

2001

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Recommended Citation

Eugene Jericho, *SMU Air Law Symposium History*, 66 J. AIR L. & COM. 501 (2001)
<https://scholar.smu.edu/jalc/vol66/iss2/2>

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SMU AIR LAW SYMPOSIUM HISTORY

EUGENE JERICO*

I. BIRTH OF THE SYMPOSIUMS

IT WAS MY PLEASURE to receive a request of the Editor-in-Chief to prepare this history of the thirty-five annual Air Law Symposiums in Dallas. The February 2001 event will attest to the continued remarkable service rendered to the aviation legal community. Southern Methodist University's School of Law is to be congratulated for the foresight and effort evidenced in the creation of such an ambitious undertaking.

The *Journal of Air Law and Commerce* was originally published in 1930 by the Law School of Northwestern University at Evanston, Illinois. In 1961, it was given to the SMU School of Law. At this time, the dean was John V. Riehm. He was dean from 1959-1963. Then followed Charles Galvin, dean from 1963-1978, who encouraged the growth of the symposiums during its formative years, supplemented by selected faculty advisors. The *Journal* is believed to be the only academic air law publication in yearly distribution in English. Four times a year it is made available on subscription worldwide.

II. EARLY GROWTH

The first symposium at SMU was held in August of 1967, in Dallas. The subject examined was the Warsaw Convention, which was governing international air carriage for many countries. Every year since then it has always assembled in Dallas, Texas, near the Southern Methodist University campus. It always has an amazing breadth of subjects. Sporadically, other law schools and professional organizations have undertaken air law institutes in various parts of the world.

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Early on, the speakers were requested to bear their own expenses. With few exceptions, this custom continues today. In the past, several of the speakers stayed in private homes. Registrations are slowly growing each year reaching about 500 in recent times. With modest costs and student labor, significant funds grew. As registrations grew, various larger local hotels were selected to meet the increasing requirements for lecture halls, luncheons, banquets, and privately sponsored receptions.

The first hotel engaged was the upper class Hilton Inn near the SMU campus. The cost of a room in 1967 was \$14 per night. Due to a limited budget, dinners were served at the nearby home of Gene Jericho for the speakers and registrants. The growing numbers of attendees, however, required this hospitality to be transferred to hotels. The first symposium was well accepted, starting off with featured speakers. The speakers included Harold Caplan, a London barrister then with the British Aviation Insurance Company, Ltd. He was and still is an internationally acknowledged expert on the Warsaw Convention. He continues to speak in numerous countries on this subject. Other early speakers from New York City were John Martin of Bigham Engler Law Firm, George N. Tompkins, and Lee Kreindler. Marshall Foreman, of San Diego, Eugene Feldhansen of TWA, Wallace Maloney of Chicago and Dallas, and many more early aviation experts were included. Eventually, the reputation of the symposiums grew to international prestige and attracted registrants from virtually each state of the nation as well as Canada, Great Britain, Iceland, Puerto Rico, Republic of China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and Sweden.

III. CONTINUED MOMENTUM

A custom of assembling these air law institutes (in the spring of each year) followed. The usual schedule was Wednesday evening, Thursday, and Friday, with optional Saturday morning visits to a local aviation facility, museum, factory, or airline. There were many evening activities such as cocktail receptions, luncheons, and banquets, some of which were underwritten by law firms and aviation insurance companies. The banquet and luncheon were included in registration fees, with each featuring a widely known speaker.

Aside from the high quality speakers on hundreds of aviation topics, there developed a unique opportunity to meet a wide group of aviation specialists of various callings. This enabled lawyers currently handling aircraft litigation for plaintiffs, defend-

ants, and their insurance carriers to meet in private to explore settlement possibilities involving large amounts of damages. It became a major attraction for successful lawyers who came to discuss various pending cases with opposing parties' counsel.

The central programming was geared towards aviation, legal, and economic subjects. The speeches ran from morning until evening. Through the years, many outstanding aviation speakers of the world made oral presentations in the lecture halls, based on their written papers and personal experiences. The formal papers were required to be prepared and submitted to the *Journal* staff well in advance of the symposium. Then, each paper was assembled in a large loose-leaf notebook, which was presented to each registrant. The notebook included a biography of the speaker and photograph. These valuable annual notebook collections became treasured additions to libraries of many lawyers involved in aviation litigation. The subjects examined by each speaker, often with slide and movie presentations, covered an amazing breadth of common and exotic matters.

Literally hundreds of problems were explored related to the international aviation industry, especially in the United States. Speakers chosen by the Advisory Board of the *Journal* consisted of lawyers from the United States and abroad. The over 350 areas of air law are too many to list. All manner of aircraft were discussed year to year, from early fixed-wing-propeller sightseeing World War I models to modern supersonic jet transports. These aviation speakers came worldwide from airline executives, government employees, trade organizations, trial lawyers, manufacturers, insurance leaders, law school professors, and others in the profession.

IV. FUTURE CHALLENGES

The *Journal of Air Law and Commerce* Editors and staff are to be commended for 35 years of intense effort to produce the best in annual air law education. With the guidance of the Symposium Advisory Board and faculty advisors, the quarterly academic publications and annual outstanding air law symposiums have established the School of Law of Southern Methodist University as a leader in education involving aviation matters. The annual symposiums have become a distinguished yearly reunion of outstanding aviation specialists. The symposium gives aviation specialists the opportunity to form valuable friendships, while enhancing their continuing legal education.

The greatest challenge is to continue the high quality content of the *Journal* and Symposiums. Our rapidly changing technology and political arena will require continued current valuable information and products for the aviation community. During the 1990s, general private aviation activities—which was the bulk of many practicing lawyer's work—faded dramatically. This vacuum now seems to be changing slowly, in part due to a new generation of products. For example, on the horizon are several models of new personal jets that could cost less than one million dollars to buy and can be flown less expensively than a small, single-engine propeller airplane. Four factors have combined to make the timing right for such an airplane: a plethora of fresh aerodynamic research from NASA, radical advances in jet engine technology, the growing use of lightweight composites for air frames in place of metal, and the continued implosion of the nation's commercial airline service. The target in flight is air speeds around 400 mph at 41,000 feet and is projected to be only slightly more difficult to fly than a golf cart is to drive. Will these new light jets revolutionize air travel the way PCs changed computing? Perhaps the true measure of the concept will come when today's elementary school students reach adolescence and ask, "Dad, may I borrow the keys to the jet?" Future progress in aviation is limited only by the ingenuity of our developing technology. Our future annual air law symposiums will surely meet the challenge!