

Strolling Through the Past

Whiting Airport

As told by
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The invention of the airplane in the early part of the 20th century proved to be quite successful. Air travel was booming and the uses of airplanes in other ventures were starting to take notice. Businessmen in the Fox Valley were no strangers to this concept. They felt that with an airport in their own backyard, they could access the air mail delivery and increase their abilities to do business around the country and world.

Neenah industrialist George A. Whiting was one of the businessmen that saw this opportunity. He donated \$5,000 to finance the construction of an airport on the condition that it is named after him. In 1928, 100 acres of farm land was leased from Michael Wittmann. This land was located on the corner of present day Appleton Rd. and Airport Rd. The airport was officially named George A. Whiting Field but was also known as Wittmann Airport.



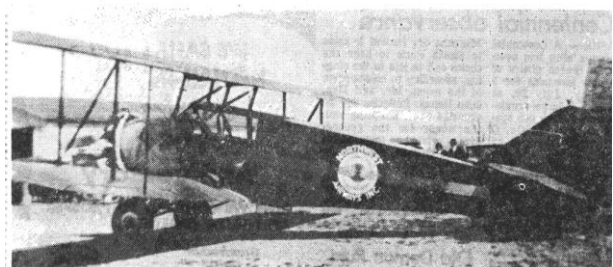
Michael and MaryAnn Wittmann - 1913

The airport's runways faced all four directions allowing planes to take off and land regardless of wind direction. Originally the runways were left as grass, but were later covered with gravel and cinder. In wintertime, when the snow was too deep, planes were directed to Lake Winnebago where they landed and took off on the lake's frozen surface.



Aerial view along Airport Rd. - 1929

As it was built for airmail service, delivery started on December 15, 1928. The airport was located on U.S. Airmail Route 9, which ran between Chicago and Green Bay, with stops in Milwaukee and Oshkosh. Delivery service was provided by Northwest Airways Inc. All mail delivered was taken to the Appleton Post Office where it was sorted and mail destined for Neenah and Menasha were then delivered by mail messenger.



Northwest Airways biplane - 1929



Pride of Appleton plane - 1929

The airport became busier and at one time there were 15 airplanes based out of here. The first airplane delivered was the "Pride of Appleton." The wingspan was so large; it had to be anchored behind the Wittmann family barn. A flight school was based at the airport and in June 1929, the first class graduated consisting of six pilots and four mechanics. Flights from Whiting Airport were increasing with regular flights bound for Milwaukee, Chicago, and the Dakotas.

Andy Wittmann, son of Michael Wittmann, recalls a story that Amelia Earhart, the famed female pilot, made a brief appearance at an air show held at the airport. Oshkosh's Wittmann Regional Airport is named Michael Wittmann's cousin Steve Wittmann, who had previously flown out of the Town of Menasha airport.



Aerial view along Appleton Rd. - 1930



Airport office - 1930

Airmail service slacked in 1930 when the U.S. Government would no longer fund airmail service to private airports. This caused Northwest Airways to pull out of the airport. During this time a lawsuit was filed against the airport by a pilot over damages to his plane. The airport eventually lost this suit. With the lost suit and loss in revenues from the loss of airmail and delivery service, the airport was forced to close. The Fox Valley remained without air service for the next 29 years.

Today, Kitz & Pfeil Hardware Store stands on the site of the former airport. The hardware store utilizes the old hangar as part of the store. The old hangar is visible as you approach Kitz & Pfeil from the west on Airport Rd.



Original hangar, now Kitz & Pfeil - 2005