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Airport dedication big event here

(Editor's note: This is the fifth in a series of "then and now" articles on places of interest in Kansas City, Kan., compiled by area historian Margaret Landis in observance of the 100th birthday of KCK to be celebrated in 1986. Much of the information has appeared in the Kansan.)

(Transcriptions are presented without changes except to improve readability.)

On Aug. 3, 1929, thousands of people from all over the United States gathered in the Fairfax area to witness one of the most historic events in the history of Kansas City, Kan—the dedication of the Fairfax Airport.

The crowd was reported to be one of the largest ever to visit an airport in the Midwest. Fifty-six years later the closing of the airport on April 1 of this year was in sharp contrast. It was allowed to die a quiet death with no fanfare.

Various types of aircrafts manufactured at the airport and in use there were on display for the opening.

History of the airfield goes back to 1921 when it was said to have been used for an American Legion air meet.

Then, operating under a lease, E.J. Sweeny put up a single hangar-workshop holding approximately six planes and started a flying school. In 1925 the field became known as the Sweeny Airport.

In 1928 the field was taken over by Wood Brothers Corporation and named Fairfax.

The land on which the airport now stands, was once considered to be on the Missouri side of the state line. Then, around 1880, a change in the river's course created land nicknamed "Goose Island," where there was no identifiable boundary between the states. This caused much confusion. It was later known as the "Monte Carlo of the West,"



Old postcards show two of the milestones in the history of Fairfax Airport. The one at left shows the special envelope issued for the opening and dedication of Fairfax in 1929. The other is of an envelope that was among the first air mail delivered out of Fairfax that year. It has the cachet or seal of Kansas City, Mo., although the envelope is postmarked Kansas City, Kan. The postcards are from the collection of Joseph Firestone, philatelist.

because gangsters, gamblers, whiskey runners, cockfight promoters and prostitutes gathered there.

Finally, the land was established as the property of Kansas by the United States Supreme Court and the land became part of the Fairfax Industrial District.

KCK purchased Fairfax Airport for \$600,000 in 1941 from the Kansas City Industrial Land Company (a subsidiary of the Union Pacific Railroad), according to the Kansan. The city leased it to the U.S. as a prerequisite to acquire the North American Bomber Production Plant. The plant was a \$10 million project built and owned by the government and operated by the North American Aviation, Inc. The bomber plant is now in the General Motors building.

Though the airport was dedicated in August 1929, it opened in April of that year.

The first plane for a new air mail and passenger line of the Universal Aviation corporation, arrived there from St. Louis on May 1, 1929.

Acting Mayor of Kansas City, Mo., at that time, George Goldman, christened the ship with bottle of Missouri River water.

The plane was a Fokker Super Universal five-passenger cabinplane with two pilots. It had mail and baggage compartments and a wash room. It was powered with a 400-horsepower Wasp engine.

The plane left St. Louis at 7:25 a.m. and daily service was planned to be maintained between three cities, KCK, St. Louis, and Omaha, running on a dawn to dark schedule with 10-minute stops at Fairfax airport and a one-hour lunch stop at Omaha.

After leaving Omaha at 1:10 p.m., the return trip included a 10-minute stop in KCK at 3 p.m. and arrived in St. Louis at 5:50 p.m.

All mail going to K.C. Mo., was postmarked KCK at that time because the airport for K.C. Mo., in 1929 was Fairfax and all mail from K.C., Mo., the scheduled point, was trucked across the river at this point.

In short, the opening of the Fairfax Airport was an historic occasion for KCK. its closing April 1 of this year to make way for a new GM plant was an equally historic occasion, albeit a sad one for the community.