Iowa City Municipal Airport: Opening the West to Aviation, 1918-2007

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plowing up of valuable prairie farm land during the 1920s. Surprisingly, however, the number of Kansas farms actually increased from 1930 to 1935 as people desperately fled the cities in search of subsistence in the countryside. Although there were demonstrations—even riots—by farmers in Crawford and Wyandotte counties as well as in cities such as Topeka and Wichita, Kansas resisted the militant strategies advocated by groups such as Milo Reno’s Farmers’ Holiday Association. Although Kansas had experienced previous radical movements in the 1890s under populists such as “Sockless” Jerry Simpson, Annie Diggs, and Mary Ellen Lease, this time there was no revolt. One reason was that President Roosevelt satisfied the public demand for aid, relief, crop subsidies, insurance, and employment. The 1933 Farm Bill, creating the Agricultural Adjustment Administration and the Emergency Farm Mortgage Act, combined with the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and the Works Progress Administration, kept the opposition to a controllable minimum.

Kansas in the Great Depression is a penetrating analysis of the Wheat State’s greatest crisis since the Civil War. Its focus on local issues fills a significant gap in New Deal literature. The work ethic, not the dole, was a primary Kansas philosophy supported by most of its citizens. Prior to the New Deal, the federal government had never spent a dime for unemployed persons. But Roosevelt found an answer. Peter Fearon’s unbiased account of how federal and state officials responded to local needs in a time of crisis represents a methodology that should be applied to other midwestern states. His approach clearly indicates how social, political, and economic factors inherent in the Great Depression affected not only the people but all levels of government.


Today, the airports most people are familiar with are the giant facilities associated with the nation’s largest cities. In fact, a sizable majority of the nation’s commercial air traffic goes through only about 25 to 30 major hub airports. In the early days of aviation, however, smaller airports in smaller cities, especially in the Midwest, played critical
roles in the evolving national air transportation system. That was par-
ticularly true in the 1920s and 1930s, when carrying the mail was more
lucrative than carrying passengers and the limits of aviation technology
required frequent stops along the emerging air routes. During those
decades, small city airports witnessed their heyday.

As told by Jan Olive Nash in a short, well-illustrated work, the
eyearly history of the Iowa City Municipal Airport was typical of its
time. As the U.S. Post Office worked to create a series of airmail routes
that would crisscross the nation, it turned to local interests to provide
the needed landing facilities. Caught up in the aviation enthusiasm of
the time, Iowa City boosters jumped at the chance to place their city
on the developing national air map. The airport was originally estab-
lished through private sector action, but when citizens passed an avia-
tion bond issue in 1929, Iowa City became the first city in Iowa to own
its airport.

Like most works on aviation and airports, this history of the Iowa
City Municipal Airport focuses most of its attention on the period be-
fore 1945, including a very short section on World War II. The decades
after the war, when changing technologies as well as shifts in govern-
ment policy gradually diminished the role of the Iowa City airport,
receive less attention. Only a few pages are devoted to the end of
commercial airline traffic in 1972 and the transformation of the facility
into a general aviation airport.

This history, created in response to the imminent demolition of a his-
toric building, includes a section on that structure, the Boeing Hangar.
However, the deliberately modern 1950s-era terminal, built to serve
commercial airline passengers, still exists, a reminder of the role played
by the airport in the national air transportation system until 1972. This
work highlights the vital role played by smaller cities in the develop-
ment of the nation’s air transportation system. It should inspire a more
extensive examination of the subject, especially the long competition
between several smaller Iowa cities for airline service.

Amish Education in the United States and Canada, by Mark Dewalt. Lan-
ham, MD: Rowan and Littlefield, 2006. viii, 218 pp. Illustrations, tables,
appendixes, references. $60.00 cloth, $32.95 paper.

Reviewer Frank Yoder is an academic advisor and adjunct professor of history
at the University of Iowa. He is the author of Opening a Window to the World: A

In this very readable and interesting account, Mark Dewalt offers his-
torical background on Amish education in North America and a com-