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Article Summary: Nebraska's first air tour attracted public attention and led to aviation development. A single serious accident marred the technical success of the tour, which provided important commercial benefits for its sponsors.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Howard J Houghland, Arthur Weaver, Mr and Mrs Frank VanBoskirk, Max Kier

Stops on the Air Tour: Auburn, Beatrice, Falls City, Lincoln, Fremont, Norfolk, Columbus, York, Grand Island, Kearney, Broken Bow, North Platte, McCook, Holdrege, Hastings, Omaha

Tour Airplane Models: Stinson-Detroiter, Cessna Cantilever, Cutiss Robin, Travelair, Ford Trimotor, Waco biplane

Tour Pilots: Orville Haines, F D (Chief) Bowhan, Andrew Risser, Lawrence Enzminger, Clyde Ice, Bill Ong, Myron Taylor, R T Simmons, Eddie Moore, Andrew Nielsen, Jack Kenwood, Frank Cropsey

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Photographs / Images: outline map showing the route of the first All Nebraska Air Tour; Guy Spencer cartoon: "We can't help being not only 'air-conscious,' but 'friendship-conscious' this week." (*Omaha World-Herald*, September 10, 1929)

The First All Nebraska Air Tour, 1929: “One Big Family in the Air or on the Ground”

By Les Valentine

Early in the 1920s aviation was still part of a romantic era, when the airplane was a novelty and the aviator often a daredevil or barnstormer. With the growth of aviation and the onset of federal regulations this free-wheeling impractical age drew to an end. As 1930 approached aviation became big business and offered farsighted communities huge rewards in trade and transportation. Yet, public realization of the opportunities brought by air travel did not develop this quickly. By the close of the decade, many people still saw airplanes as toys of the leisure-seeking rich and could not envision a day when aviation would touch their lives. Civil and commercial leaders throughout the country fought this attitude, concerned that their communities might fall behind in the air race unless they rapidly built proper facilities. To encourage development, air enthusiasts searched for methods that would kindle aviation interest and convince citizens that airport construction was a public concern.

Congress debated the public nature of aviation in 1926 when it allowed the development of specific public lands in Tucson and later Yuma County, Arizona, for air purposes.¹ Secretary of the Interior Herbert Work supported these proposals and felt that because of the increase of commercial aviation, other municipalities would probably seek similar legislation.² Congressional discussion of the subject culminated in 1928 with the passage of HR 11990 authorizing “leasing of public lands for use as . . . aviation fields.”³ Acting Interior Secretary Edward C. Finney told the House Committee on Public Lands that the future of aviation depended upon landing field acquisition, and an act should be passed providing for air fields.⁴ After enactment, the legislation temporarily ended, at least on the national level, debate over the public or private nature of aviation facilities.

Nebraska dealt with land acquisition for aviation use much earlier. In March, 1921, the Nebraska Legislature passed HR 206, authorizing cities to acquire land for airfields through funding from the sale of bonds. Before cities could sell bonds, 60 percent of the voters were required to approve their issuance.⁵ While the adoption of HR 206 seemed like a step toward aviation advancement, the 60 percent clause was a formidable obstacle.

The failure of Lincoln voters to give such a bond issue approval sparked a controversy that ended before the Nebraska Supreme Court. In an April, 1928, general election bonds for the purchase of an airfield were only approved by a 50.6 percent margin, 6,330 to 6,173. Nebraska State Auditor L. B. Johnson refused to approve the bonds—citing the 1921 statute and its 60 percent requirement. In June, 1928, the Supreme Court ruled the bonds must be approved because the 1921 statute did “not apply alike to every part of the state.” Since the Lincoln home-rule charter permitted the issue of bonds on a majority vote, the court declared the state auditor’s position untenable.⁶ The passage of HR 424 the following April repealed the 1921 law and enabled Nebraska communities to sell airfield bonds upon majority vote alone.⁷ By this measure, the Legislature acknowledged that aviation had taken great strides since 1921. Air travel now had a recognizable future, and if Nebraska hoped to compete in the air race, its cities needed aviation facilities.

With airfield bonds now much easier to secure, on July 2, 1929, the *Omaha World-Herald* suggested the organization of a Nebraska air tour. The newspaper felt such a tour would spark interest, help coordinate state air development, and “give aviation the impetus it so seriously needed in Nebraska.”⁸ The possibility of a state-wide tour had originally been discussed in January during an Omaha meeting of the Nebraska chapter of the National Aeronautical Association (NAA). The proposal received insufficient support and was dropped.⁹

Reaction in July, however, was positive. Commissioner Glen Eastburn of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce believed an air tour was needed to increase interest in aviation. The Omaha Airport Commission agreed and viewed the tour as a promotional venture which would lend credibility to Omaha’s quest for regional air superiority.¹⁰

Reaction from communities wishing to take part was just as enthusiastic. Among cities expressing a desire to entertain the tour were Falls City, Norfolk, McCook, Lincoln, Broken Bow, and Scottsbluff. Leaders in McCook, supposedly one of the most air-minded cities in the country, were especially interested and promised air tourists would be lavishly entertained in their city.¹¹ Invitations even came from two towns in western Iowa. Officials in Red Oak and Shenandoah, Iowa, were excited, and for a while it appeared the tour could "scarcely be confined to Nebraska." Arthur Fetters, president of the Omaha chapter of the NAA, thought western Iowa should be included, believing there were "sections of other states . . . just as truly Omaha territory" as out-state Nebraska.¹²

The *Omaha World-Herald* seemed pleased with the response to its proposal. In an editorial the paper claimed Nebraskans looked to Omaha for aviation development with "appreciative interest," believing the state had the potential to become a vital link in United States air routes. The editorial urged construction of airfields and the organization of aviation services throughout the state. The air tour was designed to serve as a catalyst to convince Nebraska and western Iowa of aviation's promise and "bring Omaha and . . . neighboring cities into more friendly cooperation."¹³

Although the suggested addition of western Iowa never materialized, on July 10 the executive committee of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce unanimously endorsed an All Nebraska Air Tour.¹⁴ The most significant aspect of the endorsement was the organizational leadership such approval implied. Since early in the decade, the Chamber of Commerce had led the struggle for an Omaha air identity through the auspices of its Aerial Transportation Committee. While air progress in Omaha over the years was not rapid, committee members had initiated the quest for an airfield site and secured finances for its improvement. Such accomplishments were noteworthy, given the generally apathetic public attitude toward Omaha aviation.¹⁵ Leadership of the tour was later divided between the Chamber of Commerce and the Nebraska NAA.¹⁶

Early tour preparations provided opportunity for Aerial Transportation Committee members to prove their ability.

Committee Chairman Amos Thomas announced on July 19 that the tour would take place during the week of September 9. All cities expressing interest were queried about landing facilities, best dates for arrival, and plans for entertaining flyers. A major financial obstacle was removed when Skelly Oil agreed to furnish gasoline for the trip free of charge, as it had done for Kansas and Oklahoma air tours. Refueling was originally to have been the responsibility of each town en route. With this expense defrayed, Aerial Transportation Committee members expected most cities would be more inclined to provide entertainment for the visitors. Due to safety concerns it was decided no stunting or racing of planes would be sponsored by the management.¹⁷

On August 1 prominent Omaha pilots and plane owners joined members of the Nebraska NAA in a meeting with the Aerial Transportation Committee and several air companies. Midwest Aviation of Omaha announced it planned to enter two planes "for the good of aviation"—without thought of profit. Lawrence Enzminger, founder of Midwest, thought qualified pilots should be permitted to carry passengers and provide rides at every stop. Walter Halley of Rapid Air Lines in Omaha said that providing rides for onlookers was "the best selling argument for aviation." Committee members believed strict tour regulations were needed and that the tour could reasonably manage only 30 planes.¹⁸ The committee fixed no price for passengers and local riders but allowed owners to negotiate their own terms.

Cities officially invited to host the tour hoped to generate aviation interest and take advantage of recent legislation making it easier for communities to vote bonds for air-terminal development. Pilots at the August 1 meeting, though, feared some towns could not even provide safe, temporary landing fields. The *Omaha World-Herald* then agreed to sponsor a "pathfinder" plane that would travel to potential stops and investigate aviation facilities. Officials would use information gained to formulate a final air-tour itinerary.

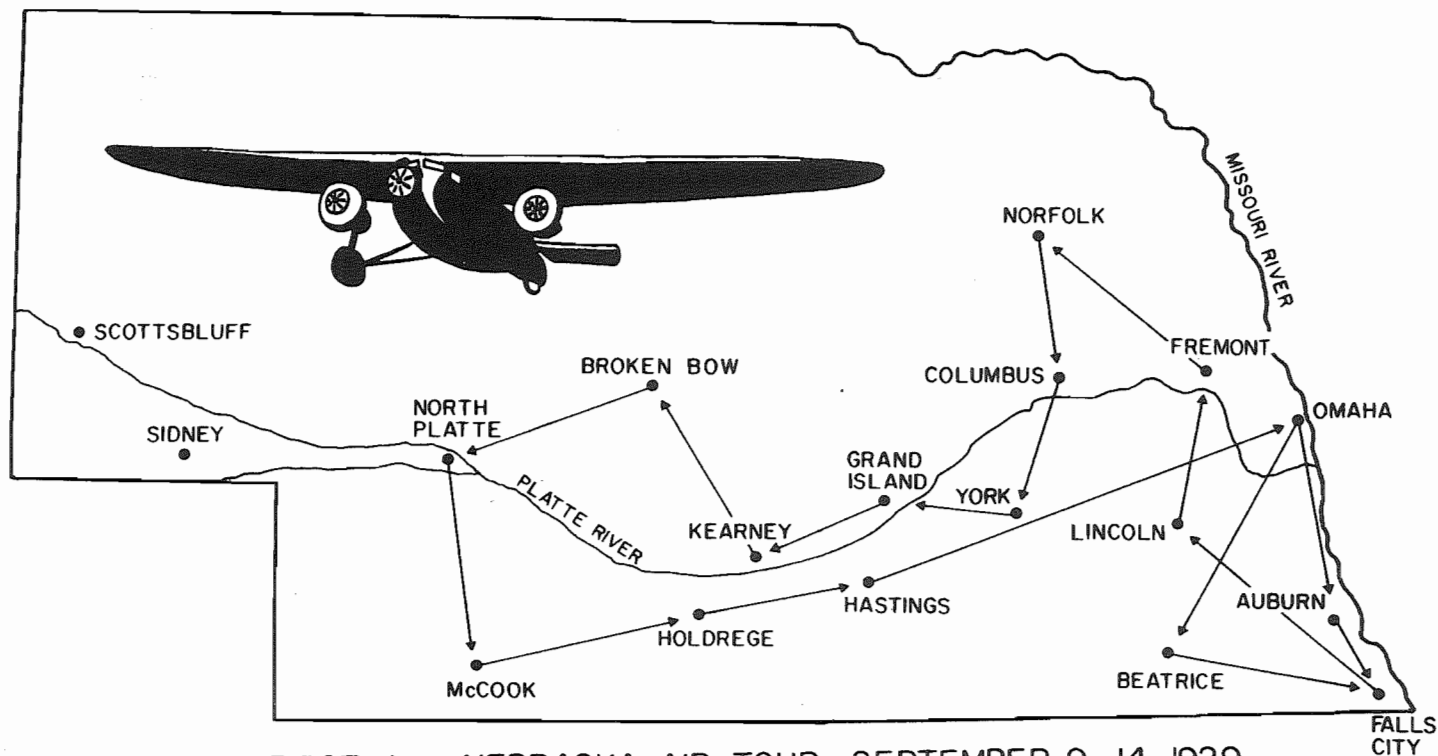
On Thursday, August 8, the pathfinder plane took off from the Omaha Municipal Airfield. This six-place monoplane, christened the *Air Tour Herald*, visited 14 cities in three days and returned to Omaha on August 10. Cities visited included Fremont, Norfolk, Columbus, York, Grand Island,

Kearney, Holdrege, Broken Bow, North Platte, McCook, Hastings, Beatrice, Falls City, and Lincoln. Although this project was advertised as an all-Nebraska tour, Scottsbluff and other Panhandle communities were not considered. Omaha officials believed "fullness of the schedule and . . . distances between some . . . towns in the far western part of Nebraska" prevented the tour from visiting that section.¹⁹

Pilot Lawrence Enzminger and four others were chosen to make the pathfinder trip. Enzminger, though, was given "chief responsibility . . . deciding upon the suitability of landing fields." Also included in the journey were Ivan Gaddis of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce Publicity Bureau, Lawrence Shaw of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, Arthur Palmer of the Nebraska NAA, and Lawrence Youngman, aviation editor of the *Omaha World-Herald*. Along with inspection of local aviation facilities, pathfinder crew members were given public relations duties. Tour management wanted Enzminger and his passengers to impress upon local committees that the expedition was not an Omaha project. Rather, the air tour was designed to benefit the entire state by bringing its cities closer together and encouraging aviation awareness.²⁰

The three-day pathfinder expedition seemed to generate in the towns visited the spirit of cooperation and enthusiasm desired by tour management. North Platte leaders, for example, were very enthusiastic, and Edwin C. Kelso of the local Chamber of Commerce said his city was "all primed to put on a big feed" for the tourists.²¹ In Norfolk and Grand Island, however, early opinion of the air tour was less enthusiastic. Although there was strong aviation interest in Norfolk, doubt remained about the tour's local sponsor—whether it would be the Chamber of Commerce or another group.²² In Grand Island where little had been done to encourage the tour, the situation was more complicated. Since the city had expressed no desire to be included, the pathfinder visit essentially meant the tour had invited itself to Grand Island. The *Grand Island Independent*, disturbed by the apathy, said most "larger cities of the state" had invited the flyers and urged Islanders to prove their progressiveness by sponsoring the tour.²³

While aviation enthusiasm differed throughout the state, the pathfinder found most local landing fields adequate for tour needs. The only airfield found unsuitable was in Broken



THE FIRST ALL NEBRASKA AIR TOUR, SEPTEMBER 9-14, 1929

Bow, where Lawrence Enzminger landed the *Air Tour Herald* on a "none-too-good alfalfa field" which could not have handled the entire tour fleet. Local aviation committee members then escorted Enzminger and his crew to a "bigger and better alfalfa field" southeast of the city. Although this 320-acre field was "somewhat sloping and dotted with haystacks," Enzminger felt with some preparation it would be "entirely satisfactory" and that a haystack could be used "as a tower for the wind sock." Broken Bow officials, enthusiastic about the tour, hoped its appearance would lead to the development of a regular airfield.²⁴

After the pathfinder trip tour officials agreed upon an itinerary. As expected, towns selected were those on the pathfinder schedule, with the last minute addition of Auburn:

September 9: First stop divided between Auburn, 9:15 a.m. arrival and Beatrice, 9:30 a.m. arrival. Entire tour arrives at Falls City, 3 p.m. for night stop.

September 10: Arrive Lincoln, 9 a.m. Arrive Fremont, 12:15 p.m. Arrive Norfolk, 3:30 p.m. for night stop.

September 11: Arrive Columbus, 9:15 a.m. Arrive York, 2:15 p.m. for night stop.

September 12: Arrive Grand Island, 9:15 a.m. Arrive Kearney, 12 p.m. Arrive Broken Bow, 3:30 p.m. for night stop.

September 13: Arrive North Platte, 9:30 a.m. Arrive McCook, 2 p.m. for night stop.

September 14: Arrive Holdrege, 9:30 a.m. Arrive Hastings, 2 p.m. Tour ends at Omaha, 6:30 p.m.

While there was no problem finding specific cities, every community planned a large aviation celebration on its tour date and exact days and times of arrival were important.²⁵

With a definite group of qualified cities having agreed to entertain the tour, Omaha officials now moved ahead with final preparations. In an August 14 meeting, air tour pilots selected Major Howard J. Houghland of the 7th Army Corps as flight commander. The pilots also agreed to a set passenger charge of 10 cents a mile or \$100 round trip.²⁶ Major Houghland chose Andrew Nielsen and Lawrence Enzminger assistant flight commanders and selected a technical and advisory committee of six flyers to oversee the "physical operation of the tour." Included were Omaha pilots Donald Halley of Rapid Aviation and Frank Grace of Pioneer Aircraft.

Others were E. D. Fox, Department of Commerce inspector headquartered in Omaha; Walter Smith, Smith Flying School in Grand Island; Orville Haines of the Sidles Aircraft Company in Lincoln; and Andrew Risser of the Siems and Risser Airfield in Norfolk.

Since tour preparations were becoming more detailed, the Omaha Chamber of Commerce chose the following General Tour Committee: Sam Houser, chairman, John Stewart, William Ellis, and Louis Thoelicke, all chamber members who concentrated on tour organization.²⁷

Perhaps the most difficult procedures following the pathfinder trip were screening entries and recruiting passengers. A primary goal of tour management was to generate as much curiosity as possible by securing a wide diversity of ships. Among planes that began the tour from the Omaha Municipal Airfield were a Stinson-Detroiter five-passenger monoplane piloted by Orville Haines, a Cessna Cantilever piloted by F. D. (Chief) Bowhan, a Curtiss Robin monoplane piloted by Andrew Risser, and the Travelair pathfinder plane piloted by Lawrence Enzminger. The greatest attraction was Clyde Ice's 12-passenger Ford Trimotor, which dwarfed other tour aircraft. Other planes joined the tour en route, and the expedition averaged 20 to 30 aircraft throughout the tour. Cruising speed among tour airplanes was 80 to 95 mph, with a high speed of 120 mph attained by the Cessna Cantilever.²⁸

Another objective was to recruit round-trip passengers to help defray expenses of plane owners. Since initial planning stages, promoters had claimed the project was not meant to benefit wealthy business interests. In the middle of August, though, Sam Houser and William Ellis of the General Tour Committee began a campaign to solicit Omaha business support. Apathy and the rather expensive \$100 round trip fee had made it difficult to secure passengers. Although they still maintained the tour was "not in any sense a commercial or trade trip," Houser and Ellis now urged Omaha businesses to use the tour for advertising purposes. Business houses should send representatives along to make contacts with outstate clients and take advantage of crowds expected at every stop. Members of the General Tour Committee were successful in their appeal for business support and did not expect commer-

cialization to endanger the aeronautical purposes of the tour. Thanks largely to Omaha businesses, the air tour began with a complete 100-passenger load.²⁹

A successful tour also required strict rules governing flying and landing. Major Houghland assigned each plane a number and permitted two methods of flying between cities. By one method each plane was flagged off a field in numerical order and maintained its position until the next destination. By another method planes took off in groups of three and flew in loose formation 300 feet apart. When ready to land, each pilot waited for the local ground crew to flash his plane number. The pilot would then "give three blasts of his motor" and land. When the ground crew heard the blasts, they flashed the number of the next plane. Since safety concerns had prevented tour-sponsored stunting, exhibitions of this kind were arranged between pilots and local aviation committees. The usual charge for these displays was \$10 for 15 minutes of stunting, during which pilots were not officially considered part of the tour.³⁰ Safety was of great concern to Major Houghland, and he personally observed tour conduct from a Douglas 0-2 Army biplane.

Even before the start of the tour, reaction from outstate newspapers proved the proposal had lifted many Nebraskans' eyes toward the sky. In Hastings the *Daily Tribune* assured its readers aviation was now a permanent fixture in Nebraska and citizens should realize the time had arrived when communities could not function "without offering aviation facilities."³¹ The *McCook Daily Gazette* advertised the air tour as a bold experiment combining both commercial advantage and aviation awareness.³² In Kearney, the *Daily Hub* informed its readers aviation had arrived. The air tour would show Kearney residents air travel was a profitable venture and deserved immediate attention.³³ In Falls City, the *Journal* claimed aviation had received "many hard knocks," but its continued development was a certainty.³⁴ The *Omaha World-Herald* was pleased with this publicity and viewed the air tour as an exceptional opportunity to advance aviation on a state-wide scale. The All Nebraska Air Tour was a chance for a "Greater Nebraska" and an "event of historic, epochal importance."³⁵

On Monday morning, September 9, 1929 the Omaha Municipal Airfield was a center of bustling activity. Due to se-

vere thunderstorms, which had brought three inches of rain into eastern Nebraska over the weekend, field conditions were muddy and the sky remained overcast and gloomy. These conditions cast doubt upon the safety of the Auburn landing field. Auburn was added to the itinerary late in August after an appeal by *Nemaha County Republican* editor Jack Walsh and without prior approval.³⁶ During a personal inspection flight commander Houghland had found Harms Field outside Auburn highly undeveloped. Houghland determined the field could safely entertain only half the tour under normal conditions and decided to divide the first stop between Auburn and Beatrice. Now, after weekend precipitation, the flight commander feared Harms Field would be virtually unusable, especially for larger ships. Prompted by safety concerns, Houghland ruled before the tour that only volunteers need travel to Auburn and that the remainder could fly straight to Beatrice. Only three pilots decided to risk an Auburn landing at that time, Bill Ong, Myron Taylor, and R.T. Simmons.³⁷

Auburn officials apparently were not aware of the change in plans. The 3,000 anxious spectators at Harms Field expected a fleet and no doubt were disappointed by the initial three-plane contingent. Later that morning, however, two more planes landed at Auburn. One of these, a Stinson-Detroiter piloted by Eddie Moore, carried Nebraska Governor Arthur Weaver. The governor planned to join the tour at his home town of Falls City to assist in the dedication of the airfield. Auburn spirits were further lifted when Gus Ruge flew his Travelair monoplane over from Lincoln and provided rides for spectators. One of his passengers, 79-year-old John Cranmer, had first seen Nemaha County from a wagon drawn by an ox team and was "more than delighted...with air transportation."³⁸ Yet, the Auburn visit was a general disappointment for both spectators and tourists.

The visit to Beatrice was also disappointing but for different reasons. Although many more planes landed there, only 1,000 spectators were on hand, the lowest total of any tour city.

The *Beatrice Daily Sun* had reported on September 6 that, due to scheduling difficulties, the tour would not visit the city. Local officials had disliked the originally scheduled two-hour stay in Beatrice and thought it insufficient "to benefit either the tour or the city materially."³⁹ Houghland's decision to

divide the first stop with Auburn made a much longer visit possible, and Beatrice officials agreed to sponsor the tour. The newspaper had not reported this to Beatrice citizens until September 8, which probably contributed to the disappointing crowds.⁴⁰ Although a "sizable throng" was reported to have been present when the tourists landed, the *Daily Sun* admitted "the size of the crowd was not proportionate to the good will the city felt . . . nor the importance it attached to the event."⁴¹

The Beatrice landing field was located on a farm owned by Frank VanBoskirk. Mrs. VanBoskirk was an important factor in Beatrice acceptance of the tour and had convinced her husband to allow free use of the field. The air tourists were treated to a chicken dinner prepared by Mrs. VanBoskirk and entertained by "Claude Carpenter on the banjo and E. [Everett] Schuck on the guitar."⁴² Seemingly unaware of poor conditions at Harms Field, the *Nemaha County Republican* in Auburn was upset by what it considered "favoritism shown Beatrice." While a "large and enthusiastic crowd" waited at Auburn, the newspaper reported only six people greeted tourists in Beatrice. As one unnamed pilot supposedly complained, the air tour was met in Beatrice by "no crowd and chicken dinner without chicken." The air tour frustration eventually convinced Auburn officials that they needed an improved airfield to keep pace with similar Nebraska communities.⁴³

When the entire expedition gathered at Falls City Monday afternoon, tour management hoped for a much smoother visit. These hopes were realized when over 3,000 persons greeted the air caravan. At the dedication of the new airfield Governor Weaver spoke on the theme of transportation. The governor thought railroads would remain the major medium of travel in the country and expected air travel to aid rather than hinder established methods of transportation. Weaver saw the All Nebraska Air Tour as a "pioneer project" and urged every community to develop airfields "for the convenience and safety of those who fly." Dedicatory exercises included stunting exhibitions by Andrew Nielsen and R. T. Simmons, who thrilled the crowd with "loops, spins, dives, zooms, [and] wingovers." Enthusiasm that afternoon spilled over into the evening during a banquet in honor of the tourists.⁴⁴ Events in Falls City

pleased tour officials, and they expected the remainder of the expedition to generate just as much excitement.

The tour left Falls City on Tuesday morning in groups of three because the fleet had not maintained an attractive numerical formation on Monday.⁴⁵ Just over 4,000 spectators observed the arrival of the fleet at the Lincoln Municipal Airfield—a port several pilots considered one of the best in the Midwest. After each plane landed, spectators were entertained by stunting exhibitions and allowed to inspect aircraft.⁴⁶ The official reception given tourists in Lincoln was reserved compared to that in Falls City. The Lincoln visit was sponsored by the local chapter of the Nebraska NAA and its president, State Representative Max Kier. During planning stages Kier had been upset by what he considered the “all Omaha” aspect of this project.⁴⁷ Although the Lincoln aviation committee was not enthusiastic, Kier now claimed he was convinced of the state-wide motives behind the tour.⁴⁸

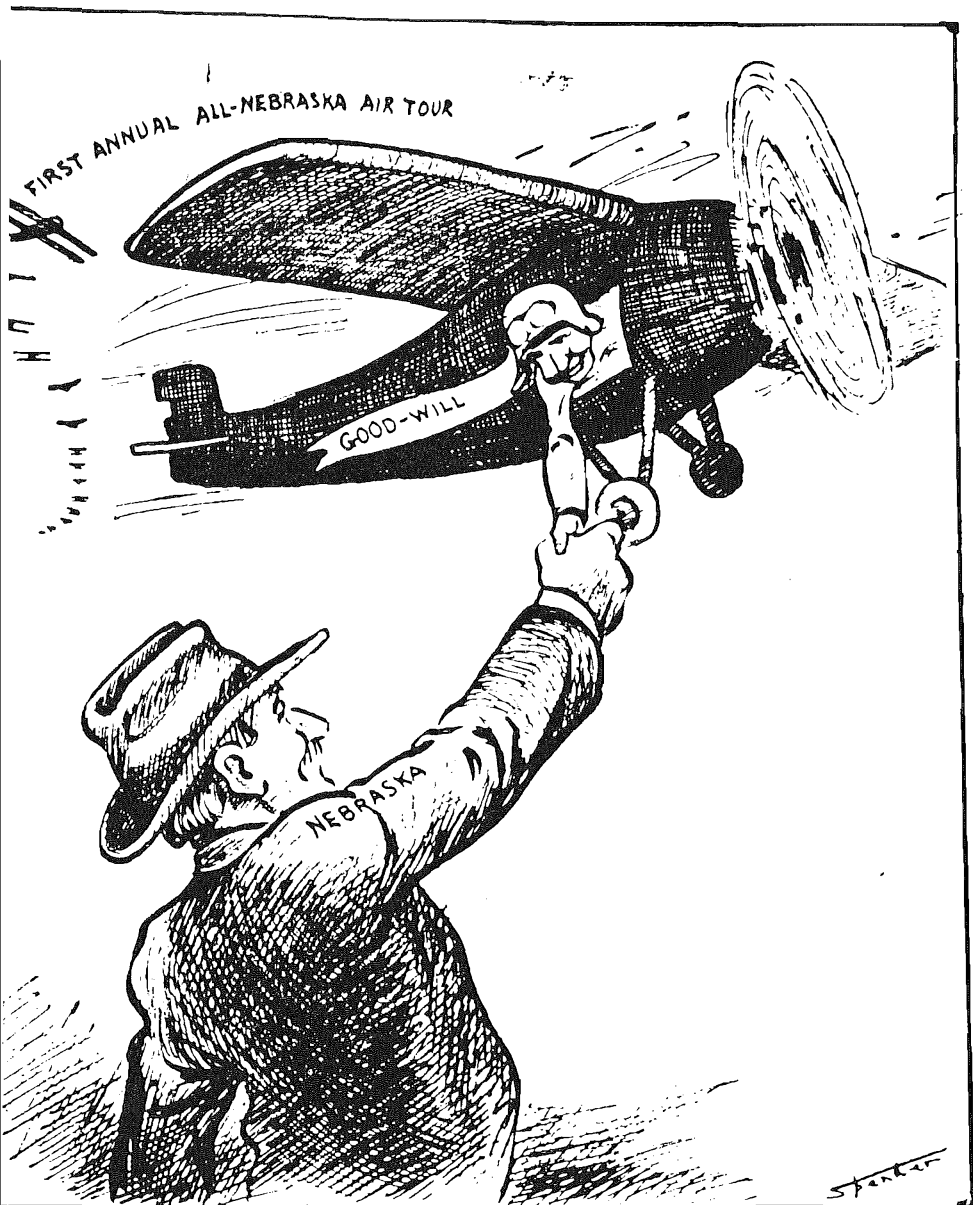
After a stay of just over two hours, the tour left for Fremont where 4,000 persons waited at the Nebraska Service Airport. After landing, flyers were served box lunches and entertained by the Veterans of Foreign Wars Drum Corps. Later in the afternoon tour pilots offered rides and stunted “far away from the airport” in case of accident. The *Fremont Evening Tribune* reported great enthusiasm and general consensus that the All Nebraska Air Tour was “the biggest thing” that had ever happened in the community.⁴⁹

The same enthusiasm was apparent in Norfolk where a crowd of 7,000 awaited the air tour. This expedition had received a buildup by the *Norfolk Daily News*, and the city was publicized as the key aviation center in northern Nebraska. In an effort to set its celebration apart, the local aviation committee sponsored a stunting display. A young Omaha daredevil, Chester Vienot, hung from a ladder in mid-air under a Waco biplane piloted by Jack Kenwood and sat on the upper wing of the craft as it landed. Another unique twist occurred that evening when all visitors were invited to attend a Miss North Nebraska Beauty Contest in Norfolk. This “pageant of pulchritude” brought together contestants from northeast Nebraska and coincided with the overnight stop of the tour. Leona McCracken of Stanton was selected Miss North Nebraska.⁵⁰ The *Norfolk Daily News* viewed the air tour

and corresponding activities as an important civic step. It said air travel was no longer a sport or curiosity but a business, and Norfolk must acknowledge aviation's great potential. The newspaper said the air tour would help Nebraska communities get into the spirit of the air age.⁵¹

In Columbus Wednesday morning tourists joined a crowd of 3,000 in the dedication of two airfields. Both the Siems and Risser and Gottberg fields officially opened, and 3rd District Congressman Edgar Howard gave the dedication address. Before the dedicatory festivities, assistant flight commander Andrew Nielsen and Lincoln pilot Frank Cropsey entertained the crowd with stunting maneuvers. At 11 a.m., just as Congressman Howard approached the speaker's platform, the crowd saw Frank Cropsey plunge 1,000 feet to his death. Cropsey had completed a dive when a wing broke away from his plane, hit the propeller, and the plane plummeted, "flopping over several times before it struck ground." Cropsey, who wore no parachute, was thrown clear of the wreckage. The fatal crash, the first in Columbus aviation history, marred the remainder of the tour.⁵² As Arthur Palmer of the tour speakers bureau stated, pilots realized death was part of the air game but felt aviation learned a lesson from each tragedy and would continue "through them . . . to a greater development."⁵³

Following the crash, interested parties denied implication in the tragedy. Officials from the Arrow Aircraft Company in Lincoln claimed the crash "was not due to any faults [in] construction of the airplane," and that although an excellent pilot, Cropsey had taken his ship out of a dive too abruptly. Arrow representatives concluded "no commercial ship [could] weather the strain of an abrupt ending to a power dive" and the accident was a result of pilot error.⁵⁴ Tour officials also seemed anxious to disassociate themselves from the incident. Afterward flight commander Houghland stated Cropsey had not been stunting, but merely demonstrating his ship's capabilities. Cropsey was "living up to the rules" of the tour and Houghland hoped "citizens in . . . cities on the rest of the tour [would] not feel this accident [was] any fault of the management." Actions of assistant flight commander Andrew Nielsen contradicted the Houghland position that stunting was not a factor in Cropsey's death. After watching his colleague perish, Nielsen landed and announced stunting was prohibited



"We can't help being not only 'air-conscious,' but 'friendship-conscious' this week," observed cartoonist Guy Spencer in the September 10, 1929, Omaha World-Herald.

for the remainder of the tour.⁵⁵ Indeed, in the report of the incident to the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, the Aerial Transportation Committee claimed Cropsey had “died while stunting in Columbus for the local [aviation] committee.”⁵⁶

The Columbus tragedy adversely affected the mood during the York night stop, which included dedication of the local landing field. A crowd of 3,000 watched the “somber group of tourists” land at the York airfield. Radio station KGBZ broadcast the arrival of each pilot from a live hookup at the field, and selected flyers were interviewed.

The tone of the celebration lightened somewhat that evening during a banquet honoring the air tourists. Governor Weaver, who had rejoined the tour in Columbus, was once again the primary speaker. Weaver was delighted with the beauty of his state from the sky and felt Nebraska should be proud of its pioneer status in aviation.⁵⁷ The *York Republican* agreed and thought credit belonged to the local aviation committee composed of “business men [with] sound vision who have foreseen the day when [York] may be . . . of great importance as an air center.”⁵⁸

When the tour arrived at Grand Island Thursday morning, gloom over Frank Cropsey’s death had largely lifted, and pilots encountered sunny skies and 5,000 spectators. Skepticism about Grand Island enthusiasm for the tour had ended, and the local aviation committee planned a gala aviation spectacle. The stunting prohibition lessened expectations, but many people were given airplane rides and everyone was allowed to inspect aircraft.⁵⁹ The afternoon stop in Kearney reportedly provided tourists with greater “enthusiasm and . . . hospitality” than any previous city. Kearney had just taken over operation of a 120-acre airfield from the United States government. The city council there had promoted the tour as a countryside holiday and planned a pavement dance downtown that evening. By the time tourists were prepared to leave for Broken Bow, the crowd had swelled to well over 4,000 people. Tour management especially commended Kearney officials for excellent crowd control and organization at the airfield.⁶⁰

Another highly successful visit was the night stop in Broken Bow, the smallest community on the schedule. Appeals from Broken Bow officials convinced Major Houghland to allow

limited stunting. Two stunting flights were permitted if pilots wore parachutes and flew far away from the airfield. Because aviation was largely a "revelation" to many in Broken Bow, tour management felt interest was greater there than in any other city. In a town of 3,200 people, over 2,500 spectators attended the festivities, 550 of whom took rides. That evening at the Arrow Hotel the local aviation committee sponsored a 200-place banquet honoring the flyers who were given a "royal welcome."⁶¹

On Friday morning the tour left Broken Bow for the North Platte landing field, which served as a base along the transcontinental airmail route. After a greeting from a crowd of 5,000, a number of tourists were taken through the Nebraska University Experimental Farm, where the "best Holstein cows in the country" were raised. Each visitor was assigned a local host, and the entire entourage ate lunch in the huge North Platte airmail hangar.⁶²

The final night stop came that evening in McCook, where the *Daily Gazette* called the tour the greatest event in Nebraska aviation history and 5,000 people visited the airfield. The newspaper chose this date for the inauguration of an air delivery service, believed the first such project by any United States newspaper.⁶³

Through its commentary on the air tour, the *Gazette* sometimes showed bitterness toward tour sponsors in Omaha. In an August 17 editorial, for example, McCook readers were told profit for "Omaha firms . . . spending money on the project" seemed as important to tour management as promised aviation benefits for Nebraska.⁶⁴ Such regional rivalry was discussed by Edwin C. Kelso of North Platte Friday night at the tour banquet in McCook. Kelso admitted some towns originally felt Omaha had "selfish motives" for promoting the air tour. It was now obvious those cities were mistaken and must have realized Omaha was western Nebraska's "best friend."⁶⁵ Following the tour the *Gazette* still seemed bitter and argued that other Nebraska newspapers had reported the McCook visit "carelessly and inaccurately."⁶⁶ Reports of other publications notwithstanding, the *Gazette* assured its readers that tour officials "were well pleased" with the hospitality.⁶⁷

The final day of the tour began with the Holdrege visit, where flyers were met by the high school band and 2,000 spec-

tators. Air tourists were particularly impressed by the bird's-eye view of this "charming town." It was generally agreed throughout the tour an aerial view highlighted the beautiful farmland and rural settings in Nebraska. The Holdrege visit was a tremendous local event and officials there thanked the tourists for making their community air conscious.⁶⁸ That afternoon after the pilots landed in Hastings before 8,000 people, a somber note once again infringed upon the festivities. At 2:30 the funeral of Frank Cropsey was held in Lincoln. All tourists assembled on the Hastings airfield at that hour, and Andrew Nielsen offered a "solemn . . . impressive" tribute to their fallen colleague.⁶⁹

As in Holdrege, air awareness was important to Hastings officials. The local aviation committee hoped the tour would generate great air enthusiasm in Hastings and help secure approval of an airfield bond issue in the November election.⁷⁰ The air tour may have helped aviation awareness in Hastings because local voters approved the bond issue by a 52 percent majority, 1,903 to 1,712.⁷¹ The *Daily Tribune* claimed this approval represented a victory for the "spirit of youth and progress" and proved Hastings had its eyes set toward the future.⁷²

Late Saturday afternoon the All Nebraska Air Tour officially ended at the Omaha Municipal Airfield. Before landing, seven of the faster airplanes flew over Omaha in a close V formation, only 15 to 20 feet apart. That evening at the post-tour banquet, general consensus among speakers held the expedition was a success in both its aviation and commercial objectives. Glen Eastburn of the Omaha Chamber of Commerce insisted the tour proved flying was a safe method of transportation, and he assured his listeners Omaha's "well earned leadership" in Nebraska aviation was further solidified. Surprisingly, Major Houghland emphasized the military advantages of aviation, which had not been a tour objective. Houghland said Nebraskans should now have no qualms about national air defense expenditures, since the tour had shown how easily "enemy airplane formations could wipe out every village and hamlet in Nebraska." Finally, despite early assurances that the tour was not a business or trade expedition, William Ellis of the General Tour Committee thanked pilots for aid given the Omaha business houses. The air tour, Ellis said, was "the most successful trade trip ever made" out of Omaha.⁷³

The All Nebraska Air Tour was also deemed successful by its promoters from a statistical standpoint. An estimated 60,000 people participated in tour celebrations, including a high of 8,000 in Hastings and a low of 1,000 in Beatrice. Another important gauge of tour success was the number of persons who paid for rides—over 3,600 in 14 cities. The greatest number of rides at any stop was 550 in Broken Bow, while the least was 50 in Beatrice. Because only one serious accident occurred in approximately 25,000 combined air miles, the tour was also termed successful from a safety standpoint.⁷⁴ In addition, tour organizers were pleased with state-wide newspaper coverage and said the air tour generated more publicity than any previous chamber-sponsored event.⁷⁵

An *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal* editorial following the tour said Nebraska was now “sold on the air.” Omaha’s self-proclaimed preeminence as the state aviation leader, though, did not “minimize to any degree the common interest of all communities, big and little.” Nebraska cities had a common destiny and should continue as “one big family in the air or on the ground.”⁷⁶ Such claims of aviation awareness were premature. Yet, air travel *was* a topic of discussion during the All Nebraska Air Tour, and afterwards the chances of statewide aviation development were greatly improved.⁷⁷

NOTES

1. *US Statutes at Large*, Vol. 44, pt. 2 (Dec., 1925-March, 1927), “An Act To authorize the city of Tucson, Arizona . . .,” April 12, 1926 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1927), p. 241; *US Statutes at Large*, Vol. 45, pt. 1 (Dec., 1927-March, 1929), “An Act To authorize the use by the county of Yuma, Arizona, . . .,” February 27, 1928 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929), p. 149.

2. US Congress, Senate, *Authorizing the use by the city of Tucson, Arizona . . .*, S. Report 109, 69th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926), p. 2.

3. *US Statutes at Large*, Vol. 45, pt. 1 (Dec., 1927-March, 1929), “An Act To authorize the leasing of public lands for use as public aviation fields,” May 24, 1928 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929), pp. 728-729.

4. US Congress, House, *Aviation Fields*, H.R. 1009, 70th Cong., 1st sess. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1929), p. 1.

5. *Session Laws passed by the Legislature of the State of Nebraska*, 40th sess., HR 206, “An Act To authorize cities . . . to acquire lands for the pur-

pose of establishing an aviation field," March 15, 1921 (Lincoln: Kline Publishing Company, 1921), pp. 658-659.

6. *State ex. rel. City of Lincoln v. Johnson*, *State Auditor* 220 North Western Reporter, pp. 273-274 (1928).

7. *Session Laws Passed by the Legislature of the State of Nebraska*, 45th sess., HR 424, "An Act relating to municipal corporations . . .," April 24, 1929 (York: Blank Book Company, 1929), pp. 147-148.

8. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 2, 1929.

9. *Ibid.*, September 9, 1929; *Grand Island Daily Independent*, August 9, 1929.

10. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 2, 1929; A less publicized tour objective was to advertise the Diamond Jubilee of the creation of the Nebraska Territory. See *Kearney Daily Hub*, September 12, 1929 and *Omaha Bee News*, August 16, 1929.

11. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 10, 1929.

12. *Ibid.*, July 3, 1929.

13. *Ibid.*, July 6, 1929.

14. Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Executive Committee Minutes, July 10, 1929, 128. Hereafter cited as Executive Committee Minutes; *Omaha World-Herald*, August 16, 1929.

15. For a more detailed discussion of early Omaha aviation development see Leslie R. Valentine, "The Development of the Omaha Municipal Airfield, 1924-1930," *Nebraska History* 61 (Winter, 1980), pp. 400-420.

16. *Omaha World-Herald*, July 11, 1929.

17. *Ibid.*, July 20, 1929.

18. Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Aerial Transportation Committee Minutes, August 1, 1929, 13-15. Hereafter cited as ATC Minutes.

19. *Omaha World-Herald*, August 7, 1929. Most newspapers in far western Nebraska did not comment upon this decision or cover the tour extensively. In Sidney the *Telegraph*, September 10, 1929, felt air travel was too dangerous and declared it wiser to "stick to terra firma." See also *Omaha's Own Magazine and Trade Review*, 4 (October, 1929), pp. 22-23.

20. *Omaha World-Herald*, August 7, 1929.

21. *Ibid.*, August 10, 1929.

22. *Ibid.*, August 9, 1929.

23. *Grand Island Daily Independent*, August 9, 1929.

24. *Omaha World-Herald*, August 10, 1929.

25. ATC Minutes, August 12, 1929, 16; *Omaha Bee News*, August 16, 1929; *Columbus Daily Telegram*, September 9, 1929.

26. *Omaha World-Herald*, August 15, 1929.

27. *Ibid.*, August 17, 1929.

28. ATC Minutes, August 1, 1929, 15; *Omaha World-Herald*, September 9, 1929.

29. *Omaha World-Herald*, August 18, 1929; *McCook Daily Gazette*, September 9, 1929.

30. *Norfolk Daily News*, August 26, 1929; *Omaha Bee News*, September 7, 1929.

31. *Hastings Daily Tribune*, August 11, 1929.

32. *McCook Daily Gazette*, August 17, 1929.

33. *Kearney Daily Hub*, September 5, 1929.
34. *Falls City Journal*, August 7, 1929.
35. *Omaha World-Herald*, August 18, 1929.
36. Auburn's addition at this late date was odd. The only reason ever given was that the General Tour Committee could not overlook the invitation of Jack Walsh. See *Beatrice Daily Sun*, August 27, 1929, *Nemaha County Republican*, August 29, 1929.
37. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 8, 9, 1929; *Omaha Bee News*, September 7, 9, 1929.
38. *Nemaha County Republican*, August 29, September 5, 12, 1929.
39. *Beatrice Daily Sun*, September 6, 1929.
40. *Ibid*, September 8, 1929.
41. *Ibid*, September 9, 1929.
42. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 8, 9, 1929; *Beatrice Daily Sun*, September 8, 1929.
43. *Nemaha County Republican*, September 12, 1929.
44. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 10, 1929; *Falls City Journal*, September 10, 1929.
45. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 9, 1929.
46. *Lincoln Star*, September 10, 1929; *Lincoln Evening State Journal*, September 10, 1929.
47. ATC Minutes, August 1, 1929.
48. *Lincoln Star*, September 10, 1929; *Lincoln Evening State Journal*, September 10, 1929.
49. *Fremont Evening Tribune*, September 10, 1929.
50. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 11, 1929; *Norfolk Daily News*, September 11, 1929.
51. *Norfolk Daily News*, September 10, 1929.
52. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 11, 1929; *Columbus Daily Telegram*, September 11, 1929; *Lincoln Evening State Journal*, September 11, 1929; *Lincoln Star*, September 11, 1929.
53. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 12, 1929.
54. *Ibid*; *Lincoln Star*, September 11, 1929.
55. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 11, 1929.
56. Executive Committee Minutes, October 17, 1929, p. 154.
57. Tour officials claimed Nebraska had a greater number of planes involved in its air tour than any other state. See *Omaha World-Herald*, September 12, 1929.
58. *York Republican*, September 12, 1929.
59. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 12, 1929.
60. *Ibid*; *Kearney Daily Hub*, September 5, 10, 11, 1929.
61. *Custer County Chief*, September 12, 19, 1929; *Omaha World-Herald*, September 13, 1929.
62. *North Platte Evening Telegram*, September 13, 1929; *Omaha World-Herald*, September 13, 1929.
63. *McCook Daily Gazette*, September 9, 12, 13, 1929.
64. *Ibid.*, August 17, 1929.
65. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 14, 1929.

66. *McCook Daily Gazette*, September 14, 1929.

67. *Ibid.*, September 16, 1929. While the *Gazette* never mentioned these publications by name, there appears to be little grounds for such accusations. Newspapers in cities on the rest of the air tour, including those in the Omaha metropolitan area, reported the McCook stop generously and in a favorable tone. The *McCook Tribune* also supported the air tour, yet its coverage was quite reserved in comparison. See *McCook Tribune*, September 16, 1929.

68. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 14, 1929.

69. *Ibid.*, September 15, 1929; *Lincoln Evening State Journal*, September 14, 1929.

70. *Omaha World-Herald*, August 10, 1929.

71. *Hastings Daily Tribune*, November 10, 1929.

72. *Ibid.*

73. *Omaha World-Herald*, September 15, 1929; *Omaha Bee News*, September 15, 1929.

74. *Omaha Bee News*, September 16, 1929. No barnstorming figures were taken in Auburn.

75. Omaha Chamber of Commerce, Minutes, Governing Board, Bureau of Publicity, September 10, 1929.

76. *Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal*, 18 (September 21, 1929), p. 8.

77. ATC Minutes, September 27, 1929, 17-18. Prompted by this success, the Second All Nebraska Air Tour was held June 23-28, 1930.