LA CROSSE AIRPORT DEDICATION

First Flight
Northwest Airlines, Inc.
TO THE GATEWAY CITY’S CLASS IV AIRPORT
IN THE HEART OF THE COULEE REGION
* LA CROSSE, WIS. * MARCH I, 1947 *
The people of La Crosse must be mindful of pride in achievement today as they participate in the dedication of Municipal airport.

Among the milestones of progress celebrated on other notable occasions, this one is unique, bearing a new significance, indeed.

For the thing we mark today transcends, somehow, the achievement of something purely local in nature. An airport is inherently more than that.

The mere statement that La Crosse possesses a Class IV field, and is today recognizing the resumption of flights by Northwest Airlines on an international basis, carries a vibrant overtone of world-wide significance such as only the addition of an airport to a community can give.

For when the wings of a mighty Northwest Airliner bore down on Municipal airport today—at that moment La Crosse was less than 60 hours distant from the most remote corner of the globe!

This had been the vision, when, four years ago, a Citizens’ committee undertook to bring an airport to La Crosse. These were bleak days, airportwise, fraught with previous disappointment and surely with uncertainty.

For the moment, La Crosse had been at the crossroads, possessing less fortitude that would be required for the great decision to proceed. Difficulties, gnawing at our courage and diluting our unity, had been many.

But in the fog of indecision and the apparent futility of once again attempting a successful airport beginning, it appeared La Crosse merely had been marking time, awaiting the selection of a site to accommodate the type of field aviation was demanding.

Meanwhile, the ships were overhead—droning persistently up and down the beacon-lighted trail we had earlier helped to establish. The monotony of it had irked and plagued us until, in a fit of new determination, a Citizens’ committee and the Common Council took hold to bring decision and action to the community.

The people of La Crosse themselves made the fateful decision by voting two to one in a referendum election to purchase the airport site. This officially marked the real beginning, beyond which a determination to see it through was compelling enough to have enlisted federal government support at a time of national crisis, and the airport thus was built.

All this is history, now, but it brings a new challenge in development of the field such as will require the same uncompromising courage which marked the initial effort.

The immediate necessity is an administration building comparable to and in keeping with the class of airport we possess.

The prestige we enjoy in landing accommodations begs a decision to erect an “ad” building of commensurate proportions, and to provide other ground facilities such as will match the present level of achievement.

Anything less than full adequacy of passenger, mail and express facilities will blight the vision with which we began and stymie the objective for which we set out.

We have gone too far, we have achieved too much, we are sitting too pretty in the possession of a great airport, frankly, to fail to pursue the design so courageously fashioned in the beginning.

R. L. BANGSBERG
Chairman of the Citizens' committee which actively took hold of the airport from the beginning was Quincy H. Hale.

Working in close cooperation with the Wisconsin State Planning Board, first in the selection of a site, and later in formulating plans for government consideration, Mr. Hale gave forceful leadership to the citizens group.

A request to M. W. Torkelson, director of regional planning for Wisconsin, brought prompt assistance of a nature which later developed as overwhelming testimony at Washington and resulted in the federal government's decision to proceed with construction.

Assisting in the preparation of an Airport Analysis, comprising facts and figures relative to the potential of aviation necessity in La Crosse, was Mr. T. K. Jordan, also of the state planning board.

Together, Mr. Torkelson and Mr. Jordan supplied the Citizens' committee with its most factual argument in the form of this analysis, and fortified the committee with a volume which federal officials could hardly deny—and in the end, did not deny.

To all of this effort, in addition to the constant vigilance of the Citizens' committee, Mr. Hale made his own outstanding contribution by effectively directing the community's complete support to the project at hand.

Mr. Hale's efficient leadership stemmed from his own personal interest in behalf of the community toward the airport development. It was wholehearted and sincere from the beginning, and thus was able to bring the full cooperation of all in one of La Crosse's more remarkable excursions of complete solidarity and aggressive purpose.

The people of La Crosse took wholesomely to the project which Mr. Hale and the committee were sponsoring. They furnished absolute assurance to Mayor Verchota and the Common Council that this was a needed adjunct in La Crosse, with the result that appropriations for the land were approved.

The Board of Public Works—City Attorney Fred E. Steele, City Engineer John Barth, and City Comptroller L. J. Kaiser—did yeoman service to their community in the extensive proceedings of land acquisition.

Congressman William H. Stevenson played an active part in convincing the federal government that it could hardly neglect an original promise to proceed, and received confirmation in a White House presentation of the case.

To Mr. Hale and the Citizens' committee, for leadership first of all, and to those who in turn gave the needed boost in proper time and order, La Crosse is indeed grateful for the achievement of Municipal airport.

An important step in the history of the city’s government was made on Nov. 9, 1945, when the common council vested in an aviation board the responsibility for all affairs of the municipal airport.

For the five men upon whom this responsibility was laid, no pattern of local experience could be supplied. They began with no prior knowledge of how to proceed, but with the determination of learning by doing.

The task before them was and is one of great magnitude, one which must consider developments in this day of rapid technological advancement that cannot be predicted with certainty for long periods ahead.

But the mayor chose wisely in his selection of men with qualities of both business acumen and vision who have the ability to plan logically and carefully and to act progressively.

Under the able leadership of their chairman, the aviation board members went to work immediately after their appointment to attack the backlog of airport affairs that had accumulated and to prepare for the operation of the field which was turned over to the city early in 1946.

During that year the aviation board spent countless hours to provide temporary facilities, to obtain necessary equipment and to lay out plans for future development.

Realization of these plans, held in abeyance until the civil aeronautics board granted major airlines service to La Crosse, will be the aviation board’s aim for the coming year, one which it will attack with the same confidence and vigor that it has manifested since the beginning.
From the Beginning . . . and Now

Nineteen forty-seven began auspiciously for the La Crosse municipal airport as a year of realization for the inauguration of Northwest Airlines transcontinental service—a goal toward which all interested in placing the city on the high roads of the air had worked for 15 years.

Four of these years had been ones of invigorating accomplishment that led to the completion of the one and one-half million dollar airport.

The last, 1946, was one of impatient waiting for the civil aeronautics board decision to grant regularly scheduled landings to some of the dozens of Northwest airliners flying over the city daily.

The year had stretched itself out to its very final day before the news came through of the favorable decision which included also authority to Parks Air Transport, East St. Louis, Ill., for feeder line service.

Memories of the trials of the ever-persevering citizens airport committee, of the city administration, of the aviation board and all others who had worked toward the goal were lost in the sense of exhilaration generated by the new activity of preparing for the start of Northwest operations and for the dedication of the field on March 1.

Immediately after New Year's day the aviation board—Emil H. Erickson, chairman, Frank Sisson, Walter T. Roth and Harold Eeg—met to discuss the changes that would have to be effected for passenger and mail service.

Northwest officials and engineers flew to La Crosse on Jan. 13, made a rapid but conclusive survey of airport accommodations, suggested essential changes and set March 1 as the date for beginning operations.

Six days later the blueprints arrived, were approved by the board and on Jan. 23 the work began. On Feb. 2 the executive committee of the airport dedication group, with R. L. Bangsberg as chairman, outlined plans for a celebration appropriate to the day of achievement.

Although the 1946 airport log, listing 1,792 visiting planes from nearly every state in the union, Alaska and six Canadian provinces was not belittled, a sense of frustration had arisen in the city as Northwest planes continued to drone overhead on their flights with no immediate prospects of their circling to land for passenger and mail transportation.

In the hands of the CAB all through 1946 lay the fate of La Crosse's aviation future through the board's decision on the north central case, one involving 21 airline applications for service to

Citizens Airport Committee Executive Board. Seated, left to right: Gysbert van Steenwyk, Q. H. Hale, R. C. Bice and George Fuller. Standing: George Hall and R. L. Bangsberg. (Not on picture, A. J. Bates and Edward Madden.)
more than 500 cities lying between Lake Michigan and the Rockies.

At the first hearing by the CAB in this case at Des Moines on March 12, 1935, Southwest had presented its petition to include La Crosse on one of its routes.

In March, 1946, the city learned that a CAB examiner had recommended a temporary certificate to Parks Air Transport for feeder line service between Chicago and the Twin Cities with a stop at La Crosse, but nothing was said about Northwest trunk service.

April brought the development that the CAB would hear oral arguments on the north central case at Washington, D. C., on May 6 at which the city could petition to intervene.

The Chamber of Commerce rushed to make a survey of air travel and air mail potentialities, the results of which were outlined in a 13-page
exhibit to be presented to the CAB after City Attorney Fred E. Steele had completed his 10-minute oral argument before the board.

As the result of this intervention and Northwest's petition, the efforts of years of work on the part of many citizens were rewarded with the granting of a certificate to Northwest and a temporary certificate to Parks, which expects six months to elapse before it will be ready to begin.

The present municipal airport became a reality through the promotional work of a committee of citizens that met on March 30, 1942, under the chairmanship of Quincy Hale in a revival of work that had gone on for more than 20 years.

"The crisis has been met and overcome!" was the frequent cry during the 20's and 30's as community leaders struggled first with the Salzer airport on Losey boulevard south and then with the Pfafflin field on French island which later, extended, became known as the La Crosse county airport in 1935.

During those years, even when the city and county administrations gave up temporarily, members of the La Crosse Flyers association kept
BEGINNING and NOW (con'd)

on flying and lent its enthusiasm to keep the air­
port project alive.

Salzer airport, leased in 1919, purchased in 1928
at a cost of $30,000, saw the institution of air mail
service on June 7, 1926 when Northwest carried
its first route between the Twin Cities and
Chicago.

On April 20, 1931, after the city had made its
last payment of $10,000 with interest on the field,
postal authorities ordered the discontinuance of
the eastbound flight because of hazardous field
conditions.

A clamour arose in the city, especially from the
business firms who used air mail to meet compe­
tition from outside industries. Upon the recom­
mendation of Northwest and postal officials, a
site belonging to Ray and Charles Pfafflin, who
had a private field on French island, was leased
and the field was made ready for service which
was reinstated on May 12.

In October, when the lease with the Pfafflins
was to be renewed, the city decided to improve
the Salzer airport and awarded a contract of
$10,548 for this purpose. Later in the month
the council learned that the government had
signed a lease to move its weather station to Brice
Prairie, in the belief that the city would continue
to use the Pfafflin field.

When work on the Salzer field had to be post­
poned until the spring of 1932 because of the
weather, the city renewed the French island lease
and passenger and mail planes continued to land
there.

This service was discontinued in October 1932
because the field did not meet requirements and
in August, 1933, the council voted to abandon
the Salzer site.

During the worst years of the depression the
county board, with Raymond C. Bice as chairman
of its aviation committee, set up a CWA project
at the French island field to provide work for the
unemployed.

This airport was dedicated on Aug. 18, 1935,
(Continued on Page 20)
La Crosse’s Common Council


Standing left to right: Walter T. Roth, Warren Smith, Donald J. Lyden and Franklin Pamperin. Seated left to right: W. P. Roellig, E. H. Derr, Charles A. Beranek, Harold Eeg, and Fred A. Kraft. (Not on pictures, Dr. A. R. Kempter.)
Facts About the La Crosse Airport

Aerial view of the runways at the La Crosse Municipal Airport.

One of the few places on the Mississippi flood plain within 100 miles to afford territory for landing strips long enough to accommodate large planes, the French Island site was selected in 1942 for the La Crosse municipal airport.

The area includes about 1,100 acres, of which 450 acres were graded in construction of the field.

It is located on a direct major air route to Chicago and the east; to the Twin Cities and on to the Pacific northwest, Alaska, the Orient and Asia.

The original contract for construction let by the CAA for $925,777 was supplemented by a drainage contract and one of $62,000 for electrical installations. With the city appropriation of $170,183 for land, the original cost amounted to more than one million dollars.

Three 150 by 5,300-foot runways paved with asphaltic concrete, have 1,000-foot safety zones at the ends; one runway is unsurfaced. Taxiways 50 feet wide serve the runways and a concrete apron for loading and unloading fronts the administration area.

In the first grading operation alone, 1,600,000 cubic yards of soil were moved. Pipes varying in size from 12 to 30 inches in diameter, totaling 9,385 feet, supply a perfect drainage system.

During the height of construction, 80 trucks transported crushed limestone to the field on an average haul of 11 miles from quarries near La Crescent.

A green and white rotating 1,800,000 candlepower light, topping a 51-foot tower, is visible for nine miles.

Runway lights numbering 142, set 200 feet apart, can be controlled to five different degrees of brightness. These lights are amber 1,500 feet from the end of the runways to warn pilots. At the ends of the runways are 24 boundary range lights.

Recently appointed manager of the La Crosse airport is a native son, Frank Muth (above), who took up flying in the early days at Salzer field. He has experience as a flight instructor, commercial flyer, and in maintenance work.
La Crosse is a key city in the system of radio beam ranges which guide planes safely on their flights from the Twin Cities to Chicago and back.

All planes equipped with two-way radio equipment follow the radio path. As they pass over each radio beam range they establish contact with the weather station to report their progress and to learn the latest quirks and fancies of the weather.

The radio beam range system at Lytles, 12 miles northwest of La Crosse, is shown in the picture on the left. The weather station at Brice Prairie is shown in the other photograph.

Finding out the weather conditions prevailing here and passing the information on is a coordinated job between the U. S. weather bureau and the civil aeronautics administration. The weather bureau gathers the information on temperature, wind velocity, elevation of the practical flying ceiling, etc., and the civil aeronautics administration men pass the information along.
Field Ceremonies

MARCH 1, 1947

R. L. BANGSBERG, Editor, La Crosse Tribune,
Presiding

2:30 p.m. Concert - *Massed High School and College Bands
2:50 p.m. Arrival of first Northwest Airlines scheduled flight
to La Crosse.
3:00 p.m. Departure of Northwest Airlines Plane
Star Spangled Banner and Flag Raising
Band and Combined American Legion-VFW Color Guard
Invocation - - - - - - The Rev. Ivar M. Gjellstad
Introduction of Honored Guests - - - - F. W. Sisson,
Member of Aviation Board
Remarks - - - - - - Mayor J. J. Verchota
In the Beginning - - - - - - M. W. Torkelson,
Wisconsin Director of Regional Planning
For Northwest Airlines - - R. Lee Smith, Eastern Regional
Vice-President, Northwest Airlines
Dedication Address - - - - Maj. Gen. W. E. Kepner
Song—America - - - - Audience
Air Demonstration - - - U. S. Navy and Army Planes

* Massed band arranged by Harold Youngberg, represents musicians from
La Crosse State Teachers college and Central, Logan and Aquinas high
schools under direction of Thomas Annett, William Baker, Frank Italiano
and Harmer F. Root.
Formal Banquet

STODDARD HOTEL
6:30 P. M., March 1, 1947

FRED E. STEELE, City Attorney, Presiding

HON. JENNINGS RANDOLPH of West Virginia

Music -------------- Trio
Invocation - - - - - The Most Rev. John P. Treacy, Coadjutor Bishop
Dinner
Introduction of Distinguished Guests - - - - Mr. Steele
The Airport—From Sandburs to Cement - - R. L. Bangsberg Chairman, Dedication
Current Airport Developments - - - - E. H. Erickson Chairman, Aviation Board
Reminiscences - - - - Quincy H. Hale Chairman, Citizens' Committee
We Serve La Crosse - - - R. Lee Smith Eastern Regional Vice-President, Northwest Airlines
Address—
Aviation Builds a New World - - - Hon. Jennings Randolph
Song—On Wisconsin - - - - - Audience

As an accommodation to visitors, the following organizations have made available their clubrooms for entertainment after the afternoon and evening dedication programs: Eagles, Elks, Knights of Columbus, A. F. of L., C. I. O., American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and La Crosse Club open to men.
La Crosse Has All Four . . .

For decades La Crosse has taken great pride in the transport facilities which carry its products from the Heart of the Coulee Region to the far-flung corners of the world.

It has had the finest of railroad service, an excellent network of bus and truck lines, and barge-line service on the Mississippi river. Today La Crosse keeps up with the leaders by adding air transportation afforded by Northwest Airlines to flying services already available locally.

Along the rails La Crosse is served by the Milwaukee, Burlington and North Western roads...
whose crack passenger trains stop here on schedule — the Hiawathas, Zephyrs, Empire Builders and 400s.

On the highways coming into the city are buses operated by Greyhound, Jefferson Lines, and the Winneshiek and Waterloo Stages.

In addition to railway freight service, La Crosse is fortunate in having extensive truck line operations.

La Crosse is located on the Mississippi river inland waterway system which connects the Ohio river system and the navigation facilities of the TVA. This is the most important waterway system in the nation, exclusive of the Great Lakes.

The city has constructed a municipally-owned river terminal on this waterway for handling of freight moving to and from the river. One oil company is operating a terminal for handling and storage of water-bore petroleum products.

The city's Northwest Airlines connections now lead as far as the Orient.
Military Planes to Show Here

Left: The huge amphibious airplane, the PBY, which was used for reconnaissance and submarine patrol during the war.

Above: One of the fastest and most dependable naval pursuit ships, the F6F, the Hellcat.

Right: The new model Bell helicopter, the YR13A, which is being put through its paces at Camp McCoy, to determine its operating efficiency in cold weather.

Above: Popular carrier or land-based plane, the F4U, known as the Corsair.

La Crosse is fortunate in having naval and military aircraft made available for the dedication of the airport. At least 30 airplanes, including a huge PBY amphibian and speedy torpedo and dive-bombers, were assigned from the naval air station at Wold Chamberlain field, Minneapolis, for maneuvers and formation flights. Task Force Frost at Camp McCoy, Wis., where clothing and equipment are being tested for all military service groups, made available its helicopter for demonstration and display purposes. The helicopter, model YR13A, carries two passengers in a glassed-in cabin. The craft has a maximum speed of 100 miles an hour and its vertical rate of ascent is 400 feet a minute. The naval and military air demonstration was to follow an aerial parade over the city of La Crosse by civilian aircraft, arrangements being completed through the La Crosse Flyers' association.
INTRODUCING THE OFFICIALS OF

Northwest Airlines, Inc.

Croil Hunter
President and General Manager

E. I. Whyatt
Executive Vice-President

W. Fiske Marshall
Vice-President—Operations

John F. Woodhead
Operations Manager

R. O. Bullwinkel
Vice President—Traffic

R. L. Lee Smith
Eastern Regional Vice-President

Northwest's Daily Flight Schedule for La Crosse

Westbound — 8:30 A. M.
Eastbound — 9:20 A. M.
Westbound — 10:30 A. M.
Eastbound — 2:50 P. M.
Eastbound — 7:50 P. M.

(Departures are 10 minutes later)
Northwest Airline Planes
For Your Air Travel Comfort

Regular Northwest air service to La Crosse will be by the DC-3 type plane shown above.

Northwest Stewardess Phyllis Peterson demonstrates dispensing of liquids from buffet two-quart vacuum bottles.

Co-Pilot with Northwest Airlines is David Brenner of La Crosse.

An interior view of the DC-3 which will serve La Crosse.
BEGINNING and NOW (Con'd)

after many delays and difficulties and Ray Pfafflin was given a contract to operate it for five years with the county's having the option of buying it at any time.

Now came the lean years. The county was forced to abandon improvements because the government would supply no further funds unless the county owned the land. About $50,000 had been expended, of which the county's share was $5,000. Some effort was made to purchase the field and then the matter was dropped.

In 1939 the Chamber of Commerce created an aeronautics committee as the result of demands by flying enthusiasts, but no progress was made.

The airport question was revived in 1941 under an air progress committee which concluded that because county or city support for acquiring land seemed impossible, the federal government would have to purchase the land as well as finance the project.

Bice, one of the group who had never given up the idea of an airport, suggested in 1942 that a joint committee be formed, with representatives of nine governmental, civic and fraternal agencies as members. It was this group, later expanded, that began the push which resulted in the present airport.

M. W. Torkelson of the state planning board, T. K. Jordan, state WPA airport engineer and H. E. Horner, regional director of the civil aeronautics administration, were brought to La Crosse to inspect sites and recommend the French island area as the best location on the Mississippi within 100 miles.

The citizens committee appealed to the common council for an appropriation of $150,000 to purchase the land upon which the government would build a Class IV airport. The referendum on the issue on September 16, 1942, indicated the will of the citizens in a two-to-one vote favoring it.

A comprehensive airport prospectus was undertaken by the Chamber of Commerce with the state planning board, Torkelson and Jordan doing the lion's share of the work. This survey showed the military and economic importance of La Crosse in air transportation.

In 1943 the preliminary work began to move with Jordan as engineer. Land condemnation proceedings, one of the most extensive pieces of legal undertaking in the entire history of the county, started in September 1942, dragged out for 13 months. Surveying began in June after an allocation of $400,000 for the airport by the CAA.

In September when contractors' bids were to be opened, the question of the type of paving on the runways—concrete or asphalt—caused a tempest that threatened to halt progress, but this too passed over as one of the many crises with the decision to favor the type of paving having the lowest maintenance cost.

By this time the CAA had decided to spend nearly one million dollars on the field. AGT Associates, Eau Claire, were awarded the contract for $925,777.50 in November.

Clearing of land started in January 1944 with H. P. Jandacek, CAA project engineer, and A. L. Mathy of AGT Associates in general supervision of airport construction, and hopes were high for the beginning of work on March 15 when a presidential directive ordered the revaluation of all airports on which construction was not under way.

The citizens committee went to work again, through April, May and June, making contacts with various governmental officials and groups to bring about a decision. Congressman W. H. Stevenson played a decisive role in presenting La Crosse's case to President Roosevelt, who personally ordered resumption of work as a result of Stevenson's plea. By the time the go-ahead order was received on June 12, the contractors had moved their equipment to another job and a further delay was caused until July 19 while they obtained rented equipment to proceed with construction.

On this day Mayor J. J. Verchota operated the scraper which took the first bite out of the soil, while an audience of city officials, citizens airport committee members and others looked on.

Cold weather stopped construction in December when the base courses and paving were 90 per cent complete and the entire airport was 65 per cent complete.

From March to September work progressed on surfacing operations. Runways were finished on Sept. 9 and then the electrical contractors moved in.

The lighting system, turned on for the first time on Dec. 20, 1945, was approved by a CAA engineer as one equal to that of any other city airport in the country.

At intervals during the progress of airport construction the citizens committee had urged the council to appoint a commission to supervise the affairs of the field but the matter was brought to a decision not before November 1945 when, against considerable opposition, a five man board with three alderman members was approved.

By this time so many problems requiring immediate attention had arisen that the new board's energies were taxed.
In December it informed the council that the airport would be turned over to the city on Feb. 2, after CAA engineers had given final inspection to lighting facilities.

Frank Muth, who had been a flight instructor and commercial flyer at Salzer field in the early days and who had continued his interest in flying, was employed as maintenance man and a year later, December 1946, was appointed airport manager. Three more employees were engaged for day and night duty, and four were added later as maintenance duties grew.

During 1946 the aviation board purchased two multiple T hangars, each to house eight planes, one of which was in use at the end of the year and the other to be shipped in April 1947. Snow removal equipment and tractors also were obtained.

In an agreement with Fanta-Reed Air Service that firm erected a 100 by 150-foot hangar with shops and offices which the city may purchase at any time.

The present administration, remodeled for Northwest Airlines, and the airport office, cottages that the city acquired during the condemnation proceedings were moved to their locations in the administration area in December 1945.

Still in the plan stage are the enlargement of the concrete apron to provide more loading and unloading space, the construction of a new administration building with adequate facilities for passenger and mail traffic and for a weather bureau and communications station, and storage buildings.

A city and county project still to be realized is the building of a new road to the airport.

As a result of a meeting of county and city government representatives on August 14, 1945, of seven suggested routes the group recommended one along Rose street to Hayes street, across the Black River on a new bridge to the administrative area of the field.

Four operators and one plane sales agency requested contracts for operation in 1947: Fanta-Reed, Skyways, Freyhoff Brothers, Inc., John Main and Manufacturers Sales operated by Norman Schulze. The first three firms instituted training for veterans under the GI bill of rights during 1946.

Of the operators, Jack Fanta and Kenneth Reed are pioneers at the airport. They took their flight training at Salzer field and moved to the present site in 1934.

As the restoration of La Crosse on Northwest flight schedules was imminent to place the city and the entire Coulee Region in a favorable position on the great network of national and international skyways, word of a new recommendation for further expansion came from the CAA in Washington.

It is the proposal for a Mississippi river seaplane base for the city as part of a three-year airport program in Wisconsin.

Perhaps all those who worked so valiantly for the municipal airport will have another task to accomplish, that only by faith, resolution and teamwork can a community move along the road of progress.
Airport Dedication
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE


Committees for Dedication - La Crosse Municipal Airport

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