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STATE PROMOTION OF AVIATION IN PENNSYLVANIA*

CHARLES FINLEY†

The total airport program of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania approved by the President of the United States and Governor George H. Earle involves an expenditure of \$20,157,239. This is almost twice as much as the total estimated cost of New York's Works Progress Administration Airport Program and way ahead of the amount planned to be spent by any other state. In the construction and reconstruction of the 29 airports and the continuing of the five airways that traverse the Commonwealth from east to west, from north to south, Pennsylvania already has expended more than ten million dollars. Its complete program carried out under the Works Progress Administration, with the assistance of State funds, will be completed by the end of July, 1938.

The Keystone State took an early lead in the beginning of its manifold contributions to aviation. We first recognized the value and true significance of air transportation back in 1927. Early in aviation history Pennsylvania came to be known as the "Graveyard of Aviation." Its mountain chains, rugged terrain and variable weather made it the most hazardous flying country in North America. These factors increased enormously the cost of constructing airports, emergency fields and other aviation requisites. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, several municipalities and a few pioneer individuals undertook to provide these facilities for the new medium of transportation. So rapidly did aviation develop that many of these facilities soon were outgrown. Some were abandoned because of the greatly increased cost of maintenance. Governmental bodies, handicapped by restricted budgets, were unable to keep pace with the growing needs of aviation. City after city was dropped from airline schedules. Air mail service was discontinued in all but a few communities. Even the State Capital—Harrisburg—was deprived of regular air service when its airport was declared inadequate and unsafe for the new, larger, faster ships. Although more air traffic passed over its surface than over

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any state in the Union, Pennsylvania was fast disappearing from the airway schedule.

Then with the cooperation of the Bureau of Air Commerce, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and more than a score of municipalities, the W.P.A., put into operation the largest airport development program ever undertaken in any state in the nation. It involved the construction of twenty-nine airports most of which are nearing completion. The balance will be finished during the 1937-1938 program. However, all of these 29 airports are now in condition for safe and practical service. Air transport companies already have resumed regular service on some of these airports. When the work started only two airports in Pennsylvania were municipally owned. Today all 29 are owned either by the Commonwealth or by the municipalities in which they are located. This insures their maintenance and further expansion to meet future demands.

Recognizing the need for adequate supervision, the Commonwealth in 1929 set up rules and regulations governing the use of aircraft and airports operating within the territorial limits of the state. At this time interest in aeronautics was steadily advancing. Airlines were becoming interested, private ownership of planes was increasing. Officials of the Commonwealth realized regulatory steps had to be taken immediately before the situation got out of hand. Accordingly, three inspectional areas were instituted: one in the Eastern, one in the Central and one in the Western Part of the State. Here navigation facilities were established and are still being perfected on the five airways traversing the Commonwealth. A beginning was made on the construction of airports at strategic points on those airways.

You may be interested in knowing the location of the airways and the transportation companies operating over them. Airway No. 1 is from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh by way of Harrisburg. It is owned and operated in conjunction with the Bureau of Air Commerce. Twenty-seven beacons send their beams, shining through the night, to show the pilots rushing through the darkness, the way to safety and a happy landing. Three intermediary landing fields at Blain, Williamsburg and Ebensburg add to the safety of his route. This airway is traveled by the T. W. A.

Airway No. 2, McConnellsburg to Pittsburgh is operated in conjunction with the Bureau of Air Commerce. Fourteen beacons are staggered over this route which is covered by the Penn Central

Air Lines. The airway has one intermediary field located at Siding Hill.

Airway No. 4 is divided into 2 sections. Between Harrisburg and Allentown it is operated solely by the Division of Aeronautics of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. It is lighted by 7 beacons. TWA covers this route. TWA also covers the other section of Airway No. 4 operated between Harrisburg and McConnellsburg and run in conjunction with the Bureau of Air Commerce. Five beacons light this way and two intermediary landing fields are located at Centerville and Saint Thomas.

The American Air Lines cover Airways 2 and 7 between Stroudsburg and Elmira. This airway is operated by the Division of Aeronautics and is protected by 10 beacons and two intermediary landing fields, one at Mt. Pocono and one at Towanda.

The Division of Aeronautics operates Airway No. 10 between Pittsburgh and Erie. Nine beacons illuminate this airway.

There also is a Federal Airway, No. 19, from Newark to Chicago, which is flown by the United Air Lines.

The construction of the airports was begun back in the days when the Civil Works Administration was organized by President Roosevelt to take up the slack in unemployment while the Public Works Administration was getting under way with its many projects. Since that time the work has continued under the present Works Progress Administration.

The Commonwealth has provided \$130,000 to purchase and erect radio aids to navigation. This will include three range stations at important locations and seventeen marker beacons at points on the airway for the purpose of providing check-points indicating the various ridges in the Alleghenies.

When the WPA began operations, Pennsylvania sponsored a WPA airmarking program in addition to that already sponsored by the Bureau of Air Commerce. This calls for the marking of approximately 325 cities and 150 fire towers. These facilities added to the 400 towns already marked, identify practically every community in Pennsylvania.

The Commonwealth itself has evinced a marked interest in the development of aeronautics. Governor Earle and every member of his cabinet are air-minded. They make constant use of the state-owned airplanes in hurrying from one end of the state to the other in the conduct of the business of the Commonwealth. As a matter of fact, it was through the interest of the state that one of the major airports in the Eastern part of the United States is now

being completed in Harrisburg. It is operated entirely by the Commonwealth. Because of its excellence it has been the means of bringing two air lines into the Capital City—the TWA and the Pennsylvania Central Air Lines. The Harrisburg Airport, the largest undertaking of its kind in Pennsylvania by the Works Progress Administration, is situated about 4 miles from the Capital. The field, about 300 acres in area, has three hard-surfaced runways, 150 feet wide, two of them 4,000 feet long and the third 3,950. The 4,000-foot strips lie within the minimum that the Government has established for accommodating the 40 passenger liners expected soon to be in use. East and west bound planes of TWA stop at the Harrisburg Airport. Pennsylvania Central Air Lines also stop here with passenger and mail service between Washington and Buffalo. Almost completed in every respect, the airport will cost, it is estimated, \$1,216,469 in Federal funds and \$591,000 in Commonwealth, a total of \$1,807,469.

Little remains to be done. The fine-grading and the hard-surfacing are practically completed; a modern hangar, 125 x 170 feet, will be under roof within a short time. The Administration building and an additional hangar will be ready for use by spring. Many of the figures which express the size of the projects are imposing. Thus, the 15-acre triangle and the runways are equal to 23 miles of 20 foot hard-surface highway. The runways and taxi strips required 132,000 tons of stone. Excavation totalled 600,000 cubic yards. More than 35,000 lineal feet of drain pipe were installed. For almost two years the project furnished steady work for an average of 300 men.

Pennsylvania also has undertaken an educational program to provide, without charge, an instrument course in flying to any citizen in the Commonwealth. This course operated through the use of the Link-Trainer. One of these machines is owned by the State and operated at the Harrisburg Airport under the direction of a licensed pilot who has completed the government's course in instrument flying. The Trainer was purchased at a cost of eight thousand dollars and the man assigned to it will devote full time to the job of instructing the members of the various classes in training at the airport. There are already five classes under this pilot's supervision and there seems to be little doubt but that the Trainer will be kept continuously busy.

It is expected that the air program of the Commonwealth, including all work being done on the 29 airports in Pennsylvania and the five airways, will be completed by the end of July.

The Division of Aeronautics of the Department of Revenue has an engineering force available to any community which wants assistance in planning an airport. It has already assisted many such projects.

Pennsylvania is proud and I believe you all will agree, justifiably so, of her airport program. Her government officials and also her people are becoming more air-minded as the days pass.