

100 YEARS OF IOWA AVIATION 1910 to 2010

1910 to 1919

The first powered airplane flight occurred in May 1910. That year, longer flights were made in June, and in October an air meet was held at Red Oak. Balloon ascensions, which had begun in 1845, continued. Parachutists performed. The pendulum, however, swung toward airplanes. The first women to fly exhibitions in Iowa were Ruth Law in 1915 at Burlington and Katharine Stinson in 1916 at Shenandoah. Some Iowans built airplanes and flew them at exhibitions. In Grinnell, Billy Robinson designed, built, and flew airplanes. Thousands who had been thrilled by balloons, airships, and gliders flocked to watch airplanes fly. Airports built at cities were often only grass strips. Two flying clubs were formed in Des Moines. In 1919, Dr. Forrest Shaklee of Fort Dodge purchased a Jenny to use in visiting patients. Iowans helped fight World War I as pilots and mechanics.

1920s

Aerial circus performers, Iowans and nationally prominent exhibitionists, entertained enthusiastic spectators. More airports were built, some private and others public. Dedication days, usually combined with air shows, brought thousands to the sites. Barnstormers took hundreds aloft for their first flights. Fixed base operations, including charter and flight schools, were started. The *Des Moines Register and Tribune* purchased the first of their eleven aircraft, named *Good News*, in May 1928. A year later, a Travel air 6000B was the choice of the Automatic Washing Machine Company of Newton. Some early aircraft manufacturing companies were: Parker Aircraft Company at Perry, White Aircraft Company and the Bolte Aircraft Company at Des Moines, the Dunn Manufacturing Company at Clarinda with the Cruizaire, the Saul Aircraft Company at Carroll with the Triad, the Kari-Keen Aircraft Company at Sioux City, and the Central States Aero Company, builders of the Monocoupe, at Davenport. Aeronautical clubs were started at Fort Dodge, Davenport, and Dubuque. Iowa native Clarence Chamberlin flew nonstop to Germany in June 1927. Lindbergh flew to Iowa in August 1927. Iowa pilots participated in the National Air Tours for the Edsel B. Ford Reliability Trophy, held from 1926 to 1932. Several Iowa cities hosted tour stops. John Livingston, who won first place in 1928, Art Davis, and other Iowans competed. Among the early airlines in Iowa were Curtiss-Iowa in 1920 at Fort Dodge, Boeing Air Transport in 1927 on the transcontinental route to Des Moines, Midwest Airways in 1928 at Chapman Field in Waterloo, Hanford's Tri-State Airlines in the Sioux City area in 1928, and Yellow Cab Airways at Des Moines in 1929. Licensed pilots in the state numbered 35 in 1928. That year, Iowa State College in Ames offered its first aeronautical courses.

1930s

Many more airports were built and later improved, some at original locations and others at new sites. Cities, such as Spencer, began sponsoring annual air shows. The Iowa Air Good Will Air Tours brought airplanes to many cities. Airlines, some operated by Iowans, began serving the larger cities. These airlines were National Air Transport at Burlington, Rapid Air Transport at Ottumwa, Braniff Airlines, Mid-Continent Airline, and the former Tri-State Airline. Air Mail service was expanded, with scheduled airlines involved. The north-south and east-west routes went through Des Moines. Ellen Church of Cresco became the first stewardess in May 1930. Pilots competed in both cross country and closed circuit races. The Commission on Aeronautics was formed in 1933. When the Civilian Pilot Training Program began in 1939, Iowa was one of the leading states, with units at twenty locations, including Des Moines and Sioux City.

1940s

In March 1940, Douglas DC-3s began Iowa service. In 1941, nineteen Iowa cities had airports designated as municipal or commercial, three had intermediate designations, and three as auxiliary. When the CPTP ended, the War Training Service began at many Iowa airports. Iowans fought World War II as pilots of aircraft and gliders, navigators, gunners, mechanics, and parachutists. The Ottumwa Naval Air Station was operational from December 1942 to September 1945. Iowans worked in factories where war materiel was manufactured, one of the largest being the Maytag Company in Newton. Veterans using the G.I. Bill to obtain pilot and mechanic ratings could earn these at 72 private aviation schools in Iowa. In 1946, twelve colleges in the state were offering aeronautical courses. That year the Des Moines Technical High School Aviation Mechanics Program began. Civil Air Patrol and Iowa Air Guard units were begun. In 1945, the Iowa Aeronautics Commission (IAC) was formed with a state appropriation of \$25,000 that year and the following year. In 1946, 633 aircraft were registered. Iowa pilots numbered 2,498. At the end of the fiscal year 1948-49, a final payment of \$34,674.33 was returned to the General Fund to complete the reimbursement of the \$50,000. By December 1949, there were 198 registered airports.

1950s

Iowans served in Korea. A total of 1,893 aircraft were registered in 1952. In fiscal 1954-55, only \$14,249 was spent in salaries for three IAC employees, the lowest ever. Appropriations of \$25,000 were awarded annually from 1956 to 1959, at which time with the carryover from the previous year and registration fees brought total income to \$124,000. In December 1959, the IAC moved into a new 40 x 50 building just south of the terminal at Des Moines. That year the Aviation Trust Fund was legislated and all unrefunded aviation fuel taxes, which previously had gone to highways, were shifted to the IAC. During this decade, dedications had been held at twenty airports. In 1958, Iowa pilots numbered 3,225.

1960s

Iowans served in Vietnam. The IAC received the first money from the Aviation Trust Fund in 1964. At that time Iowa ranked 14th nationally for the number of airports, 5th for the number of lighted runways, and 15th in the number of airports with paved runways. IAC staff numbered nine. Listed in the annual report were 101 municipal airports, 59 with paved surfaces, and 64 with two-way radio. During the 1960s, Iowa received \$10,430,400 in federal funding for airport development. In 1966, 2,074 aircraft were registered. By 1969, the national rankings were 13th in total number of airports, 9th in the number of municipal airports, fourth in the number of lighted airports, and 11th in the number of paved and lighted airports. Listed that year by the IAC were 115 municipal airports and 113 private ones. In 1968, total pilots numbered 6,550. In October of that year, Walter Cunningham was one of three aboard *Apollo 7* when it orbited earth 163 times.

1970s

Pilots in Iowa numbered 7,887 in 1970. In 1974, the Iowa Aeronautics Commission operated jointly with the Aviation Division or the new Iowa Department of Transportation. The IAC was dissolved in 1975. At that time, the I-DOT aeronautics division had twelve employees, the same as the former IAC. A comprehensive evaluation of airports began, with the first TransPlan appearing in 1976. Cities were required to have master plans in order to receive federal, state, and local funds. Cities received engineering help for doing these plans. Funding was extended for nondirectional beacons, transmitters, rotating beacons, UNICOMs, weather instruments, hazard removal, drainage, windsocks, and repairs to existing facilities. Registered aircraft in 1979 numbered 3,178.

1980s

In 1981, 12,408 pilots called Iowa home. Iowans on *Discovery* flights were Loren Shriver, Dale Gardner, David Hilmers, and James Kelly. The I-DOT Airport Improvement Program (AIP) received larger amounts. For instance, in 1980, the state received \$6,879,638 in federal aid, \$778,000 from aircraft registrations, and \$386,000 from the Aviation Trust Fund. Public Airports numbered 169. The I-DOT Aviation Division started a runway pavement management program.

1990s

Iowans served in the Gulf wars. In 1991, the Legislature voted to transfer Aviation Trust Fund money to the General Fund and appropriate money annually. David Hilmers fourth *Discovery* mission occurred in January 1992. The new aviation museum at Greenfield opened its doors in May 1990. Reported UFOs were published on a list dating from 1920 to 1996. Fiscal funding for airports remained near two million dollars annually, large portions coming from the United States Department of Transportation AIP program. In 1996, three historical aircraft, a Curtiss, a Bleriot, and a Benoist, were hung in the Iowa State Historical Building. In 1999, 22 projects at 20 airports were funded. Many airports received assistance during this decade.

2000s

Iowans served in Iraq and Afghanistan. In June 2002, Peggy Whitson began working aboard the International Space Station. In fiscal 2003, the Iowa AIP program ceased as a result of the terrorist attack in September and its effect of reduced state money available. This began a large increase in requests for federal funding. State funding continued for infrastructure, the hangar loan program, and facilities and equipment. That year aircraft registrations totaled 3,770. Pilots numbered 6,135. The Antique Airplane Association celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2003. Museums located at Blakesburg, Greenfield, Indianola, and Sioux City continued to display items reflecting Iowa's aviation history. All Iowans have benefited from the vast amounts of planning and work done in all facets to bring aviation to its present state in 2010. In fact, the current benefit, including what businesses receive, is 18 billion annually. The economical impact of Iowa airports is 1.5 billion annually. (Ann Holtgren Pellegreno - pilot, historian, and author)