

## BARNSTORMERS, BUSINESSMEN, AND V-12S: BLOOMSBURG'S ROMANCE WITH AVIATION

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines the factors that fostered the growth of aviation in Bloomsburg, a small Pennsylvania town, from the 1920s to the 1950s. The author argues that air-mindedness motivated key members of the community's elite to push for the construction of an airport to enhance the town's status and economic standing. This development shares important similarities with large urban municipalities, as well as crucial differences. Detroit, Tampa, and Tucson are used to compare and contrast this process.

Even before Charles Lindbergh made his amazing solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean in 1927, millions of Americans had already become aviation-minded. Joseph Corn in *The Winged Gospel* (1983) argues that by the early 1920s many had come to see the airplane as a symbol of the "promise of the future." A kind of technological enthusiasm spread among aviation proponents, imbued with a sense of religious faith. These people were absolutely certain that America—even the world—could be improved with the mass acceptance of the airplane. Evidence of this "winged gospel" could be found in many areas of life by this decade, including support for the creation of an infrastructure necessary to advance an air-minded society.<sup>1</sup>

While a few historians have examined the growth of aviation in large urban areas, little work has been done on this process for small towns.<sup>2</sup> This paper will examine the factors that fostered aviation in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, from the 1920s to the 1950s—the crucial period that set the foundation for the emergence of mass commercial aviation in the United States. This study will also assess aviation's economic, social, and spatial impact on the Bloomsburg area. Equally important, it will compare and contrast this development with several large urban areas, looking for similarities and differences in this process.

What was most remarkable was that a significant number of Bloomsburg's business elite shared the same values as their major city counterparts. They worked hard to expand their airport because they saw it as a crucial means to enhance their community's status and economic standing. Bloomsburg's elite saw "progress" in the same way as boosters in large urban areas. Important differences also clearly existed. Bloomsburg never obtained commercial air service. Though they tried, several factors inhibited this crucial development. Among these were Bloomsburg's small population and economic base, resistance to letting go of strongly held laissez-faire attitudes, and rapid changes in airplane technology.

Bloomsburg is a small town located in the rural central part of the commonwealth. In the 1920s it had a more diversified economic base than many of the surrounding

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communities that depended primarily on the coal industry. In addition to being the county seat, home of a state teachers college, and the largest retail center in the area, furniture, match, silk, florist, and textile companies numbered among the town's many small to mid-size, owner-operated, manufacturing firms. The Magee Carpet Company employed the largest number of workers in the town. Three railroad lines provided connections to regional and national markets.<sup>3</sup>

By the 1920s the local press had clearly become air-minded, publishing numerous articles on record-setting flights.<sup>4</sup> Probably the most amazing aerial accomplishment during 1924 occurred when three American Army airmen became the first to circumnavigate the globe by air. One of the army pilots, Lieutenant Leslie Arnold, came to Bloomsburg at the request of the Kiwanis to chronicle his trip before an assembly at the State Teachers College in September.<sup>5</sup> Later that month the operators of the Bloomsburg Fair, a major institution in the town's life for many decades, saw the possibility to attract more fairgoers by capitalizing on this growing air-mindedness. They hired a pilot to offer flights over the Susquehanna Valley. *The Morning Press* announced this stunning triumph with a front-page article more than a week before the fair opened. Immediately after the plane arrived on October 7, many children surrounded it. The *Press* predicted that it would prove "to be a center of attraction during the remainder of the week."<sup>6</sup>

Public support for aviation soared when Charles Lindbergh flew from New York to Paris. The local newspaper carried as much coverage as major urban papers, such as *The New York Times*. During the Lindbergh hubbub *The Morning Press* simultaneously ran other aviation-related front page stories, such as Hawaiian Pineapple company president James Dole's \$25,000 offer to whoever would be the first to successfully fly non-stop across the Pacific.<sup>7</sup>

Two years after Lindbergh's amazing flight, air-mindedness began to assume a more tangible shape. On March 17, 1929, *The Morning Press* proudly proclaimed with a front-page story that the "first commercial flight ever made to Bloomsburg ... for business purposes" took place when two Philadelphia carpet designers flew to the town to conduct business with the Magee Carpet Company. The local firm was probably taking advantage of its connections with the Philadelphia carpet industry. In 1889, James Magee II, the son of Francis Magee of the Philadelphia textile firm Ivan, Deitz, and Magee (later Hardwick & Magee), established James Magee and Company (later Magee Carpet) in Bloomsburg. Magee's current President Willie Law, Assistant Secretary Harry L. Magee—James' son, and J. Paul Barger greeted the visitors, took them to the mill, made selections, and then sent them off on their one-hour return flight. Noting that since there was no airport the pilot had to circle several times over the town before finding a suitable farm to land, Mr. Law boldly predicted that "it will only be a few years until most business appointments will be made by airplane. This shows the necessity of a landing field for towns that want to keep up with the times."<sup>8</sup> Law's statement was significant for two reasons: first, he clearly exhibited the faith held by all aviation advocates that flying was the modern, forward-looking way to travel, and sec-

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ond, he strongly suggested that Bloomsburg needed to join the air-age as soon as possible. Since Law and Magee soon became chief proponents for putting Bloomsburg on the air map, their experiences this day may have been most meaningful.

In the next few months, the Bloomsburg Rotary Club began to take a leading role advocating the construction of an airport. On October 31, 1929, Army Lieutenant Richard K. LaBrou spoke to the Rotary Club on aviation. By this time, the Rotary Airport Committee had begun working with a federal government representative to obtain their goal of a modern airport for the community. Significantly, both Magee and Law were prominent Rotary members. Other examples of air-mindedness abounded. Local retailer Gelb and Mayer, for example, used an airplane to advertise their Philco radio line.<sup>9</sup>

Sharing space on the front page with the aviation-related articles during the last three months of 1929 were several pieces on the New York Stock Market collapse. These articles barely suggested the serious structural problems in the economy that underlay the Great Depression. As the economy plummeted over the next two years, local aviation proponents continued to push for a town airport. Meanwhile, *The Morning Press* churned out front-page stories on a wide variety of record smashing aerial feats, coverage of airplane crashes, articles on the growth of commercial aviation, and air-minded advertisements. On August 19, 1931, they reported that Harry Magee had been making a series of test landings trying to find the best site for an airport.<sup>10</sup>

In his trilogy *The Americans*, historian Daniel Boorstin described the peculiarly American type of businessman as one who was an organizer, persuader, community booster, proponent of improved transportation, and always on the look out for the new business opportunity. In many ways he was describing Harry L. Magee of the Magee Carpet Company. In addition to the textile business, Magee participated in so many activities that one wonders if he ever slept. One of his passions was flying. In early September 1931, he formed the Bloomsburg Flying Club with seven other prominent air-minded citizens. Five of these men were members of Rotary. The non-profit Flying Club organized "for the purpose of increasing the interest in and promoting the progress of aviation in Bloomsburg." Exhibiting the highest form of the "winged gospel," they predicted that "aviation is the coming means of transportation and all people with vision and interest in the future are rapidly accepting aviation" to help foster "industrial improvement." This organization led the drive to construct an airport. In a letter to the Town Council, Harry Magee noted that though the Flying Club was taking the initiative, their goal was for the town to purchase the airfield while they operated it. The State Aeronautical Commission supported this proposition. The council appointed a special committee on September 8, 1931, to investigate this possibility and charged them with generating a report within the next month. No action was taken on this initiative at this time. The next year, the *Press* indirectly mentioned the issue when they noted that the airport originally "had been considered as a municipal proposition but later the plan was launched with private funds." Though it is not clear exactly why the town did not purchase the field, perhaps its financial situation—like so many other

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towns across America at this time—did not permit such expenditures. Or possibly it was a legal issue, as it was not until 1933 that the state passed a law “authorizing incorporated towns”—of which Bloomsburg was the only one in the state—to own a municipal airport. It is also conceivable that council members agreed with the popular late 1920s idea of private ownership of airports. This view would have complemented the highly individualistic, laissez-faire ideology, common to the town’s elite. Unlike other representatives of the community’s elite, members of the Flying Club had begun to qualify their laissez-faire attitude—at least when it connected with their passion for aviation. If the council had acted on the Flying Club and State Aeronautical Commission’s recommendation, they would have been able to benefit from the federal funds later made available under the New Deal airport programs. These monies could only be used for municipally owned airports.<sup>11</sup>

As the foundations of Herbert Hoover’s associative state collapsed around the nation in the early 1930s, its core principles could still be seen operating in Bloomsburg as state and federal government technical experts supplied guidance to assist private business interests in constructing the airport. The origins of this cooperative effort date back to the late 1920s when the Rotary brought a Department of Commerce Aeronautics Branch official to town to provide advice on establishing a landing field. In 1931, State Aeronautics Commission representatives, charged with the same mission as the federal agency but at the state level, worked with local aviation proponents to find the best site to locate the field. The next year state officials gave the airport a commercial rating.<sup>12</sup>

Nineteen thirty-two was not a very good year for millions of Americans. Yet, as the economy reached its nadir, the Bloomsburg Airport opened for business. Evidence for the passionate commitment of aviation proponents could not be more compelling than this small town example of air-mindedness. *The Morning Press* began promoting the big day with front-page articles more than five months before the field commenced operations in April 1932. On the first weekend that it was opened to the public, more than 6,000 people arrived to inspect the facilities—equivalent to more than half of the town’s population. *The Morning Press* trumpeted this as a most “impressive demonstration of the tremendous interest in aviation.” In the best tradition of the booster press, they declared that the field “can well be used as a model for much larger communities” and would “reflect credit and prestige upon the fair name of Bloomsburg.” Then, they praised Harry L. Magee, “a man so imbued with the spirit of aviation and so confident of its development against the odds of depression and distrust and fear, that practically single handed he went out and put Bloomsburg on the air map.” From this point onward, Magee and the airport became synonymous in local lore.<sup>13</sup>

Bloomsburg’s airport quickly became the center of much activity. Whether unusual or mundane, *The Morning Press* publicized these events with front-page stories. Various service clubs, such as the air-minded Rotary and Kiwanis, met there. Proponents of the “winged gospel” spread the faith with speeches and free airplane rides. Hundreds of local businessmen took to the skies for the first time in Bloomsburg Flying Club aircraft. Parachute jumps became a crowd favorite during the first summer of

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operation. It was not unusual for 5,000 people to flock to the field to watch local favorites, like Dare Devil Martin, make several jumps during a Sunday afternoon spectacular. By July 1932, an audit revealed that the airport was almost making money. Principle sources of income included "gas and oil sales, student instructions, passenger flights and storage." To foster increased use of the facilities, the Flying Club began running advertisements in the *Press* offering sightseeing rides for only \$1.00. *Morning Press* scribes made sure to describe these flights as having the "same ease as in the finest Pullman" so as to make a direct connection in the public's mind between the safety commonly associated with train travel and air travel. They guaranteed that, "after one ride you will be an enthusiast." To further promote the airfield, the paper also listed the charter fares for flights to nearby cities, such as Philadelphia, Wilkes-Barre, and Williamsport.<sup>14</sup>

During the next several years, *The Morning Press* continued to record and promote Bloomsburg's growing air-mindedness. Front-page coverage touting the most recent aviation events contrasted sharply with stories reflecting the economic and political turmoil in the country. On July 17, 1934, for example, the *Press* proudly noted a "novel program" at the airport designed to demonstrate the practicality of air travel for Bloomsburg State Teachers College students, while the adjacent column provided a negative portrayal of the San Francisco general strike. College president Dr. Francis Haas and Flying Club president Harry L. Magee developed the special college program, which foreshadowed the greater interaction between the school and the airport that would occur within a few years.<sup>15</sup>

Magee and the Bloomsburg Flying Club remained very busy during 1934. They helped get the airport designated an approved repair station by the Aeronautics Division of the Department of Commerce, continued to put on large aerial shows, and persuaded the Town Council to allow them not to pay town taxes during the year.<sup>16</sup> The two most significant events that year, however, were the introduction of commercial charter service during the summer and participation in the State Air Caravan in October.

On June 14, *The Morning Press* noted in a front-page story that the Bloomsburg Flying Club had initiated regular semi-weekly plane service from Bloomsburg to Philadelphia. Organized under the name Columbia Airways, plans included expanding service to New York City if sufficient demand existed. Apparently it did. By August, Columbia Airways began publishing a schedule in the *Press* for their charter service to eleven different destinations—including Philadelphia, New York, and Pittsburgh. The local paper did not miss any chances to promote this development, claiming that the airport was "one of the finest airports of the East and an asset to the town," with the "last word in hangar construction" and an "exceptionally fine turf" landing field. They even noted when Magee Carpet Company President Willie Law and Secretary James Law took off for New York. Though not recorded, the trip's purpose could have been to visit the company's showroom in the Textile Building.<sup>17</sup>

On October 13, 1934, the "biggest day for aviation this section has ever known" took place as more than forty planes landed at the airport as part of the first Pennsylva-

nia Air Tour. Similar to the earlier Henry Ford-sponsored automobile and airplane reliability tours, the state version sought to promote aviation. The local press began plugging this event two weeks prior. Front-page articles told of the list of famous aviators and aircraft that had been scheduled to arrive, including Captain Eddie Rickenbacker, holder of numerous speed records Captain Frank Hawks, and the latest in commercial airliners—a United Air Lines Boeing B-247 transport. Despite the cold weather, the “birds of progress” attracted thousands of spectators to the field. The Bloomsburg Retail Merchants Association fed the flyers in between eager aviation enthusiasts seeking autographs from the “birdmen.” The *Press* reveled in the fact that air-minded Bloomsburg was the smallest town on the tour, and attributed the honor to “the untiring efforts of Harry L. Magee” and the “exceptionally fine airport here.” The Rotary seconded this tribute stating that “we take off our hat to Harry.” It would be hard to find a better example of aviation’s fervent supporters in action.<sup>18</sup>

In 1937, Governor George H. Earle III—the only governor at the time with a pilot’s license—appointed Magee to the newly formed State Aviation Council. This body played an advisory role, promoting all aspects of aviation within the commonwealth. Several days later, *The Morning Press* editorialized that “fitting recognition to Bloomsburg’s prominence in the aviation world and to the part he has played in making it such was paid Harry L. Magee in his appointment.” While in many aspects this organization looked like earlier associative state agencies, it signaled the transition to the regulatory state with its concern for governing private flying.<sup>19</sup>

By the late 1930s, support for aviation ran into severe headwinds in Bloomsburg. The Rotary’s annual airport meeting, begun in 1932, stopped in 1938. Ironically, this was the year when the town’s primary aviation advocate, Harry L. Magee, was elected vice-president of the organization. The next year Magee closed the airport. In a letter to Town Council President Nathan Krauss, Magee stated that he faced increasing competition from municipally owned fields whose operating expenses were lower because they did not have to pay the substantial insurance premiums that he did since he operated a private airport under a certificate of public convenience. Even as he justified his action to shut the field down based on financial considerations, he cited many reasons why the town still needed the airport. He pointed out, for example, that increasing numbers of businessmen had been flying into Bloomsburg. Furthermore, he argued “the loss of the airport to this community is a step backward.” He reasoned that it made no sense for a town that considered itself “progressive” to lose such an important asset. Clearly, Magee had not entirely lost faith in the “winged gospel.” His actions, however, revealed that there was a limit to his enthusiasm. While Town Council held several sessions addressing the closing of the airport, Magee began plowing the field in preparation for growing crops. Worried that the community might lose the facility altogether, the council jumped into action. They officially declared their intention to retain the airport. A special committee began looking for a solution. President Krauss contacted Democratic Senator Joseph Guffey of Pennsylvania, hoping to obtain his assistance in persuading the Civil Aeronautics Authority to provide aid for the field.<sup>20</sup>

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Harvey A. Andruss, soon to be President of Bloomsburg State Teachers College, played a crucial role in the second coming of the 'winged gospel' in 1940. By June, sensing that war was on the horizon, and having learned of the Civil Aeronautics Authority's Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPT), Andruss closed in on his goal to reopen the airport. He reasoned that the State Teachers College could build on its earlier aviation programs and, by more closely associating with the federal government program, assure its continued operation once the armed forces began drawing on civilians. Working with Harry Magee, members of the Town Council, and several service clubs, Andruss knew that time was running out. On August 27, Town Council held a special meeting to consider leasing the airport from Magee. In another meeting three days later, Andruss, who was also a council member, made his case for what was necessary for the school to obtain a CPT contract. In order to be able to do this the town had to lease the airport by August 31—the next day. The Town Council then voted unanimously to conclude an agreement with Magee. They reasoned that it would be an advantage to the community to lease a municipal airport with the option to purchase—as long as taxes would not have to be raised. Local press coverage and editorials repeatedly emphasized the "meager sum" that it would cost the town, the connection with the Teachers College, and how much the town's reputation would be enhanced. They confidently predicted that, "Bloomsburg will once again become one of the leading air centers in the east." After forming an aviation committee in September to study the matter, Town Council then subleased the field to Sam Bigony, who, in conjunction with the State Teachers College, held a CPT contract to train civilians for later placement in navy and army flying programs. Eventually, one hundred students participated in this program, taking ground school classes at the college and practicing flying at the airport.<sup>21</sup>

During World War II, the college operated several aviation-related programs, training more than 1,100 pilots. The two most significant courses were the Navy V-5 program, which trained more than 500 aviation cadets between 1943 and 1944, and the Navy V-12 program, which trained over 500 officer candidates from July 1943 to October 1945. In a front-page story, *The Morning Press* on May 17, 1943, touted the fact that Bloomsburg was the only teachers college in the nation to be a part of the V-12 program. Harvey Andruss, now President of the College, worked with state and federal officials to obtain these programs for the college and community. Faculty taught a variety of courses, such as descriptive geometry and history, to the trainees. The tremendous activity generated by the aerial students led the local paper to observe, "the round-the-clock droning overhead of airplane motors is a usual but encouraging sound to the populace." While this must have been a tremendous contrast to the more quiet pre-war days, the *Press* encouraged the local citizens to bear up under the noise by first praising them for their air-mindedness, and then pointing out that all the activity indicated that "the task of turning out more flight instructors" would produce "more skilled pilots . . . to bomb the Axis with ever increasing fury . . . until the philosophy of the dictator's 'new order' is blasted from the earth and free men can turn once more [to] their peacetime pursuits."<sup>22</sup>

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The military-college-airport programs were vital to the town's economic health. During the war, the navy aviation programs pumped \$2 million per year into the Bloomsburg economy. They helped keep the college open during a time when many schools closed for lack of students. The Rotary supported this development by continuing its longstanding policy of holding meetings promoting aviation by bringing air-minded speakers to talk before the club. These programs also helped to keep the airport open at a time when, for security reasons, the Commonwealth closed most airports for the duration of the war. Many municipalities suffered from the elimination of any aviation-related economic activity.<sup>23</sup>

Before the war was over, Bloomsburg began to ponder how to use its strengthened connection with aviation to enhance its position once hostilities concluded. In July 1943, the State Teachers College began laying the groundwork for a postwar pre-flight aeronautics curriculum. One year later, the Chamber of Commerce met to discuss future plans for the airport. As the Allies kept pushing back the Germans and Japanese, the Chamber's Airport Committee worked with the Town Council to decide the fate of the airport. During the first week of May 1945, front-page coverage of the final days of the Third Reich shared space with the airport issue. Finally, more than a decade after first being considered, the town decided to purchase the field from Harry L. Magee. The town then leased the airfield to a licensed operator. The Town Council and *The Morning Press* emphasized three reasons for the purchase: a bargain price—50 percent off the assessed valuation; the importance to the college's postwar plans; and fulfillment of the "winged gospel." To illustrate the last point, one need only read the many newspaper booster articles. For example, in a May 2 editorial, the *Press* argued that, "the town left without an airport in the post-war program will find itself in much in the same position as a town without a railroad in bye-gone days." The editor pointed out that the war had made America more air-minded than at any time in the past. He also noted a pecuniary motive for this long-delayed decision—plans for federal and state aid to airports did not include funding for privately owned facilities. Perhaps the town's elite had finally overcome their aversion to federal assistance. Howard Ailor, the operator of the airport for the last three years, argued that prospects for economic success were good because, among other reasons, the college had definite plans for using the field. Questions raised as to whether the airport could accommodate large commercial airliners led Mr. Ailor to respond that the field could handle the type of aircraft that would serve in a feeder line capacity, taking passengers to larger urban airports.<sup>24</sup>

Most of the aviation activity in the immediate postwar years consisted of training pilots under the provisions of the G.I. Bill, the operation of a repair shop, air shows, and flight instruction for college students majoring to be high school aeronautics teachers. In his advertisements promoting private, commercial, and instrument flight training at the Bloomsburg Airport, new manager Andy Perugino emphasized that he was an "Ex-GI." Columbia Aircraft Services, head-quartered at the airport, ran numerous ads in the local paper promoting the low-cost Piper Cub for business and pleasure travel. To further entice potential customers, ads stressed that the aircraft was safe, "as economical to operate as your car," and that the buyer would receive free flying lessons.<sup>25</sup>



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During this period, the Bloomsburg Municipal Airport faced increasing competition from several nearby airports. In May 1946, the Center Airport opened just a few miles away. Two ex-Army Air Force servicemen, Keith Schulyer and Jack Laubach, operated this new airport. The paper's Business and Service Directory from this period carried ads for flying schools at Bloomsburg, Center, and Danville airports. When Bloomsburg hosted an air show in April 1948, many of the planes that performed had flown from neighboring airports.<sup>26</sup>

Beginning during the war, the Bloomsburg State Teachers College instituted a curriculum to train students to become teachers of aviation in the Commonwealth's high schools. In the early postwar years, predictions of a nation of flyers abounded. Some members of the State Department of Public Instruction, along with the Teachers Colleges and secondary schools, shared this enthusiasm. Graduates of the aviation program would be able to teach pre-flight aeronautics in the high schools, or obtain a position in an aviation-related agency, such as the Civil Aeronautics Administration. Columbia Aircraft Services at the Bloomsburg Municipal Airport offered flight instruction in an assortment of aircraft, such as Piper Cub Trainers, while college faculty taught a variety of courses, such as Aerial Navigation and Commercial Air Transportation. For most of the 1950s, the college had a contract with the Air Force Reserve. The aeronautics program, however, did not seem to be attracting many students during this period. The college handbook listed only one aviation instructor. It ended before the decade did.<sup>27</sup>

Bloomsburg's air-mindedness persisted through the 1950s, though it seemed to be losing some of its fervor. While *The Morning Press* continued to run front-page articles on local and national aviation-related events, the coverage was not as frequent or as extensive. Advertisements for flight training disappeared. The Rotary no longer expended so much energy promoting aviation, as other issues—especially the fear of communism—became the focus of their attention. While general aviation continued to play an important role at the airport, the state no longer classified the facility as a commercial field. Advances in aviation technology primarily account for this change in status. The larger postwar propeller and jet aircraft could not land at the small airport. Maybe the realization that the modern airplane could also carry nuclear weapons undermined the aviation advocates confidence. By the end of the 1950s, the airport still held air shows and offered employment for a number of people, but it no longer was so central to the concerns of the local citizens.<sup>28</sup>

Bloomsburg's experience with aviation shares some important similarities with large urban areas, as well as some crucial differences. Detroit, Tampa, and Tucson will be used to compare and contrast this process. These cities have been selected because they fulfill key comparative criteria: varying size, different regions of the country, diverse economic bases, and are FAA-designated large, medium, and small size hubs.

Each of these communities had fervent believers who extolled the benefits of aviation. These air-minded individuals and organizations assumed that aviation promoted progress. Key businessmen in each community—for example Harry Magee in

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Bloomsburg and Monte Mansfield in Tucson—had a significant impact, though the individual may have had more influence in small town Bloomsburg than in the larger cities. Newspapers played a crucial booster role. The major papers in Detroit, Tampa, and Tucson all shared with *The Morning Press* a firm conviction that enhancing aviation's infrastructure would improve their communities' status and foster economic growth. In each case, the Chamber of Commerce also had a significant impact. In the larger communities their efforts began as early as 1910. In Bloomsburg, since the Chamber did not start until 1941, the Rotary served as the most important booster organization. It appears that service organizations had a more influential role in small-town Bloomsburg, while in the major cities' governmental organizations—such as the Tucson Airport Authority, the Wayne County Road Commission for Detroit, and the Hillsborough County Aviation Authority for Tampa—expended the greatest efforts fostering airport and airway development.<sup>29</sup>

Each of these communities also increasingly benefited from their growing relationship with the state. This was especially true during World War II when they took advantage of various government programs to improve their airports. The federal government saw each community's participation as essential to the war effort. While this trend continued in the postwar period, Bloomsburg's experience increasingly diverged from the large cities due to several factors.<sup>30</sup>

Unlike the major urban centers, Bloomsburg never obtained regular commercial air service. Though local boosters tried both before and immediately after the war, they never succeeded. Even during the 1930s, when the field was able to accommodate the largest commercial transports, the airlines realized that the town did not generate enough traffic to be added to their route system. There were just not enough entrepreneurs and professionals who needed to conduct business outside the area. When these people had to fly, they used the charter services of the local Columbia Airways. After the war, the field could not accommodate the much larger passenger aircraft—such as the four-engine Douglas DC-4—being rapidly introduced by the airlines. In sharp contrast, cities such as Detroit obtained regular commercial air service in the 1920s to serve their much greater population and major corporations that engaged in nationwide commerce. City boosters constantly struggled to obtain more routes and better connections to help them in the competitive race for business. In 1944, for example, Detroit officials pointed out to the Civil Aeronautics Board in their testimony for more direct air links to New York that, "good airline service is necessary to the commercial life of a city." After the war, extensive connections to the expanding international airline network became increasingly important as business globalized.<sup>31</sup>

While Bloomsburg's airfield did support a number of business activities, it never became a major economic generator like the large urban airports. In Tucson, for example, local boosters, such as the Committee of 100 and the Tucson Airport Authority (TAA), used the airport to attract high-tech electronics industries to the immediate environment. Tucson's experience shared similarities with many other urban airports in the postwar period. Increasingly, high-tech and service industries, typical of the firms driving the emerging postindustrial economy, located near or adjacent to airports

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so that they could take advantage of the tremendous time savings by quickly shipping their high-value products or flying their highly-paid executives to distant locations. While airports became magnets for unplanned growth, they also helped stimulate a new phenomenon as contractors built more and more planned airport industrial parks. This process began in Tucson in 1948 when the TAA built a site adjacent to the airport. Over the next two decades numerous electronics firms located at the Tucson International Airport Airpark, substantially transforming the city's spatial economy. Airports increasingly rivaled central business districts as loci of economic activity. Though on a much smaller scale, even Bloomsburg joined this trend, constructing an industrial park next to the airport in the 1960s.<sup>32</sup>

Bloomsburg's experience also differed significantly from most large cities in that the latter obtained substantial funding from the federal government beginning in the 1930s. During the New Deal, local municipalities obtained huge sums of money to improve existing airports or build new ones as part of the federal work relief programs. Tampa, for example, saw the Civil Works Administration, Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and the Works Progress Administration spend \$228,000 upgrading its existing airport, and another \$800,000 to construct a new combined land and seaplane facility closer to the central business district. In Detroit, these three agencies expended almost \$633,000 on the city airport, and the Public Works Administration and the WPA invested \$355,000 in the county airport. This trend accelerated during the war under the Development of Landing Areas for National Defense and the Development of Civil Landing Areas. Bloomsburg could not take advantage of these programs because to obtain federal assistance, the facility had to be publicly owned. The naval training programs did, however, indirectly channel considerable federal funds into the airport.<sup>33</sup>

When the town finally purchased the field in 1945, that made it possible to obtain assistance from the state and federal government. Between 1950 and 1956, Bloomsburg received over \$3,000 to upgrade the airport's facilities from the Commonwealth's Airport Safety Improvement Program. Though the community tried to acquire federal funds, no record of federal assistance exists. This is not surprising since the bulk of the monies went to large commercial airports being overwhelmed by rapidly expanding air traffic. Detroit, Tampa, and Tucson obtained substantial federal assistance under the Federal Aid to Airport Program. Reflecting changing conditions, by the 1960s the federal government downgraded the Bloomsburg Municipal Airport's classification from commercial to general aviation.<sup>34</sup>

In summary, Bloomsburg's romance with aviation lasted several decades. The airport generated significant economic activity before and especially during World War II. Its role after the war slowly declined. Yet, it undoubtedly helped Bloomsburg stave off the sort of economic decay and population loss that affected nearby central Pennsylvania communities, such as Centralia, that were over-dependent on the declining coal industry. As the experiences of Detroit, Tampa, and Tucson would suggest, to successfully make the transition to the postindustrial economy, a municipality needed more

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than a dedicated group of aviation advocates and an airport. The story, however, is not over. According to Bloomsburg Chamber of Commerce President Edward G. Edwards, the town and the chamber are currently working on a new airport master plan. They want to take advantage of the Federal Aviation Administration's increased funding for general aviation airports to expand the runway to allow larger corporate jets to land. Sounding very much like the proponents of the "winged gospel" in the 1920s, Edwards pointed out that Bloomsburg needed a proper airport if it was to be competitive.<sup>35</sup>

### Notes

1. (quotation from) Joseph Corn, *The Winged Gospel: America's Romance with Aviation, 1900-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), vii-x, 136-137.

2. See, for example, Leslie Valentine, "The Development of the Omaha Municipal Airfield, 1924-1930," *Nebraska History* v. 60 (Fall 1980): 401-420; Betsy Braden and Paul Hagan, *A Dream Takes Flight: Hartsfield Atlanta International Airport and Aviation in Atlanta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press and Atlanta Historical Society, 1989); Douglas Karsner, "Aviation and Airports: The Impact on the Economic and Geographical Structure of American Cities, 1940s-1980s," *Journal of Urban History* v. 23 (May 1997): 406-436.

3. "Old History and Industries of Bloomsburg," WPA Project No. 15253 (1938); "Bloomsburg Faces the Crossroads of the Future," *Commonwealth* (March 1948), reprint found in "Bloomsburg, PA—Industries" folder. Both documents found in Columbia Country Historical & Genealogical Society [hereafter cited as CCHGS].

4. Selections from *The Morning Press* include, "New Seaplane Speed Record," July 12, 1924, 2, and "Japanese Aviators May Go Round the World," July 23, 1924, 1.

5. For coverage of the flight by *The Morning Press* see, e.g., "Chicagoans Honor World Aviators, To Omaha Today," July 16, 1924, and "American Flyers End First Complete Circumnavigation of Globe by Air," September 29, 1924, 1; "Lieut. Arnold To Be With 60 Craft In Tour Tomorrow," October 12, 1934, 1, 6.

6. "Aviator Coming During the Fair; Take Passengers," *The Morning Press*, September 29, 1924, 1; "Airplane Here," *The Morning Press*, October 8, 1924, 2.

7. Sample *Morning Press* articles include, "Lindbergh Starts for Paris," May 20, 1927, 1-2; "Lindbergh at Sea, Passes Newfoundland at 7:45 P.M.," May 21, 1927, 1-2; "Lindbergh Lionized By French; Honors are Heaped on Him," May 24, 1927, 1; "Offers \$25,000 for Non-Stop Flight Across the Pacific," May 26, 1927, 1; "Millions Honor Lindbergh on New York Holiday; Paper Thrown From Windows Resembles Snow Storm," June 11, 1927, 1, 3.

8. (quotations from) "Round Trip from Phila. In 2 Hours, First Air Business Trip," *The Morning Press*, March 7, 1929, 1; *You and Your Company: A Handbook for Employees of The Magee Carpet Company* (1955), 6-10, in "Bloomsburg Industries—Magee Carpet Company" folder, CCHGS. Magee President Willie Law and Superintendent Frank Edwards had both previously worked for Philadelphia's Stinson Brothers. See "Inspirational Story is That of the Plant," *The Morning Press*, August 8, 1925, 8; "Carpet Making From Its Early Days, Was Told to Rotary Club," *The Morning Press*, March 3, 1922, 1-2.

9. Hiester White, "History of Bloomsburg Rotary Club, No. 599," v. 1 (July 1, 1944), 51, 56, Bloomsburg Public Library [hereafter cited as "Rotary Club"]; "Progress in Air Transport Told by Lieut. LaBrou," *The Morning Press*, November 1, 1929, 1-2; "Philco ad," Gelb & Mayer, *The Morning Press*, November 29, 1929, 9.

10. Representative *Morning Press* articles include, "Post and Gatty Seen By Few in Passing County," July 2, 1931, 1; "Wives of World Fliers Uninjured in Plane Crash," July 9, 1931; "Airlines Take More Passengers," July 28, 1931, 10; "Of Course Women Prefer Them They're Fresh," Camels Cigarette ad with woman aviatrix, August 14, 1931, 6; "Airport for Town Being Considered for Near Future," August 19, 1931, 1.

11. Daniel Boorstin, *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Random House, 1966), 115-123. Though Boorstin was examining the origins of this character type in the nineteenth century, this breed was still prevalent in early twentieth century America. "Bloomsburg—Industries—Magee Carpet Company" folder, CCHGS; "Town Council Minutes," Council Chambers, Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, September 8, 1931, 769,

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CCHGS; "Flying Club Registered; Airport Purchase Awaits Inspection," *The Morning Press*, September 4, 1931, 1; "Airport Proposal Being Considered By Town Council," *The Morning Press*, September 9, 1931, 1, 4; (first two quotations from) "On Wings of Tomorrow," framed certificate and illustration commemorating the birth of the Bloomsburg Flying Club, 1931, in Magee's Restaurant, Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania. (third quotation from) "Invite Public To Inspect Airport During Week-End," *The Morning Press*, April 22, 1932, 10. On the issue of private versus public ownership of airports, see Nick A. Komons, *Bonfires to Beacons: Federal Civil Aviation Policy Under the Air Commerce Act, 1926-1938* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), especially 174-176. Evidence of the local elite's individualistic, laissez-faire ideology can be seen in editorials and advertisements in *The Morning Press*. See, for example, "No Passing of Buck," editorial, January 7, 1932, 4; "W. Law's Answer to the Advertisement of the Democratic Co. Committee," November 8, 1932, 6. On the federal relief program requirement that airports must be publicly owned to obtain funding, see *America Spreads Her Wings* (Washington, D.C.: Works Progress Administration, 1937). H. J. Hanley, "Bloomsburg Airport" *Straight and Level* v. 1 n. 12 (November 3, 1943), 1, 7, 11, "RG 7 V-5 Straight and Level Newsletter 1943" file, Bloomsburg University Archives [hereafter cited BUA].

12. On the associative state see, Ellis Hawley, *The Great War and the Search for a Modern Order* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), and David Lee, "Herbert Hoover and the Golden Age of Aviation," in William Leary, ed., *Aviation's Golden Age: Portraits From the 1920s* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 127-147. On the federal role see, Komons, *Bonfires to Beacons*. On the state role see, *Division of Aeronautics Handbook* (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Revenue, June 1, 1938), especially 4-8, and *Civil Aviation in Pennsylvania: Two Decades of Progress* (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Aeronautics Commission, Department of Military Affairs, 1966), 4-5. *Morning Press* coverage of this issue can be found in, "Airport Proposal Being Considered By Town Council," September 9, 1931, 1, 4; "Invite Public to Inspect Airport During Week-End," April 22, 1932, 1, 10; "Nearly 120 View Bloomsburg From Air During the Day," May 20, 1932, 1, 4. "Town Council Minutes," September 8, 1931, 769.

13. *The Morning Press* ran many articles on this development, including "Transformation Made At Airport With 40 Employees," November 10, 1931, 1-2; "Work Complete At The Airport," April 8, 1932, 1; (quotations from) "Thousands Visit New Airport Here To See Facilities," April 25, 1932, 1, 4.

14. "Bloomsburg Rotary," 1932, 65. Of the many *Morning Press* articles on these topics, see especially, "Expect 150 Today at Meeting Town Men at Airport," May 19, 1932, 1; "154 Passengers at the Airport," May 23, 1932, 1; "Thousands Visit Airport to View Parachute Jumps," June 27, 1932, 1; (quotation from) "Airport Almost Paying Its Way Audit Discloses," July 17, 1932, 1; (second and third quotations from) "Air Travel Proves Economical, Safe, With Fine Planes," July 20, 1932, 1; "Have You Visited the Bloomsburg Airport," ad, July 30, 1932, 8.

15. See the following *Morning Press* articles: "College Students Airport Guests This Afternoon," July 17, 1934, 1; "All Business Tied Up In San Francisco By General Strike," July 17, 1932, 1; "A Notable Event" and "The San Francisco Strike," editorials, July 18, 1932, 4.

16. *Morning Press* stories included, "Local Airport Designated As Approved Repair Station," April 27, 1934, 1; "Annual Test of Airplane Pilots At Airport Here," April 25, 1934, 1; "Year's Biggest Day At Airport," July 23, 1934, 2. "Town Council Minutes," July 13, 1934, 28.

17. *The Morning Press* coverage of this important development included "Plane Service to Phila. On Regular Schedule Planned," June 14, 1934, 1; "Airway Special," Columbia Airways ad, June 14, 1934, 2; "Plan New Repair Shop At Airport," July 9, 1934, 1; (quotations from) "Airport a Big Asset to Town," July 25, 1934, 9; "Charter Trips," Columbia Airways ad, August 4, 1934, 4.

18. *The Morning Press'* extensive coverage included "Pilot's Association in Tour of the State Will Make Stop Here," October 3, 1934, 1; "Rickenbacker and Hawks Head List Saturday Guests," October 11, 1934, 1-2; "Speaking of Bloomsburg," editorial, October 12, 1934, 4; "Great Air Spectacle In Prospect Today As Tour Arrives Here," October 13, 1934, 1; "Bloomsburg Flying Club," ad, October 13, 1934, 9; "Thousands Inspect Planes During Stop Of State Aerial Tour," October 15, 1934, 1-2; "Bloomsburg Rotary," 1934, 77. On the automobile and aviation reliability tours see William Leary, "Henry Ford and Aeronautics During the 1920s," in *Aviation's Golden Age*, 1-17.

19. In *The Morning Press* see, "Magee Named To Air Council," July 28, 1937, 1; "A Fitting Recognition," editorial, August 2, 1937, 4; "Governor Says He Gets 'Big Kick Out of Flying,'" July 20, 1934, 9. "State Aviation Council," *Division of Aeronautics*, 6, 8 ½.

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20. "Bloomsburg Rotary," 1939, 110. Rotary records record at least one airport meeting every year from 1932 through 1937, with the exception of 1933. See "Bloomsburg Rotary" 1932 through 1939. "Town Council Minutes," August 7, 1939, n.p., and September 11, 1939, 330.

21. "Town Council Minutes," August 27, 1940, 367-368, and September 9, 1940, 370, and September 27, 1940, 371; Hanley, "Bloomsburg Airport," 1, 7, 11; James G. Schneider, "On Campus in World War II: The U.S. Navy V-12 Program," *Carver*, 1988, 7; Harry Andruss, "War and Cooperation Programs, 1941-1945," *Bloomsburg Through the Years* v. 20, n. 6 (August 1952), 9. In *The Morning Press* see, "Town To Lease Airport, Choice To Buy In Year," August 28, 1940, 1, 8; (quotation from) "A Wise Course," editorial, August 28, 1940, 4; "Airport Lease Is Signed Here," August 31, 1940, 1, 5; "Another Forward Step," August 31, 1940, 4.

22. Andruss, "War and Cooperation," 9; "175 Navy V-12 To Enter Local College July 1," (quotations from) *The Morning Press*, May 17, 1943, 1, 3; "Flight School Is On A Round The Clock Basis," *The Morning Press*, July 3, 1943, 1, 19; Harvey A. Andruss, President, State Teachers College at Bloomsburg, to Dr. Francis B. Haas, State Council of Education, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, April 1, 1943; Francis B. Haas, Superintendent, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Department of Public Instruction, Harrisburg, to President Andruss, June 9, 1943; Harvey A. Andruss, President, State Teachers College at Bloomsburg, to Dr. Francis B. Haas, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, July 3, 1942; three letters in "RG 7 V-12 Approval by State Authorities 1942-1943" file, BUA; L. E. Denfeld, Chief of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, Washington, D.C., to President Harvey A. Andruss, Bloomsburg State Teachers College, September 21, 1945, "RG 7 Navy V-12 Program (Misc.) 1944-1945," BUA.

23. *Report of Accomplishment by the Pennsylvania Aeronautics Commission, 1943-1951* (Executive Offices, Harrisburg State Airport, 1951), 5; "Town Acquiring Of Airport Now Before Council," *The Morning Press*, May 1, 1945, 1, 9; "Bloomsburg Rotary" 1941, 131; "Bloomsburg Rotary" 1943, 143, 146, 149; "Bloomsburg Rotary" August 10, 1944.

24. *The Morning Press* carried many articles on these developments. See, for example, "169 Arrive At College for V-12 Training," July 2, 1943, 1, 7; "Discuss Future Airport Plans," July 27, 1944, 1; "Wide Interest Shown In College Air Program," August 8, 1944, 1, 4; "Town Acquiring Of Airport Now Before Council," May 1, 1945, 1, 9; (quotation from) "The Airport," editorial, May 2, 1945, 4; "Town Purchases Local Airport For \$50,200.11," May 8, 1945, 1, 11; "A Forward Action," editorial, May 9, 1945, 4; "Town Council Minutes," April 30, 1945, 558-559; "Town Council Minutes," May 7, 1945, 559-560.

25. Extensive *Morning Press* coverage of these developments occurred during 1946 and 1947, but declined thereafter. See, e.g., "Fly Your Own Plane," Columbia Aircraft Services ad, April 3, 1946, 9; "The Plane that Costs You Less to Buy and Fly," Piper Cub ad, June 3, 1946, 7; "Learn to Fly," Bloomsburg Airport ad, October 9, 1946; "Repair Shop At Bloomsburg Airport Is Busy Place," April 9, 1947, 8; Thousands at Airport Show," April 7, 1947, 1, 8; "Veterans Act Now!" Columbia Aircraft Services ad, May 14, 1948, 14.

26. *Morning Press* coverage included, "Center Airport Is Licensed," May 24, 1946, 1, 4; "War Veterans," Center Airport ad, June 27, 1946, 12; "Center Flying School," ad, April 2, 1947, 11; "Drill by Drum Corps, Air Show, Ball Featured," April 7, 1948, 1, 5.

27. *State Teachers College Bulletin, Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania*, annual catalogues for 1944-45 through 1957-59; "Trustees Minutes, September 1955-May 1956," RG 1/1 Board of Trustees Minutes, 1955-56 through 1965-66; "World Congress on Air Age Education," Proceedings of the Meetings of the Board of Presidents, State Teachers College, June 1, 1946-May 31, 1947. All documents in the BUA. Consult also "Encouragement of Aviation Education," *Report of Accomplishment by the Pennsylvania Aeronautics Commission, 1943-1951* (Executive Offices, Harrisburg State Airport, 1951), 12-13.

28. *The Morning Press* selections include, "Local Airport On CAA List," May 11, 1950, 1, 14; "Taking to the Sky," editorial on the rise of domestic airlines, September 4, 1952, 4; "Fifteen B-47 Strato-Jets Cross Ocean," June 5, 1953, 1. "Bloomsburg Rotary" 1947-1957, 1961-1962.

29. On Monte Mansfield's crucial "Magee-like" role, see Monte Mansfield to R.C. Campbell, District Advisor, Airport Section, Department of Commerce, September 23, 1936, Box 5, Record Group 237, National Archives, and "History of Tucson Airport Authority," *Tucson Airport Authority* (Tucson: Tucson Airport Authority, 1991), 1-2. On the urban booster press see, "Detroit Freight Winging Away," *Detroit Free Press*, August 15, 1948; "Jets for Detroit," *Detroit Times*, September 21, 1959; "Airport, Air Service Both Hold Out Bright Prospects," *Tucson Citizen*, January 12, 1956, 8; "Another Step for Tampa in Aviation Progress," *Tampa Times*, De-

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ember 20, 1950; "Tampa's Wings Grow," editorial, *Tampa Tribune*, December 29, 1959. On the role of urban chambers of commerce see, *Come to the Growing Southwest to Tucson for Industry and "A Way of Life"* (Tucson: Tucson Chamber of Commerce, 1952); "XXV Anniversary Tucson Airport Authority," (1973), TAA folder, vertical clippings files, Tucson Public Library.

30. "Federal Expenditures, United States Recapitulation," CAA data chart, 1952, Federal Aviation Administration, Washington, D.C.

31. (quotation from) Brief of City of Detroit, Intervener *Before the CAB Chicago and Milwaukee to New York*, Docket No. 629 et al, April 21, 1944, 3, 7; Allen Dean, Oral Argument *Before the Civil Aeronautics Board Detroit-St. Louis-Memphis*, June 20, 1944; Mayor Miriani to James Donfee, Chairman, CAB, September 14, 1959, Mayors' Papers, 1959, Aviation Commission folder, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library; Vince Davis, "Plan Initiated to Bring New Business Here," *Arizona Daily Star*, May 14, 1953, 1, 14; Mayor Hixon to CAB Chairman Joseph O'Connell, May 13, 1948, Mayor Curtis Hixon Papers, box 2, folder 13, City of Tampa Archives and Records Service.

32. "Electronics Firm Coming to Tucson," *Arizona Daily Star*, May 12, 1955, 5-C; "Hughes to Build at Airport," *Arizona Daily Star*, December 11, 1956, 1-B; *Industrial Site Study: Report #1, Industrial Patterns and Trends; A Community Analysis for the Tucson Urban Area* (Tucson: City of Tucson Planning Department, 1976), 52-53, 67; "Industrial Park Plans Reported," *Arizona Daily Star*, August 10, 1958, 10-B; Paul Wilder, "Many Firms Put Millions in Tampa Industrial Parks and More Are on the Way," *Tampa Tribune*, July 8, 1961, 1, 7; *Bloomsburg Area Chamber of Commerce, Annual Report 1967*, "Bloomsburg Chamber of Commerce" folder, CCHGS. For an overview of this whole development, see Karsner, "Aviation and Airports."

33. "Federal Expenditures." For a detailed analysis of these issues, see Douglas Karsner, "'Leaving on a Jet Plane': Commercial Aviation, Airports, and Postindustrial American Society, 1933-1970," (Philadelphia: Temple University Ph.D. Dissertation, 1993).

34. As late as 1951 the airport had a CL II commercial license. By 1967 it was rated G for general aviation. See *Pennsylvania Week: Aviation and Air Transportation Defends Freedom* (October 13-19, 1952), 6, 32; *1967-1972 Airport Plan for the Communities* (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Aeronautics Commission, Department of Military Affairs), 22; "Money Paid Under ASIP—1950-1956," *Civil Air Progress in Pennsylvania* (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Aeronautics Commission, Department of Military Affairs, June 1962), 40. All documents in the Pennsylvania Law Library, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. See also, Karsner, "'Leaving on a Jet Plane'."

35. Interview with Edward G. Edwards, President, Bloomsburg Chamber of Commerce, March 31, 2000; John Finnerty, "Valley Airports Closer to Funding," *The Daily Item*, March 17, 2000, 1, 6.

