

The Chagrin Falls Airport

One of the more interesting facts about Chagrin Falls' history is that it was once served by an airport. The Chagrin Falls Airport, although small, was decidedly important to the community. Prior to its dedication, various residents of Chagrin Falls practiced amateur flying on a large field owned by a gentleman named Albert Warren. After multiple years of this unofficial usage, the pilots finally attempted to secure the land for the construction of an airport. On June 28th, 1932, a ten year lease worth \$200 for an airport was finalized. Weeks later, on July 14th, the official dedication ceremony occurred. The event itself was intended to be something between an airshow and an induction. News of the proceedings spread throughout Northeast Ohio, leading to a reported attendance of over 10,000 people, and appearances made by 28 different "ships." Well known pilots such as Eddie Rickenbacker, James H. Doolittle, and Alexander de Seversky either looked on at the festivities, or flew in the airshow themselves.

After its initial dedication, the airport quickly gained traction in Chagrin Falls. In addition to the numerous amateur pilots who used the once undeveloped field as a runway before the airport occupied the space, a flight school now operated out of it. Wilbur "Will" Horn, the head of the school, was responsible for the training of many pilots, and the school itself oversaw their development into veterans of the skies. In 1937, the airport was recorded as having two runways: an 1800' North-South strip, and a 1600' East-West strip. Compared to the gargantuan 9000' runways of today this may not appear very large, but the traffic that airport manager Don Hein directed proved ever present.



As it was primarily local, the Chagrin Falls Airport handled various types of air traffic. The primary air traffic it dealt with consisted of US Mail planes delivering Chagrin-bound letters and packages, and casual community flyers wanting to take to the skies. While this was beneficial for the community, it occasionally resulted in catastrophe. Some tragic airfield accidents include a 1966 crash that killed four, and a 1929 mail plane crash which killed the pilot, Thomas P. Nelson. The mail plane crash sparked much talk amongst news outlets, and it even attracted famed pilot Charles Lindbergh to Chagrin Falls to aid in the search for the wreckage.

The airport operated for multiple decades, was reportedly staffed by great people, and provided a unique pastime for the community. Flying became a popular hobby for many, and if a resident did not know how to fly, they could go for flights in their friend's planes. Towards the end of its lifespan, the airport possessed just one main 2400' runway. In April of 1979, it closed

down for good. Its buildings remained standing for a long time, and various people visited the airport after its official closing. Then, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the buildings were razed and replaced by a new neighborhood development. Its old location, off of Bell Road(now occupied by a neighborhood named Kensington Green), can still be found quite easily.



Donald C. Stem, one of Chagrin Falls' frequent flyers, on the day of the airport's official dedication

The Transient Camp at the Airport

Promptly after its official dedication, it was determined that upgrades on airport facilities could be made. These upgrades required backbreaking landscaping and construction improvements. As the Great Depression was in full swing at the time, many people were willing to do this sort of labor in return for payment. Funding for these infrastructure-aimed projects was also available. The state and local leaders noticed this and capitalized. A transient camp, number 5 of 10 in Ohio, was built to house the workers and cut transportation to the jobsite out of the equation. The laborers ate three meals a day, had water for drinking and hygiene purposes, and makeshift housing for sleeping on site. The total cost of the project was \$17,000, and the workers typically earned anywhere from \$.50-\$1.20 an hour for their services. As a result of the camp, the requested upgrades were completed in effective time. For more information on the transient camp, please visit the “Transient Camp” bubble on the word cloud.



The Chagrin Falls transient camp and its workers helped to greatly enhance the local airport