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## STATE AIRPORT PROGRAMS

LOUIS M. NIMS\*

It is as a kibitzer I venture to address you today. I know so very little about the realm of aerodynamics, that I feel quite humble and abashed before this expert assemblage. But because the construction of a number of airports was thrust upon me, because I have found it delightful from time to time to "float through the air with the greatest of ease," I feel I can qualify.

Some twelve years ago I took my first airplane ride. It was in a flying berry-crate known as a Jenny. I even remember the motor, a Curtis OX-5. The "O," I recall typified to me the entire uncertainty of the project and the "X" I felt sure would eventually indicate where the body was found.

My pilot was just a barnstorming five-dollars-for-five-minutes sort of a fellow, but for that five dollars and in that ten minutes he found it necessary to demonstrate to my entire lack of satisfaction, his ability to execute difficult manoeuvres. The shades of Immelmann and other departed bird men may have looked down from their even loftier heights with honest pride and satisfaction on the antics of their pupil, but for me, a lowly earthworm, the incipient desire to sprout a pair of wings was then and there suddenly and definitely squelched.

And so for ten years after that experience I observed the occasional airplane with a cold, detached sort of satisfaction, that he, the pilot, was up there hanging from nothing, poor fool; while I had my two feet planted firmly and safely on good old earth.

All of this became changed, when in my capacity as state engineer for the CWA, I found it frequently necessary to be several places at once. Not caring to solve the problem by dissection, I appealed to Col. Floyd E. Evans, director of the Michigan Department of Aeronautics, who promptly put the state ship at my disposal, together with himself as pilot. He assured me he had been flying for some eighteen years without serious accident. He also told me that he was all through with stunt flying and that his program consisted in taking off, flying directly to his destination and then promptly "sitting down" without embellishing the flight with outside loops, falling leaves or Chandelles, whatever they may be.

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\*Director, Project Division, Michigan Works Progress Administration.

So, after ten years, I again took to the air. Since then I have flown several thousands of miles. I have never handled the controls. I have never cared to. For me always the placid role of passenger, sometimes a navigator, but never a pilot. I have flown in heavy rain, in blinding snow storms when the ceiling was so near zero that each tree and telegraph pole presented its individual problem. I have had forced landings on golf courses, on convenient little islands. I have even participated in a successful ground loop without serious consequence other than to the ship. I have been the first on and the first off many new fields. Certainly I have explored Michigan from the air. So, you see, I really do qualify as an aviation kibitzer.

The Michigan Airport Program started by Legislative appropriation in 1931 and since then, heavily augmented by relief labor and relief funds, is a very comprehensive one. Roughly speaking, the Lower Peninsula of Michigan might be considered as a triangle with air traffic from Detroit, Coldwater and Niles, and all points south, converging to an apex at St. Ignace. In the Upper Peninsula, two more lanes of traffic diverge at St. Ignace—one covering the Lake Michigan shore and the Wisconsin boundary and the other following very generally the Lake Superior shore. It is on these five air lanes that the Michigan program is largely centered.

Because of help secured from CCC camps, the CWA and the FERA, this ambitious program is now ten years ahead of its schedule. With some 132 existing fields and 56 new ones projected under the present WPA program, the pilot's dream of fields twenty miles apart is fast becoming a reality.

Michigan airways in the northern half of the Lower Peninsula and in the entire Upper Peninsula serve a dual purpose. They are not only planned to handle normal traffic, but they are also part of a well-developed plan to eventually patrol the entire State and National forest area of Michigan from the air. Successful tests have proven, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that forest fire-fighting controlled from the air by two-way radio communication is entirely practicable and very effective. It is contemplated that once these airways are completed, the Conservation Department of Michigan and the United States Forest Service will join in a comprehensive program of aerial fire control.

If I were to criticize the Airport program of Michigan, and I presume this applies equally well to the program of other States, it would be because of the over-development of fields, rather than the under-development. It is so easy to couple local enthusiasm

with generous Federal aid to the point where an ambitious layout of hard surface runways, hangars and field lighting are foisted on a community far beyond the needs and means of that community. The inevitable result is a subsequent lack of interest in the airport and a setback for the development of aviation in that territory.

It seems to me that the first essential is a level, usable field, plainly marked with the conventional circle and boundary monuments. Such a field requires little, or no, upkeep. It is not a drag on the tax-ridden community and offers a practical first unit on which to base future field development as needed.

A number of fields have been improved in Michigan, and I presume this also applies to other States, on land leased for short periods of time. Under our new program, no work can be done on fields where the land is not definitely owned by the public. I think this is entirely wise and proper. If a community owns the land on which the airport is located, their interest in its maintenance will be considerably greater than if it is leased. For the development of intermediate fields, not necessarily related to any particular community, there is usually an abundance of State or Federal owned land which may be acquired for this purpose. So if airports and landing fields are created and improved in proportion to the existing air traffic, with the greatest development near massed centers of population and at points on established commercial lanes and the balance of the program is confined to ordinary landing fields and emergency fields where only a minimum of upkeep is required, it seems to me you will have established an intelligent and comprehensive system of airways which will meet with public favor and which can be easily expanded at any future time.