

Dirigo Flyer

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
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EPM Eastport Municipal Airport **A Brief History of Eastport Airport** **by Peter Noddin**

The motivation for building an airport at Eastport had its beginnings in a series of requests by city leaders to the CAA in the mid and late 1930s. Eastport, like a number of municipalities in Maine, was declared bankrupt in 1937 due to the extensive costs of general assistance to the poor combined with the failure of local businesses and loss of tax revenue. Eastport would remain under state financial control until 1943. An airport, and airline service, was seen by local officials as a logical part of their “new deal” for economic growth in the area as the country came out of the great depression.

Another important chain of events that shaped the construction and operation of the airport was the creation of “Quoddy Village” in the late 1920s. This was conceived as a “model village” for construction work and eventual operations personnel housing for the federally funded Passamaquoddy Tidal Power Project. When the project was abandoned in 1935, the village was turned over to the National Youth Administration for a vocational training facility. With the world situation deteriorating toward WWII in the late 1930s, the training programs at the facility were shifted toward skills needed by war production facilities. These included foundry work, machine tool technology and several aviation related fields, including aviation sheet metal technology. By 1941, there was a large contingent of “Women Ordnance Workers Corps” trainees at the facility studying aircraft construction and maintenance techniques. Beginning in 1937, the NYA began voicing support for the CAA to construct an airport in Eastport to provide “live” aircraft for their training programs.

Of course, the potential for the U.S. being drawn into war was the catalyst that finally resulted in Eastport being selected for the site of an airport and a seaplane base. The CAA was funding construction of a series of airfields, built to basic military specifications, across Maine and across the nation for national defense. Some of these, like Bangor, Houlton, and Presque Isle would later become commissioned as military airfields.

Sometime in 1939 or 1940, the CAA began acquiring land by eminent domain for the airport and some test holes were dug by WPA labor in 1940. On April 23, 1941 Works Progress Administration Administrator John C,

Fitzgerald announced in a speech at Houlton that he had received a telegram to proceed with construction of the Eastport airfield. The 120 men on site doing test and preparation work were expected to be joined by nearly 200 more and completion of the first 3000' runway was expected by July 1.

CAA approval to construct the facility had apparently been delayed for several months in early 1941 due to a WPA proposal to change the grade of the east-west runway.

The April 20, 1941 *Eastport Sentinel* announced that construction had started in earnest on the airport the day before. WPA Superintendent Lewis Kennison gave a brief speech to the workers and told them that they should consider their work as part of the nation's readiness. About 120 men were on site and all WPA projects in the region were closed to expedite the airport project. The workforce was expected to rise to about 200 men. A local contractor was hired to mine gravel nearby and transport it to the construction site by rail.

The first objective was completion of the 3000' NE-SW runway. The E-W 2500' cross wind runway would be built second. The July 1 proposed completion was a little ambitious and the runway was not completed until late 1941. In September 1941, progress was delayed when a decision was made to re-grade the runway from 2% to 1.5%.

The airfield was finally declared finished in late 1942.

Construction began on the nearby seaplane base at Deep Cove at Crosby Beach in August 1942.

In April 1943, the Civil Air Patrol began anti-submarine patrol operations out of Eastport Airport, Lt. Harold Robinson, former CAP Flight Leader in Houlton commanded the squadron with about 20 members.

An event that would change the operations at the airport for the remainder of the war also occurred in April 1943. After much debate, Congress abruptly de-funded the National Youth Administration. The NYA school at Quoddy Village was closed and was vacant within weeks.

By September, however, the Department of the Navy had successfully acquired the facility and commissioned it as a training facility for the newly formed Construction Battalions- "Seabees". Initially, Seabees who had completed their training assembled and drilled there in newly formed units with their assigned officers and NCOs prior to deployment. The training operations later expanded. In 1944, the installation was re-named Camp Lee-Stephenson after the first two Seabee officers killed in action.

There is no evidence the airport was ever commissioned as a Naval Airfield or listed as an auxiliary airfield. It is reasonable to believe, however that there was significant transport and liaison aircraft traffic in and out of the field while the nearby training facility was in operation. Like other Maine airports, it likely would have seen military training flights and unscheduled landings due to emergencies and weather.

In 1968, the Pittston Oil Company of New York proposed to purchase the Airport land and the adjacent campground for construction of an oil refinery. This proposal was amended in 1977, and finally rejected in 1980, allowing continued operation of the facility as a municipal airport.



Top left: Terminal area, **top right:** looking down runway 15. **Lower:** The 1942 military seaplane ramp which today has the Deep Cove pier built down the middle of the ramp itself. Photos taken 26 December 2007

Eastport Airport today

Identifier: EPM (KEPM)

Lat/Long: 44-54-36.4000N / 067-00-45.7000W

Elevation: 45 ft.

The airport is open to public having been activated 12/1942. Use sectional chart HALIFAX. There is no control tower. The airport is unattended. It has a segmented circle and a lighted wind indicator. There are activated lights dusk to dawn and a white-green beacon. This is a customs landing rights airport.

Navigation: The nearest VOR is the Princeton VOR/DME on 114.30 There is an NDB at the field on frequency 260 with the ID of EPM (. .-- . --)

Runway: 15/33 which is 4000 x 75 ft. Runway markings are (as of 12/2007) in poor to fair condition. It has a 2-light VSI and runway identifier lights. There is a deer hazard on the runway.

This is the easternmost airport in the United States that is available to the public.

President's Report

First of all I want to thank everyone who helped me during the past few years and have done what they could to make the Society and Museum a success. It was my pleasure to act as your President for the past two years and I know that you will be in good hands as I pass the gavel.

Elections results:

President: Robert Umberger, Jr.
Vice President: John Miller
Treasurer: Joe Quinn
Secretary: Bill Townsend

Three Board Members were elected/re-elected:

Norm Houle
Les Shaw
Stan Smith

Congratulations to all and much success in the coming year.

The February meeting will take place at the Augusta Airport and the March Meeting will be held at the Sanford Airport. More information and directions will be coming soon.

We are starting work on a new web site to be done in-house. The URL will remain (www.maineairmuseum.org) but we hope to create a whole new look and have the ability to keep it current with events and postings. We hope it will become the place to learn more about the Society and events.

Again, I wish to thank those who assist and wish the new and returning Officers well in the coming year.

Happy New Year....Les Shaw

Buy a Brick and Support the Maine Air Museum

The Maine Air Museum is proud to announce the new Memorial Pathway Program. To successfully carry out and reach the museum vision, and to help refurbish Building 98, the Maine Air Museum needs the financial support of businesses and public community leaders and individual private citizens. To this end, the museum board has established a means for receiving your monetary donation and recognizing your gift permanently in the museum pathway and wall of honor. These donations are fully deductible.

Details available on our web site: www.maineairmuseum.org or from the museum by request.

Now available:

Memoirs: With an Angel By My Side by member Alfred Cormier.

His flying life as told by Al and available exclusively from the Maine Air Museum.

\$16.00 at the museum, \$20.00 via mail. To order, call or email the museum.

"...a great story by a member of the Greatest Generation. Exceptionally good reading, riveting to the end." Bill Townsend
Teacher-in-Space, STS51.

*The United States Air Force
in Maine*



Progeny of the Cold War
John C. Garbinski

The United States Air Force in Maine, Progeny of the Cold War by John Garbinski.

Another exclusive book from the Maine Aviation Historical Society. Softbound, 134 pages, 151 illustrations. \$20.00 (plus \$3.00 postage and handling). To order, call or email the museum.

Airliners Housed at Auburn and Florida Sold

Three historic piston-engined airliners, the last built before the jet engine changed commercial aviation, have been bought by a division of the German airline Lufthansa for a total of \$748,000.

Maurice Roundy has been trying for years to make at least one of the Lockheed Constellation Starliners airworthy again but the planes were sold on Dec. 18 as part of a bankruptcy auction.

Hundreds of the four-engined Constellations known affectionately as the “Connie” were produced by Lockheed starting in World War II. Roundy’s plans were among 44 L-1649A Super Constellation Starliners built in 1957. Lufthansa was an original owner of one of Roundy’s planes and the other two had been luxury airliners for TWA.

However, Connies and other piston-powered airliners were outmoded within a few years when the jet engine became the standard for commercial flight. Most Starliners were scrapped, and the three that Roundy owned had been converted into freighters and abandoned before he found them.

Roundy kept two of the Starliners, with 150 foot wingspans on his property next to the Auburn airport and a third at the Fantasy of Flight Museum in Polk City, Florida.

The Maine Aviation Historical Society had field trips to the Auburn airport and had access to visit the airliners on several occasions, at one time observing the engines being operated on one of the airliners.

A Lufthansa spokesperson said the buy is a Berlin-based foundation within Lufthansa’s aviation group. “They essentially seek to preserve and restore and operate older aircraft from the Lufthansa fleet,” said the spokesperson. Specific plans are not known at this time.

The airliners were sold within a settlement reached with the bankruptcy court. This settlement involved Roundy giving up all three aircraft, associated technical manuals, and all spare parts. Roundy was philosophical about losing the aircraft. He tried everything he could to get back into the air but did accomplish in keeping them from being scrapped.

At the auction the bidding was reported to be furious and was over in 10 minutes. There were three parties qualified to bid on all three aircraft and three parties qualified to bid on individual aircraft. Lufthansa was the high bidder at \$225,000 per plane and choose all three. The parts and manuals sold for \$5000. The total was \$680,000 plus 10% which brought the total price to \$748,000.

Lufthansa Reportedly Plans on Building a Restoration Hanger at the Auburn-Lewiston Airport.

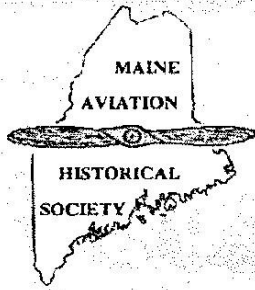
Lufthansa Berlin-Stiftung, the new owners of Starliners N974A, N7316C, and N8083H have reached a tentative deal to build a 50,000 square-ft. hanger at the Auburn-Lewiston Airport. The Germans plan on restoring at least one of the vintage aircraft. Airport officials have signed a letter of intent for the building of the hanger. Tentative plans call for two of the planes to be used as spare parts to get the best of the three flying.



Picture courtesy of the Starliner web page. Some text courtesy of Lewiston *Sun-Journal*.

Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Maine Aviation Historical Society will be held at the Augusta Airport on 9 Feb 2008 at 10 a.m. Check our web page, call, or email the Museum for directions.



Maine Aviation Historical Society Maine Air Museum * Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Special Interests: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Dues are for one year, and membership will expire in the month you joined.

Annual membership includes six newsletters!

Mail payment to:
Maine Aviation
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PO Box 2641
Bangor, ME 04402-2641

Membership	Dues	Benefits
Regular	\$25 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Family	\$35 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Corporate	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Supporting	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission, .
Lifetime	\$500*	Newsletter, Lifetime Membership Number, Museum Admission,
	* 2 annual \$250 payments	

We need volunteers-docents, mechanics, maintenance, librarians and exhibit specialists, etc.

- Please call me. I want to be active in the organization.
- I cannot join now, but would like to help. I am enclosing a check for \$_____.
- Contributions over \$20 are tax deductible within the limits of the law.
- I wish to support and obtain membership by purchasing a memorial brick.

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