, no remonstrance had been filed, and the Council moved forward with selling bonds to purchase the land. William A. Boyce, Jr., the city clerk, testified that he advertised the purchase of the airport as required by law and no remonstrance was submitted. Locations of notices included most of the municipal courts and many of the city offices. This advertising provided for a final chance for taxpayers to remonstrate. Next, the Council had to advertise for 29 days the sale of bonds before they could move forward. Finally, 693 bonds were sold at \$1,000 each with a return of 4.5% interest, and Indianapolis purchased the land for the airport.<sup>266</sup>

The purchase of site 8 only took place after the matter of the airport had come before the public. The Indianapolis City Council and Mayor Slack paid careful attention to following the proper legal procedures. Ample time was made available for Indianapolis citizens to share their views on airport ownership, construction, and operation. Although no record of responses appeared in the *Proceedings of the Common Council* or the *Minutes of the Department of Public Works*, the purchase of the land proceeded without noted argument which indicates either that citizens felt that the site

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<sup>266</sup> After the city purchased the land, the City Council passed a resolution to annex the land, which was in Marion County but not in within the boundaries of the city. Indianapolis Common Council, "March 19, 1929: Regular Meeting," *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*, 110; Indianapolis Common Council, "December 19, 1928: Special Session," *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*; "Council Adopts Resolution," *Indianapolis Star*, Jan. 8, 1929; Indianapolis Common Council, "General Ordinance 13, 1929," *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*, 118; "Sales of Airport Bonds Approved," *Indianapolis Star*, Mar. 26, 1929; Indianapolis Common Council, "April 1, 1929: Regular Meeting," *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*; "December 30, 1929: Special Meeting," *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*.

selection did not concern them or they approved of the site.<sup>267</sup> The effort to solicit public opinion and follow the correct procedures contrasts with the rushed lease and purchase of the Mars Hill airport. Undoubtedly, the city-owned nature of this airport required a more detailed and measured process. Around the country cities that built municipal airports faced lawsuits that questioned whether an airport had a “public purpose.”<sup>268</sup> Indianapolis was fortunate that the Indiana General Assembly had already passed “Article 5, Public Buildings, Section 5917v1 to 5917a2, Aviation Fields.” Douglas points out this Indiana law “addressed all of the significant legal questions” all states would face in order to build and operate airport facilities.<sup>269</sup> A city with an airport enmeshed in controversy would lose contracts and customers. To the mayor and City Council, public support was a crucial component to building a municipal airport funded by taxpayers.<sup>270</sup> City leaders’ deliberate adherence to the legal process and solicitation of public opinion demonstrates their desire to build a superior, long-lasting airport.

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<sup>267</sup> I was unable to find sources that documented the opinions of Indianapolis citizens beyond the business leaders involved in the decision-making process. Without these records, either for or against the decision to build, it is difficult to determine public reaction to a city airport. Based on the lack of documented remonstrance and popular culture’s aviation enthusiasm documented by Corn in *The Winged Gospel*, I believe that most citizens approved or were not concerned with the city airport development. The lack of protest may also demonstrate the public’s trust in government and business leaders during this period.

<sup>268</sup> In her work on early airports, historian Deborah Douglas notes that the rise of municipal airports brought a concurrent rise in lawsuits. Like any infrastructure, airports needed to have a public purpose in order to legally justify spending public money on them. Douglas, 93.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Both the city government and the Chamber viewed the citizens as a factor in development. An article in the Chamber’s publication entitled “Metropolis~ Or Keeping Ahead of the Population,” implies that the airport would help the city prepare for the future. Ultimately, the Chamber’s work toward a stronger Indianapolis was geared toward the betterment of the city as a whole. “Metropolis~ Or Keeping Ahead of the Population,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 43, no. 1 (Jan., 1929): 11



While the City Council purchased the airport site, the Equipment and Maintenance Committee researched and designed the new airport.<sup>271</sup> Paul Moore, the former secretary of the Indianapolis Airport Corporation, served as secretary to the committee. Although not the most visible and prominent airport booster, he had worked hard to promote aviation and an airport for Indianapolis.<sup>272</sup> In May 1929, the Council appointed Moore superintendent of the airport.<sup>273</sup> Mayor Slack drove the first stake into the ground on May 28.<sup>274</sup> In November, Slack and Moore announced that with the completion of architectural plans for the combination administration building and hanger, construction would soon begin. The *News* proclaimed that when completed, the building “will be one of the most modern of its type in the country.”<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Members of the Equipment and Maintenance Committee were: George T. Wheldon, real estate appraiser and member of the Industrial Commission of the Chamber of Commerce, who acted as chairman; Colonel E.S. Gorrell, the vice president of the Stutz Motor Car Company, a reserve officer in the United States Air Service, and representative of Indiana on the Board of Governors of the National Aeronautics Association; Frank H. Sparks, the president of the Noblitt-Sparks Company; George J. Steinmes, manager of the Ford Motor Company’s Indianapolis branch plant; and Capt. H. Weir Cook, United States Army instructor in aviation assigned to the 113th Observation Squadron of the Indiana National Guard. Members of the committee each researched and reported on what other cities had done at already established airports. Earl Mushlitz, “Airport Activity Gets Underway,” *Indianapolis Star*, Aug.7, 1928; “Officials Named on Airport Site,” *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 21, 1928.

<sup>272</sup> Moore had researched equipment and sites for the Mars Hill airport and served as the secretary of the Chamber’s Airport Corporation. He had also run the Chamber’s Aeronautical Bureau. “Airport Finance Body Appointed,” *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 18, 1928; “Aero Bureau Adds to City’s Aviation Promotion Program,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 41, no. 10 (Oct., 1927): 17.

<sup>273</sup> A.H. Moore, the city engineer, his assistant Gilbert Harr, and Paul Moore all oversaw the work for the airport. During his time as superintendent, Paul Moore kept a scrapbook of photos documenting the construction process. This scrapbook is at the Indiana State Library Manuscript Collection (Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection, L456, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana). “Airport Under Way,” *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 43, no. 6 (June, 1929): 4. Indianapolis Common Council, “May 20, 1929: Special Session,” *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*; “City Officials Start Work on Municipal Airport,” *Indianapolis Star*, May 29, 1929.

<sup>274</sup> “City Officials Start Work on Municipal Airport,” *Indianapolis Star*, May 29, 1929.

<sup>275</sup> The Department of Public Works contracted with the architectural firm McGuire & Shook on October 2<sup>nd</sup> to design a hangar with spaces for mail, an attendant, baggage rooms, waiting rooms, toilets, small dining room, offices, charts and pilot rooms, and heating plant. I contacted Odle

The progress on the airport took a step backward at the start of 1930. In January, Reginald H. Sullivan replaced Slack as mayor, and a new City Council took office.<sup>276</sup> Sullivan made a point to reassess the already completed plans for the airport.<sup>277</sup> The mayor and a group of city officials also traveled to the highly ranked airport in Columbus, Ohio.<sup>278</sup> With conditions similar to Indianapolis, the Columbus airport

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McGuire Shook who informed me that they had donated their architectural drawings to the Indiana Historical Society. The Indiana Historical Society's McGuire and Shook collection makes no note of the airport drawings. The Indiana Historical Society only has architectural drawings of a shop and hanger from 1938 by Rubush & Hunter. "Plans completed for municipal airport; Work to be started soon," *Indianapolis News*, Nov. 23, 1929; City of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Department of Public Works*, Oct. 2, 1929, vol. KK, 322-323.

<sup>276</sup> Reginald Sullivan's father and grandfather played significant roles in Indiana and Indianapolis politics. He attended Indiana Law School and served in the Indiana Senate from 1911 to 1913. He was in a private law practice when he ran for mayor in 1929. During his campaign, he made headlines when he was injured in a plane crash. *Indiana Biographical Series* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Commission on Public Records, 1996), s.v. "Reginald Sullivan," 20:29. Indianapolis Common Council, "January 6, 1930: Special Session," *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*, 3.

<sup>277</sup> I contacted several repositories including the Indiana State Library, the Indianapolis Public Library, the IUPUI University Library and Ruth Lilly Special Collection and Archives, the Indiana Historical Society, the University of Indianapolis's Institute for Civic Leadership and Mayoral Archives, and the Indiana State Archives and none of the staff knew of any existing papers from Sullivan's time as mayor. The Indiana State Library has a transcript of an oral interview conducted with Sullivan when he was 102 years old. Although Sullivan mentions he was mayor when the Indianapolis Municipal Airport opened, he gives very few details. I therefore am basing my analysis on newspaper articles which hint at Sullivan's position. Reginald Hall Sullivan, interview by Gerald Handfield, Jr., *Oral History Project*, Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana, 1978.

Sources indicate that Slack may have received political backlash for his efforts to build the municipal airport. George Wheldon sent letters to city leaders who were influential in the airport development process on October 23, 1930, when the coast-to-coast air service started. One of the letters was to Slack, and Slack's reply has survived at the Indiana Historical Society. In the letter Slack hints at public discontent with his handling of the airport situation: "I am very sorry to note a more or less critical attitude on the part of some people now holding responsible positions in connection with the development and only recently was very much shocked to learn an effort had been made to put forth a general criticism which some politicians thought might be beneficial for campaign purposes. It seems that it is very difficult to perform a public service and obtain an unanimous approval." (He ends the letter by predicting that in time the city would see the wisdom of the transaction—presumably purchasing the land for the municipal airport.) Sullivan may have been carefully distancing himself from Slack's political fallout by reevaluating and redesigning the layout. Ert Slack to George Wheldon, October 30, 1930, Collection 1080, Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society.

<sup>278</sup> Sullivan brought with him to Columbus the superintendent of the Indianapolis Airport, Paul Moore; Department of Public Works board members, E. Kirk McKinney, C.O. Britton, and Louis

allowed the Indianapolis delegation to learn what worked and what did not work. The new mayor used the visit as an opportunity to have a voice in the construction of an airport that would be completed under his administration. The *Star* noted his cautious approach: “Mayor Reginald H. Sullivan is determined the city shall know whither it is bound before a program of heavy expenditure is undertaken.”<sup>279</sup> Although this trip and Sullivan's editing of the plans slowed the process, Sullivan's actions showed considerable foresight into the future needs of the city and the desires of outside investors. Noting that Columbus had not made any mistakes yet, the paper noted, “Indianapolis doesn't want to discover any five years from now. But the aviation picture is a moving one, and what is new today is obsolete tomorrow.” Mayor Sullivan saw the importance of satisfying customers of the airport for years to come.

Mayor Sullivan's revision of the airport plans was also influenced by a visit from John E. Sommers of the Aeronautics Branch of the United States Department of Commerce.<sup>280</sup> Sommers' recommendations influenced the relocation of the

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C. Brandt; city councilmen, Ernest C. Ropkey, Leo F. Welch, C.A. Hildebrand, and Clarence J. Wheatley; and the architect for the administration building, William C. McGuire of McGuire & Shook. This trip to Columbus was not the only trip to another city for airport research. In addition to the trip to Detroit in 1928, before the final selection of a site, Paul Moore visited St. Louis's under-construction airport. The Board also authorized trips to Detroit, Columbus, and Chicago for Moore and airport engineer Johnson to inspect details of other airports. “Indianapolis City Officials Get Airport Planning Hints from Columbus, Ohio,” *Indianapolis Star*, Feb. 10, 1930; “Will Get Data on St. Louis Airport,” “Clippings, 1928-29,” box 1, folder 6, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana; “Moore to Study St. Louis Airport,” Aug. 1928, “Clippings, 1928-29,” box 1, folder 6, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana; City of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Department of Public Works*, Mar. 24, 1930 vol. LL, 116; City of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Department of Public Works*, May 23, 1930 vol. LL, 268; City of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Department of Public Works*, Aug. 25, 1930 vol. LL.

<sup>279</sup> “Indianapolis City Officials Get Airport Planning Hints from Columbus, Ohio,” *Indianapolis Star*, Feb. 10, 1930.

<sup>280</sup> In late February 1930, Sommers visited Indianapolis and made recommendations to Mayor Sullivan, members of the Council, the Department of Public Works, the assistant city engineer, M.G. Johnson, and Paul Moore. Paul Moore to the Common Council, Mar. 17, 1930,

administration building and redesign of the runways.<sup>281</sup> The attentive consideration of this federal expertise on the Indianapolis Municipal Airport also demonstrates the desire of city leaders to build the best airport. Bednarek notes that many city airports built in the mid-1920s came under criticism in the late 1920s through the early 1930s for not keeping up with the changes in airport technology.<sup>282</sup> Indianapolis sought expert advice to stay abreast of new technologies. Although the mayor had begun his term reassessing the airport, within the year the mayor's vision for the city matched those of the boosters before him: "We look forward to the day when this city, situated as it is at the crossroads of America, will be the outstanding aviation center of our country."<sup>283</sup> Mayor Sullivan quickly joined the aviation boosters in building an airport that would attract aviation industries through the quality of the facilities.

Under the new city leadership, Paul Moore, as superintendent, strove to make the Indianapolis Municipal Airport the best airport in the nation.<sup>284</sup> In May 1930, Moore

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"Correspondence, Municipal Airport, 1931-1937," Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana; Indianapolis Common Council, "March 17, 1930: Regular Meeting," Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>281</sup> The Department of Public Works renegotiated their contract with the architect on March 10, 1930. Paul Moore to the Common Council, March 17, 1930, "Correspondence, Municipal Airport, 1931-1937," Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana; Indianapolis Common Council, "March 17, 1930: Regular Meeting," Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana; City of Indianapolis, Minutes of the Department of Public Works, Mar. 10, 1930, vol. LL, 83-86.

<sup>282</sup> Bednarek provides several examples that show that beginning in 1928, national aviation journals published articles chiding cities that provided inadequate facilities. Bednarek, 73-79.

<sup>283</sup> The *Star* attributed this quotation to Sullivan in a proclamation he released at the beginning of a week of aviation festivities. The goal of the week was for the Indianapolis airports to work together to "get everyone in the air during the week." "Mayor Sullivan Officially Proclaims Aviation Week Here Starting Saturday," *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 7, 1930.

<sup>284</sup> During 1930, Paul Moore continued in his role as superintendent of the developing airport. However, evidence suggests that tensions existed between Moore and the new city administration. In March 1931, friction between the Board of Public Works and the City Council over control of the airport was resolved when the Board of Public Works gained control over appointing personnel. After months of friction, Paul Moore resigned and Charles Cox, Jr., the

attended the Second National Airport Managers' Conference in Buffalo, New York.<sup>285</sup> This gathering of managers from around the United States and Canada gave him insights into problems to anticipate and how to overcome them. In addition, Moore took the opportunity to visit between forty and fifty airports in Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.<sup>286</sup> In his report to the Council, Moore noted the boosterism of the other airports: "In most every case I was surprised to find that the ports are not nearly so well equipped nor in such fine condition as is claimed in the newspaper and magazine reports that we have been reading recently."<sup>287</sup> Just as Indianapolis exaggerated the strengths of its aviation efforts in publications, other cities also wished to capture the attention of the nation. Moore's travels provided city leaders with valuable information on airport management and construction. At the end of his trip, Moore concluded that the Indianapolis Airport had a positive future: "We undoubtedly have the best airport site in the United States, and we are buying our land and putting in practically the same amount of equipment for approximately \$700,000.00 that has cost other fields \$2,000,000.00 to \$5,000,000.00."<sup>288</sup>

Collaboration between boosters of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, city officials, and prominent Indianapolis businessmen had started the city on the path

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former assistant superintendent, was appointed superintendent of flying with M.G. Johnson, the assistant city engineer, as manager of the port. Cox was a major in the Army Air Corps Reserves and executive officer of the 309th squadron at Fort Benjamin Harrison. He previously served three years as the secretary of aviation for the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce. "Cox is Appointed Chief at Airport," *Indianapolis Star*, Mar. 17, 1931; City of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Department of Public Works*, Mar. 15, 1931 vol. MM.

<sup>285</sup> Indianapolis Common Council, "May 19, 1930: Regular Meeting," *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*, 256.

<sup>286</sup> Moore notes that the larger fields he visited included: Wayne County, Ford, Detroit Municipal, Grosse Ile, Buffalo Municipal Airport, Erie, Erie County, Issodum, Akron, Cleveland, and the Columbus Municipal airports. *Ibid.*, 257.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*

towards aviation greatness. Through concentrated boosterism and the interest in the city shown by TAT and Colonel Lindbergh, the Chamber of Commerce convinced city decision-makers to invest in a new airport. These promotional efforts revolved around the dream of Indianapolis as a future aviation center of the United States. This renewed rhetoric from the campaign for the Mars Hill airport demonstrates the failure of the first commercial airport to fulfill the boosters' vision. The City Council's and Department of Public Works' resolution to purchase land for a municipal airport at the start of 1930 signaled the success of the Chamber's promotion of the airport to citizens. The city government controlled land purchase, design, and construction to meet the needs of the city and outside investors, and the Chamber shifted its focus to the ultimate agenda of boosting the city to aviation industries. Boosterism and the use of the rhetorical themes originally formulated for the Mars Hill airport increased as the city planned the dedication and operation of the Indianapolis Municipal Airport.

### **Chapter Three. Attracting Attention: Opening the Indianapolis Municipal Airport, 1929-1931**

The opening and dedication of the Indianapolis Municipal Airport heralded the successful movement to establish a first-class airport that would attract national attention. As construction neared completion, citizens, the federal government, and airlines praised the new facility. City boosters used this acclaim to support their appeal to the aviation industry. Amid the signs of success hints appeared that the Indianapolis airport might again fail to transform the city into the aviation center of the nation. The Indianapolis Municipal Airport needed continual improvements to remain an excellent facility. Praise did not guarantee investment, and constantly changing technology and the state of the national economy were hard to predict. Despite these struggles, boosters saw realization of their efforts when they dedicated the new airport to national acclaim. In working toward creating an aviation center for the country, Indianapolis successfully built an exceptional municipal airport that would serve the city for years.

While city government figured out the logistics of opening a first-class airport, the Chamber of Commerce continued to boost Indianapolis and its future airport to outside companies. In July of 1929, the Industrial Commission of the Chamber began actively to pursue airplane manufacturers.<sup>289</sup> The 1930 program of the Chamber included the goal “To make Indianapolis ‘The Air Center of America’—through the development of new aviation industries—the new Municipal Airport—establishment of new air mail and

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<sup>289</sup> This marked the first time the Industrial Commission of the Chamber focused on a specific industry. “Industrial Commission centers attention on Air Development,” *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 44, no. 1 (July, 1929): 1.

passenger lines and other aviation activities.”<sup>290</sup> In pursuing this dream for the city, the Industrial Commission sent prospectus packets about the Municipal Airport and local manufacturing facilities to 250 companies involved in airplane manufacturing.<sup>291</sup>

This direct marketing push used the theme of the airport’s excellent location in the city to appeal to businesses. The Chamber made clear that it felt “that the airport [was] one of the city’s greatest assets and offers the best location for the manufacturer of aircraft, motors and allied equipment in the United States.”<sup>292</sup> The letter from the Industrial Commission that accompanied the packets laid out the goal of the Chamber: “. . . we hope that you consider carefully the possibility of locating your business on the Indianapolis Municipal Airport, where you may profit and enjoy its benefits and privileges.”<sup>293</sup> The packet also contained tax information for Indianapolis and the location of the airport relative to the business center, raw materials, and transportation. Finally, the Industrial Commission used the second theme of superiority of the airport when it indicated that the north end of “one of the outstanding airports in the world”

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<sup>290</sup> “The 1930 Program of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce,” *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 45, no. 7 (July, 1930): 1.

<sup>291</sup> “Municipal Airport Data Sent Aviation Industry Executives,” *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 45, no. 7 (July, 1930):1; “The City Airport,” *Indianapolis News*, July 8, 1930.

<sup>292</sup> “Municipal Airport Data,” *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 45, no. 7 (July, 1930): 2.

<sup>293</sup> The manuscript collection from the airport authority at the Indiana Historical Society contains a letter sent from C.G. Dunphy, the manager of the Industrial Commission, to George Wheldon with a sample letter and packet of what the Commission was sending to aviation industries. C.G. Dunphy, Industrial Commission Manager to George Wheldon, July 3, 1930, “Correspondence, Municipal Airport, 1931-1937,” Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.



would be set aside for industrial use.<sup>294</sup> The airport served as a tool for the Chamber to attract aviation companies to Indianapolis.<sup>295</sup>

As construction and boosterism continued, leaders of the movement started to see results. Hints that the three main users of the airport— airlines, local citizens, and aviation industries—were attracted to the developing Indianapolis port appeared throughout the year.<sup>296</sup> In December 1929, the United States Post Office Department announced that a new air mail and passenger route would stop in Indianapolis.<sup>297</sup> The route from New York to Los Angeles signaled a victory for Hoosier aviation promoters.<sup>298</sup> To secure this stop, three boosters had highlighted Indianapolis’s superior weather, number of potential customers, and flying conditions at a hearing before the Inter-Departmental Committee of the Post Office and Commerce Departments.<sup>299</sup> The Chamber of Commerce, and specifically the Industrial Commission, supported these efforts by preparing in-depth reports about the superior conditions of Indianapolis as a

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<sup>294</sup> C.G. Dunphy, Industrial Commission Manager to George Wheldon, July 3, 1930, “Correspondence, Municipal Airport, 1931-1937,” Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>295</sup> “Municipal Airport Data,” *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 45, no. 7 (July, 1930): 2.

<sup>296</sup> The 1929 crash of the U.S. stock market took a few years to affect the construction of airports. For more on the Great Depression’s effect see page 115.

<sup>297</sup> “City to Have New Air Mail Service,” *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 44, no. 6 (Dec., 1929): 1,8.

<sup>298</sup> Originally the route was planned to stretch from St. Louis to New York but the route was changed to Los Angeles to New York. “City on New Air Service,” *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 2, 1930.

<sup>299</sup> Indianapolis competed against Cincinnati and Louisville to be a stop on the route. Indiana Congressman Louis Ludlow along with C.L. Harrod, an Industrial Commissioner of the Chamber, and Captain H. Weir Cook, general manager of the Curtiss Flying Service of Indiana, testified at a hearing before the Inter-Departmental Committee of the Post Office and Commerce Departments. “Ludlow Confident New Air Mail Route to Include Indianapolis,” *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 44, no. 2 (Aug., 1929), 1.

potential stop.<sup>300</sup> The selection of Indianapolis demonstrated to the boosters that they had begun to have some success with their efforts to draw the aviation industry's attention to Indianapolis. Additional validation came in August 1930 when another airline, the Embry-Riddle Company, began a regularly scheduled flight from Indianapolis to Chicago.<sup>301</sup>

Indianapolis citizens also showed increased interest in the municipal airport through the efforts of the aviation boosters. In the fall of 1929, a series of articles ran in the *Star* on the importance of air transportation for the future of cities. Over one hundred local businessmen and businesses sponsored the series, which included pictures of local aviation activities and articles by local aviators. The competitive nature of American cities again underlined the boosters' efforts. Although the articles spanned a range of aviation topics, the title of the first full-page spread made clear the intentions of these businessmen in educating the public about aviation: "Concerning Indianapolis as an Airport: and why every Indianapolitan should strive to make it the finest in the middle West."<sup>302</sup> Sundays at the local airports demonstrated the citizens' growing interest in aviation in Indianapolis. Families flocked to Stout Field to watch the planes arrive and depart.<sup>303</sup> Completion of the new facilities would shift the regularly scheduled flights and attention of the local citizens to the municipal airport.

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<sup>300</sup> "City to Have New Air Mail Service," *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 44, no. 6 (Dec 1929): 1,8.

<sup>301</sup> Previously the Embry-Riddle flight from Cincinnati to Chicago stopped in Indianapolis. However, the planes were often full by the time they stopped in the Hoosier capital. The 6-passenger Indianapolis Limited flew between Chicago and Indianapolis once a day. "New City-Chicago Air Service," *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 45, no. 8 (Aug., 1930): 7.

<sup>302</sup> "Concerning Indianapolis as an Airport," *Indianapolis Star*, Nov. 4, 1929.

<sup>303</sup> "Going Down to the Depot on Sunday Afternoon' Finds New Thrill; Passenger Plane Having Come to Replace Good Old Number 7," *Indianapolis News*, Oct. 26, 1929.

Finally, the aviation companies that the Chamber desperately wanted to attract also showed interest in the Indianapolis Municipal Airport. In August 1930, the Chamber reported that after sending out packets, eight firms had indicated interest in Indianapolis as a possible base of operation. The Chamber attributed this interest to the draw of the under-construction airport: “From the manufacturing standpoint the new Municipal Airport offers distinct advantages for industries making planes, motors and accessories.”<sup>304</sup> National reactions by the federal government and other leaders in the industry drew the attention of aviation businesses. The Department of Commerce picked Indianapolis for one of seven new radio beacons, and the federal government leased land at the new airport.<sup>305</sup> An editorial in the *Star* interpreted this selection of the city as “a federal opinion that the port is destined to be one of the most important in the country.”<sup>306</sup> By the end of the year, boosters claimed the unfinished municipal airport had been ranked as one of the three best in the country.<sup>307</sup> This early interest and praise fueled the “crossroads of the air” dreams of city leaders, justified their efforts, and provided material to further boost the advantages of the city to aviation manufacturers.

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<sup>304</sup> “Aviation Firms Consider Port,” *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 45, no. 8 (Aug., 1930): 1.

<sup>305</sup> According to the editorial, the beacons were part of a general policy of the Department of Commerce to aid air travel in the same way it oversaw lighthouses for shipping. “Council Assures Airport Beacon,” *Indianapolis Star*, Mar. 4, 1930; Indianapolis Common Council, “March 5, 1930: Regular Meeting,” *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*.

<sup>306</sup> “Council Assures Airport Beacon,” *Indianapolis Star*, Mar. 4, 1930.

<sup>307</sup> A Chamber of Commerce article title notes that the airport was ranked one of the three best in the nation. The article makes no mention of who ranked the airport or what other cities made the list. This top three ranking persisted in the literature surrounding the airport into 1931. At the same time that the Chamber published this article, the *Times* noted that the airport would “rank with largest and best in United States.” The *Star* quoted airport manager Paul Moore as claiming that “Indianapolis’s field has been described by experts as one of the three best in the country.” “Mayor Sullivan Officially Proclaims Aviation Week Here Starting Saturday,” *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 7, 1930; “Municipal Port in Service Soon: Aviation Boost Seen — Airport One of Three Best,” *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 45, no. 10 (Oct., 1930): 1; “New City Airport to Rank with Largest and Best in United States,” *Indianapolis Times*, Oct. 23, 1930.

The boosters' rosy picture of the new municipal airport obscured the roadblocks to the airport's completion. The leadership change and Mayor Sullivan's subsequent revisions to the plan were the first of a series of delays in 1930. A string of construction and funding setbacks slowed work on the airport to a crawl.<sup>308</sup> Unfortunately for the city, these delays prevented completion of the airport in time for the inaugural transcontinental flight. As a sign of the newly merged Transcontinental & Western Airline's (TWA) commitment to the new municipal airport, the first flight on October 25, 1930 landed at the unfinished facility.<sup>309</sup> First day covers for the inaugural air mail trip proclaimed to all who saw them that Indianapolis was the "Crossroads of the Air."<sup>310</sup> (See Figure 9.) However, for several months following, planes landed at Mars Hill until the municipal airport was completed, and TWA moved its offices.<sup>311</sup>

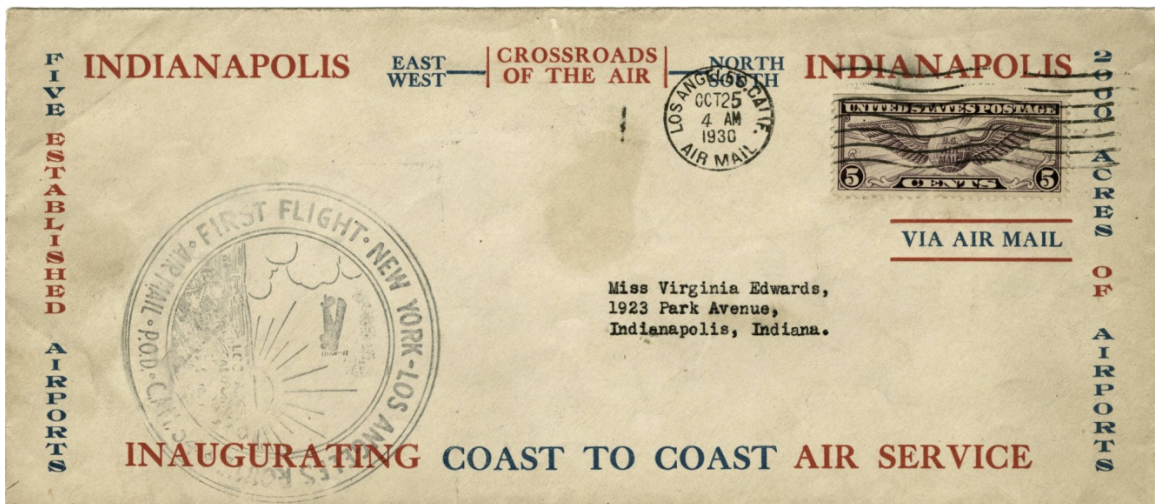
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<sup>308</sup> More delays followed when the failure to find a satisfactory water source stopped construction. Eventually, construction resumed, only to be halted again when the project ran out of money. Although the airport was "virtually complete," the only legal way to pay the final \$75,000 needed was with an excessive \$686,000 bond. The state law only allowed bond issues of \$686,000 (1% of the total property evaluation of the city). The City of Indianapolis ended up having a "friendly" injunction suit brought against it, and the court decided that city officials could issue a bond smaller than \$686,000. As the Department of Public Works attempted to solve this problem, a dispute with the building contractor stopped construction. The Board of Public Works grew upset with construction delays and withheld payment from the building contractor, C.T. Caldwell. He, in turn, ran out of funds and stopped paying his workers. Subsequently fifteen plaster workers refused to work, prolonging completion of the job. "Aviation Firms Consider Port," *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 45, no. 8 (Aug., 1930): 1; "Means to Raise \$75,000 For City Airport Sought," *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 7, 1930; "Airport Bonds," *Indianapolis News*, Dec. 26, 1930; "Lack of Cash Halts Work at Airport," *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 23, 1930; "Airport Building to be Completed," *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 24, 1930.

<sup>309</sup> On July 15, 1930, TAT and Western Air Express agreed to merge as Transcontinental and Western Airline (TWA) to settle a dispute over rights to the central transcontinental air mail route. Robert Van der Linden, *Airlines and Air Mail: The Post Office and the Birth of the Commercial Aviation Industry* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 176.

<sup>310</sup> "Coast to Coast Envelope" [First day cover], Box 1, Folder 15, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>311</sup> In May 1929, improvements had been made to Mars Hill airport in anticipation of the need for TAT to start operations from that field before the completion of the Municipal Airport. "City to Hail Air Mail Line Opening Today," *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 25, 1930; "Changes Will Raise Rating at Mars Hill," *Indianapolis News*, May 17, 1929.



**Figure 9.** “Coast to Coast Envelope,” [First day cover] Box 1, Folder 15, Collection 1080 Indianapolis Airport Authority Materials, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

The airport officially opened when Transcontinental and Western Airline, Inc. moved its offices from Mars Hill to the new site on February 15, 1931.<sup>312</sup> Another series of delays had already postponed relocation, and when the move finally occurred, the lighting equipment had still not been completely installed.<sup>313</sup> The drawn-out construction project with lingering issues made recognition of the airport's completion difficult. Actually, construction on the airport never stopped. Additions, improvements, and repairs were ongoing. Although the airport had received national recognition, without continued upgrading, praise would be fleeting. In the city, citizens gave little fanfare to the move as improvements continued, and a celebration of this noteworthy achievement did not come until seven months later.<sup>314</sup>

### *Publicity*

Between the first TWA landing at the facility in October 1930 and the dedication in September 1931, the new Indianapolis Municipal Airport received national coverage. Media attention centered on major events at the airport: the start of the TWA flights, the official opening of the airport, and the dedication.<sup>315</sup> Publicity from around the country marked a huge success for Indianapolis boosters. Positive media about the new airport

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<sup>312</sup> "Transcontinental Moves to New Municipal Airport," *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 46, no. 2 (Feb., 1931): 2.

<sup>313</sup> "Airline to Occupy City Port Monday," *Indianapolis Star*, Feb. 11, 1931.

<sup>314</sup> One marking of the occasion came from the Chamber of Commerce. In keeping with their desire to use the airport as a tool to stimulate business in the city, the president of the Chamber, Louis Bornstein, sent a giant postcard signed by Indianapolis businessmen, to the mayor of Los Angeles (the western end of the route). The card stated that Indianapolis looked forward to serving the citizens of L.A. in the future when they landed at the municipal port. "Greetings Sent Los Angeles Mayor," *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 46, no. 3 (Mar., 1931): 1.

<sup>315</sup> Many of these articles repeated the same information about the airport word-for-word (despite different authors in some cases) and many of the magazine articles were written by the same person. It is likely that much of this information was obtained from a press release.

reached potential customers who were curious to see the new Indianapolis Airport for themselves. This national publicity emphasized the size and desirable landing conditions of the airport. A *New York Times* article on the Indianapolis airport published prior to the start of the TWA line, noted that it was “one of the largest municipal airports in the nation” and that it would “be adequate in size for years to come.”<sup>316</sup> An article reprinted in the *Journal of Electrical Works and Operators*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *Labor Union* praised the airport as “one of the most modern and complete airports in the United States.” Quotes like these seemed to assure Indianapolis’s aviation boosters that they would reach their goals. The article said “Indianapolis’ place in the world of air transportation has grown in importance lately and with the provision of the new terminal the city’s future as an air center seems assured.”<sup>317</sup> Another glowing endorsement of the airport used the boosters’ own phrase: “With a view toward making Indianapolis the ‘crossroads of the air,’ the city about December 1 will open one of the best airports in the United States.”<sup>318</sup> Aviation journals, including *Airway Age*, *Airports*, and *Aero Digest*, also featured the Indianapolis Municipal Airport.<sup>319</sup> Widespread national media coverage of the new airport, especially in the aviation specific journals, increased the range of Indianapolis boosters’ messages geared toward aviation industries.

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<sup>316</sup> “Line To Coast Will Use New Field At Indianapolis, Opening Tomorrow,” *New York Times*, Nov 30, 1930.

<sup>317</sup> Charles Lutz, “Indianapolis Lights Modern Air-Port,” *The Journal of Electrical Works and Operators*, Feb. 1931, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1931-32, V408, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana; Robert Wood, “Indianapolis Builds Modern Landing Field” *Chicago Tribune*, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1931-32, V408; H. Gene Haynes, “City’s New Airport One of the Best in the Country,” *Labor Union*, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1931-32, V408.

<sup>318</sup> “City Throws Open Plane Depot Dec. 1,” *Chicago Herald*, Nov. 23, 1931.

<sup>319</sup> Of the five articles about the Indianapolis Airport in these publications, four of them are attributed to H. Gene Haynes.

The most prestigious recognition of the airport's state-of-the-art construction came from the Aeronautical Division of the Department of Commerce, which awarded the Indianapolis Municipal Airport an A-1-A rating, the highest possible.<sup>320</sup> The Department of Commerce had developed the rating system in the mid-1920s; however, requests for ratings were voluntary. Nationally, the first airport received a ranking in February 1930.<sup>321</sup> At a minimum, an airport had to have a suitable landing area, be free from obstructions, accessible from the nearest city, have a wind-direction indicator, markings, runways, drainage, and fuel, communication, transportation, and personnel available.<sup>322</sup> Beyond these basics, an airport with an "A" ranking had all of the required equipment at the airport.<sup>323</sup> The "1" indicated that the airport had at least 2,500 linear feet

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<sup>320</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Aeronautics Branch, *Air Commerce Bulletin* 3 no.4 (Aug. 15, 1931): 102. <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015021076685;view=1up;seq=112> (accessed November 8, 2014).

<sup>321</sup> The exact date the rating system was established remains unclear. The Department of Commerce first published airport rating regulations in 1928 in a U.S. Aviation Report. However, this printing indicated that the ratings were an amendment of a previous version. Douglas argues that whether or not the regulations were official, they shaped airport design at the time. An airport ranking could only be awarded "upon application of the owners of these facilities." Bednarek notes that when the first airport received an A-1-A ranking, other airports postponed their inspections to make the improvements to ensure that they would receive a higher rating. By 1932, only 5% of airports had been rated. For more discussion on the development of these regulations see Douglas, 85-89. Janet R. Daly Bednarek, *America's Airports: Airfield Development, 1918-1947* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 55; Deborah G. Douglas, "The Invention of Airports: A Political, Economic and Technological History of Airports in the United States, 1919-1939" (diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996), 4; U.S. Department of Commerce, Aeronautics Branch, *Air Commerce Bulletin* 1 no. 16 (Feb. 15, 1930 ). <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015021076875;view=1up;seq=42> (accessed November 8, 2014); Joseph H. Wenneman, *Municipal Airports History, Development and Legal Aspect of Municipal Airports, Text of Federal Acts and Regulations, Digests of State Aviation Laws and of State Enabling Acts, Ordinances of Principal Cities Having Airports on Main Airways, Legal and Business Forms in Use in the Aviation Industry* (Cleveland, OH: Flying Review, 1931): 375.

<sup>322</sup> Joseph Wenneman's 1931 book on airport laws and regulations includes a copy of the September 1930 amended regulations. A suitable landing area was defined as: smooth, well-drained, and free from obstructions. Wenneman, 377-380.

<sup>323</sup> The regulations required a hangar, repair service, and a restaurant. For details of the equipment needed see Wenneman, 381- 382. Bednarek, 46.



of runways.<sup>324</sup> The final “A” indicated that the airport had an extensive lighting system that included beacons, boundary lights, obstruction lights, a landing area flood-light system, and lighting equipment operated all night.<sup>325</sup> The A-1-A ranking indicated that the airport met all of the federal government’s criteria for the best airports in the country. Indianapolis was the ninth airport to be given an A-1-A ranking, and the *Indianapolis Star* interpreted this to mean that the airport was “among the nine leading fields in the country.”<sup>326</sup> The national ranking given to the new airport bolstered boosters’ convictions that the facility put the city on its way toward aviation greatness and provided more support for their promotion to aviation manufacturers.

The Indianapolis Municipal Airport offered exceptional facilities when the city dedicated it in 1931. The city government had purchased 947 acres for \$305,000.<sup>327</sup> A survey conducted of airports built between 1926 and 1929 found the average size to be 396 acres.<sup>328</sup> The Indianapolis airport came close in size to the largest surveyed airport of

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<sup>324</sup> The lowest ranking of “4” required 1,320 feet of runway. Bednarek, 46; Wenneman, 284-387.

<sup>325</sup> An airport without night lighting equipment would receive an “X.” Bednarek, 46; Wennemen, 386-394.

<sup>326</sup> The airport specialist, William Mackenzie, who inspected the field for the Department of Commerce and assigned the rating, also made recommendations to improve the newly completed port, and the Department of Public Works agreed to follow his suggestions. Improvements included changing the arrangement of the field flood light, buying a radio set for weather reports, and separating the garage for the gasoline truck from the hanger. “U.S. Gives City Airport Highest Official Ranking,” *Indianapolis Star*, July 31, 1931; U.S. Department of Commerce, Aeronautics Branch, *Air Commerce Bulletin* 3 no.4 (Aug. 15, 1931): 102.

<sup>327</sup> The City of Indianapolis paid \$286,000 for the original tract of land. Soon after, it purchased additional land for \$19,000 to serve as an entrance to the airport. *Indianapolis Municipal Airport* (Indianapolis Board of Public Works, Aug. 1931), 7; Indianapolis Common Council, “September 16, 1929: Regular Session,” *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis*, 719.

<sup>328</sup> In 1929, Harvard University established the first graduate school of City Planning. The following year the first *Harvard City Planning Studies* based on the school’s research was published. The first volume was devoted to airports, and to support the work, Paul Mahoney conducted a survey of U.S. airports. Mahoney traveled to 85 airports and compiled reports on each. The averages are based on 30 municipal airports and 15 commercial airports. The Indianapolis Municipal Airport was included in the survey, although it is clear that the airport was still under construction. The cost of acreage and number of acres at Indianapolis Municipal

1,085 acres.<sup>329</sup> In addition, Moore's assessment that the City of Indianapolis had paid less for its land than other cities proved true. The survey found the average cost for land was \$974 per acre (triple the \$322 per acre the City of Indianapolis had paid).<sup>330</sup> There were three concrete runways; one runway was 1,100 feet long and the other two were 2,000 feet long.<sup>331</sup> On the east end of the field a 21,000 square-foot combination hangar and administration building featured offices, the U.S. Weather Bureau, shops, mailrooms, and a restaurant.<sup>332</sup> Passengers drove on a ramp through the basement of the building for protection from the weather when unloading their luggage. In 1931, two regularly scheduled mail lines carried mail, passengers and freight.<sup>333</sup> The Indianapolis Municipal Airport had been built "equipped to care for the largest transport planes yet built by man," and 300 acres were used for the landing field.<sup>334</sup> The airport also featured a service depot.<sup>335</sup> Arguably, just as important as the airport's ability to accommodate airplanes, was the city leaders' foresight to provide for future expansion. The part of the field bordering the Pennsylvania Railroad was set aside for industrial sites.<sup>336</sup> The ample

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Airport in the survey are based on the original purchase. My data included the land purchased soon after for an entrance. Henry Vincent Hubbard, *Airports: Their Location, Administration and Legal Basis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), xiv, 88, 172.

<sup>329</sup> Cleveland's municipal airport was 1,085 acres and cost \$1,200 per acre. Hubbard, 89, 173.

<sup>330</sup> In comparison to other municipal airports, the gap between the average cost per acre in Indianapolis and the average cost grew smaller. The 30 municipal airports reported on paid an average of \$713.50 per acre. Hubbard, 88, 172.

<sup>331</sup> *Indianapolis Municipal Airport*, (Indianapolis Board of Public Works, Aug. 1931), 7.

<sup>332</sup> Mahoney and his co-author Miller McClintock, professor of planning at Harvard, cautioned that a combination waiting room, offices, control room and a hanger, "is at best temporary. . . It adds to the fire hazard and has many other obvious disadvantages." *Indianapolis Municipal Airport*, (Indianapolis Board of Public Works, Aug. 1931), 9,11; Hubbard, 84.

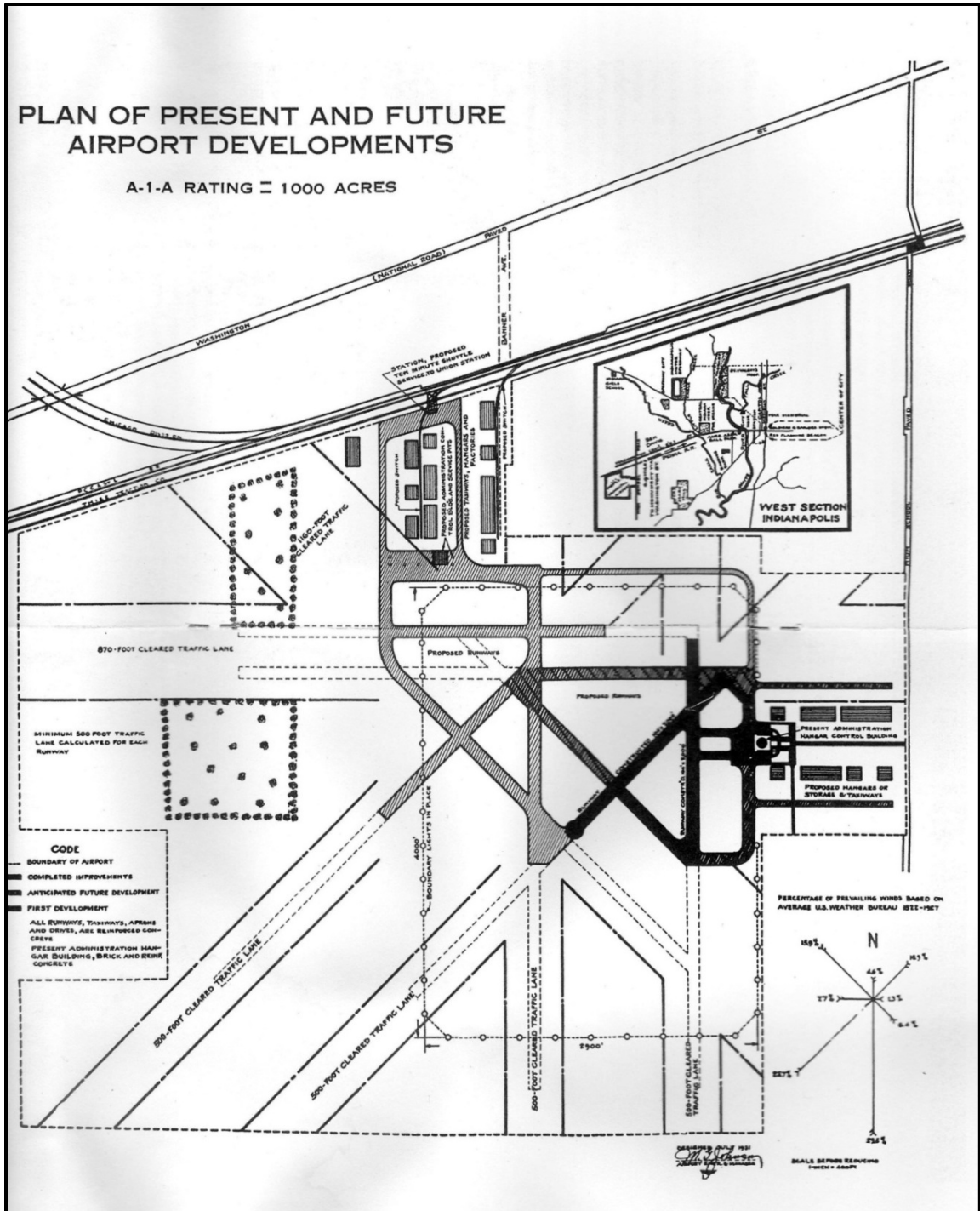
<sup>333</sup> The airport was served by the TWA line and the Embry-Riddle line from Cincinnati to Chicago that was operated by American Airways. *Indianapolis Municipal Airport*, (Indianapolis Board of Public Works, Aug. 1931), 9.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

airport property that had not been developed would provide space for expansion in the future without encroachment of the city. (See Figure 10.)



**Figure 10.** "Plan of Present and Future Airport Developments," *Indianapolis Municipal Airport* (Indianapolis Board of Public Works, Aug. 1931).

## *Dedication*

By May 1931, plans were finally underway for a spectacular dedication of the already in-use Indianapolis Municipal Airport. The president of the Chamber of Commerce, Louis J. Borinstein; a director of the Chamber, George T. Wheldon; Mayor Reginald Sullivan; the president of the Board of Public Works, E. Kirk McKinney; and the president of the City Council, Ernest C. Ropkey, met to plan this memorable event.<sup>337</sup> Although they collaborated on the planning, the Chamber of Commerce controlled the arrangements. The Chamber saw great promotional potential in the event and set a lofty goal that: “The dedication of the new Indianapolis Municipal Airport will be an advertisement for the city which will receive nation-wide attention.”<sup>338</sup> In keeping with the desire to use the dedication of the airport to boost the city, the Chamber settled on a date that coincided with the regional meeting of the National Airport Managers Association. For two days prior to the event, 150 managers from states east of the Mississippi came to Indianapolis to discuss the airport industry.<sup>339</sup> The Chamber’s investment and the value it placed on the festivities is reflected in its appointment of over one hundred city and business leaders to twenty-three planning committees.<sup>340</sup> The dedication of the Indianapolis Municipal Airport climaxed the boosters’ efforts.

Although largely focused on gaining national attention, the Chamber did not overlook the local population in planning for the festivities. The Chamber of Commerce calculated that every person in Indianapolis had a per capita investment of \$2.00 in the

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<sup>337</sup> “Plan Dedication of New Airport,” *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 46, no. 5 (May, 1931):8.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>339</sup> “U.S. Gives City Airport Highest Official Ranking,” *Indianapolis Star*, July 31, 1931.

<sup>340</sup> “Municipal Airport Dedication to Attract National Attention,” *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 46, no. 7 (July, 1931):1, 7.

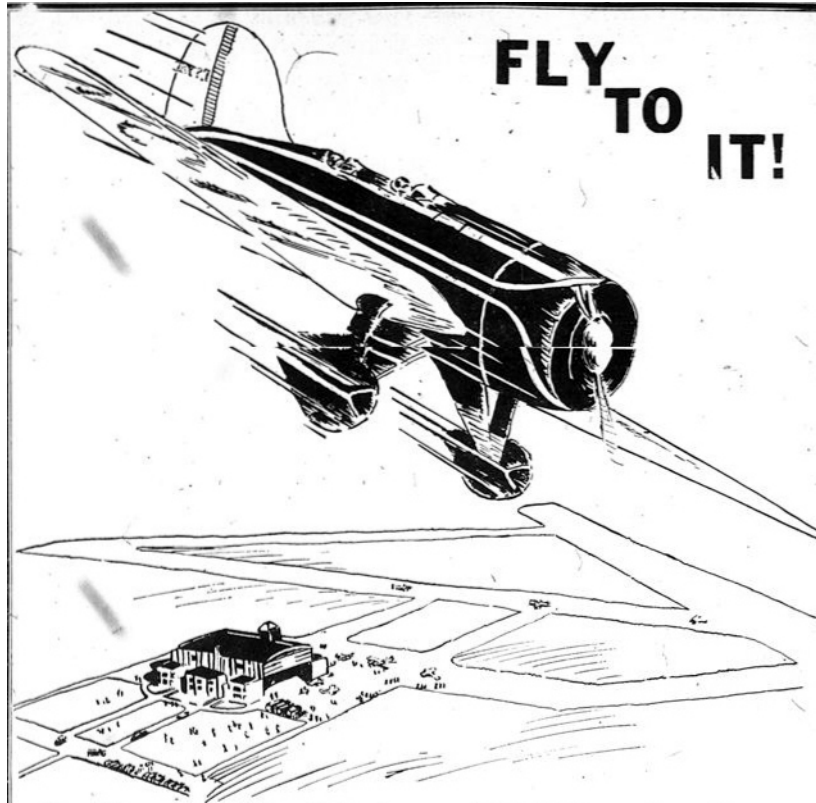
airport's development.<sup>341</sup> The Chamber urged everyone in the city to come to the ceremonies in order to examine what their money had funded. A large advertisement in the *Indianapolis Times* called for a large crowd at the ceremonies to support the city's new airport: "The success of such a venture is wholly dependent upon the co-operation and support of Indiana residents."<sup>342</sup> (See Figure 11.) Indianapolis business leaders recognized that building an airport was not enough to put the city on the national stage of aviation. Citizens also had to continue to prove the city's commitment to aviation "by backing it up with patronage."<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> "The Airport Dedication," *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 46, no. 9 (Sept., 1931):4.

<sup>342</sup> The same image, which featured a building that resembled the new terminal building, a similar runway, and the words "Fly to it!," were also used as the cover of a souvenir program pamphlet. "Fly to it!," *Indianapolis Times*, Sept. 24, 1931.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*



## Indianapolis Invites All Hoosierdom to the Dedication of the New MUNICIPAL AIRPORT

The one thousand-acre A-I-A Municipal Airport, which is to be dedicated this week-end, is without exaggeration as fine as any air harbor in the world. The success of such a venture is wholly dependent

upon the co-operation and support of Indiana residents. Now is the time to indelibly impress the United States that Indianapolis is seconding the effort expended in building this beautiful Port by backing it up with patronage.

### THREE DAYS OF EXTRAORDINARY AERIAL ACTIVITY

*Friday, Sept. 25—Saturday, Sept. 26—Sunday, Sept. 27*

Come and spend a thrilling and entertaining week-end at the Indianapolis A-I-A Municipal Airport.

#### EXCEPTIONAL OPPORTUNITY FOR CHILDREN OF INDIANAPOLIS

Intensely interested in children of our city, the committee in charge of the dedication of the Indianapolis Municipal Airport has made it possible for every child to be admitted at a charge of only 10 cents. The committee has issued a combination ticket costing 60 cents which admits one adult and one child. The dedication of the airport is going to be one of the most spectacular and educational events from the child's as well as the adult's viewpoint that has ever occurred in Indiana.

National aviation leaders—those continually in the headlines of the newspapers—those who are making history in aviation, will be here throughout the ceremonial. Contests, stunts, maneuvering, formations that will electrify the audience have been arranged for every afternoon, but especially for Saturday afternoon when it is hoped that parents will make it possible for children to attend in great numbers, and witness an event they will never forget.

BRING THE CHILDREN

#### This Advertisement Sponsored by the Following Firms and Individuals:

JOHN C. McCLOSKEY FLETCHER AMERICAN NATIONAL BANK Success to the Indianapolis Municipal Airport CENTRAL TRUCK CO. 281 Central Avenue VIRGINIA SWEET GELLEE 25 East Maryland Street FURNAS ICE CREAM CO. The Cream of Quality, Now - Fast Frozen ARTHUR BOHN MARSH & McLENNON 125-49 Merchants Bank Bldg.—Insurance HATFIELD PAINT CO. 184 South Meridian Street Distributors for Fruit and Lardner Products McGUIRE AND SPOON Architects for the Indianapolis Municipal Airport 61 North Meridian Street GARLANDER TREE AND BIRCHER CO. 811 South Illinois Street	BOSSIER PETE CAPITAL PAPER CO. 213 West South Street I. W. Kaba, President LEVY PRINTING CO. 125 West Ohio Street A. M. Glimbrener, President TROUP ANNING SHORPE 1807 College Ave. EMPIRE LIFE & ACCIDENT INSURANCE CO. INDIANAPOLIS POWER AND LIGHT CO. STATE AUTOMOBILE INSURANCE ASSOCIATION Seventh Floor, Occidental Bldg. ALLISON ENGINEERING CO. FIRST-CLASS STORAGE BATTERY CORPORATION ALLAN A. WILKINSON LUMBER CO. 87 East Michigan Street B. HOWARD CAUGHERAN Attorney-at-Law 225 Indiana Trust Bldg. ALFRED BRIDGTON State Fire Marshal	GEORGE C. FORNEY JR. Receiver Indianapolis Street Railway Co. SUN LIFE ASSURANCE CO. OF CANADA 125 Chamber of Commerce Bldg. R. L. Carlson, Mgr. INDIANA STATE BOARD OF AGRICULTURE RICHARD JEBBER GLEN S. HASK CHARLES A. GREATHOUSE JOHN F. GECKLER BOWERS ENVELOPE & LITHOGRAPH CO. 30 W. Michigan Street ELECTRIC LEAGUE OF INDIANAPOLIS Tos C. Brown, Mgr. SEARS ROEBUCK & CO. WESTERN FURNITURE CO. 616 P. Dubois, Pres. STEGEMACHER CAFETERIA 18 South Central Avenue LLOYD LEEBLOW	JOSEPH E. WILLIAMS E. O. SMITHEN CENTRAL AERONAUTICAL CORPORATION, Representing Waco, Stearns and Eglar Airships, Municipal Airport, Hill Road 1224 JOSEPH G. HAYES E. KIRK McKENNEY LOUIS C. BRANDET M. G. JOHNSON, Manager & Engineer—Municipal Airport. CLARENCE I. WHEATLEY LOUIS J. ROBINSTEIN HENRY E. BEHRENS RETIARDED WALLPAPER CO. 415 Massachusetts Avenue. 5145 1211 WILLIAM M. HUBBARDMAN WILLIAM B. ANSTED JR. HOWARD C. MANNING E. K. GATES DR. WILLIAM H. LARRABEE
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Figure 11 "Fly to it!" Indianapolis Times, Sept. 24, 1931, p. 7.

The airport dedication ceremonies lasted three days from September 25 to 27, 1931. The festivities had thousands of attendees, and hundreds of planes filled the skies. Although the dedication was not the largest aerial event in history, as the Chamber had hoped, it had a plethora of activities, and many famous fliers and aviation businessmen attended.<sup>344</sup> Attractions included “dead stick” competitions, parachute competitions, acrobatic displays, races, the release of seventy-five pigeons with colored wings, and a military day.<sup>345</sup> Unfortunately, most of the Friday activities were rained out, and several pilots never made it to the event due to the weather.<sup>346</sup> Saturday turned out a little less rainy, but it was still cold and windy: “At noon more than 5,000 people shivered in cold

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<sup>344</sup> Spectacles included dead stick landing contests; parachute contests; ten parachute jumpers in the sky at once; several speed races; acrobatic stunts; formal dedication ceremonies; attempts for new world records recognized by the National Aeronautic Association and the Federation Internationale Aeronautique; mock military attacks; climb contests; unveiling of plaques for the airport; tactical formations of military planes; attendees’ examinations of airplanes including an autogyro and a midget plane of the Texaco Oil Company; dinners for the military pilots; performances by the national championship American Legion drum and bugle corps from Miami, Florida, Cathedral High School Band, Indianapolis American Legion drum and bugle corps, and the Colored Y.M.C.A. Band; and a parade.

The dedication featured accomplished military pilots, speed-record holders, acrobatic pilots, and airline officials. Noted guests included: Richard A. Arnett, W. F. Bliss, Dr. J.D. Brock, Russell (Skyball) Brinkley, Colonel A. J. Dougherty, Major James H. (Jimmie) Doolittle, Colonel Halsey Dunwoody, Major Herbert Fletcher, James (Jimmy) Haizlip, Captain Frank M. Hawks, Miss Dorothy Hester, A.R. Killip, Freddie and Betty Lund, William P. MacCracken, L. B. Manning, Captain John Mullin, Jr., Lieutenant Arthur W. Neehan, “Tex” Rankin, Gene Rock, Lou Strickler, Earl B. Wadsworth, A. H. Wiat, Lewis A. Yancey, and, members of the Navy, Army and National Guard from Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Massachusetts, Kansas, and Ohio. “Famous Airmen Expected Here for Dedication,” *Indianapolis Star*, Sept. 25, 1931; “Aviation Future Declared Bright,” *Indianapolis Star*, Sept.25, 1931; “Planes Hum at City’s New Concourse of Air,” *Indianapolis News*, Sept. 25, 1931; “Famed Fliers Here to Open City airport,” *Indianapolis Times*, Sept.25, 1931; “Plane Attacks to be Features at City Airport,” *Indianapolis Star*, Sept.26, 1931; Lowell Nussebaum, “Throngs Flock to Air Show,” *Indianapolis Times*, Sept. 26, 1931; “Aviation Service Branch Honored,” *Indianapolis News*, Sept. 26, 1931; Walter F. Morse, “Fighting Planes Make Attack on Municipal Port,” *Indianapolis Star*, Sept.27, 1931; Walter F. Morse, “City Airport Now Formally in Use,” *Indianapolis News*, Sept.27, 1931.

<sup>345</sup> In the dead stick landing competition the pilot had to land the plane with the motor dead and no brakes used. “Plane Attacks to be Features at City Airport,” *Indianapolis Star*, Sept. 26, 1931.

<sup>346</sup> “Plane Attacks to be Features at City Airport,” *Indianapolis Star*, Sept. 26, 1931.

wind awaiting the show.”<sup>347</sup> Despite disappointing weather, the dedication provided a spectacular event for the city.

Cartoons represented the success of the Chamber’s goal to draw the attention of Indianapolis citizens to the airport and aviation in the city. The occasion of the dedication of the municipal airport warranted a cartoon in the *Indianapolis News* depicting the popular view of the new airport. (See Figure 12.) Although few citizens of Indianapolis knew much about the aviation industry or the new airport, they were drawn by the swirl of activity surrounding the port.<sup>348</sup> With the national recognition they began to claim the airport as their own. One cartoon, “Effects of An Airport Dedication” (See Figure 13.), appeared on the last day of the dedication and illustrated that the impact of the ceremonies was not confined to those who attended at the airport.<sup>349</sup> With so many planes performing feats, even residents who remained at home caught glimpses of the festivities in the air.<sup>350</sup> In addition, a radio broadcast of all three days’ events went out to the city.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>347</sup> “Throng Flock to Air Show,” *Indianapolis Times*, Sept. 26, 1931.

<sup>348</sup> “Our New Birdhouse,” *Indianapolis News*, Sept. 26, 1931.

<sup>349</sup> “Effects of an Airport Dedication,” *Indianapolis News*, Sept. 27, 1931.

<sup>350</sup> Over 100 military planes came for the second day. “Aviation Service Branch Honored,” *Indianapolis News*, Sept. 26, 1931.

<sup>351</sup> “Chamber’s Accomplishment for Indianapolis Cited,” *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 46, no. 12 (Dec., 1931): 2.





Figure 12. "Our New Birdhouse," *Indianapolis News*, Sept. 26, 1931, p 1.



**Figure 13.** "Effects of an Airport Dedication," *Indianapolis News*, Sept. 28, 1931, p. 1.

Beside the spectacular exhibitions and famous aviators, the Chamber utilized additional promotional tools to draw attention to the Indianapolis Municipal Airport. The Chamber sponsored a program to use a postal cachet on mail leaving the airport during the dedication. The promise of a specially marked envelope attracted the national attention the Chamber sought. The *Indianapolis Star* reported that over 2,000 letters had been sent to the Chamber from all over the United States and Canada to be stamped and sent out again.<sup>352</sup> The Chamber also published a twenty-three page promotional pamphlet for the dedication. Almost every square inch of the airport was described in detail, with measurements and costs for materials. All of the technical details suggest the city viewed the municipal airport as a superior construction. It also highlighted the boosters' vision and the theme of centrality in the nation: "Geographically, the Indianapolis Municipal Airport is the logical center of all United States commerce. An air-minded city has seen this and has equipped the port as befits such an ideal air terminal site."<sup>353</sup> The booklet continued to be handed out to promote the airport beyond the dedication weekend.<sup>354</sup>

The Chamber of Commerce viewed the dedication as a success in gaining the local and national attention for the airport it desired. The *Bulletin of the Chamber of Commerce* issued following the airport's dedication featured a cartoon highlighting the Chamber's intentions and successful view of the outcome. (See Figure 14.) The organization had always made it clear that the airport would be a tool to attract commerce to the city, and following the dedication this appeared to be true.<sup>355</sup>

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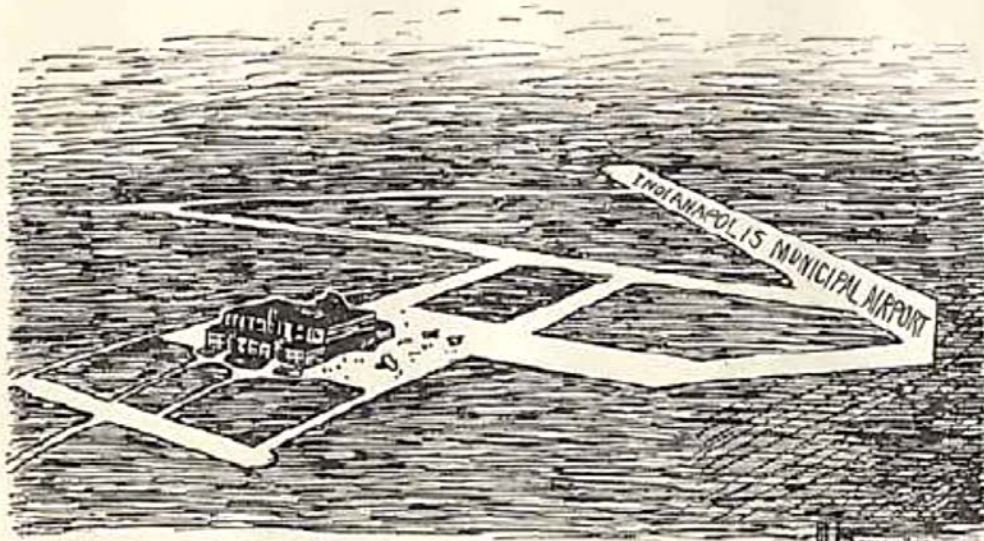
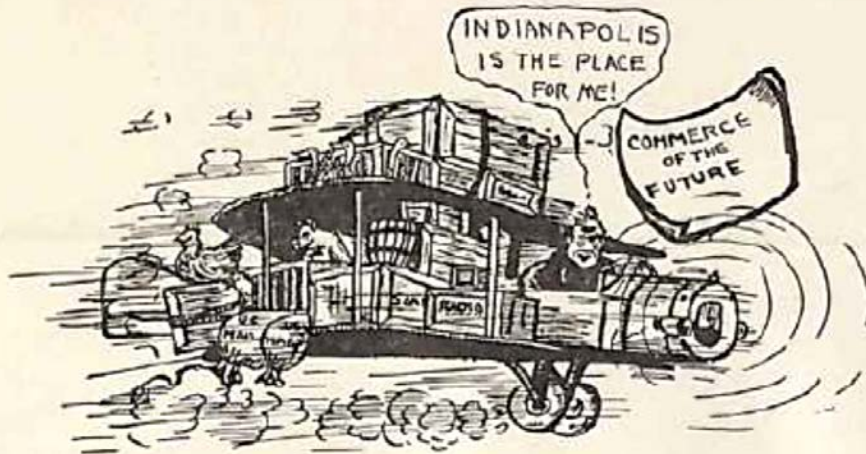
<sup>352</sup> "Plane Attacks to Be Features at City Airport," *Indianapolis Star*, Sept. 26, 1931.

<sup>353</sup> *Indianapolis Municipal Airport* (Indianapolis Board of Public Works, Aug. 1931), 6.

<sup>354</sup> The dedication pamphlet still served as promotion for the airport in 2013. Robert Duncan, the director of the airport, had reproductions produced, and he handed them out to interested parties.

<sup>355</sup> "Municipal Airport Dedication a Success," *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 46, no. 10 (Oct., 1931): 2

# No Question Where it Will Land



ERIC K. GRAU

The construction of the Indianapolis Municipal Airport built on the vision city leaders had originally dreamed for the Mars Hill airport. The new airport drew national praise, and airlines made Indianapolis one of their permanent stops. The fanfare surrounding the airport's inclusion on the TWA route, its opening in the spring 1931, and its dedication in September 1931 prompted national attention from the media. Combined with the praise of the speakers and aviators who visited the airport during the dedication festivities, this publicity demonstrated that city leaders and aviation boosters had succeeded in building a noteworthy airport. The *Indianapolis Times* featured one pilot, "Skyball Russ" Brinkley, who claimed "While on this tour, I visited every airport in the United States and in no instance did I come across a more adequate airport than you have right here in Indianapolis."<sup>356</sup> Indianapolis's city leaders' research, careful planning, and attention to detail had produced a modern municipal airport that would serve the city for years to come.

The building of an excellent airport was never the primary goal of local boosters. Superior quality equipment and landing facilities did not guarantee that businesses would congregate around the Indianapolis airport. The city had already learned that the aviation industry continually evolved, and that the airport would require constant attention. The city government made improvements to the airport during 1931, and following the dedication, the airport continued to need upgrades. The day following the dedication a program of the Department of Commerce to improve the radio stations at five Indiana airports included \$40,000 for the Indianapolis Airport.<sup>357</sup> In addition, the October 1931

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<sup>356</sup> "Skyball Russ" Brinkley, "City's Future as Air Center Made Certain," *Indianapolis Times*, Sept. 25, 1931.

<sup>357</sup> "New Radio Station Listed for Airport," *Indianapolis Star*, Sept. 28, 1931.

issue of *Aero Digest* highlighted other improvements that needed to be made, including an improved control system for managing planes. While the increase in traffic reflected positively on the draw of the airport, national air traffic also increased throughout 1931.<sup>358</sup> A modern airport would have to be constantly adapted and improved in order to continue to offer first-class facilities.

The opening and dedication of Indianapolis Municipal Airport drew national and local attention. This attention fueled Indianapolis's city and aviation leaders' message that Indianapolis would one day be the center of aviation in the country. At the end of 1931 these leaders of the movement had built an exceptional airport and attracted national attention to it. Only time would tell if the airport would draw other aviation activities and transform the city into the aviation center of the United States.

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<sup>358</sup> H. Gene Haynes, "Indianapolis Municipal Airport," *Aero Digest* (Oct., 1931): 59, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1931-32, V408, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana.

## Epilogue. Try, Try, Again: National Experiments, 1935-1939

In the years following the 1931 dedication, no major events propelled the Indianapolis Municipal Airport into the local spotlight.<sup>359</sup> During this period, airports around the country faced the economic hard times of the Great Depression.<sup>360</sup> In their analyses of national airport development, historians Janet Bednarek and Deborah Douglas both argue that during the 1930s, the national practice established with the Air Commerce Act of 1926 of funding airports locally changed. Gradually, federal funding of municipal airports became the standard.<sup>361</sup> Prior to the Great Depression, local governments and private interests had been expected to fund airport development. Bednarek notes that the Depression “virtually stopped” this flow of investment. Municipalities around the nation defaulted on their bonds, which had paid for 70 percent of urban development.<sup>362</sup> As a result, cities running municipal airports increasingly turned to the federal government as a potential source of stable and substantial financial support. The federal government responded, first through Depression-era relief programs

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<sup>359</sup> I found very few references to the Indianapolis airport during this time period. The 1929 crash of the U.S. stock market devastated the economy and started a time of hardship known as the Great Depression. My interpretation is that the city was preoccupied by the challenges of the crash. Other economic problems drew the attention of city leaders. The new airport continued to operate but efforts to boost the city by promoting the airport dwindled during the first half of the 1930s.

<sup>360</sup> The Great Depression ended the airport boom period but because of the momentum of ongoing projects a few years passed before the construction boom ended. Deborah G. Douglas, “The Invention of Airports: A Political, Economic and Technological History of Airports in the United States, 1919-1939” (diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996), 292.

<sup>361</sup> While Bednarek focuses on the role of local government, Douglas’ analysis deals with the federal level of change. Both authors examine the nationwide context of airport construction and both emphasize that during the 1930s, responsibility for funding airports shifted from local sources to the federal government. Douglas, 195-196; Janet R. Daly Bednarek, *America’s Airports: Airfield Development, 1918-1947* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 97-100.

<sup>362</sup> See Bednarek, 97, for a discussion on the end of commercial and private investment. See Douglas, 292, on the details for the significance of municipal bond defaults.

and later with the 1938 Civil Aeronautics Act.<sup>363</sup> During this decade of transition, the City of Indianapolis also turned to the federal government to make needed improvements to the airport as aviation technology advanced (though the Indianapolis did not default on its bonds). Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers built a new runway, installed the three instrument landing systems that the federal government tested, installed a radio field traffic control system, and cleared timberland on undeveloped airport property to provide safer approaches.<sup>364</sup>

The Indianapolis Municipal Airport reentered the national spotlight from 1935 to 1939 when the Bureau of Air Commerce and the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) conducted a series of experiments at the city airport.<sup>365</sup> These tests culminated in the establishment of a federal experimental station located on the Indianapolis airport property. The experimental station consolidated three federal testing stations into one location for research in aircraft radio technology.<sup>366</sup> This national attention reignited boosters' aspirations for Indianapolis to become the center of aviation in the United States that had lain dormant following the 1931 dedication.<sup>367</sup> The renewed use of

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<sup>363</sup> In addition to the influence of the Depression, Douglas argues that the 1932 to 1933 period produced a significant change in the economics of airports because of the shift from Republican to Democratic presidential administrations. Douglas, 10.

<sup>364</sup> "Airport Inspection Program Speeded," *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 31, 1937.

<sup>365</sup> The Civil Aeronautics Act of 1938 replaced the Bureau of Air Commerce with the Civil Aeronautics Authority. The CAA was a new federal agency with greater power to regulate air transportation than the BAC. Douglas, 10, 185, 195-196, 292; Bednarek, 97-100; "Airport Inspection Program Speeded," *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 31, 1937.

<sup>366</sup> Sam Tyndall, "Aviation in Indianapolis," *Indianapolis Times*, May 24, 1939; "U.S. Officials, Aviation Leaders to See Laboratory Dedication," *Indianapolis News*, May 26, 1939.

<sup>367</sup> The lack of aviation investment by the city following the positive national reception of the Indianapolis Municipal Airport may be due in part to the Depression's effect on the industry. Braden and Hagan note in their study of Atlanta's airport, "Practically overnight, aviation changed from an industry in which anyone might make and sell aircraft to a closed game in which subsidiary sold to subsidiary. The resulting financial turbulence brought down many aircraft manufacturers, and the pages of aviation publications in 1930 and 1931 were thick with consolidation and reorganization notices." Betsy Braden and Paul Hagan, *A Dream Takes Flight:*



previously employed rhetorical themes demonstrates that the boosters thought the prior promise that a municipal airport would bring the aviation industry and businesses to the city was unfulfilled.<sup>368</sup> The Mars Hill airport had not attracted national attention, and the municipal airport had not transformed the city into an aviation hub.<sup>369</sup> Once again disappointed, the boosters sought a major new construction project at the airport to achieve their dream, and they drew from the previous rhetoric to encourage support in the city. The promised economic activity that would accompany an aviation center offered an incentive for citizens to support the construction of an experimental station. The rhetoric associated with the CAA experimental station at the Indianapolis Municipal Airport and federal experiments held there from 1935 to 1939 demonstrate that the continued hope for an aviation center fueled airport developments despite past failures.

The tests that occurred at the Indianapolis Municipal Airport in the 1930s were a small part of a larger narrative of airplane technology development. One of the most important areas of technical research for aviation was the development of a system to

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*Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport and Aviation in Atlanta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press for Atlanta Historical Society, 1989), 58.

<sup>368</sup> The Indianapolis Municipal Airport deviated from the national norm during the 1930s in its success toward becoming self-supporting. By 1938, the airport manager, Nish Dienhart, only asked taxpayers for \$3,000 to supplement the income from day-to-day business and predicted that by 1939 the airport would run without tax support. The airport generated around \$20,000 yearly from rentals of office space to three major airlines, renting hangar space, renting the restaurant, and selling gasoline. The total tax levy for the City of Indianapolis in 1938 was \$6,976,588.18, of which the municipal airport made up \$3,384.48. While the Indianapolis airport had not succeeded in attracting the aviation industry, it had attained a level of financial well-being envied by airports around the country. Indianapolis's ability to come close to self-sufficiency while other airports in the nation admitted that they would always be dependent on outside funding demonstrates the cautious nature of Indianapolis leaders when they built the Municipal Airport in the late 1920s. "Airport One Department that Relieves Taxpayer Headache," clipping, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1936-39, V408; Donovan A. Turk, "Local Airport Leads Nation; Long Runways Being Added," *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 17, 1938; Indianapolis Common Council, "August 16, 1937: Regular Meeting," *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*, 475.

<sup>369</sup> While the construction of both airports led to the city becoming a stop on a few national aviation routes, this business in no way matched the grand promises of boosters.

allow a pilot with obscured sight to land safely. A 1925 analysis of the United States Post Office air mail operations revealed that adverse weather conditions caused 76 percent of forced landings. According to Erik M. Conway, the historian at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, "Weather was the nascent industry's greatest foe, and in the ensuing few years aviation promoters pursued a means to eliminate this tremendous obstacle to reliable, safe service. They sought what was then called a 'blind landing system.'"<sup>370</sup> Beginning in 1927, the United States Bureau of Standards, the Army Air Corps, and later the Bureau of Air Commerce worked for twenty years to develop a reliable system.<sup>371</sup> In Indianapolis in 1936, the Bureau of Air Commerce installed and tested both its own system and the Army Air Corps' system.<sup>372</sup> A German system, known as the Lorenz Instrument Landing System, was the next test conducted at the Indianapolis airport in 1937.<sup>373</sup> In 1938, the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) selected Indianapolis as the site of its newly consolidated federal experimental station and further blind landing tests

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<sup>370</sup> Conway further expanded his research on the development of a blind landing system in his 2006 book: Erik Conway, *Blind Landings: Low-Visibility Operations in American Aviation, 1918–1958* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006). Erik M. Conway, "The Politics of Blind Landing," *Technology and Culture* 42, no. 1 (Jan., 2001): 81.

<sup>371</sup> For how each system worked and the debate over what limitations would be acceptable see Conway's "The Politics of Blind Landing."

<sup>372</sup> "Airport Chosen for Blind Flying Test Ground . . . Safety Factor Important," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 51, no. 7 (July, 1935): 2; *Indianapolis News*, June 5, 1936, clipping, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1936-39, V408.

<sup>373</sup> "Aviation Experts, Minton View Blind Flying Tests at Airport Here," *Indianapolis Star*, May 15, 1937.

occurred there.<sup>374</sup> By 1940, the CAA had developed the first reliable instrument landing system (ILS) and demonstrated it at the Indianapolis station.<sup>375</sup>

The development of the Civil Aeronautics Authority Experimental Station in Indianapolis took place from 1937 through 1939. Airport Superintendent Nish Dienhart realized that the federal government was preparing to build an experimental station outside of Washington, D.C.<sup>376</sup> Together with Mayor Walter C. Boetcher, Dienhart convinced the Bureau of Air Commerce that Indianapolis was the ideal location and persuaded the city government to provide the resources required to add to the federal government's contribution.<sup>377</sup> In March 1938, the Bureau of Air Commerce and the City of Indianapolis's contract provided that the federal government would rent land at the Indianapolis airport, and in return the city would erect an office building, hangar,

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<sup>374</sup> Prior to this time, the federal government had conducted experimental research at several locations around the country and had no centralized location for testing. Theresa L. Kraus, "The First Federal Civil Aviation R&D Facility," Federal Aviation Administration, [http://www.faa.gov/about/history/milestones/media/The\\_First\\_Federal\\_Civil\\_Aviation\\_RD\\_Center.pdf](http://www.faa.gov/about/history/milestones/media/The_First_Federal_Civil_Aviation_RD_Center.pdf) (accessed November 13, 2014)..

<sup>375</sup> Kraus, *ibid.*; Hans J. Oser, "Development of the Visual-Type Airway Radio-Beacon System," in *A Century of Excellence in Measurements, Standards, and Technology*, ed. David R. Lide (Washington D.C.: National Institute of Standards and Technology, 1988), 44, <http://books.google.com/books?id=5AdRAAAAMAAJ> (accessed November 13, 2014)..

<sup>376</sup> A native of Indianapolis, Ignatius "Nish" Dienhart graduated from Butler University in 1930. Dienhart moved from his position as the head of the state arson investigation division when Cox left to administer a Midwest WPA airport project. He was superintendent of the airport from 1932 to 1942. "Dienhart Made Head of Airport," clipping, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1936-39, V408; "Editorial," Jan. 3, 1939, clipping, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1936-39, V408; *Indiana Biographical Series* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Commission on Public Records, 1996), s.v. "Ignatius Dienhart" 92: 139.

<sup>377</sup> Indianapolis competed with 31 other cities. Boetcher was mayor of Indianapolis from 1936 to 1937. While City Controller, Boetcher entered the mayor's office following the resignation of his predecessor, John Kern. "Vision of 2 Wins City Station," clipping, *Indianapolis Star*, May 28, 1939, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1936-39, V408; "Expect Airport Testing Station to Attract Aviation Industry," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 54, no. 3 (Mar, 1938): 1; *Indiana Biographical Series*, s.v. "Walter C. Kern," 30: 88.

machine shop, and two runways with special landing facilities.<sup>378</sup> (See Figure 12.) In April 1938, the Indianapolis City Council approved a \$70,000 bond and construction began in October.<sup>379</sup> On May 29, 1939, the experimental station officially opened with a formal dedication sponsored by the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, the CAA, and the Society of Automotive Engineers.<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>378</sup> The rent was \$986 a year for twenty years with annual renewal. The Bureau planned to staff the station with twelve men. "Indianapolis Wins Fight for Federal Air Testing Station," *Indianapolis News*, Mar. 12, 1938; "Expect Airport Testing Station to Attract Aviation Industry," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 54, no. 3 (Mar. 1938): 1; *City of Indianapolis, Minutes of the Board of Public Works and Sanitation*, Mar. 8, 1938 vol. B, 313.

<sup>379</sup> Indianapolis Common Council, "April 4, 1938: Regular Meeting," *Journal of the Common Council of the City of Indianapolis, Indiana*. "Work Begun on \$97,000 Airport Radio Project," *Indianapolis News*, Oct. 19, 1938.

<sup>380</sup> Sam Tyndall, "Aviation in Indianapolis," *Indianapolis Times*, May 25, 1939; "Chamber Helps Sponsor Dedication of Radio Experiment Station," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 55, no. 5 (May, 1939): 2.

Entered as second-class matter at post-office, Indianapolis, Ind. Issued daily.

THURSDAY EVENING,

# LANDING



Figure 12. "Landing," Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1936-39, V408, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Progression from the first experiment conducted at the Indianapolis airport to building the experimental station revived the boosters' rhetoric that tied improvement of the airport to the city's destiny as the center of American aviation. Selection of Indianapolis as a site for experiments in 1935 and execution of the first test in 1936 did not immediately capture boosters' attentions. The first few local newspaper articles announcing selection of Indianapolis for blind landing tests gave no reason for the decision and did not describe the airport in any way.<sup>381</sup> "Local Airport Test May End Flying Peril," was one of the first articles that noted why the Bureau of Air Commerce had selected the Indianapolis Airport. According to the article the airport's ideal location and lack of heavy traffic influenced the choice.<sup>382</sup> Ironically, the fact that Indianapolis city leaders had not succeeded in developing the heavily used air center they desired was the reason that the airport became a location for aviation technology development.

Following this article, newspapers and boosters focused on the ideal location, the size of the airport property, and the flat terrain to explain the choice. This rhetoric echoed themes used to boost the Mars Hill airport and the Municipal Airport. Despite this rhetorical slant, lack of traffic continued to be an important determining factor for use of the Indianapolis airport for experiments.<sup>383</sup> Once city leaders realized that the experiments conducted at the Indianapolis airport could revive their dormant dream of an air center, the explanations offered in the newspapers grew more and more complimentary of the Indianapolis Municipal Airport. In addition, it was in the best

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<sup>381</sup> For examples see "Blind Landing Field to Be Installed at City Airport," *Indianapolis Times*, May 15, 1935; "Airport Chosen for Blind Flying Test Ground . . . Safety Factor Important," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 51, no. 7 (July, 1935): 2.

<sup>382</sup> "Local Airport Test May End Flying Peril," *Indianapolis Times*, Mar. 9, 1936.

<sup>383</sup> I found no additional mention of lack of traffic. Perhaps, this unfavorable observation was omitted from explanations to the public as local boosters began to take notice.

interest of federal officials attempting to gain the support of the city to paint the airport in a favorable light.

As experiments progressed, the descriptions of the Indianapolis airport became less specific and implied that the airport was nationally significant. The newspapers spun praise of the airport with frequent quotations of Rex Martin, assistant secretary of the Department of Commerce and supervisor of the Bureau of Air Navigation. One article published during preparation for the first experiment proclaims, “Port ‘Best Ever,’ Air Official Says.”<sup>384</sup> Actually, Martin qualified his statement that the airport was the “best ever” because “there’s nothing like it for perfect approaches.”<sup>385</sup>

Comparing two sources’ announcements about the second round of experiments further illustrates how papers used Martin’s quotes to boost the airport’s importance. The *Indianapolis Star* reported Martin as the voice of the Department of Commerce: “‘Absolutely none better in the United States,’ says the Department of Commerce—will become the ‘guinea pig’ for all blind flying experiments in the country.”<sup>386</sup> In contrast, the *Indianapolis Times* included more of Martin’s statement: “We selected the Indianapolis airport for the experimental laboratory because it is one of the best in the United States. . . . But in addition to the excellent physical property, the personnel, under Mr. Dienhart, has been most hospitable and co-operative to the Bureau plans.”<sup>387</sup> The *Times*’ inclusion of Martin’s gratitude for the hospitality, qualifies that the Indianapolis airport was one of the best in terms of physical property. This does not mean that the entire airport was the best in the nation, or that the entire Department of Commerce

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<sup>384</sup> “Port ‘Best Ever,’ Air Official Says,” *Indianapolis Star*, Apr. 15, 1936.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> “Local Airport is Test Center,” *Indianapolis Star*, Feb. 5, 1937.

<sup>387</sup> Daniel M. Kidney, “Experimental Base to be at City’s Airport,” *Indianapolis Times*, Feb. 5, 1937.

agreed as the *Star* article implied. This rhetorical spin showed that use of the Indianapolis Airport would increase with the decision to locate the CAA experimental station in the city.

Newspaper accounts of the boosters' position differ for this airport development in the number of local leaders quoted. Success of the movement to build the experimental station suggests that a group of businessmen and government officials supported federal use of the Indianapolis Airport as another means of attracting the aviation industry. However, newspapers only mention the airport managers and mayor by name. When the Department of Commerce first chose Indianapolis as a site of experimentation in 1935, Major Charles Cox, who had been manager at the time of the airport's dedication, still ran the airport. Cox's successor overseeing airport operations, I.J. (Nish) Dienhart, was the most vocal of local boosters of the airport. Dienhart, and Mayor Walter C. Boetcher, promised that location of the CAA Experimental Station at the Indianapolis airport would transform the city into the center of American aviation.<sup>388</sup> Boetcher announced that one of the major goals of his administration was to transform the city into the center of the airlines and aviation industry.<sup>389</sup> Together, Dienhart and Boetcher represented the boosters' voice as reported in the local newspapers.

Discouragement about whether airport improvements would attract industry may be one reason that the newspapers identified fewer supporters. During the 1930s the Indianapolis Municipal Airport faced a public made wary by the economic hardships of

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<sup>388</sup> For example: Donovan A. Turk, "City Pledged Best Airport in the Nation," *Indianapolis Star*, Dec. 5, 1937; Donovan A. Turk, "Local Airport Leads Nation; Long Runways Being Added," *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 17, 1938; Al F. Casse, "Indianapolis to Become Big Aerial Center," clipping, November 27, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1936-39, V408.

<sup>389</sup> Donovan A. Turk, "Local Airport Leads Nation; Long Runways Being Added," *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 17, 1938.



the Great Depression. In her study of the economics of early airports, Deborah Douglas observes: “Between 1930 and 1933, there was a growing recognition that only a few airports would ever be financially viable institutions. It suddenly was very clear to airport managers and city officials that the adage ‘Build it and they will come’ had an important corollary: ‘Just because you build it, does not necessarily mean they will come.’”<sup>390</sup> The rhetoric of Nish Dienhart, Walter Boetcher, and the national personalities advocating for Indianapolis as the location for federal aviation experiments conveys a continued belief that development at the airport would bring businesses to the city. While the evidence is scarce, it may be that the fewer named supporters indicates that Indianapolis businessmen realized that investment in the city airport did not directly correlate with an increase in aviation business for the city.<sup>391</sup> Despite this potential realization by some citizens, the

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<sup>390</sup> Douglas, 195.

<sup>391</sup> The number of sources I was able to find after the dedication of the Indianapolis airport drops off until 1940. The Chamber of Commerce, while still interested in the airport, did not continue to use the airport to boost the city in its monthly publication during this period. In 1931, a change in how the City of Indianapolis ran the airport put primary responsibility for the airport with the Board of Public Works, and the City Council only oversaw the appropriation of money. The City Council proceedings only list what money was spent at the airport for the year and what funds were transferred from one department to another. The newspaper index at the Indiana State Library includes only a few newspaper articles a year between 1932 and 1936, in contrast to the heavy coverage of the airport during development. One 1936 to 1939 Municipal Airport Scrapbook at the Indiana State Library includes many newspaper articles on the experiments and the experimental station. Unfortunately, I was unable to determine the dates and which newspaper published them. The airport collection at the Indiana Historical Society also lacked documentation of this period. Only the first page of the first yearly report remains in the collection. I found no other records of airport operations during the 1930s following the 1931 dedication. My interpretation of this decade is therefore based on a few newspaper articles. See “A Note on Primary Sources” (page 139) for more information on where I looked. I contacted both the National Archives at Chicago and the National Archives at College Park about sources on the CAA Experimental Station at the Indianapolis Airport. The Chicago office replied that their holdings included Record Group 237, “Records of the Federal Aviation Administration” but the materials postdated the 1937 to 1940 time period. At the College Park location, a staff member checked the “Works Progress Administration Progress Reports” (Entry UD 14) and the General Files (Entry UD 16) in the “Records of the Civil Aeronautics Administration” (Record Group 237), but failed to find any material relating to the Experimental Station. A more thorough review of Record Group 237 or Record Group 197.2.2, “Records of the Civil Aeronautics Authority” (which includes the Minutes from 1938 to 1940), could provide

City of Indianapolis agreed to invest in an experimental station for the Civil Aeronautics Authority in the hope that it would transform the city into the long-dreamed-of aviation center for the nation.

The media's attention to the opposition of Louis C. Schwitzer provides another indication that citizens no longer fully trusted that airport improvements would bring prosperity. Schwitzer, the president of the automotive company Schwitzer-Cummins, wrote a letter to the *Indianapolis Star* in 1938.<sup>392</sup> Schwitzer argued that the experimental station would devalue the taxpayers' investment in the airport and the testing done by the station would crowd out commercial aviation. In addition, Schwitzer did not believe that the station would lure aircraft factories, which he claimed were few and well established in their locations. He concluded, "I think it is a pity that the city officials are being misinformed and misled in killing the Municipal airport as a commercial airport, and paying a pretty stiff price, not only in establishing the station, but in the increased operation cost."<sup>393</sup>

Schwitzer's arguments drew enough attention that the interested parties responded to his concerns. Richard Gazley of the Bureau of Air Commerce stressed that the experimental station would be separate from the rest of the airport and would lure radio

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more insight into why the CAA chose Indianapolis as the location for the experimental station. "Cox is Appointed Chief at Airport," *Indianapolis Star*, Mar. 17, 1931; "Municipal Directory and Chart," *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* 52, no. 3 (Apr., 1936): 11.

<sup>392</sup> The *Star* also noted that Schwitzer was an amateur pilot. "Schwitzer Charges Testing Station Will Crowd Out Commercial Airport," *Indianapolis Star*, Mar. 14, 1938; "Views of Our Readers: Airport as Experimenting Field," clipping, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1931-32, V408, Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, Indiana.

<sup>393</sup> "Views of Our Readers: Airport as Experimenting Field," clipping, *Indianapolis Star*, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1936-39, V408.

and aviation industries as well as bring visitors to the city.<sup>394</sup> The president of American Airlines, C.R. Smith, echoed the assurance that commercial flying would not be interrupted and justified attracting the federal operation:

Indianapolis has the finest natural approaches without hazards of any airport in the United States. This is the logical selection. No city is yet the aviation manufacturing center of the country as plants are widely scattered. With this start and the fine aviation spirit you have in Indianapolis, you have excellent chances of concentrating manufacturing there.<sup>395</sup>

These assurances by national figures and boosters' interpretations of them seemed to satisfy city officials as testified by the contract and passing of the bond.

Boosters justified the \$70,000 the City of Indianapolis invested in the experimental station with the promise it would transform the city into the center of the nation's aviation industry.<sup>396</sup> The renewed hope that the experimental station brought allowed the boosters to acknowledge the Municipal Airport's failure to fulfill their promises: "'This is the air center of the United States.' Within a short while, Indianapolis boosters who take their guests to the Municipal Airport for a look around the field will be able to drop this remark without having their fingers crossed . . . ."<sup>397</sup> Once again the boosters made the same promise—investment in the airport will attract aviation-related

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<sup>394</sup> U.S. Negotiations for Radio Air Station Snag on Runway Material," clipping, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1936-39, V408.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid.

<sup>396</sup> In 1939, the Department of Public Works and Sanitation unanimously adopted a policy to encourage the fulfillment of the goal of bringing aviation industries to the city. They clearly believed that the industries would spur development and economic growth in the city. The Board's new policy said the city government "will lease industrial sites for aviation industries or for acceptable aviation activities on the Indianapolis Municipal Airport at a nominal fee per acre for a period of fifteen years, and with provisions for renewal of the leases, to corporations that are prepared to demonstrate their financial ability and readiness to place their plans in immediate operation." City of Indianapolis, *Minutes of the Department of Public Works and Sanitation*, July 21, 1939 vol. C.

<sup>397</sup> While city officials did not sign the contract or float the bonds until 1938, negotiations had begun in 1937. With the possibility of the experimental station, boosters justified the expense. Donovan A. Turk, "City Pledged Best Airport in the Nation," *Indianapolis Star*, Dec. 5, 1937.

business, and the city will become the center of the country's aeronautical development. "Within the next year Indianapolis should become the air center of the United States," explained Mayor Boetcher to the *Indianapolis Star*. "We have facilities at the airport that cannot be matched anywhere and the location of the experimental unit here will do much to throw the spotlight on Indianapolis as the aviation center."<sup>398</sup> As before, the city's past accomplishments in other modes of transportation served as proof that the city would succeed: just as the annual Memorial Day race at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway had led to the "flourishing community of Speedway City," so, too, the experimental station would attract a business community around the airport.<sup>399</sup>

National figures in aviation had a stake in the success of the project and supported this renewed booster vision for the city. In addition to Richard Gazley and Rex Martin, other spokesmen included Oswald Ryan and Peter J. Harkins.<sup>400</sup> Ryan, a board member of the Civil Aeronautics Board and a Hoosier, had studied landing fields in Europe and declared that the Indianapolis airport was one of the best in the country and was destined to become one of the finest in the world.<sup>401</sup> Harkins from the Department of the Interior, noted: "Indianapolis is destined to become the aviation manufacturing center of the

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<sup>398</sup> Donovan A. Turk, "Local Airport Leads Nation; Long Runways Being Added," *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 17, 1938.

<sup>399</sup> "Editorial," clipping, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1936-39, V408.

<sup>400</sup> At the start of the development of the experimental station, Gazley was the Director of the Safety and Planning Division of the U.S. Bureau of Air Commerce. "U.S. Negotiations for Radio Air Station Snag on Runway Material," clipping, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1936-39, V408.

<sup>401</sup> Oswald Ryan grew up in Anderson, Indiana, and served as a prosecuting attorney. He was first appointed as a Republican board member of the Civil Aeronautics Board in 1938 after winning several United States Supreme Court cases. *Indianapolis Star*, Aug. 21, 1938, clipping Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1936-39, V408; *Indiana Biographical Series*, s.v. "Oswald Ryan," 18: 21.

nation. . . ”<sup>402</sup> Airline executives also praised the landing conditions in Indianapolis and expressed the opinion that the experimental station would make Indianapolis more attractive to manufacturers.<sup>403</sup> These statements fueled the boosters’ renewed faith in airport development as a tool to attract the aviation industry.

The selection of Indianapolis as the site of experiments because of the airport’s low traffic indicates the failure of the 1928 to 1931 campaign to build an excellent airport that attracted aviation manufacturers to the city. As the federal experiments at the Indianapolis airport drew more attention, descriptions of the Indianapolis airport grew increasingly complimentary. While almost all of the praise for the airport focused on the terrain and landing conditions, local papers once again proclaimed that Indianapolis’s airport was one of the best in the country. When additional developments at the Indianapolis airport presented the chance to become the site of a national testing station, boosters revived the dream of Indianapolis as the center of American aviation. Booster rhetoric tied the airport improvements to the guarantee that the aviation industry would subsequently invest in the city. As with the building of Mars Hill airport and the Municipal Airport, the experimental station supported the booster dream of an aviation center, and the dream of an aviation center led to the investment in the experimental station. Booster rhetoric had intertwined airport improvements with the future of the city of Indianapolis. This symbiosis would continue in the subsequent decades, with the boosters’ vision never realized, despite airport improvements.

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<sup>402</sup> “Indianapolis Seen as Center for Aviation Manufacturing,” Dec. 30, 1938, clipping, Indianapolis Municipal Airport Collection 1936-39, V408.

<sup>403</sup> See statements by Jack Frye, the president of TWA; C.R. Smith, president of American Airlines; and Robert Littler, station manager for Eastern Airlines, in Donovan A. Turk, “Local Airport Leads Nation; Long Runways Being Added,” *Indianapolis Star*, Oct. 17, 1938.

## Conclusion: A Comparative Story

From 1925 to 1939, the dream of Indianapolis's boosters to transform their city into the "crossroads of the air" inspired building and improving the city airport. The work of local businessmen and city officials resulted in the construction of the Mars Hill (Stout Field) airport, the Indianapolis Municipal Airport, and the CAA experimental station. The hope that Indianapolis could become the center of the U.S. aviation industry drove these three projects. Boosters—Chamber of Commerce members, local businessmen, and municipal leaders—encouraged the support of local citizens with promotional rhetoric that tied the future of the city to the airport. At the same time that boosters promoted an airport, they also used it to attract industries. While boosters achieved the desired airport for Indianapolis, no aviation manufacturers moved to the city. Each new period of boosterism and construction signaled the failure of the previous effort to achieve the boosters' ultimate goal of an aviation center. Nevertheless, the work of city leaders established an airport that still serves Indianapolis today.

The story of the Indianapolis Municipal Airport is a significant part of the history of Indianapolis. Much of that history is shared by municipal airports developed around the country in the 1920s and 1930s. Boosters, and in particular local Chambers of Commerce, were the initial driving forces behind the construction of many municipal airports.<sup>404</sup> As public aviation enthusiasm grew, leadership on airport projects shifted to municipal control with federal support. The progression from the Chamber-led Mars Hill

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<sup>404</sup> Aviation historians Janet Bednarek and Deborah Douglas provide numerous examples of the role that Chambers of Commerce played in constructing municipal airports. Janet R. Daly Bednarek, *America's Airports: Airfield Development, 1918-1947* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), 64; Deborah G. Douglas, "The Invention of Airports: A Political, Economic and Technological History of Airports in the United States, 1919-1939" (diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1996).

project, to the city-managed Municipal Airport, and finally, the federal experimental station illustrates this national trend.<sup>405</sup> Other details of the successful establishment of the Indianapolis Airport also reoccurred at airports around the country. Nationally, boosters shared Indianapolis boosters' goals of increasing economic prosperity, rivaling other cities, and creating a specialized niche in aviation. In addition, local reactions to aeronautical news encouraged development around the country: air mail routes spurred rushed construction, Charles Lindbergh inspired aviation enthusiasm, and the advancement of aviation technology made renovations necessary.

Many boosters used the competition between cities and the desire to be the best in a new industry to rally supporters. According to historian Janet Bednarek in her study of municipal airports, "During the 1920s and through the 1940s airport boosters promised great economic benefits from airport development, but their great expectations were seldom met."<sup>406</sup> In Austin, Texas, "city leaders embraced aviation as the key to urban growth and economic progress."<sup>407</sup> The Aviation Committee of the Austin Chamber of Commerce used the competition among cities to keep up with modernity, claiming: "The city which is not alive to aerial transportation today, may, in the future, be in the same position as the town which ignored the railroad."<sup>408</sup> In Los Angeles, California, the Chamber of Commerce promoted the city as the future "aeronautics capital of the nation." Just as boosters in Indianapolis relied on a rhetorical theme of the city's central

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<sup>405</sup> In *America's Airports* Bednarek illustrates and explores this national trend from boosterism, to municipal leadership with federal funding.

<sup>406</sup> Bednarek, 179.

<sup>407</sup> Kenneth B. Ragsdale, "Barnstormers, Businessmen, and High Hopes for the Future: Austin, Texas, Enters the Modern Air Age," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 107, no. 4 (Apr., 2004): 535.

<sup>408</sup> *Ibid.*, 542.

location, Los Angeles boosters argued the favorable weather of their city made it the natural location for the aeronautics industry.<sup>409</sup>

Boosters' influence on Atlanta's airport development also closely matched that of Indianapolis. Betsy Braden and Paul Hagan begin their study of Atlanta's airport by noting, "topographically, it was preordained a hub."<sup>410</sup> Early aviation boosters predicted that "Atlanta will be the aeroplane center of the south."<sup>411</sup> When the city renovated its inadequate facilities, the head of the Atlanta City Council's Aviation Committee announced, "We are ready to begin to make Atlanta the southern aviation metropolis." One early Atlanta booster in an interview with Braden and Hagan admitted that local airport supporters often encouraged airport development by warning that the city would lose aviation business to nearby rival, Birmingham, although Birmingham was not a threat.<sup>412</sup> Boosters across the country connected economic prosperity, competition, and excellence with the development of airports.

Like Indianapolis, many cities reacted to national aviation developments. The prospect of local air mail service in Austin prompted boosting the advantages of flight to local residents and hastened the search for a landing field.<sup>413</sup> As in Indianapolis, Lindbergh's successful flight inspired Austin's interest in air mail.<sup>414</sup> In Atlanta, "confident belief that a mail route would follow possession of a landing field" prompted

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<sup>409</sup> Los Angeles boosters were more successful than their Indianapolis counterparts; by the end of the 1930s the city was the fourth largest urban center in American and led the nation in aircraft production. Tom Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted: Boosterism and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce," *California History* 64, no. 1 (Jan., 1985): 29.

<sup>410</sup> Betsy Braden and Paul Hagan, *A Dream Takes Flight: Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport and Aviation in Atlanta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press for Atlanta Historical Society, 1989), 1.

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>413</sup> Ragsdale, 543.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 544.



development. As was the case in Indianapolis, this hope “turned out to be a bit of wishful thinking.”<sup>415</sup> Aviation historian William Trimble records the same reaction to national events in his history of Pennsylvania aeronautics. He notes that during the boom period following Lindbergh’s flight, municipalities and individuals in Pennsylvania invested in the construction of new airports.<sup>416</sup>

The technological advancement of aviation in the 1920s and 1930s led to the need for major airport renovations soon after construction. In Philadelphia, the National Guard, the local Chamber of Commerce, and the Aero Club worked together to establish a municipal airport in 1926. When completed, the airport was already too small to serve the city.<sup>417</sup> In 1929 the city lost its airline operation to a new, modern airport in nearby Camden, New Jersey.<sup>418</sup> Horrified by this loss of business, the Aero Club and Chamber of Commerce successfully promoted a new airport, and broke ground in 1931.<sup>419</sup> Pittsburgh encountered a similar situation when the city had to replace its first airport in 1929. Trimble notes that even after opening one of the nation’s finest fields, both the city and county found “maintenance and necessary expansion costs increasingly burdensome.”<sup>420</sup>

Other airports were successful even with inadequate facilities. The first airport serving Washington, D.C. was insufficient even when it opened in the late 1920s. Despite problems, the number of passengers at the small airport increased every year, and by

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<sup>415</sup> Braden and Hagen, 27.

<sup>416</sup> William F. Trimble, *High Frontier: A History of Aeronautics in Pennsylvania* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), 194, 196.

<sup>417</sup> Trimble, *High Frontier*, 123.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>419</sup> Philadelphia soon ran out of funds for the project and had to wait for federal relief programs to complete the new airport. *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

1932 thirty flights to New York left daily.<sup>421</sup> By 1936, Washington D.C. had the third most passengers and air mail in the country, but the federal government did not build a new airport until 1941.<sup>422</sup> Atlanta also grew as an aviation center before the city constructed a suitable airport. Although slightly less populous than Indianapolis at the time, by 1928 Atlanta was a hub with several connecting flights landing on a regular basis despite having no central terminal and a dirt runway that was too short for safe landings.<sup>423</sup> In 1932, this inadequate port finally received major renovations in boosters' efforts to "insure Atlanta's leadership as the Finest Airport in the South."<sup>424</sup>

The success of the Washington D.C. and Atlanta airports demonstrated that airlines did not require a modern and updated airport to concentrate their activities. Indianapolis boosters had been incorrect in their arguments that the city needed to improve its airport to attract passengers, airlines, and businesses. Indianapolis city officials and airport managers would eventually learn this lesson.<sup>425</sup> When Daniel Orcutt, director of the Indianapolis Municipal Airport from 1970 to 1995, was asked if increasing the size of the airport would bring additional traffic he replied: "No. No, it's the

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<sup>421</sup> James M. Goode, "Flying High: The Origin and Design of Washington National Airport," *Washington History* 1, no. 2 (Oct., 1989): 10.

<sup>422</sup> Goode, 10.

<sup>423</sup> In a 1929 survey of airports, Atlanta's population is listed as 255,100 and Indianapolis as 382,100. Henry Vincent Hubbard, *Airports: Their Location, Administration and Legal Basis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1930), 139; Braden and Hagen, 42-50.

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>425</sup> Fred W. Sommer, a member of the Airport Board from 1948-1969, noted that for a long time it was believed that the airport itself would draw industries without any other incentives. Fred W. Sommer interview, by R.T. King, October 11, 1980, 80-062, "Economic History of Indiana in the Twentieth Century, 1976-1980," Center for the Study of History and Memory, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

community that generates the traffic. You're saying that the airport itself generates the traffic—it is the community.”<sup>426</sup>

### *An Airport at the Crossroads*

The Indianapolis Municipal Airport has continued to cycle through periods of major development projects. Following construction of the CAA experimental station in Indianapolis, the airport and the city shifted their attention to national defense. During World War II, the United States Army Air Corps signed agreements with airports across the nation and took over management of many of them.<sup>427</sup> In Indianapolis, despite boosters' hopes that the CAA and Army would center defense work at the airport, the CAA only monitored operations.<sup>428</sup> In 1940, an award-winning pilot, Roscoe Turner, opened an aviation school at the municipal airport to train pilots for the CAA Civilian Reserve Program.<sup>429</sup> After the war, the city followed the national trend of developing general aviation airports to accommodate private flying.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>426</sup> Daniel Orcutt interview, by Frank Howland, April 7, 1982, 80-073, “Economic History of Indiana in the Twentieth Century, 1976-1980,” Center for the Study of History and Memory, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

<sup>427</sup> Bednarek, 152.

<sup>428</sup> For examples of boosters' hopes of a military center, see “CAA Takes Over Airport Tower: Defense Lead to Move for 24-hour Service,” *Indianapolis Star*, Dec. 5, 1941; “Plan to Arm U.S. Gives City Boost: Indianapolis May be One of Leading Military, Aviation Centers,” *Indianapolis Star*, May 18, 1940; “Tighten Rules at City Airport: CAA Likely to Man Control Tower in War Move; Visiting Curbed,” *Indianapolis Times*, Dec. 17, 1941.

<sup>429</sup> “Turner Leases Plot for New Plane Hangar: Awarded Airport Gasoline Franchise After 4-Hour Conference,” *Indianapolis Times*, June 27, 1940.

<sup>430</sup> In an interview, Fred Sommer notes that during World War II aviation grew everywhere and the Indianapolis Airport had to acquire secondary airports. Fred W. Sommer interview, by R.T. King, October 11, 1980, 80-062, *Economic History of Indiana in the Twentieth Century, 1976-1980*, Center for the Study of History and Memory, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana; Bednarek, 166-167.

Today, the Indianapolis International Airport has very little in common with the first city municipal airport constructed in 1931, renamed Weir Cook Airport in 1944.<sup>431</sup> In 1976, Weir Cook became the Indianapolis International Airport when an international arrivals building was dedicated.<sup>432</sup> In addition to the name changes, the demands of jet propelled air travel and increased security have required a more complex airport. Longer, more durable runways and baggage and passenger screening are now necessary features of the airport. In 2008, the city opened a new midfield terminal as “a proper gateway from the rest of the world to this thriving, 21<sup>st</sup>-century city,” instead of remodeling the old building.<sup>433</sup> By 2013, the airport served 3.6 million departing passengers and owned 9,000 acres of land.<sup>434</sup>

Despite these surface differences, many of the city leaders’ goals for the airport in the 1920s and 1930s remain a key part of its operation today. In 2011, the Indianapolis Airport Authority announced a new 30-year strategic plan. The plan echoes the early

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<sup>431</sup> Colonel H. Weir Cook was a pioneer pilot in air mail delivery and involved in early Indianapolis airport efforts. He died in a plane crash during WWII. Ironically, Cook served as the chairman of a 1931 American Legion committee to determine if the municipal airport should be named after an Indianapolis aviator killed in World War I. The committee determined that no one aviator should be honored above the others and instead recommended a plaque to honor all of them. “Impressive Military Ceremonies Accompany Honors Paid Memory of Air Hero,” *Indianapolis Star*, Mar. 29, 1944; “Flying ace Weir Cook taught of courage,” *Indianapolis Prime Times*, June 2001; “Name of Airport May Honor Flier,” *Indianapolis Star*, Apr. 6, 1931; “Would Honor Flyer at New City Airport,” *Indianapolis News*, Apr. 6, 1931; “War Fliers Plaque for Airport Urged,” *Indianapolis Star*, Apr. 7, 1931.

<sup>432</sup> “Now It’s International,” *Indianapolis Star*, July 24, 1976.

<sup>433</sup> After unsuccessfully seeking a new use for the old terminal, the Airport Authority began demolition of the original terminal in 2013. “Smooth landing for new terminal: Applause, cameras greet the first arrivals after airport opens with ribbon-cutting,” *Indianapolis Star*, Nov. 12, 2008; IND Foundation, Inc., *IND The Art of It All: Art, Architecture, and Cuisine at the Indianapolis International Airport* (Indianapolis: Emmis Publishing, 2009), 17.

<sup>434</sup> “Airline Activity Report,” Indianapolis Airport Authority, Nov. 2014, <http://www.indianapolisairport.com/admin/uploads/797/November%202014%20Airline%20Activity%20Report.pdf> (accessed January 21, 2015); “Indianapolis Airport Authority announces land use initiative to support economic development,” Indianapolis Airport Authority, Nov. 21, 2014, [http://www.indianapolisairport.com/admin/uploads/1057/11.21.14IAA\\_Land%20Use%20Initiative%20Press%20Release.pdf](http://www.indianapolisairport.com/admin/uploads/1057/11.21.14IAA_Land%20Use%20Initiative%20Press%20Release.pdf) (accessed January 21, 2015).

airport boosters' desires to develop the land around the airport to attract aviation industries. Based on a concept of "aerotropolis," the press release for the strategic plan describes this goal as:

In its simplest sense, an aerotropolis is a strategically planned, fully integrated urban development that drives economic development throughout a defined geographical area.

A central airport "city" comprised of landside and airside passenger, cargo, and aviation service facilities in addition to hotels, conference centers, offices, and similar enterprises would be positioned at the heart of an Indianapolis aerotropolis. It would be encircled by a roadway that "rings" the airport proper.

Outside the ring, defined clusters of development such as office parks, industrial parks, light manufacturing companies, warehousing and distribution facilities, entertainment complexes, educational and medical centers, and other enterprises would be developed. These clusters would radiate outward along major interstate and rail corridors for up to 20 miles in all directions.<sup>435</sup>

Although broader and more complicated in terms of what businesses the Indianapolis Airport Authority hopes to attract, the desire to build up industries around the airport to "drive economic development" in the city is a reflection of the intentions of the original airport boosters.

Construction of the Indianapolis airport conforms to the national trends of airport construction in the 1920s and 1930s. This study of a single airport offers insights into the national story of airport construction and how the dreams of local boosters produced the airports that serve our cities today. As with any individual case, aspects of the Indianapolis story distinguish it. The motivation to be the "crossroads of the air" shaped and molded the airport improvement process in Indianapolis. Although the dream never became reality, it resulted in the building of a nationally ranked airport with enough room

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<sup>435</sup> "Indianapolis Airport Authority approves 30-year strategic development plan," Indianapolis Airport Authority, Feb. 18, 2011, <http://www.indianapolisairport.com/admin/uploads/527/02.18.11AirportLandUsePlanApproved.pdf> (accessed January 21, 2015).

to expand and adapt to new technology and security challenges. Understanding why the Indianapolis leaders developed a public airport provides insights into the current role of the Indianapolis International Airport. The development of the airport demonstrates that an unachieved goal can still produce excellent outcomes. Eighty-three years after the dedication, the Indianapolis Municipal Airport serves as a symbolic gateway welcoming the world to Indianapolis.

## A Note on Primary Sources

This study on the Indianapolis Municipal Airport draws on local records that have been preserved from the 1920s and 1930s. Unfortunately, many documents that would provide a clearer picture of Indianapolis's relationship with its airport have been discarded or misplaced over the years. To find the sources that still survive I searched at state repositories, academic institutions, Indianapolis organizations, and institutions interested in the history of aviation. The majority of my work comes from three state-focused establishments: the Indiana Historical Society, the Indiana State Library, and the Indiana State Archives. The Indiana Historical Society's *Indianapolis Airport Authority, 1928-2012 Collection* contains documents and photographs from primarily the 1950s onward. The bulk of the collection was donated by the Indianapolis Airport Authority prior to the 2008 opening of a new terminal. I viewed the collection before and after it was processed. The Indiana Historical Society also holds a collection from the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce. I viewed clipping files on a wide variety of aviation and airport topics at both the Indiana Historical Society and the Indiana State Library. I also relied on the newspaper and biography indexes at the Indiana State Library. The State Library Manuscript Division contains the photograph and clipping scrapbooks of the first and third superintendents of the airport, Paul Moore and Nish Dienhart respectively. The Indiana State Archives holds a collection similar to that at the Indiana History Society from the Indianapolis Airport Authority. The collection covers until the early 1980s and contains many leases and contracts.

I also searched at nearby academic institutions and local organizations. The IUPUI University library, the Purdue Aviation Technology Library, and the Butler University Library all had airport plans and reports postdating 1950. The Center for the

Study of History and Memory, part of Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, has oral interviews of later airport directors, Edwin Petro and Daniel Orcutt, as well as Fred Sommer, a member of the airport board for many years (first the Indianapolis Board of Aviation Commissioners and after 1961 the Indianapolis Airport Authority Board), in its oral history collection on “Economic History of Indiana in the Twentieth Century, 1976-1980.” Unfortunately the tape recorder did not work when I visited, and I could not listen to the Petro interview. Orcutt and Sommer’s interviews were transcribed. The Indianapolis Public Library’s digitized copies of the *Activities of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* and the *Bulletin of the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce* were crucial to this study. The Public Library also had a few other Chamber of Commerce documents from this time period, but they did not pertain to the airport, and all airport documents they held dated after the 1940s. The Indianapolis Airport Authority has donated most of its materials to the before mentioned repositories. The Airport Authority still holds copies of the minutes of the Airport Board and Airport Authority Board dating back to the creation of the board in 1945. Enquires at the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, the Indianapolis City Council, and the Indianapolis Department of Public Works did not turn up any sources.

I also checked with Indiana museums and organizations interested in aviation history. The Weir Cook Memorial Project, the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, the Indiana Military Museum, the Atterbury-Bakalar Air Museum, and the Hoosier Air Museum all were unable to provide sources about any of the three development projects I cover. The Indiana National Guard indicated they had some early sources on Stout Field (Mars Hill airport) and offered to send them to me. However, I never received them. I also



contacted both the National Archives Regional Branch at Chicago, Illinois and National Archives II at College Park, Maryland, about sources on the CAA Experimental Station at the Indianapolis Airport. Neither location found references of the experimental station in Indianapolis.

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