Air shows have trouble getting off ground

Looking back

By Rose McIlveen

6-20-1951

Anyone looking at Monroe County's history in the realm of air flight would think the area was jinxed. Not that local people weren't fascinated with the idea of flying. On the contrary, the Bloomington Commercial Club (forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce) had in 1911 scheduled a flight of a fragile craft as an inducement to potential curiosity seekers and customers.

But the flight ended abruptly at the edge of the Indiana University campus when the pilot failed to get enough speed to "slip the bounds of earth." The idea of providing such an attractive show did not die with the semi-comic crash of Horace Kearney, a barnstormer of note, who later was lost in a flight over the Pacific Ocean.

Plotting another — hopefully successful — air show, in 1914, the sponsors, Harry Orchard, C.H. Marxon, Carl Breeden, Otto Rotte, A.C. Coyle and Elmer Henry, planned an ambitious two-day "Booster Day" for Bloomington. Names were tossed around. Reported the Bloomington *Telephone*, "There was some talk of securing Beachey, the famous loop-the-loop aviator. Beachey and Barney Oldfield, the automobile racer, have recently been doing a barn-storming stunt at various fairs over the country and have proved a great attraction. They were at Indianapolis and Terre Haute about four weeks ago."

Having failed on two earlier occasions to provide pilots who managed to get their planes into the air, the sponsors built into the contract a "no flight, no pay" clause. Chirped the *Telephone*, " . . . but there is little chance of the machine not flying, as the last two or three years have witnessed wonderful improvements in the aircraft."

Anyway, explained the newspaper, the second attempt didn't really count, since it involved "a half-baked boy whose flying experience must have been very limited." Actually, admitted the *Telephone*, on his second attempt, the boy did get into the air, but his flight was only two miles.

The 1914 version of exhibition