Flying the Golden Years

A History of the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport

In Commemoration of its 50th Anniversary
Table of Contents

Preface 1
Introduction

The 1930s 3
Lewiston Municipal Airport

1940 - 1943 10
Dreams and Challenges

1944 20
Taking Wing

1946 - 1952 28
Technology and Government

The Fifties and Sixties 51
Aviation At Work and Play

1970s...A Regional Threat 69

1975 - 1993 75
Beyond the "Field of Dreams"

On the 50th Anniversary 80
Preface

This "history" was written because of planning done to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport. Upon discovering that the "golden anniversary" of the Airport was coming up, there were quite a few people who felt the event needed to be recognized. "After all," I was reminded, "A 50th Anniversary will only happen once." The question then was, "How to commemorate?" Many ideas were discussed during work sessions with the airport staff, City Manager, City Council, and County Board of Commissioners. One suggestion was to put the history of the airport in writing. I happen to enjoy history, so I committed myself to the project. Had I realized the amount of research required or had I understood the number of hours it would take, I might have had second thoughts.

I became Manager of the Regional Airport in 1984, not quite 10 years ago. I have often wished there had already been a history done. Had that been the case, I might have avoided learning some lessons the hard way. If nothing else, this "history" document may provide lessons for someone else in the future. As I prepared to finish this project, I asked several people to proofread the text. Jan Vassar, the City Manager, suggested that I include more information from my tenure as the Airport Manager. So, I broadened the last section a little bit more. The change I made there may not have been to the extent the City Manager intended. I found it difficult to add much more than some facility and service enhancements that have taken place. History, for me anyway, seems to provide lessons only when it can be put into perspective. I am "too close" to the last decade of the airport to provide that perspective. Partial stories of many people are tied to the regional airport. While most of their names will never show up in "real history" books, I did find some "real everyday heroes." Hughes, Gustin, Zimmerman, Martin, to name just a few. It's an honor to simply be trusted with the stewardship of what they produced. I couldn't put my name among theirs.

I don't pretend to be a good author. Consequently, it would be presumptuous to "dedicate" this document to anyone or anything. Any errors or omissions the reader finds are mine, and I would appreciate knowing of them. But there may be some value in this project too. If so, there are some who need to be recognized. The airport staff not only helped with the research and editing, they put up with me while I struggled with words, grammar, and stacks of historical documents. The City Council and County Board of Commissioners supported the whole program associated with the 50th Anniversary, including this document.

As I mentioned, this narrative is only a part of the total commemoration of 50 years of Airport history. One irony of looking at the past is that it begs the question of the future. I believe the future of the airport and the region is nothing if not bright! The multi-modal transportation capability in the Valley is producing new economic developments almost daily, and the potential is there for so much more. The Valley and the region's vacation and tourism potential is only just being tapped. The
partnership between airport businesses (including the airlines) and airport administration is resulting in improved services and an improved business climate. Our airlines have developed travel partnerships with other airlines allowing better fares and improved schedules. This means passengers can fly into the region from virtually anywhere. Improved business has also meant that our airlines have been able to invest in a new generation of aircraft, tailored to the regional market. The day is not too far away when the vast majority of aircraft used in scheduled service to the Valley will have the same amenities as those used at major airports.

As the economy in the region builds upon its assets, the large chartered aircraft business grows along with it. Hundreds and hundreds of local customers are now, regularly, visiting such places as Las Vegas, Elko, Reno, and more through this growing charter industry. The major universities and their competitors are finding the convenience of using the Regional Airport for chartering their PAC-10 and Big Sky Football Teams in and out of the area. And, as Lewis-Clark State College, the Universities, and the convention centers grow, so does interest by airlines serving new markets into the Pacific Rim Countries and Europe.

And 50 years from now, there will be names added to the list of leaders from the first fifty. The names will include Jan Vassar, the City Manager; J.R. Van Tassel, the City Council's representative on the Airport Commission; Larry Vincent from the County Board of Commissioners. There'll be Bill McCann Jr., Chair of the Airport Commission and Mike Martin of the Lewis Clark Air Festival Team. I am enjoying my part in this celebration and future. I want to thank those leaders for letting me have the opportunity.

Robin L. Turner, AAE
Airport Manager
Introduction

It would be difficult to tell the story of the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport without also recalling some history of aviation and the airline industry. What was the Valley like when the first powered flight took place on those windy hills of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina? And how long did it take for word of Wilbur and Orville Wright's historic flight of December 14, 1903 to reach North Central Idaho? It is likely, that like the rest of the nation, there were those who simply did not believe that man had actually flown. But it is also likely there were some who sensed the same excitement that pioneers felt when witnessing the birth of a historical event. Whatever the consensus was, looking back, there were enough foresighted people to make aviation happen in the Lewiston-Clarkston Valley.

J.J. Ward made the first successful airplane flight in Idaho at Lewiston on October 13, 1910

According to Arthur Hart's Wings Over Idaho, it was a race to get the first "air ship" airborne in the State of Idaho. A Tacoma businessperson had shipped a Bleriot monoplane to Boise to be flown at the Idaho Intermountain Fair, scheduled for October 10-15, 1910. At the very same time, James Ward and a Curtiss biplane were scheduled to fly at the Lewiston-Clarkston Fair. A smooth strip was built immediately in front of the main grandstand, and, according to Mr. Hart, "Ward made the first takeoff ever witnessed in Idaho on Thursday, October 13." During preparations for the demonstration, the Lewiston Morning Tribune proclaimed that the Lewiston area was an ideal location for the flights. "Sheltered by the high hills, the Lewiston-Clarkston valley offers an
exceptionally good aviation field for successful and spectacular flights."

Although it would be another 34 years before Lewiston would become home to a modern airport, the interest in aviation itself didn't fade. In fact, there would be several airports that would come and go through the years. The October 14, 1929 edition of the Spokane Daily Chronicle, told a story about local aviation history at one of the early airports. The story today, is almost difficult to believe. According to the Chronicle, a 14 year old Joe Lamarche, of Clarkston, aided by a small pocket flashlight "successfully directed the first night landing of a plane at the Lewiston-Clarkston airport Monday night. The navy flyers, Ensign W. R. Jones and Ensign John Blum, from the Seattle naval air base made a perfect three point landing following the light from the instrument in the boy's hands."

Perhaps it is stretching things a bit to claim that Joe Lamarche was the first air traffic controller in the Valley. On the other hand, his simple "instrument" looks the forerunner of the marshaling wands in use today at airports throughout the world. And the story is true, told by someone who lived in that time.

The Lewiston-Clarkston Airport is no longer there. But it is part of the history of the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport. That history follows in these pages, much of it told in the words of people who were actually a part of making the dream a reality. It was not just a dream of a home for airplanes, it was a dream of a place where transportation, business, commerce, and even fun could mesh. That dream is now reality!
The 1930s

"Lewiston Municipal Airport"

The first real airport in Lewiston was, for all intents and purposes, an effort of the Chamber of Commerce. It was 1932. President Hoover had been soundly defeated in his bid for reelection and all three of Lewiston's banks had closed their doors in a depression. Then the Chamber of Commerce appointed a committee of three people to select and arrange for the "lease of an airport." The site chosen was a fifty-acre field adjoining the Lewiston Orchards on the west, about three miles south of what was then "the" business district. It was immediately west of what is now the thirty two hundred block of 4th Street.

A five-year lease with an option to apply the rental on the purchase price was negotiated with the owner. All that was on the land was a wheat crop and it was necessary to buy part of the wheat to provide space for the runways. The State of Idaho appropriated $2,500 for developing the field and the plan was to surface the runways with crushed rock by early fall, 1932. By late 1932, negotiations were under way to turn the "port" over to the American Legion. The Legion expected to build a hangar and sublease the field so that it could pay its own way for operations and maintenance. So, the Lewiston City Engineering department made a topographical survey and staked two runways. The first runway was 2,200 feet long and 300 feet wide and the other 1,500 feet long and 300 feet wide.

What happened to the American Legion's role in airport development is no longer known. But the Chamber's role continued in many ways. In 1933, the Engineering Department prepared airport hangar plans and specifications for the Chamber of Commerce. Bids were received and "the hangar" was built.

As Lewiston's airport grew, so did interest in it and aviation. The local government's interest can almost be felt in the words chosen by the City Engineer for his annual report from 1934:

To the uninformed person, an airport merely means an added luxury to the overburdened taxpayer. But to the few who know and have watched and studied the development of aviation, a realization of its importance as an asset to the community is fully realized. The Lewiston Airport was originally sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce back in 1931...The ground is fairly level, sloping somewhat to the northwest.

When he wrote the phrases, the City Engineer had not been
charged with "responsibility" for the airport. Eventually, he would. In the mean time, he simply assisted others. Their love of airports and aviation began rubbing off on him.

Original Location of "Lewiston Municipal Airport" (From Lewiston City Engineer's Annual Report, 1932)
The early 1930s was the beginning of Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal" era. The new President used direct funding of projects to try to "jump start" an economy that had fallen into depression. Airports were among the projects eligible for development under the "New Deal." Many areas in Idaho, including Lewiston, had benefited from such construction projects. To continue development of its airport, the City of Lewiston took over the airport lease from the Chamber of Commerce on January 15, 1934. Assumption of the lease was intended to allow the community to apply for "New Deal" airport development funds. But along with the lease, came a debt of $584 on the "new hangar" which had originally cost $1,500. State airport funds, however paid off that debt, giving the City a "clean slate" to all airport improvements until that time.

Current Photo Original Airport Hangar
The building now belongs to Gale Wilson
(Courtesy of Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport)

The first manager of this airport was one whose name would later become synonymous with pioneering commercial aviation in the State of Idaho. His name was Fred Zimmerly. In his capacity as airport manager, he worked under the City Engineering Department. Managing the airport was a "moonlighting" job, his full-time employment kept him busy. Fred Zimmerly was starting a business he
called "Zimmerly Flying Service." Some of the airplanes he was flying in and out of the municipal airport included a Travelair, a "Student Prince," and a Zenith Z-6-B. The Zenith was six passenger aircraft, considered in its day to be one of the largest, most powerful private airplanes of the Northwest. During the first year of operation, 750 people flew into and out of the Valley through this "primitive" municipal airport.

By the time 1935 came around, the "Zimmerly Brothers" were operating the field and had developed a "nice flying business," doubling operations over the previous year. The Zimmerlys' business included flight training and transporting passengers any time to any place having a landing field ("short passenger hops"). It was no secret that they were making plans to operate a scheduled airline. Their idea at the close of the year called for scheduled passenger service from Lewiston to Grangeville to Elk City, and then return...on a daily basis! Zimmerly made improvements to the airport too during the year. They included the addition of "electric lights in the hangar, a concrete warmup block, runway markers, a parking rail, and an underground electric gasoline pump!"

As the Lewiston City Engineer helped out with these minor enhancements, he kept his eyes open. And he honestly started to love aviation. For him, it translated into something a little different than just learning to fly. He began to see the commercial value of a first class modern airport and what it could mean for a community and region. The Engineer’s name was William P. Hughes. Until 1936, he'd kept a healthy skepticism, remaining behind-the-scenes in airport development. But his writings from the era suggest no small amount of time spent looking for ways and funds to provide development. In 1936, he wrote:

With new airports, partially financed by Federal funds, under construction all over the country, there has been considerable speculation as to why Lewiston has not received a share as it has all other government money.

This department [City Engineer's Department] made a thorough investigation of the possibilities of development under the Federal program and found it to be impractical for the following reasons. First, the present field would have to be abandoned and a 200-acre tract adjoining on the south purchased at a cost of fifteen to twenty thousand dollars; secondly, no definite assurance was given that the government would participate even if the property was negotiated for; third, a considerable sum would be required in
AIRPORT MAP

of

IDAHO

SHOWING AIRPORTS AND
LANDING FIELDS

1939

Published for Free Distribution by the
Department of Public Works
AERONAUTICS DIVISION
BOISE, IDAHO

AIR TRAFFIC RULES

LAWFULNESS OF FLIGHT. Flight in aircraft over the
lands and waters of this State is lawful, unless at such a
low altitude as to interfere with the then existing use to
which the land or water, or the space over the land or
water, is put by the owner, or unless so conducted as to be
terminally dangerous to persons or property injuriously
on the land or water beneath. The landing of an aircraft on
the lands or waters of another, without his consent, is
unlawful except in the case of a forced landing. For dam-
ages caused by a forced landing, however, the owner or
lessee of the aircraft and/or the owner shall be liable, as
provided in Section 5.

FEDERAL LAW FOLLOWED. It is hereby declared that
the policy, principles and practices established by the
United States Air Commerce Act of 1926, and all existing
amendments thereto, are hereby adopted and extended
and made applicable to cover all air traffic in this State;
so far as not covered by Federal Law at any time.

Application of the Law. "In order to protect and pre-
vent undue burdens upon interstate and foreign air com-
merce the air-traffic rules are to apply whether the aircraft
is engaged in commerce or non-commercial or in foreign,
interstate, or intrastate navigation in the United States, and
whether or not the aircraft is registered or is navigating
in a civil airway." (Statement of managers accompanying
conference report, 1939.)

1939 Idaho Airport Map Depicting Layout of the Lewiston Airport
(Courtesy of Stan Hoepfer)
cooperation with government money for materials, equipment, and supervision. A bond issue is the only way the city could raise the necessary money for cooperation, and it was felt that the public was not sufficiently air-minded to support such a bond issue at the polls. Therefore, this department could not consistently recommend the proposal to the Mayor and Council.

His words almost sounded defensive. As though he or the Council had been receiving some not-so-gentle pressure from "air-minded" citizens. He knew, from an engineering standpoint, that the existing airport location, off from what is now 4th Street, was just not adequate for a "real airport." As his insight into the benefits of aviation grew, so did his frustrations. By the middle of 1937, his report read:

Probably no city in the Northwest occupies a more enviable and important position, from the benefits that could be derived from airport development, than Lewiston. Apparently suffering from internal decay, we turn our backs to the future and let the sun of opportunity sink in dismay at our feet. We have let the parade of alphabets pass by our threshold, laden with gold for airport development, but public indifference to this very important phase of our development has allowed the opportunity to pass into the night. To avail ourselves of Federal money for airports, it is necessary to acquire ownership of the land. Our land, being leased, we have been unable to avail ourselves of Federal funds for this much needed purpose. It is well to bear in mind that the towns and cities of the future will be on airways. Therefore, it behooves the people of Lewiston to become more "air-minded" before much development can be expected along this line, for which the Government in the past few years has spent millions of dollars.

William Hughes now had a vision. The vision saw his home as a gateway to the rest of the Nation, united through air transportation. He had done his own research on the role of weather in aviation and the routes of the airlines. And, he knew that the communities' position was ideal. It had very little fog or snow, probably less of the latter than any other "port" in the state.

We are on a direct air route between Missoula and Portland, and between Spokane and Boise. Had a port with sufficient rating been constructed, we could be on major airways with air mail and transportation facilities at our service. The United Air Lines have knocked at our door, but without response, and until the people waken to what this means, we will stumble on and do the best we can with our present inadequate facilities.
As Hughes looked at the needs and the facilities, he came to a realistic conclusion. Although the City had the option to purchase the existing airport land when the lease expired in 1938, it would simply "not be good business to purchase." Still, the Zimmerly brothers continued their "nice flying business," and activity continued to grow for them. Each year, they added a little to their equipment, logged a few more miles, sold a few more gallons of fuel, and a graduated a few more successful pilots.

The Zimmerlys eventually subleased the Lewiston Municipal Airport. That kept it open until about 1939. Meanwhile, a small airport opened in Clarkston, not that far from the Clearwater River. Eventually the Lewiston facility closed. All that remains today of the municipal airport is the former hangar, some wheat crop, clumps of weeds, and a few memories. Horses graze where Zimmerly's planes touched down. But the dream didn't die there.

Hughes reported that "...the United Air Lines are anxious to make Lewiston a stop if we had the facilities, but until that time, the large commercial lines will pass Lewiston up like ships that pass in the night and Lewiston will remain the largest and most important city in Idaho without airport advantages." By the time Lewiston Municipal Airport closed, the Zimmerlys' business had grown from 54 trips per year to 208. The number of passengers flown grew to 4,150. Eighteen thousand pounds of air cargo had increased to over 50,000 pounds. And while Hughes' dream focused on "United Air Lines," the key player in local airline history was to be none other than Bert Zimmerly himself.

In 1939, there were many things on the minds of the people of the Lewiston-Clarkston Valley. War was undoubtedly one of them, for this was the eve of World War Two. Hitler had already divided portions of Europe with his Russian ally, and many felt it was only a matter of time before the United States was directly involved. But airport planning continued. Executing the plan would have to wait until the right opportunity...one that had yet to present itself. Even while the Third Reich's troops were marching into eastern Europe, the City Planning Commission continued to look at the dream of its own airport.
1940 - 1943

Dreams and Challenges

The world was at war, even though the United States wasn't directly involved. But for national leaders, the events in Europe and Asia were cause for increasing alarm. Only as disaster approached France and Britain did American sentiment allow President Roosevelt to act more strongly. His action boosted the war readiness industry and ironically boded well for the establishment of a Lewiston Airport. In early 1940, Roosevelt, stressing the need for hemispheric defense, convinced the Congress to appropriate funds for the construction of 50,000 aircraft annually.

Then, rumors from Washington, D.C. suggested that Congress was considering a new bill for defense and economic development purposes. This bill would supposedly provide large sums of money to local communities for airport development. The rumors alone were enough to revive the 10-year old dream of a modern airport for the community. Nez Perce County, the City of Lewiston, and the Chamber of Commerce bonded. Each began new efforts working toward this "dream", encouraging City Engineer Hughes to press on. He hardly needed more than an approving nod. Preliminary survey work was done on land south of the City in the Lewiston Orchards. He had to decide if an area could be found that would meet the Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) standard airport requirements. The CAA, forerunner to today's Federal Aviation Administration was also encouraging the community. Their officials cooperated, making sure the City Engineer was equipped with the latest airport engineering standards. Talks between the City and County continued, finally producing a tentative agreement. If the bill before Congress, providing 80% funding for airport development passed, they would find the local matching funds. By the end of June 1940, William Hughes produced site maps for the CAA engineer, complete with tentative locations of landing strips.

With the war looming ever closer, some people suggested that the U.S. Army might be interested in having an Air Corps base in Lewiston. Were that to be the case, the Army might be interested in helping construct the airport. However, the initial idea continued to be that of a civilian airport installation.

In spite of the CAA's initial encouragement, their reception of Hughes' maps was only slightly more than lukewarm. The survey work done on the Orchards location showed that a great deal of earthwork would be necessary to provide the required grades for runways. Nonetheless, the CAA Engineer, Paul Morris promised that he would visit Lewiston that year to actually look at the site
and its potential as a future airport.

By mid July 1940, interest in the development of an airport in Lewiston was growing. Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA) was offering communities projects...projects that might have National Defense potential. Out of a laundry list of eligible projects, the one that appealed most was an airport. Jumping on the band wagon of Federal money "falling" from the sky could have been all too easy. Instead, William Hughes offered his community cautious optimism. In a letter to the City Council, he discussed his meeting with the CAA engineer and his correspondence with other agencies. He explained that because of topography, the "ideal site" would require a considerable outlay of money. It was something that needed thorough study from all angles before any definite step was taken. Furthermore, when it came to WPA airport projects, "support of the CAA is essential," he repeated, "before a commitment from the WPA can be expected." The Village of Clarkston had already invested $50,000 building and developing an airport. Paul Morris, Hughes counterpart at the CAA, would have to reach the conclusion that the Clarkston airport had limited potential before additional Federal airport funds would be spent in the Valley.

The Lewiston Chamber of Commerce, had already proven its interest in aviation. It began lobbying efforts, submitting letters to many agencies including the State Administrator of the WPA. The Chamber's position consistently advocated that Lewiston had excellent Army Air Corps potential. The Chamber also encouraged the City Engineer to boost his lobbying efforts through the Civil Aeronautics Administration. But on October 1, 1940, the Lewiston Morning Tribune, reported that 200 cities in the Northwestern United States were on a tentative list of communities to receive airport funds. All were supposedly needed as part of a Defense Plan. Lewiston was not listed; Clarkston was.

Not yet discouraged, Mr. Hughes sent a telegram to Colonel Donald H. Connelly, the Administrator of the CAA in Washington, D.C., asking how the City of Lewiston might be placed on this list. Similar telegrams were quickly fired off to congressional representatives. Congressman Compton White assured the Council that Lewiston's application would be considered with the rest. That show of support was probably little consolation.

The Senate canceled the airport development fund anyway.

Still, the news in the October 1st Tribune article must have
incensed a vocal part of the community. In a report to the Council, City Engineer Hughes responded:

It is generally conceded by all concerned that the Clarkston port can never have a first class rating, but it has been approved for CAA training and is suitable for emergency purposes and has possibilities as a stop for a feeder line connecting one of the main air routes.

Hughes explained that he and Homer Lipps, the Chamber of Commerce Airport Committee Chairperson, had held several conferences with the CAA airport authorities and WPA officials. He then asked for everyone's patience, reemphasized the process, and suggested no one "be sidetracked" in their pursuit of the ideal airport.

By this time, the "Zimmerly Brothers" had relocated to the Clarkston Airport, constructing a hangar of their own. Their dream of building a scheduled airline was also being frustrated by the lack of a first class airport, so it is likely they too had intensified their lobbying efforts toward that goal. Mr. M.J. Crabb, Chair of the Airport Committee of the Asotin County Treasurer's Office wrote to the CAA requesting assistance in developing the Clarkston Airport. The CAA response must have disheartened the Zimmerlys. But it offered a glimmer of hope for optimists like Hughes. Clarkston's Airport, the CAA explained, was severely limited. "Further development warrants only limited additional investment," explained CAA's Paul Morris, "until an adequate all-way field could be available to replace it." The Clarkston Airport, it seems, was restricted to daylight and fair weather operations. Adding "insult to injury," overhead powerlines off the departure end of a runway were a safety hazard. And the CAA was not willing to waiver. In the same letter though, the CAA engineer encouraged the City of Lewiston to proceed with land acquisition. He suggested finding a site that would be for an airport when funds became available.

By the time early 1941 rolled around, the Northwest was buzzing with news of the War in Europe. After Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act intending to make America the "Arsenal of Democracy," industry began trying out new technology. Innovations in aviation and airports as defense developments added to the ironic excitement. A spring edition of The Sunday Oregonian highlighted Army and Navy airport installations in Washington and Oregon...Seattle, Tacoma, Pendleton, Spokane, Snohomish County. The list must have seemed endless. The Idaho Statesman reported on the millions that were being invested in Boise Air Terminal to prepare for Air Corps Training. Some Valley residents may have almost given up hope. Some were motivated by a desire to see the region contribute to the war's air effort. Others saw an opportunity and felt the valley was being left behind. If Bill Hughes felt any sense of despair, it didn't show. He and a few
others continued the quiet efforts to make sure that all possible preparations were made for the day when funds would be available.

Then, early in 1941, hope was revived when the Civil Aeronautics Administration wrote to the Mayor and Council. The Federal government was finally willing to take a positive step. "If asked", the letter said, "The CAA will respond favorably to a proposal to construct an air field next to the City." The site, long since selected and even initially surveyed by Hughes was immediately west of the Lewiston Orchards and directly south of the western part of the city, about three miles from the city center.

This was the signal the community had been waiting for. The Lewiston Mayor and Council took immediate steps to option the land. More engineering surveys were started early in February. First, the boundary survey was made. Then elevations were taken and maps prepared showing contours platted on 2-foot internals.

Aerial Photo of Proposed Airport Location
(From the Lewiston City Engineer's Report, 1941)

Runways were tentatively located and other necessary data gathered. The package was presented to and, as expected, approved by the CAA. Hughes then prepared a tentative construction estimate
and the proposal was submitted to the Works Progress Administration. CAA engineers made several minor changes to comply with new regulations. But by Mid-June, most of the preliminary field work had been completed and the plans were progressing more rapidly than ever. Even the funding picture looked rosier than before. Airports approved by the Army as having value for national defense could now be constructed by the WPA with up to 90% Federal funds.

Suddenly, the decade long dream of a new, first class airport for the region was moving rapidly. All the pieces were in place. On January 27, 1942, after a year of negotiating with officials of the Army, the Civil Aeronautics Administration, the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and countless other bureaucrats, a historical telegram was received at City Hall.
WASHINGTON, D.C.                      JAN. 27, 1942

WM. P. HUGHES
CITY ENGINEER

PRESIDENTIAL APPROVAL GIVEN THIS MORNING TO LEWISTON
AIRPORT PROJECT [STOP] SPONSOR FUND $134,523 [STOP]
FEDERAL CONTRIBUTION $420,304 [STOP] TOTAL $554,827
[STOP] CONGRATULATIONS [STOP]

COMPTON I. WHITE, M.C.

City Engineer Hughes should have been elated. He was on the verge of accomplishing something great. But if his emotions showed, it didn't slow him down. Perhaps he realized that his work was only just beginning.

The CAA didn't provide final approval of the plans until March 5th. Then, actual physical work began. WPA Superintendent William Howard arrived on the scene of the project. A crew of 25 men started work, clearing the premises of 300 trees. Several buildings needed to be removed and fences had to be built on property lines.

Nez Perce County, fully supporting the project, moved on the scene with three large tractors (two with bulldozer attachments) and a large grader. By March 30th, three 12 yard dump trucks were working in three shifts and within a month, three more were moving earth. Installation of 15,000 feet of drainage pipe began. Then a one and a half yard shovel started with five dump trucks on the long haul of what was initially designated as "runway A."

By the end of June 1942 almost 45 per cent of the grading was complete, 50 percent of the drain pipe was laid, and 21 out of 62 manholes were in place. Hughes was hoping to start paving by the first of September so that the project could be finished by fall. Maybe that was Hughes' usual optimism. Nonetheless, he assigned assistant City Engineer, R. B. Anderson to work full time on the airport project along with a city crew of two men.
Locally and nationally, there were many WPA and defense related construction projects going on. Competition for labor and equipment resources made construction progress on the airport slower than Hughes would have liked. Lack of heavy equipment was frequently the reason. In spite of the shortages, however, the Lewiston airport project soon became a vast plain of activity as the trucks roared through dust clouds and power shovels bit into ridges of rock and gravel.

Bulldozers crunched forward, crews dug ditches, leveling rough spots, and engineers surveyed new stake lines. From the air, the site started to look like a giant "V". Additional money became available bringing in bids for additional construction resources, adding to what was already on the site. But the project still moved slowly. Relyea and Plastino Construction Company of Boise was awarded the contract for the pavement. They set up a rock crusher on the north side of the Orchards, ready to haul the gravel that would be needed for the base of the runways. The oil was ordered and expected to arrive any time. One hundred and seven men were now working on the airport project. WPA crews were straining, putting in drain pipe through rock that had to be blasted out of the way. Asked when the project would be done, Hughes wouldn't publicly display his usual optimism, simply responding, "It will be done when it's time."

Early in the year, Hughes took his first look at the project from the air. He must have been proud, as he soared just above the future airport. Approaching from the Snake River side, the airport was indeed a giant "V", its apex bustling with shovels, trucks and men at work. Against the dull earth of the Orchards district, it stood out clearly. The two upper hands of the "V" spread out to the breaks---the Swallows Nest on the western side of the River almost directly across from the lower and southernmost hand. Already though, costs were increasing beyond the original engineering estimate. The WPA, with some help again from Congressman White secured additional funding. The newest estimate for completion of the project was now up to almost $800,000. Still, work went on.

With all the hurdles the Community had overcome in its quest for an airport, a new one could have signaled a jinxed project. On February 1, 1942, President Roosevelt, noting that unemployment had dramatically decreased, ordered all WPA projects liquidated! Construction on the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport ground to a screeching halt with almost 80 percent of the work complete. Hughes immediately opened negotiations with CAA requesting funds to complete the airport. The CAA regional office approved his request and sent it on to Washington, D.C. Even with the Region's approval, the request needed an ally in the Capital if it were to get the attention of the bureaucracy.

There had been no apparent interest in the project by the War Department as an Army Airfield. Consequently, Hughes turned to the Department of the Navy. Weather information and records were gathered depicting an almost ideal air training climate. They were
packaged up by the City Engineering Department and sent to the Navy. This time, partly due to the unusually bad flying weather throughout the northwest in the winter of 1941 and 1942, the Navy suddenly showed an interest. On March 12, a group of high ranking naval officers headed by Admiral Wagner, flew into town and spent most of the day with Hughes. Together, they inspected the unfinished airport. Other members of the Navy team began to inventory other facilities that might be needed should the Navy want to make use of the facility. While it doesn't appear to have been widely understood at the time, it was understood that the Navy was looking at the Lewiston location as a potential bombing training site!

As a result of the visit, the Navy alluded to the possible use of the airport (should it be completed) in their training program. The Navy not only asked the CAA to help finish the airport, they also asked the CAA to extend two runways to 5,000 feet in length. Airport Approval Board in the Nation's capital accepted the Navy's request and ordered additional surveys to cover the expansion.

Hopes in the Valley soared. With this kind of interest, some even began to believe that the airport would even be usable by the winter of 1943. With contractors standing by, delayed by the WPA liquidation, the CAA and Navy worked out the arrangements to complete the project. A telegram on March 3 informed Hughes that work on the project would begin again...immediately! Mayor McGregor expressed his own pleasure at the news. Words indicate he too had misunderstood the Navy's support for the project. Regardless, the Navy's moral support was welcome. But their lukewarm approach later would come as a minor surprise.

"Of course the Navy reconnaissance parties have looked over the project three times within three weeks," the Mayor said. "With the Lewiston area declared under jurisdiction of the navy for training operations, completion of the airport will be followed by naval operations here. It is not only the fact that this airport may be useful during war times that is important, but as a postwar benefit for transportation of passengers, mail, and freight it is..."
the greatest advancement the community has had in a long time."

The news was high point. The low point hit when Hughes found the bureaucracy couldn't react as quickly as he wanted. The transition from one bureaucracy to another, from a WPA project to a CAA project with Navy moral support was not smooth. Bids had to be advertised all over again. Finally, on August 11, 1943, bids were opened. The low bidder was Northwestern Engineering Company of Rapid City, South Dakota at a cost of $447,200. The contract for the airport lighting was to be advertised later.

Saturday, September 11, 1943, the local rail yards saw a flurry of activity. Seven railroad flatbed cars of heavy equipment rolled in from Denver, Colorado. The heavy equipment, included three 23 yard carryalls, two 12 yard carryalls, conveyors, large caterpillars and bulldozers. Three additional flatbed railroad cars followed within several days, all bound for the Lewiston Airport project. Once again, the dust began to roll and the thunder of earth moving equipment was heard coming from the airport site as 100 locally hired men strove to reach a targeted December completion date.

However, by November 1943, mired rain, dampness diminished the prospects a winter opening. The contractor simply could not continue. Paving would have to wait
until spring. Still, the weather didn't totally dampen the excitement of a project of this magnitude. Accompanied by Hughes, Governor C.A. Bottolfsen made an inspection of the airport in mid-December.

"Completion of the airport will bring the southern and northern parts of the State into closer communications," he said. "In the establishment of auxiliary air service as feeders to main lines," Governor Bottolfsen went on to say, "The pioneers of aviation should be given preference and assistance in continuing in the business they established under adverse conditions."

So as 1943 drew to a close, Hughes could almost see the airport as a reality. Few major problems remained to be solved. As he looked to the future, in the post war world, his writings again reflected on the prospect of commerce and business operations. He even quoted the President of United Airlines in his annual report to the Council:

"A city without an airport will, in the future be like a seaboard town without a harbor. This applies not only to the potential service of air transport companies, but to private flying of the future as well. The extent of private flying, will be influenced to a great extent by airport facilities throughout the country. In my opinion, every alert city should have a municipally owned airport."

In Hughes mind, once the airport was open, commercial development would no longer be a matter of "if", but "when".
As 1944 rolled in, the Lewiston-Clarkston valley was feeling the war. Potlatch employees were remembering their former co-workers by shipping Christmas packages overseas. Recycling was essential and Lewistonians were collecting waste paper. The paper was used to make protective bands for five hundred pound bombs. Other drives collected clothing for war victims in Europe and Western Asia. The Nation was, in 1944 committed without doubt, to a world war. In fact, American forces were already marching up through Italy before the first month passed. To many people, total victory was not yet a sure thing. That mind set may explain the assumption that the airport would eventually become a full-fledged defense installation.

But even before work crews could gear up for the final construction phase, it appeared that the Navy's interest in the Lewiston Airport was waning. The reasons today are not clear. According to Hughes writings, the Navy Department reached the conclusion that the surrounding terrain was too valuable for bombing operations. Later, the Navy would deny having used this reason. However, it did appear obvious by early 1944, that the Navy would not be taking over the site upon completion unless world events totally shifted. Community leaders did appreciate the Navy's moral support in completing the airport, even without direct monetary investment. There would be a little more "courting" of the Navy. But for the most part, the community would now limit its interest in the Navy to simple shows of appreciation.

Work on the airport had slowed to a snail's pace as uncooperative weather kept contractors from putting the finishing touches on the aviation facility. Paving operations needed to start. The electrical contract had been delayed pending the War Production Board's release of what was then considered essential war materials. Construction rubble had to be cleaned up and an access road built to bring people to the front door of the airport.

William Hughes, with his usual clairvoyance, now began mapping out a postwar airport development plan focusing on the role "his airport" would play in the new world. With the consent of Mayor Clements, in May 1944, Hughes briefed the Council on the report he was preparing for a hearing in Washington, D.C. before the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB). He armed himself with graphs, figures, and data on travel, telephone service, telegraph service, postal receipts, movement of mail, traffic, industries, and even bank deposits. Hughes was to speak on behalf of the region, petitioning
for CAB approval of air service to the community...airlines! And that wasn't all. He was also preparing a master plan that would contain layouts of the airport with locations and plans for a true airport administration or terminal building, hangar areas, access roads, lighting systems, and even navigational aids. At the same time, the frame work of a joint City/County airport board was in the making. With a resolution from the City Council and the County Board of Commissioners, this Board would provide the advice and vision needed to steer the airport in the post war world.

AIRPORT UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Left to right—Dale Kenaston, project manager Northwestern Engineering; Wm. P. Hughes city engineer, City of Lewis; Oliver J. Bandelma, resident engineer Civil Aeronautic Authority, inspect port at beginning of paving operations.

As 200,000 allied assault troops hit the beaches of Normandy in early June 1944, Hughes could plainly see that airport paving was almost done. Runways and taxiways were complete. Contractors finished a 30,000 square foot aircraft loading apron next to the administration area. A temporary administration building was placed nearby. The building was originally located on a parcel of land acquired by the City and County for the airport. It had once been the Zintek house. With four rooms and a bath, it could now house a caretaker for the airport. The Zintek house would serve as the "administration building until replaced by another Hughes' dream. He'd someday have a genuine airport administration building. Then, the old house could be relocated again becoming somebody's home once more.
The fresh paint and landscaping hide the former use of the Zintek House
(Photograph Courtesy of Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport)

As "opening day" of the airport neared, the owners began setting up the airport board. The City of Lewiston named Council Member Henry Crozier to represent it on the joint airport commission. On June 12, the Nez Perce County Board of Commissioners appointed its chairperson, Wayne S. Talbott, as its delegate. Under the guidance given by the two governing bodies, Henry Crozier and Wayne Talbott met, electing Mr. R. McGregor, a "civilian member," as chair of the new airport advisory board. In its first action, the board gave the airport a name. Voting unanimously, it called the new aviation facility "The Lewiston, Idaho Airport." During the same meeting, the Board recommended

"The City and County, along with the Lewiston Orchards Highway District enter into an agreement with the Northwestern Engineering Company to grade, gravel, and oil approximately 600 feet of highway constituting the approach to the administration building of the airport, the three taxing units so named each to pay one-third of the cost with the exception of the highway district which is to pay not to exceed $200."

This "highway" replaced the existing, 10-foot wide unpaved access road. Stretching from the airport administration area to Fifth Street, the paving would increase the width to 22 feet, and provide a solid, dust-free road. With this recommendation approved, the first airport action by the City and County, independent of the Federal Government had been taken.
July 13th marked the final milestone in opening the airport. Along with representatives of the contractors and the Civil Aeronautics Administration, William Hughes made the final inspection of the new airport.

"It's a first class job," Hughes stated for the media. And it was. Needless to say, the Civil Aeronautics Administration inspector also approved of the product.

July 29, 1944, was set as the official dedication day of the airport. While the actual location and appearance of the dedication ceremony have been lost to time, there was much symbolism. Hughes worked in the background and the tone of the dedication was to reward and recognize those who had helped make the day possible. The Senior and Junior Chambers of Commerce were asked to make the arrangements and they sent engraved invitations to dignitaries from Seattle to Washington, D.C. Those attending did symbolize all who played a role in the result.

Commander John J. Bergen, Chief Staff Officer of the Naval Air Center in Seattle and Commander B.B. Smith of the Naval Air Station in Pasco represented the Navy. Paul Morris, the Regional Manager of the Civil Aeronautics Administration in Seattle also came. Congressman Compton I. White, who had sent the original congratulatory telegram was there. The dust had settled over the airport. The huge earth moving machines that had carved out an airfield where there had been solid rock ridges were no longer in sight. Flags fluttered in the warm Ormonds breeze, bunting adorned the podium. "Numerous prominent officials and citizens witnessed the colorful dedication," said Hughes later as he recalled the event. Perhaps his mind was drift off, trying to picture the future of his dream. But his consciousness returned when the low rumble of engines echoing through the Snake River Canyon turned into the roar of Navy planes flown in from the Pasco Naval Air Station.

Now that the new Airport Board was formed, one that shared his vision, Hughes tried to take more of a technical role in airport development. Still, it was his words that provided the vision for those charged with making sure that what the ceremony dedicated was only a start. "Civilization," He explained, "has always advanced hand in hand with the development of transportation. American city governments, therefore, have always been concerned with the problem
of improving transportation facilities. Just as boats require docks and harbors, just as trains require roads of steel, just as motor cars need streets and highways, aircraft must have airports."

The Zimmerly brothers, who had long since moved their operation to the Clarkston Airport, were now in the "scheduled passenger service" business. The ribbon had not even been cut on the new Lewiston airport before the Zimmerlys were making it stop on their intrastate route. While initial service was being flown with a Cessna and a Travelaire, it wouldn't be long before Zimmerly acquired the first of several "modern passenger airliners"...the Boeing 247D. Scheduled passenger service was now a reality. The airport needed some "amenities". One of the earliest, post-dedication improvements to the airport happened in 1944. It was the addition of four hundred feet of barbed wire fence. Located along the edge of the aircraft loading ramp, the fence served as a safety measure, keeping people away from the airplanes' spinning propellers. Decades later, the Federal Aviation Administration regulations would require airports to install many miles of such fencing around the perimeter for safety and even security concerns.

But to Stan Hoepler, one of the original Zimmerly airline pilots, it was simply a "pain".

"One of my jobs", recalled Mr. Hoepler many years later, "Was that early in the morning, I would ferry the airplane from the hangar at the Clarkston Airport to the Lewiston Airport. When it came time to load the airplane, I had to spread the barbed wire so that passengers didn't tear their clothing climbing through the fence"!

For Wayne Hughes, things must have seemed pretty well in hand. He continued to shift his efforts toward future facilities. Hughes began to researching issues such as how to handle airplane hangar development, user fees, fuel concessions, and post-war building. He surveyed other airports, learning how they had dealt with the same questions. Simultaneously, Lewiston Mayor Verner R. Clements urged the Airport Commission to contract with an experienced airport consultant to begin drawing up an airport master plan. The General Engineering Company of Seattle, came highly recommended for the job of "developing suggested locations for the future administration building and hangars complete with landscaping."

And questions were asked. Questions like, "Who... government or private industry... should provide "what" at the airport. Most airports in the Northwest were simply leasing land, allowing
private development to take place under the control of the airport owner. Hughes favored that approach. He explained, "After airline service is established, then the policy of building has to be established, which will probably call for one large hangar, with office attached, and an administration building to be planned for at a later date when development is farther advanced."

But City officials were still, in April 1945, under a slight illusion that the Navy would inevitably be showing up at the airport. Nazi Germany was only a month away from total surrender and the Japanese were in retreat throughout the Pacific. The war was all but over. Now, the Navy's interest in the airport needed to be "nailed down, once and for all". This was necessary to determine the direction the community should take with post war airport development. Having had no recent communications with the Navy, the City again turned to Congressman White. He confronted the Department of the Navy, and an almost terse response came back to the Congressman from the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations in April of 1945.

No Navy funds have been spent on the Lewiston airport but the field was developed by the Civil Aeronautics Administration at the request of the Navy. As Admiral McCain advised you in his letter of April 26, 1944, it was planned originally to utilize the field for the training of carrier squadrons operating from the Seattle area. Subsequently a gunner range immediately south of Pasco, Washington, became available and, because of a readjustment in the primary flight training program, the completely equipped primary flight training base at Pasco became available and was transferred to the Fleet for the use originally contemplated for Lewiston.

The ...Navy has no immediate plans for its use and, until such time as the Navy should request a lease, there would be no objection to any other type of activity at the airport.

W. Miller
Captain, USN

Whether or not this "final word" disappointed the community and Hughes is no longer known. But, the response should have answered "once and for all" the question of the Navy's intent. It should have released the leaders to do whatever they could to continue to develop the airport commercially. So they pressed on.

When it came to commercial hangar development, the newly formed airport board agreed with Hughes. This was a function best left to private firms, although there was, for a while, a sentiment that those firms may need a boost. The airport had no hangars. Many other airports, developed with firm defense commitments had an abundance of aircraft storage facilities. Hughes began to feel this placed the Lewiston airport at a comparative disadvantage.
With that in mind, he added hangar development to his communications with the CAA:

In discussing this with Bert Zimmerly, who may use the port, he suggested a hangar of the [such] size, stating it would take care of at least three DC-3s and provide adequate room for offices and shop. This would just be a starter, however. I am anxious to get some kind of a design on this, and costs.

On July 12, 1945, Hughes reported to the airport owners. The General Engineering Company of Seattle had been retained to draw up some initial airport plans showing areas for hangars and the administration building. The hangars and administration building were necessary for airline service growth. But, Hughes was in for another disappointment. United Airlines had petitioned the Civil Aeronautics Board to provide scheduled service to the Valley. The petition was denied. The result, was that Zimmerly Airlines, by default, became the most important air business in the valley. The opportunity would be placed before Zimmerly to grow, in the absence of any other choice.

These were intellectually taxing activities. It might be easy to forget that there was development happening at the new "sky-port". No one seems to know when it was actually installed, but on March 30, 1945, the Civil Aeronautics Administration sent a "Tetrahedron" to Lewiston. It was shipped by rail from Ogden, Utah, and this large, metal, three-dimensional triangular wind direction indicator became the first meteorological instrument for the new airport. It was installed next to and south of runway 11-29 and provided a very visible sign of the wind direction near the runway environment.
The "Tetrahedron" today. During the 1970s, the FAA proposed removing it. A flood of protest letters from local pilots changed the FAA's position.

(Photo Courtesy of Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport)

So as 1945 drew to a close, not all was disappointment. The Tetrahedron was far from being a technological marvel. But it was a start. The more intensive technology would have to wait. After all, it had only been since September that the single bomber had, in another demonstration of aviation technology, dropped the famous explosive on Hiroshima causing the surrender of Japan and the end to the costliest war in American history. Lewiston was ready for peace, ready for reuniting its families, ready to grow.
1946 - 1952

Technology and Government

For the time being, the horrors of war were over. Harry Truman, making the transition to peacetime president, was not exactly in the peak of popularity. His methods of dealing with several crippling strikes and his retention of wartime price controls turned both organized labor and business against him. Still, the nation entered a period of relative prosperity, and as 1946 arrived so did change for the Valley. Plans were already afoot for Snake River flood control. Crops were good that year too, easing food shortages that had been quite serious. Business seemed to surge forward in Lewiston as Potlatch Forests Incorporated unveiled plans for a twelve million-dollar pulp and paper mill.

As "normalcy" returned, the nation, and of course the region, found itself within reach of some technological progress that the war effort had produced. So, the Airport Board, hooked to the driver of Hughes, pressed to make use of that technology. War essential supplies and assets were being released. The wish list now seemed only arms length away.

Even by the measurements of 1946, the Lewiston Airport was quite an engineering feat. The relocation of hundreds of thousands of cubic yards of rock and earth had produced some of the finest runways around. They were able to handle virtually any aircraft used in the civilian aviation industry. Notwithstanding these assets, the goal of day or night, all-weather flight required technology. The goal of having an aviation gateway to and from the region required a modern administration building. Such were the lofty goals of the people steering the airport as the Community entered the postwar era.

The technology to take advantage of the airport's excellent flying weather was already available. At the top of the needs list was lighting. A lighting system had been included in the WPA work program, but was deleted when Roosevelt liquidated Works Progress
Administration projects. By then, lighting systems were designated as a war essential supply. So the lights had not been included when the CAA agreed to complete the project. Not only were runway lights necessary, but obstruction lights and a rotating beacon were needed too. For adverse weather conditions, some form of navigational equipment was required, something like a radio range station for instrument flight. Technology wasn't the hold up on the administration building though. The bite there was simple cash.

Even as early as February 1946, General Engineering was drawing up concept plans for the right kind of structure. As usual, Hughes was on top of the design, considering everything from the role of the building in marketing aviation to the long range operating costs of the facility. After discussing his thoughts with the governing bodies, General Engineering received its critique, and the idea began to take form:

It has been suggested by the Commission and the City Council that the restaurant space is too small...It was also suggested that a patio or veranda be placed over the second story to serve as part of the restaurant. We have hot weather here and long springs and falls whereby this would be quite an attraction. It is, therefore, suggested that you see if you can work something in of this nature. Another reason for this is that in a town of this nature, there is not very many attractions and it is felt that if our restaurant facilities are made large enough it will be the means of bringing a great many people to the airport and there by selling them on aviation.

Regarding your heating suggestion...bear in mind that the cheapest fuel in this section is sawdust, wood briquettes, and what they call nuggets. The latter are preferable and more economical for a setup such as this as they would not require as much storage space.

By April 1946, the administration building plans were substantially complete. Construction would have to wait for funding.

Growth in business was one obvious result that peacetime brought. This growth was apparent through out the nation in many industries, and the airlines were no exception. The Federal Government wanted to make sure that this essential industry assumed a proper role in fueling peacetime economic growth. Thus began a long course in regulating the economic affairs of the airlines. The growth in Zimmerly's airline was well known, and if the growth was to continue, the airline would need certification by the Civil Aeronautics Board. Receiving "a Certificate of Convenience and Public Necessity" would result in lucrative contracts for carrying passengers, cargo, and of course air mail. Unfortunately for Lewiston, the Federal requirements for a Certificate included the
availability of significant physical facilities...facilities that were yet to be available at Lewiston's airport.

On May 7th, word leaked out that Zimmerly Airlines was considering a move to Boise, Idaho. The need for a larger operating base for Zimmerly was cited as the reason for looking at Boise Air Terminal. In a statement appearing in The Lewiston Morning Tribune, Zimmerly was quoted as saying that "The Lewiston Airport would be an excellent base for Empire Air Lines if buildings were available."

This statement must have hit Hughes in a skeptical mood. He fired off a letter to the Civil Aeronautics Authority, trying to find out if the requirements for the Certificate were truly as dependent upon buildings as Zimmerly had said. Citing the plans of the Airport Commission for a terminal building, for a weather station, hangars, and lighting, Hughes asked for the truth. The CAB responded May 17th. The Board informed the City Engineer that Civil Air Regulations did require Empire Airlines to show adequate hangar and shop facilities, as well as radio, lighting, and weather capability for its base operation.

The extent of the facilities required would be variable, depending upon the size of the operation and its location. Hughes probably feared not only the loss of an aviation pioneer to the Valley, but loss of airline service itself should Zimmerly move to Boise. That had to be a valid fear, one that would plague Lewiston and small communities throughout the United States for many years.

It seemed as though the facilities simply could not grow fast enough to keep up with aviation demand. In May 1946, a bill before the United States Congress provided reason for hope. Hughes closely watched the bill's progress. "Lewiston's airport has a complete set of runways and is a million-dollar airport," he told the Tribune. "We need buildings, including hangars, an administration building and the extension of the loading apron to the site of the administration building." June 1st rolled around, and the Airport Development Bill, now passed by Congress, waited for President Truman's signature. Hughes seemed cautiously optimistic:

If Federal funds would become available to Lewiston, they
might be used toward the $50,000 administration building, plans for which are almost complete.

Then Hughes took another leap of faith, noting that the $25,000 lighting system that the airport needed may be financed entirely by the CAA, "as a reward for the previous large funds spent by the City and County on airport construction."

Lewiston's "Million Dollar Airport" in 1945.
(Photograph from the Lewiston Morning Tribune)
Local officials were scrambling, looking for any opportunity to get facilities started, to show good faith toward meeting the requirements and needs of the local airline. Hughes telegraphed Congressman White in Washington, D.C. to find out the status of Congressional appropriations for a weather reporting station for the Airport. The efforts didn't stop there. Conferences were held with Weather Bureau officials, Department of Commerce Officials, Senators and Representatives. News releases and press conferences kept the community informed. All communications emphasized the need to establish weather reporting capability at the airport to meet the requirements for airway facilities. Lobbying efforts intensified to include floor space in the proposed administration building for the weather bureau.

But the scramble began to place Zimmerly's operation in a less than favorable light. Finally, on June 26th, an assistant to Bert Zimmerly clarified the Airline's position. Only a portion of the business, renamed Empire Airlines in March, would be moved to Boise. "Lack of weather and range (navigation equipment) and office space here [Lewiston-Clarkston] make it imperative for us to move the operations division to Boise. Administration, maintenance, communications, and five pilot crews will be based in Boise and the headquarters will be maintained at the airport in Clarkston which has the only housing facilities available."

Hughes had come so far, yet it must have at times, seemed like a losing battle for Hughes. The Airport Commission's position was that all hangar construction was to be left to private development. This seemed to conflict with the goal of keeping Empire Airlines in the Valley. Empire was unwilling or unable to make the investment in hangar area on their own. Conversely, Boise Air Terminal seemed to have an abundance of former military hangar space available. Empire needed the Federal Certificate to operate as an interstate carrier. To get the Certificate, the company needed to convince the CAB that it was financially sound. That, by definition, seemed to preclude massive investment in physical facilities.

Soon, Empire was running three Boeing 247-D's with a load factor of 58%. The CAB skeptically granted the airline a certificate to run Air Mail Route Number 78 and was watching the fledgling company closely. The skepticism came from the Board's feeling that the economies were just not there without anchoring the route structure to a major city.

So discussion continued. Empire began to take more of a partnership role in the airport. Space was made available in the temporary administration building for Empire. The airport board made it clear that the "former house" would be moved when funds became available for a new administration building. Empire officials backed off from the need hangar space at the airport. For the time being, they'd continue the practice of ferrying the aircraft to and from the Clarkston airport on a daily basis. Discussing this with the Commission, airline representatives advised that instead of hangar development, emphasis should instead be placed on the acquiring portable airfield lighting. That would
greatly help the airline until the CAA provided permanent lighting. Meanwhile, President Truman signed the airport aid bill. It was landmark legislation and would eventually be looked on as having done more for aviation development than any bill to date. But, the mechanism for dispensing the money would not be in place until at least 1947. This left the Commission in a bind. The airline needed airport improvements to continue operations. The improvements were costly without Federal assistance.

Hughes took the initiative, contacting the CAA for the loan of some portable lighting equipment. Word was received before July had passed that the CAA had some war surplus portable lighting equipment, including the obstruction lights. The navigational equipment was a little more complicated. Bert Zimmerly, in testifying before the Commission said that the CAA had a track record of providing this kind of equipment. So Hughes began contacting officials in Washington, D.C. This time though, it was Zimmerly who came through. He made contact through his attorney in Washington, D.C. Zimmerly's Operation's Superintendent, D.G. Hendrickson, told Hughes:

I have been advised unofficially that the radio range at Pasco, Washington, may be for sale as surplus, but I have not as yet been able to find out whom to contact regarding this matter. If it had an Army range, it would no doubt have been handled through Portland; however, it was a Navy range and I am not sure who handles their surplus equipment.

More congressional level meetings, more conferences, more telegrams, all aimed at shaking loose a defense-oriented bureaucracy, one strapped to a war time economy, for the sake of a weather station and a navigational aid.

In the mean time, Hughes wrote to Paul Morris, by now the Superintendent of the CAA Airports branch in Seattle. Hughes brought Morris up to date on efforts through Washington, D.C. to obtain extra funding for the radio range. But since he was going for improvements, Hughes "went for the gusto". He asked for advice on purchasing a rotating beacon and advice, should the City and County want to get the navigational aid without Federal funding assistance.

This was a flurry of correspondence and action behind the scenes. But other, more visible development was happening in August 1946. This development would reinforce the actions Hughes pursued...from a different angle. In his letter to CAA's Morris, Hughes discussed the fact that Melcher Flying Service was spending "$15,000 or $20,000" on the airport. The investment was for a hangar and facilities for a "G.I. program". Melcher Flying Service was starting a business that would include flight instruction. The "G.I. Bill" had passed Congress providing veterans education and training benefits to returning soldiers and sailors. Flight training was considered "eligible training" under this bill, and the flight instruction Melcher intended required night flying.
This, according to Hughes, should provide an added incentive for the CAA to move on the portable lighting system.

Morris responded. All Hughes had to do was to pay for the freight and the portable lighting system would be his! The navigational station or radio range, was different, and Paul Morris began to discourage the Airport from finding its own. Explaining the continuous maintenance requirements that only a specially trained technician could accomplish, Morris encouraged Hughes to wait. The CAA would eventually provide the airport with a radio range and maintain it through the Spokane CAA office. Neither Hughes nor the Airport Commission were willing to accept this as the solution. The fear of losing airline service was too great, even with the assurances of the CAA officials in Washington.

By early September, Hughes was making a little progress. The temporary administration building costing $4,000 was almost ready for Empire Airlines' operation. While primitive by today's standards, the little "tar paper shack" did provide a transient home. Bids were also ready to be opened for a rotating beacon and tower. Arrangements had been made with Morris of the CAA. Four separate portable runway lighting systems were being shipped to Lewiston from Idaho Falls. Then, on top of that, Empire Airlines offered to participate in the cost of the radio range...to the tune of $5,000! Still more support was needed to get the radio equipment.

Hughes was attending a meeting of the Northwest Aviation Council in Butte when he met an officer of Northwest Airlines. During one conversation, the officer mentioned that his airline might be interested in providing financial assistance too. It seems as though Lewiston was directly on the route between Portland and Butte, a route already flown by Northwest as a certificated airline. This being the case, the airline could sure use a radio range located in Lewiston to help in navigation. Simultaneously, he revealed Northwest's interest in making Lewiston one of its scheduled stops. Hughes promised that Lewiston would be back in touch. Then, the lobbying efforts through Congressman White's office began paying off.

Monday, October 13, 1946 an announcement came through the Seattle Region's National Weather Service. The word was that a weather office would soon be opened in Lewiston! As soon as 400 square feet of office space were made available at the airport, a five-person weather station would be set up. Wasting no time, Hughes and R. A. Dightman (representing the Seattle Weather Service region) inspected possible airport sites. They looked over the possibilities Thursday morning and presented their recommendation to the airport board before noon.

"The new bureau will be modern in every feature," stated R. A. Dightman of the Seattle Office, "With facilities for temperature recording, judging wind speed, and forecasting." The announcement almost caught City officials off guard, not realizing that a weather station would be opened quite that soon. "Once the quarters are provided, we can set up limited service immediately,
"Dightman said, "And we can go into high gear within 30 days!"

A small addition had already been made to the temporary administration building to fit two weather teletype machines in a ten foot by ten foot area. Noting that this area was simply not big enough, Hughes and Dightman along with representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, began to look at other places, including the new privately-owned hangar. The Melcher Flying Service Hangar, now under construction had potential. But it wasn't quite right. Some in the community felt that the National Weather Service should build its own "quarters".

"It's definite," Dightman stated. "Someone will have to build it for us (referring to "quarters"). The Weather Bureau is not in the building business," noting that the station will not only serve the airport, but the entire region. Then, as if to sound a slight warning, he recalled how Lewiston had lost its original weather station in 1933 during a government economy drive.

Hughes' head must have been spinning! Challenges were being thrown up as fast as problems were solved. The marathon race was to get facilities, lighting systems, and navigational aids in place in time to meet the needs of the airline. But he was making headway in meeting the Civil Aeronautics Administration Airport Standards as the year progressed.

Early November 1946 saw the installation of the temporary Army portable runway lighting system supplied by the CAA. The installation cost was $450. A new physical feature on the airport landscape was also beginning to take form. A 51-foot rotating beacon tower was under construction by John Nanniga. The actual green and white rotating light or beacon would be installed after the tower was built, at a total cost of $4,374.73. With this "modern visual aid" in place, only the radio range was left to satisfy minimum civilian airport standards. Then, Hughes probably could pay more attention to the administration building.

The tar paper shack "expansion" had been made ready for the weather service. It was November 20, 1946, and R.C. Border, formerly the flight advisor at Great Falls, Montana, stepped outside. He scanned the horizon from West to East, then North to South. Border also looked over the "new" temperature indicator and checked the humidity. From that tar paper shack he issued the first Lewiston weather report since 1933. "R.C." had to drive to town to issue the report because neither the teletype nor telephone were
available in the $1,200 addition to the administration building. But the telephone cables were being laid, and by January 30th, even the teletype machines were in operation.

The original "Rotating Beacon", shown on the right was replaced in 1993. It was originally installed by John Nanniga's firm. The same company dismantled it 47 years later.

(Photo Courtesy of The Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport)

The five-man, 24 hour-station would not only provide weather services. It would also serve as another set of valuable eyes and ears at night, advising when airplanes were "wandering around", reported Hughes. Consequently, repairs were made to the Zintek-House, making it liveable for renting to one of the weather forecasters at $40 per month.

By December 1946, the other lobbying efforts began to pay dividends. A news release published in the Tribune disclosed that the Federal Government had granted CAA permission to include $50,000 in its budget for the installation of a radio range at the Lewiston airport. That budget of course, would not become
effective until July 1, 1947. Add to that the time required for bidding and construction. The radio range authorized by Congress just didn't look like it was on the "fast track" for support of the fledgling Lewiston airline industry. So Hughes continued to work the problem. "There is a possibility," Hughes reported, "that a low frequency radio range formerly used by the Navy may be brought here. This localizer, formerly used at the Pasco Navy base, is now being held by the Naval district in Seattle, and Naval officials are making efforts to get the localizer sent here."

Unfortunately, what seemed like "breakneck" speed of airport development, what seemed like mountains moved in satisfying the Civil Aeronautics Board, the effort to keep Empire Airlines' entire operation headquartered out of the Valley was failing.

"When the weather is bad here," Empire Airlines General Manager Thomas Robinson stated, "Planes cannot get in. This has caused us quite a bit of trouble in our maintenance work." Consequently, the lack of a radio range for navigation was cited on December 16, 1946, as the prime reason for relocating two more of Empire's departments to Boise. Within a month, only the management "arm" of the airline Zimmerly founded in the Valley would remain in the Valley. All maintenance and communications crews would head to Boise.

The hangar Empire had been using at the Clarkston airport was returned to Bert Zimmerly, for use in the still-operating Zimmerly Air Transport company. Ironically, Zimmerly had been replaced as the president of Empire in a stock split for financial expansion. Now operating Zimmerly Air Transport, he'd use the hangar to house planes which had been stored outside at the airport during the growth stages of Empire Airlines. It would also store the growing number of private aircraft using the field.

Few details are known about the airport's first six months of 1947. But it was a place of activity. The War Assets Administration committed itself to relocating the Navy Radio Range to Lewiston.

Empire Airlines, which by now, had relocated much of its staff to Boise, was growing rapidly. In spite of the CAB's skepticism, Empire was the first "feeder" airline in the Nation to be awarded a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity. The Air Mail Route provided a "bread and butter" subsidy contract and allowed Empire to expand its route structure remarkably. A petition was already on file with the CAB by mid 1947 allowing Empire to operate a route structure connecting Lewiston to Seattle via Walla Walla, Pasco, Wenatchee, Ellensburg, Yakima, Kennewick, and Richland; and Lewiston to Portland via Walla Walla, The Dalles, Goldendale, Pasco, and Kennewick.

Melcher Flying Service had been renamed The Hillcrest Aircraft Company. The owners Ivan Gustin, Tom Duffy, and Howard Melcher started in 1946 with three aircraft, one mechanic, and one flight instructor. By mid 1947, Hillcrest had two mechanics, four flight instructors, and a bookkeeper. The company had an average monthly
payroll of over $2,500. This general aviation business already had plans to build a 10-plane hangar for individual aircraft storage. Its founders could rightfully claim to be the first business located and based at the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport.

The Hillcrest Aircraft Company's original building is now the home of Stout Flying Service, owned and operated by Ralph Stout. (Photo Courtesy of Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport)

The Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport in the late 1940s. Note the "temporary administration building". (Photo Courtesy of the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport)
The second business, though small, was the first to generate controversy. It seems that Bill Morgan, sometime in early 1947, had placed candy, gum, and cigarette vending machines in the paper Administration Building without permission from the Airport Commission. During their March 1947 meeting, the Commission took a firm stand on the perceived encroachment. The members insisted that the business provide the airport one and a half cents per package sold, or else remove the machines. This "firm stand" was slightly modified by the City Council and County Board. They demanded instead, a flat 20% commission on the sale of these items. Mr. Morgan promptly paid, and The Inland Vending Company retained its good reputation. Apparently, the airport was being viewed as a place "where things were happening." More and more people wanted to be a part of the action. In December, the Commission approved the application of Dolores Maynard of Asotin, Washington, to operate a "lunch counter" in the building. The fee approved by the Commission was $5.00 per month.

In May 1947 the radio range station building and electronic equipment arrived. Bids were advertised and invited for the installation work. After all the efforts to get the "high tech gear" to Lewiston, it was disappointing that no bids were received. Again, it was up to Hughes to make it work! And he did. By October, the Navy "Type YA-1 Radio Localizer Range, equipped with an engine generator set and switchboard was ready for operation. Because this was a privately owned navigational aid serving a public air carrier, the Civil Aeronautics Administration closely watched the installation, operation, and maintenance. It was, after all, highly unusual for a municipally owned airport to get its own navigational aid. However, Hughes had picked his electronics maintenance help carefully, and its operation was under the supervision of Harley Steiner. When all was said and done, the CAA was so impressed with the electronics work the inspector paused long enough to commend Hughes' performance. The CAA did make it clear that they would eventually take over the operation and maintenance of this navigational aid. But for the time being, Lewiston was finally on the airways. The FCC granted the Lewiston Airport a radio license on December 17th.

One of the last things Hughes did in 1947, was apply for another CAA grant. This time, the money would install permanent runway lighting and marking, a lighted wind sock, and a segmented circle around the wind sock. Hughes displayed his usual, thorough technical virtuosity in designing the system to CAA specifications. The funds came through unexpectedly early.

His system was to consist of 94 runway and 24 threshold lamp units with more than five miles of interconnecting underground cable. His lamp units were to be the latest model and their design was the result of years of experimentation by the CAA and the aviation industry. Each lamp unit, placed on a concrete pad was provided with a special mounting. If accidentally hit by an aircraft the mounting would break at a fixed point, limiting the damage to the light and virtually eliminating potential damage to the aircraft. A central panel located in the administration
building would control the entire lighting system.

Project construction started in early 1948, about the same time as construction started on a new bridge across the Clearwater River. Besides this lighting, the runways would, for the first time have markings...numerals 60 feet long, painted on the pavement at the ends of the runways. The lighted wind sock was situated between the two runways near the giant Tetrahedron. The segmented circle around the wind sock was to be built of 20 concrete slabs. Each would be 12 feet long and 4 feet wide, laid on the ground in a circle, 100 feet in diameter.

With the marking and lighting, Lewiston was rapidly, in Hughes mind, becoming the complete, modern airport he had envisioned, ready to meet the demands of the growing aviation industry. As mid year, 1948 approached, paving was going on around the terminal building area, anticipating the construction of a true administration building that was still on the list for realization. As the airport's infrastructure assumed its initial contemporary state, the CAA was also approaching a more "modern" style of oversight...for better of worse. The freeform days of aviation, though few realized it, were numbered. With the massive doses of Federal money coming to aviation and airports, Federal control grew along with it. For the first time, the Commission had to submit "Rules and Regulations" to administer aviation and business affairs at the airport. Similarly, congressional level committees were developing new safety and business regulations for public airports. Senator Henry Dworshak, for whom the huge dam in Orofino was named, was on the Senate Appropriations Committee, grappling with some of these earliest airport regulatory actions. Dworshak's work contributed to the future world of airport aircraft rescue and fire fighting.

Late 1948 Artist Concept of Proposed Administration Building
(Courtesy of Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport)
In 1949, the airport was even four years old, yet its growth was nothing short of phenomenal. Hughes' writings reflect the bustling activity at the airport:

In the past year, pilots from 673 planes have signed the guest book at the Hillcrest Aircraft Company. This figure represents approximately 1,346 people that have flown to Lewiston in private planes...Hillcrest Aircraft Company has given flight instruction to more than two hundred students and has issued 65 private and commercial certificates to students who have completed their training.

During the past year, Hillcrest planes have flown approximately 4,500 hours or 450,000 miles. This year, in addition to instruction, charter trips, ambulance service, and maintenance, Hillcrest added two crop dusting and spraying planes to its fleet.

Hillcrest now owns and operates ten planes from their base on Lewiston Field. In addition to these, there are eleven privately owned planes based at the field, making a total of 21 planes based on the airport.

During the past year, the field has been used by planes ranging from small individual planes to large military planes. Representatives from the Weyerhaeuser Lumber Company have made numerous trips to Lewiston, landing at the Lewiston airport. The field has also served planes from Sears Roebuck, Morrison-Knudsen, Robeling Wire Rope Company and several other nationally known companies who operate large planes. Recently, two four-engine C-54s, belonging to the U.S. Army Air Forces used the facilities of Hillcrest Aircraft company and the field to transport fire fighters from this area to fires occurring in Montana.

Paving Apron in Front of Hillcrest Aircraft Company
(Photo Courtesy of Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport)
Although it was no longer looking a Lewiston as a Headquarters, things were not very bad for Empire either. Gwin Hicks, the Vice President and General Traffic Manager for Empire Air Lines, Inc., wrote Hughes:

We feel it pertinent to point out...that our operations for the year included only three and a half months of [the old Boeing 247Ds with 10 seats].

We now operate four Douglas DC-3 aircraft, each having a capacity of 24 passengers and a crew of three. These aircraft are powered with Pratt and Whitney Twin Wasp air cooled engines equipped with Hamilton Standard Hydromatic propellers. These airplanes have a normal cruising speed of 180 miles per hour. Radio, navigational aids, and other equipment is identical to that used on all major air carriers throughout the world. Empire is now serving all 20 of its certificated cities through out Oregon, Washington, and Idaho.

![Empire Airlines' New DC-3s](Photo Courtesy of Jack Milligan)

Everything finally seemed about like it should be. Even the Weather Station was a part of the action, as Hughes wrote:

...The U.S. Weather Bureau has maintained a 24-hour office, staffed with a complement of six personnel at the Lewiston Airport. The office is located in the airport
administration building. Here, reports are received by teletype equipment from the United States, Alaska, Canada, Mexico and ships at sea in the north Pacific Ocean, and relayed to all parts of the country. Pilot balloon observations of the upper air were started last fall and are conducted twice daily for the purpose of observing the velocity and direction of the upper air currents up to 50,000 feet above the earth's surface. The data collected by these observations is used to provide more efficient flight scheduling information and to furnish better forecast services.

All who loved aviation knew that there were more problems that needed solutions. But in general, the sky appeared the only limit as the community looked into the decade of the 1950s. With all the good news, there was one cloud that scattered the rays of sun. On February 17, 1949, during a snowstorm near Pullman, Washington, Bert Zimmerly, the founder of Empire Air Lines died. In a plane crash. An editorial appeared in the Lewiston Morning Tribune on February 20, 1949. It summed up what the community must have felt:

The bitter irony of the accident that snuffed out the life of Bert Zimmerly is that this seemed the least likely manner in which he might go. Long the dean of active flyers of this region, skill and Providence had carried him through hundreds of dangerous missions and mercy flights which the less competent and venturesome would not dare attempt. Perils of flying over rugged terrain under all kinds of weather conditions had become familiar to him and ceased to have any terrors. Yet when the end came it was while piloting an apparently sound aircraft, on course, over ordinarily "safe" territory, during a routine and brief flight home from Spokane. Fate must have its jest, even in death.

It is not only his fellow flyers and countless personal friends who bow their heads in shocked sadness and regret. There can be no doubt that the public throughout the Tri-State Empire as well is deeply affected. For Bert Zimmerly had become a symbol of aviation throughout this region, his services and ventures spanning its development from the days of cow-pasture barnstorming to present maturity as a full fledged and comparatively safe transportation industry.

To his love of flying and zest for adventure, Zimmerly joined the spirit of pioneer building and an astute vision of what aviation could be in this land of vast distances and inadequate ground transportation facilities. He and his brother founded a charter flying service and flight school at what was then proudly called Lewiston's first airport--a landing strip on the plateau
west of the Lewiston Orchards. This grew into what is now one of the largest enterprises of the kind in the inland northwest. When he perceived the need of a scheduled airline service between north and south Idaho, Zimmerly started an intrastate airline with what equipment he had on hand. Out of that developed the present Empire Air Lines, which bids fair to expand into one of the principle feeder-line operations of the nation.

Here was a builder of remarkable energy, ambition and infectious enthusiasm, yet withal a modest and likeable citizen, as popular as any who ever lived in the community. He appeared chosen for many years of useful service to the cause of aviation and progress. But he was not so chosen and over this our hearts are heavy with repining and sorrow.

But the aviation seeds Zimmerly had sown would continue to grow. His influence on the work Hughes had done and would continue to do are to this day, immeasurable. But they would grow.

In early May 1949, a call finally went out for bids...bids for a modern airport administration building. Construction of the two-story, reinforced concrete structure was anticipated to take six months at an estimated cost of $125,000 to $150,000. The first floor was to house the U.S. Weather Bureau, an airport manager's office, a waiting room, a ticket office for Empire Air Lines and a coffee shop. The second floor included room for future communications equipment of the Civil Aeronautics Board and a "skyroom" large enough to accommodate a banquet of 200 diners. An observation deck would be built on the south and west sides of the building. With the early start, Hughes was hoping that construction could begin as early as mid-June.

As the airport gained credibility, so did Empire Airlines which turned three years old on September 27, 1949. During those three years, the airline had flown a total of over 3.3 million miles without an accident. As a safety record, it was an accomplishment the company and pilots of the line looked at with justifiable pride. As reported by the Tribune, "Lewiston, however, has more than a fatherly interest in its sky prodigy. Of the total of 43,501 passengers flying with EAL during the last three years, nearly one fourth have boarded planes at the Lewiston airport."

In the same article, the Tribune described "one of the greatest boons" to air travel for Lewiston. This was the way the newspaper described Empire's announcement in March of direct nonstop service from the "twin cities to the capital city of Boise." The authority to fly this route was granted at a CAB hearing in Washington, D.C. on May 9th. The newspaper's excitement rested in the fact that this route placed Lewiston only one hour and 10 minutes from the state capital. Before that, the flight to the same city required three hours and seventeen minutes flying.
time with stops at LaGrande, Ontario, Pendleton, Walla Walla, and Pasco.

But even as progress on commercial aviation picked up speed, progress on the terminal building seemed to crawl along. Nonetheless, as the year 1949 began drawing to an end, Hughes was in good spirits. There were still happenings to be grateful for and things to laugh at. Gwin Hicks (Vice President and General Traffic Manager of Empire Air Lines) sent a letter to Hughes along with an announcement. The Federal Government, attempting to encourage communities to install runway lighting, now offered to participate in that kind of project to the tune of 75% of the cost. Of course, the letter from Hicks had probably been a "generic" letter to all airport owners throughout Empire's system. But Hughes couldn't resist the temptation to gently "jab" Hicks.

Dear Gwin:

Your letter of November 21 to the Honorable Mayor Ardie Gustafson, has been handed to me for reply.

I am rather staggered and numbed by the fact that you did not know the Lewiston Airport has had a high intensity runway lighting [system] for over a year. All I can say in connection with this is "come up and see me some time!"

Merry Christmas.

Sincerely,

Wm. P. Hughes

Hughes had reason to be in good spirits. The CAB had given tentative approval to construction of the administration building. And the plans for the building now included space for Northwest Airlines! Northwest had received tentative approval from the CAB for a stop in Lewiston. While this approval was subject to the pending installation of navigational aid equipment in the Battered Mountain barrier forming the border between northern Idaho and Montana, it did seem to suggest that Hughes' administration building might be home to more than one airline. An article in the December 11, 1949 Lewiston Morning Tribune insinuated that the building would add "the final Airport Touch". The reporter can be forgiven for assuming that an airport or any other transportation facility could ever have a "final touch." Because, it must have seemed so.

Lewiston's million-dollar airport, an airstrip that men of the northwest skies regard with a particular affection, has a plan for its future.

By late next summer [1950], a $157,000 administration
building is scheduled to be completed that will, airmen say, make the Lewiston airport the airport with everything. By "everything", they mean unobstructed approaches, mile long paved runways, radio aids, complete lighting facilities, and an adequate administration building.

He doesn't fly himself, but aviation won Hughes respect, interest and support years ago. Just this summer, he was elected as president of the International Northwest Aviation Council, an organization fostering and promoting commercial flying in the Northwest United States and Canada.

There's one more plan, however for the airport before Hughes figures the project is complete: Landscaping of some three acres around the administration building.

Late 1949 Architect Drawing of Proposed Administration Building
(From the Lewiston Morning Tribune)

The reasons are now obscure, but 1950 also would come to a close without the administration building complete. But it was at least ready for breaking ground. The plans, drawn up by Lewiston Architect Hugh Richardson called for a structure 161 feet long and 39 feet wide. Ever confident that "his" airport would be "completed", Hughes sat down to write his report in June 1950. "Lewiston's airport is now well equipped with all of the features
necessary for safe flight operations such as adequate paved runways, modern field lighting, weather station, rotating beacon, and radio range station, but it is definitely behind on administrative and passenger accommodation space."

As realization of this objective became easier to see, Hughes seemed to be feeling as though he had accomplished things. And indeed he had. His writings reflect that sense:

Before the days of modern air travel, Idaho's mountainous terrain prevented the advance of adequate public transportation between north and south Idaho and restricted economic activity between the two areas. Even with the improved road building methods of the present, it remains impossible to travel from one end of the state to the other on paved roads without entering another state. These natural barriers have undoubtedly retarded the progress of Idaho and have promoted political and other differences. An eight or ten hour drive by auto is hardly conducive to close relations between the north and south part of the state. Growing public demand for relieving these conditions brought about the formation of Zimmerly Airlines in 1944. Until June 1945, service was maintained with four place planes which were replaced with twelve passenger Boeings. Later, the name of the organization was changed to Empire Air Lines and headquarters were transferred from Clarkston, Washington, to Boise, Idaho. Continued demand for increased space accommodations brought about the replacement of the smaller craft with modern DC-3s capable of carrying twenty-one passengers at higher speeds, thus reducing travel time between Lewiston and Boise to three hours and fifteen minutes. Sustained effort on the part of Empire Air Lines management to increase service resulted in CAB authorization for a direct scheduled flight non-stop between Lewiston and Boise which further reduced travel time to one hour and twenty-five minutes.

In addition to providing necessary transportation facilities, Empire Air Lines, recognizing the potential tourist attraction values of Idaho's rugged mountains, has inaugurated scenic flights over the Seven Devils and Hell's Canyon areas. These flights leave Lewiston early in the evening and last about two hours, giving a magnificent trip over one of the most spectacular land areas in the United States.

Hughes' goal of a modern administration building was coming closer with each passing month. The original plans for a modern administration building had, of course been put on hold while the more technical, yet essential focus remained on such developments as navigational aids and lighting systems. The 36 by 20 foot frame building constructed in 1946 at a cost of $4,154, and later
expanded to 50 by 20 feet to accommodate the National Weather Service had now been long since outgrown.

Bids were opened on Hugh Richardson's specifications for the new structure on September 25, 1950. Six bids were received on the general contract and one each on the plumbing and electrical contracts. A Spokane firm, Busboom and Rauh, General Contractors was the low bid at $118,940 for the construction. Lewiston Plumbing, Heating, and Sheet Metal Company proposed a price of $27,615 for the heating and plumbing work while John's Electric Shop bid $14,767 for the electrical installation. Both of the latter firms were local companies. On October 30, 1950, the bids were awarded for a total of price $162,721 after several alternate items were removed from the basic proposals.

Once again, the airport would be the scene of a multitude of construction activity. Promptly on November 1st, excavation of the basement began. As the structure took shape through the winter of 1950 and 1951, some must have looked at the forms going up for the walls and known that Lewiston had surely come of age. The concrete beams were massive enough to support a bomb shelter. Work went on schedule until May, when it became apparent that the completion date (June 5, 1951) would again have to slip. The main doors and heating convectors among other items simply could not be delivered on time. So it looked as though a reasonable occupancy date of September could be targeted.

Hughes' notes show that the final building plan design was strong enough to allow construction of a control tower on top. This control tower addition to the building would wait until the Civil Aeronautics Administration felt it was appropriate. Now, the completed building would have outside dimensions of 161 feet by 42 feet. The construction was to be of reinforced concrete except the dining room. Framed with wood and finished on the outside with knotty pine, the dining room's atmosphere would be "in keeping with the atmosphere of the great lumber producing area of Northern Idaho."

Empire Air Lines, now in its fifth year of operations continued to be the "bright shining star" at the airport. It was sometimes felt that this airline was the prime justification for the existence of the airport and vice versa. Empire was offering six flights per day by mid-1951 and was boarding over 7,000 passengers annually.

The proposition that Empire might be still be an amateur firm was no longer contemplated by early 1950s. In fact, it was 1951 that the airline received the prestigious National Safety Council award. Decades later, people would take as a "given" that air transportation was the safest form of transportation. But in the 1950s, a reminder couldn't hurt. For having completed 21,181,000 miles without a single fatality in scheduled passenger carrying flight operations, the award was a credit to the management and a reflection of the region's faith in aviation.

But that growth was, among others, a motive behind the work on the administration building. By late 1951, the actual allocation of floor space was being drawn up and the furniture ordered.
Airport Administration Building Under Construction
(Courtesy of Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport)
The furniture bid-list included six davenports, eight settees, 11 chairs, a couch, and 29 "sand jars" (apparently for the smokers). Old drawings show that all airline activity would be located on the eastern end of the building. A "waiting room" was laid out in the middle of the structure, while the coffee shop and weather bureau were on the west wing. The second floor of the building, at this point in construction was to be left "roughed in". Traffic was not sufficient at this time to warrant the additional finished floor space.

The year 1951 turned over into 1952. Instead of the continuing peace that the world might have expected, the United States was again at war. This time it was Korea. The call-up of the armed forces must have again placed the thought in Hughes' mind that the military would one day become a tenant on the airport. Some of his writings hint that he believed it possible, even as the finish was put on the administration building:

Due to world conditions, additional benefits are apt to occur through the enlargement of the Army and Navy program. Dormitory space could be afforded [in the administration building] for 200 men in the second story. The program in 1944 was developed with that purpose in view as the Navy contemplated its use in connection with Pasco.

Hughes probably arrived at the new airport administration building on June 1, 1952 early. As customary, he wanted to make sure for himself that everything was in place. Passengers were already coming and going on Empire's early flights, and there were a few smaller planes taxiing away from Hillcrest's facility. Hughes looked around at what his work had brought. The midmorning sun was already warming the asphalt apron and the Blue Mountains were especially pretty that Sunday. He didn't pause too long. The dignitaries were due in shortly.

At 3:00, the Mayor and Chair of the County Board of Commissioners made their welcoming remarks over the monotonous tone of a Super Cub warming its engine for takeoff. Hughes' mind trailed off as the Civil Aeronautics Administration official extolled on the virtues of airports and the central role of the administration building. Colonel Marshall Lewis, the Deputy Base Commander of Fairchild Air Force Base provided the dedication speech as Hughes recalled the massive amounts of earth and bureaucracy he'd moved to bring the Community to this day. He absent-mindedly handed the scissors to the Mayor who cut the ribbon on the building. The audience applauded and everyone went in for a tour.

Hughes retired soon after. He'd given City of Lewiston almost 30 years of service and looked forward to retirement in California. As he left the Valley, he knew he'd probably not return. But he'd be remembered again later, for the work he'd done on the airport.
The Fifties andSixties

Aviation At Work and Play

In his pictorial history entitled LEWISTON, Gene Mueller describes the 1950s and 60s in Lewiston as a "time of almost continuous change. The Korean "police action" became a full-fledged war involving Lewiston residents. Potlatch Forests, Inc., constructed a pulp and paper mill, while schools were being closed, opened, and created." Mr. Mueller also told of Lewiston's national guard unit, Battery C of the 148th Field Artillery, being called into active service for the fifth time in its history. This call-up coupled with the selective service reactivation, increasing attention to Civil Defense, and casualty lists all contributed to the increased attention being paid to military aircraft at the airport during the decade's air shows.

Physical developments at the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport during the 1950s and 1960s were more technical that ever before. But the action holding everyone's interest was that centering on the very thrill of aviation itself. Technology was making the replacement of wartime surplus lighting systems and navigational aids easier than anticipated. It may have even been that the community was so used to moving mountains for its airport that the less visible improvements didn't seem to be as noticeable. Airlines too were evolving and technology played its role there too. West Coast Airlines had been operating scheduled interstate service between such cities as Astoria, Chehalis-Centralia, Aberdeen-Hoquiam, Olympia, Portland, and Seattle using DC-3s as early as 1946.

Then in a business merger, Empire Airlines and West Coast Airlines married on August 1, 1952. The resulting corporation was still called West Coast. But the merger continued the growth
City that he simply did not have the time to be airport manager. The Lewiston City Council met in special session on April 10, 1961 and decided that it needed a full-time staff member to manage the airport. Until a manager could be found, the City Engineer would regain the responsibility. The arrangement with Ivan was terminated. When the Airport Board met on April 24, 1961, the members present included Clyde Martin, Dick Garlinghouse, Dwight Baron, Elmer Heitman, and A.B. McCready, with Elmer Sonneville as "acting airport manager."

The same board met on May 11, 1961 at the Lewis Clark Hotel. They discussed a proposal by Les Hamilton to operate a restaurant and bar in the administration building; a presentation by the Lewiston Lion's Club to use airport land for a public golf course; and the possibility of a new runway. These issues would one day be a part of what had made the airport a local commercial success.

Before May was over, the Board had recommended to the City and County that Hamilton be allowed to use the entire second floor as a restaurant and lounge. Hamilton was prepared to finish off the second floor as part of his endeavor. Unfortunately, Hamilton quickly ran into some rather sporty problems. The County Prosecuting Attorney had ruled that a liquor license at the airport would be illegal and the county would give no permission for a lounge. It was a dead issue for the time being.

The temperatures in Lewiston were hot that summer, the National Weather Service recording 11 days in a row with the mercury peaking higher than 90 degrees. That was the bad news. The good news, according to forecaster Robert Wing, was that the 100 degree days were out of the way for a while. That was good news for air show buffs headed for the airport for the Lewiston Centennial Air Fair. The slate of performances for the July 23rd show included flyovers by local aircraft, parachute jumping by model aircraft flight demonstrations, a drag race between a "Hot Rod" and an airplane, a demonstration of Aerial Fire Bombing, and a star flyby with the USAF Thunderbirds flying F100 Sabre Jets. Clyde Martin, Chairperson of the Chamber's Aviation Committee later reported that the fire bombing was called off because of the "dry grass nearby." Nonetheless, the air fair had to be the biggest aviation event the region had witnessed.
Mr. and Mrs. Virgil Adair appeared before the Airport Commission in late August. Virgil had already established himself among aviation buffs, having flown for many years. To this day, there are many long time residents in the community who will testify that Virgil's original pilot certificate had been signed by one of the Wright Brothers. This time, his purpose was not to run an aviation business, but an airport restaurant. The Commission unanimously voted to back Adair's proposal, which would provide a successor to the recently closed coffee shop on the airport administration building first floor. Virgil didn't waste much time. By November 14th, he was already making plans to move the entire food and beverage business to the second floor. Before the year was finished, his creation, the "Tailwinds Cafe" would be in operation, providing a location for Commission meetings, breakfasts, lunches, dinners, and thousands of aviation stories.

If there had ever been a formal plan for the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport drawn up in William Hughes' day, it has probably been lost to time. It was obvious that Hughes had a plan. However, by 1961, the Commission seemed to feel as though it was time formalize it...to have a planning study done. The preparations for this study seemed to occupy much of the Commission's time. In November, the process finally started. Four engineering firms had thrown their hats into the ring for the airport's first master plan. The Commission settled on Barton, Stoddard, and Milhollin, and asked the attorney to draw up a contract as soon as possible. A lump sum price of $4,000 was set.

By early 1962, the planning study was already showing indications that a new, longer runway was going to be needed. The new generation of aircraft in use by the airline industry required more runway that Lewiston had. West Coast Airlines voiced their agreement. Already, the F-27, their primary aircraft was not able to be used to its greatest potential. Lewiston's runway length was the limiting factor.

Still, the airport was already known as a place where things were happening. Hertz opened its counter and car rentals were off and running. General Aviation seemed to be moving along too. Potlatch had its corporate hangar on the field and Hillcrest had been there from the start. Suddenly, requests for businesses and hangar space were coming from everywhere. There was an airport limousine service, insurance vending machines, and even a taxicab contracted to haul people and mail from the airport.

West Coast itself seemed to be doing well. In 1961 alone, the airline boarded over 12,000 passengers. Again however, their officials stated, a longer runway would be necessary if the airline was to continue to grow. The planning firm prepared several options for runway replacement and presented them to the Commission. By April 1962, Barton, Stoddard, and Milhollin had completed the planning study and briefed the Airport Commission. The major result of the study showed, as originally believed by the Chamber of Commerce years earlier, a longer runway was definitely
needed.

Simultaneously, there appeared a movement out of the Pullman-Moscow area, aimed at the possibility of a brand new regional airport to serve both metropolitan areas. The governing board of the Palouse airport invited the Commission to meet to discuss the possibility of participating in a feasibility study. The Commission voted unanimously, responding that Lewiston was not interested in a consolidated airport, and the Commission pressed on with plans for the new runway. The County Board of Commissioners had placed the question of a $700,000 bond issue for the runway on the June 5th ballot.

Accusations immediately surfaced that the runway plans had been too hastily drawn up. Concerns were raised by organizations such as the Lewiston Orchards Advisory and Development Committee. While not totally against the concept of the runway improvements, the Committee expressed concern that not enough study was done. Some even felt that the regional idea proposed by the Pullman leadership offered promise. But the aviation community was not going to give up. Representatives of the Chamber's aviation committee, members of the Airport Commission, and even segments of the airport community began making speeches to civic groups, presenting information to the newspaper, and providing informational leaflets anywhere they could. But when the June election was complete and the votes were counted, the bond election had failed.

The Chamber of Commerce urged that a bond issue be placed on the ballot again as soon as possible. Even the Tribune expressed its discouraging opinion in an editorial titled, "Aviation Faces Dubious Future Here." The problem wasn't that the region's voters didn't believe in the value of a modern, regional airport. The problem seemed one of communicating the need for the bond issue to provide the matching funds for the Federal grant funds. The problem also appeared to be one of convincing people that the consolidated airport-idea of the Pullman leaders wasn't going to fly. The Commission wasn't discouraged. In spite of the failed election, the Commission voted unanimously to request Federal grant funds for the runway improvements. The application optimistically showed that the source of the matching funds would be a county-wide bond issue.

On September 6, 1962, the Nez Perce County Board of Commissioners were again asked to place the bond issue on a November 6th Ballot. Again, the airport commissioners began to spread the word. Support came early from the Merchants Committee of the Chamber of Commerce.

Frank Sullivan was already active in the Chamber's Aviation Committee. He thought it would be a good idea to have an aviation display at the airport. In his mind, he pictured a historic airplane somewhere near the main entrance to the airport. Others agreed with him. The correspondence started early. By October 1962, he received word from the Air Force Logistics Command that some older T-33 "T-Bird" jet trainers were being phased out. That
was all Frank needed to hear. Still, Air Force officials kept
telling him that none were available for Lewiston. Frank, however,
was not one to take "no" for an answer. "I was going to keep
bugging them until they said 'yes'". Frank recalled years later.
And Frank continued his "bugging" for more than seven years.

No one could have anticipated the challenges that started in
1963. These were challenges that would tax the aviation leaders'
patience, innovation, and vision to the maximum. These were chal-
enges involving the runway system, challenges that would
involve the terminal building, and challenges that would even go
the very core issue of airline service itself. Elmer Heitman was
serving as the "airport manager". It was clear however, that the
will and wisdom of more than Heitman would be needed to keep the
airport up to date.

The Commission already knew that the bond election had failed
to receive the required two-thirds supporting vote. Consequently,
claims to the Federal grant funds had to be relinquished. However,
a recommendation to remodel the administration building did gain
approval from the City Council and plans began to take shape.
Along with these improvements, other less visible, yet important
developments were taking place, including the installation of new,
state-of-the-art weather equipment. The new rotating beam
ceilometer was a vast improvement over the older fixed beam models.
It could measure the cloud height faster and more accurately.
Earlier in the year, the FAA installed a new navigational aid.
Called a VOR, this "high-tech" device transmitted high frequency
radio signals through 360 degrees of the compass. It became the
very basic aid for air navigation through out the United States.
With that installation, the Airport Board gave authority to
decommission the radio range station Hughes had worked so hard to
get. It was obsolete.

William Hughes would probably have been amazed at how soon his
"completed modern" airport had become out-of-date. Aviation
technology had antiquated the Airport Hughes felt was done. The
Airport Commission didn't give up on its drive for a longer runway
capable of handling aircraft in what was now to be called the "Jet
Age". The bond issue had of course failed. Other options were
looked into, including lengthening the existing runways.
Consideration was even given to the possibility of a totally new
airport at a new location, within a special airport district. West
Coast Airlines, which was showing record passenger activity at
Lewiston began making cutbacks at the Pullman airport for
logistical and performance reasons. This only added pressure to
the demand for improved facilities at Lewiston.

The City Council, County Board, and Airport Commission met
with a financial consultant. Ideas were thrown on the table.
Concepts were debated. A different option emerged for getting the
runway construction matching funds. This option called for a City
general obligation bond. While this option didn't appeal to the
Council any more than the previous ones, the consultant sounded a
warning note. All the discussion of a totally new airport,
endless debate over the potential for a "regional" facility on the Palouse, and the seeming inability of the City and County to come up with matching funds was beginning to wear on the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA).

"The Lewiston-Nez Perce County Airport is already a regional airport in terms of the services it provides to the area," he explained. "Building [your] new runway would insure that it continues to play that kind of role."

Then came the note of caution. For three years, the FAA had offered the community the major portion of funding for the construction. And for three years, the community would not come up with matching funds. "It's time to fish or cut bait," he informed the group.

The factors involved seemed almost too complicated for everyone to digest. And they would not go away. At the insistence of the Pullman contingent, a meeting was sponsored for the four governmental entities on March 1, 1963, to listen again to the idea of a new airport on the Palouse. Trying to appeal to the common interests, a proposed location midway between the four cities was suggested, midway in Genesee, Idaho. While all agreed that the costs in starting over would be immense, a "steering committee" of one representative from each agency was selected to look further at the proposal.

Chet Moulton, Director of the Idaho Department of Aeronautics entered the fray in April by letter to the "Genesee Airport Committee."

Mr. Moulton, long respected as a driving force in the development of Idaho aviation and airports expressed concern over the idea. He knew there would be great difficulty in getting that many political entities "harmoniously" involved in a project of that importance. Emphasizing this pitfall, he recalled how difficult it had been for two communities to share a single sewage disposal plant. "Instead [with the Genesee Airport], it would involve two states, two or three counties, several cities, and the Federal Government...We believe and recommend that Lewiston should keep, and improve their own airport."

As if this was not complicated enough, other minor irritants kept plaguing the Commission. West Coast announced several major flight changes to coincide with connections at the major cities. These would be large blocks of time without flights coming and going at the administration building. This, "makes the restaurant impossible to profit," Virgil Adair announced. He made plans to close. While it may have been "minor" in the total scheme of things, the Lewiston Morning Tribune called it a "crisis" in its October 23, 1963 issue. The restaurant closure problem, however, had its roots in the same problem the community had wrestled for three years now. West Coast Airlines wanted to use its new turboprop F-27s at Lewiston. But, the length of the runways limited the F-27's performance. This was illustrated in June, when 50 passengers were denied boarding because weight restrictions limited the F-27's ability to take off. Consequently, West Coast was altering its flight schedule, using more of its older DC-3 aircraft in the schedule, which in turn resulted in fewer customers
for the Tailwinds Cafe.

So, for the third time, a bond election was proposed. The November 1963 election proposed a City General Obligation Bond. Unfortunately, questions about the legality of such a proposal precluded its placement before the voters.

The year 1964 brought many of the same deliberations before the parties. Some of the names would change, though. Early in the year, the name Heitman disappeared from the "airport manager" signature block. Richard Storch, the new City Engineer appears to have taken over the role at least temporarily. He tried to provide continuity, resuming negotiations with various aviation and development officials. But by March of 1964, the Airport Commission once again had relinquish its claim to Federal funds for the fiscal year.

Concerns too began to surface about simple operations and maintenance. The initial landscaping and tree planting done during the Hughes era had been let go. The airport began to take on a shabby look. It began to appear that a dedicated airport manager was needed. In June of 1964, the Airport Commission voted to make Robert J. Anderson the airport manager.

Very little is known about Anderson. He was one of at least five applicants for the position. Commission Chair Clyde Martin announced the appointment in a news release.

Bob is a native born Lewistonian and has had extensive experience in airport operations and management during two active-duty tours in Naval Aviation. He is a retired Naval Aviator and holds a commercial license. Much of his experience in field management was in the Northwest and he comes to us with a first hand knowledge of the problems which confront the industry in this area. In addition, Bob is a well-qualified public relations counsel with an excellent background in municipal and governmental management.

Robert must have had his hands full. The Commission immediately placed several projects on his "plate." The list ran the gamut from the trivial replacement of awnings on the terminal building to the more complex problem of recommending a zoning ordinance to protect airport approaches. But Robert "hit the deck running", meeting with aircraft owners and pilots, replacing underground lighting cables, and investigating acquisition of some surplus CAA threshold flashers from Walla Walla airport. He didn't seem to lack for energy. He even reached an agreement with the Adairs to keep the restaurant open. In spite of his best efforts though, relations with the restauranteur continued to deteriorate. The Adairs became further behind in their lease payments.
West Coast Airlines, in early December, celebrated its 18th Anniversary. Many in the community recalled its progress and felt especially frustrated when the latest bit of bad news hit the region. New FAA regulations further restricted the use of the F-27s at Lewiston. The Lewiston Morning Tribune scolded the community in an editorial on December 4th.

The recent imposition of new takeoff restrictions on the runway at Lewiston airport reemphasizes the shortsightedness of Nez Perce County voters in repeatedly rejecting a bond issue to build an adequate runway.

The Federal Aviation Agency has imposed an additional 2,000 pound weight restriction on West Coast Airlines planes taking off toward the southeast. The reason is that an uphill slope in effect reduces the usable length of the runway from 5,000 to 3,520 feet.

West Coast Airlines already had been forced to operate its F-27 planes at less than capacity loads in taking off from the airport in warm weather. The new restriction will curtail load limits even more sharply whenever the runway is used....

The assorted alternatives offered by the objectors have exploded in their faces one by one. The FAA's latest ruling is just another reminder of the folly of rejecting the plan which had been approved by all the qualified agencies involved in operation of the airport.
Still, the problem remains unsolved and becomes more crucial year by year. The solution also becomes more expensive each year. It is a frustrating situation for the community.

As if the problems with the airport were not already clear, another announcement in January of 1965 would seal the fate of the shorter runway at Lewiston. West Coast made public that month its intent to purchase jet aircraft. The acquisition had been narrowed down to either the British Aerospace Corporation (BAC) 111, the Douglas DC-9, or the Boeing 737, not yet in the production. While this acquisition contributed to West Coast's future preference for longer-haul routes and larger market areas, the decision also would, over night, double the capacity of the airline. With record boardings system wide and annual growth exceeding 50%, it appeared to be a smart business decision. But if the Lewiston airport's infrastructure was too small to handle the existing F-27s, it certainly wasn't up to handling the larger aircraft projected for purchase.

The bad news and good news was affirmed almost immediately. Jim Barrott of West Coast Airlines, informed the Airport Commission that the aircraft purchase decision had been made. The DC-9 was to be the next generation aircraft for West Coast and the first route it would fly was Seattle to Salt Lake City via Spokane. Since the airline operating certificate required a stop between Spokane and Boise, the natural place to stop was Lewiston. Unfortunately, because of the lack of runway, the Airline would make the stop in Walla Walla instead, shuttling passengers to Lewiston.

The good kept coming with the bad. The new airport manager in early 1965 received word that the Idaho Legislature had provided special liquor licenses for airports. This had the potential of providing additional income for smaller airport restaurant and lounge operations such as Lewiston's. The cooperation and patience between the airport manager, the Commission, and Virgil Adair seemed ready for paid off. In late March 1965, Adair was again ready to give the operation a try. The Commission granted him permission to begin construction on the airport restaurant and lounge. Regrettably, the relationships had deteriorated too badly. Negotiations broke down, and the Tailwinds Cafe and lounge was soon under the new management of Jim L. Brush.

In the mean time, the Aviation Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, with Frank Sullivan as Chair, was gathering support for the effort to build the new runway. Pressure began to mount within the two governing bodies. So in July, the City and County had decided to study the situation again. A County-wide study group was appointed with Dr. O.V. Bauman as chair. These were people with an interest in and understanding of airports. The consensus reached came as no surprise to anyone. If Lewiston were to remain viable as an air transportation airport, a new runway was needed. Dr. Bauman's committee report, submitted in July, was clear and concise. It pointed out the economic benefits of an airport that
was capable of handling the kind of traffic the region was capable of producing. But the report came short of recommending immediate action. Another group formed with Dwight Barton and Frank Sullivan at the helm.

Anderson, the Airport Manager, became increasingly frustrated with all the studying. He knew action was needed immediately. The runways needed work, taxiways needed repair, and the terminal building was becoming congested and outmoded. His frustration came through in his writings frequently as committee after committee studied the situation, each coming to the same conclusion. "Our airport improvement project has reduced time and whittled into routine matters to such an extent that progress," Anderson wrote, "seems like two steps forward and three steps back."

Airport Terminal Building in the 1960s
(Photo Courtesy of Lewiston-Nye Pierce County Regional Airport)

Then, in late November 1965, the latest committee forwarded their final recommendation. The "...County Commissioners [should] call for a bond election to be held sometime in February of 1966." By now, the costs of the improvement were estimated at over $1.6 Million. Nonetheless, the County Commissioners endorsed the recommendation calling for a bond election for the new runway. Paul Wise, Chair of the Commission said that he "certainly endorsed this type of program." He said air travel is "imperative in any community and that it is the one growing mode of transportation in man's progression from walking to better and faster methods."

The airport bond would again come before the voters on March 1, 1966. The County's persistence was even appreciated by Bill Hall of the Lewiston Morning Tribune on December 30th. Discussing the boom in Lewiston air travel, Mr. Hall said that the community had "cracked the success barrier on commercial airplane service,"
entering an upward spiral in service and use.

If the bond issue is approved March 1, there will be time to complete the runway improvements by the first part of 1967 when the DC-9 jet service will become available. It would represent an irrational act for the voters of this county to throw cold water on the growth of airline service at a time when we have reached the self-generating state of development.--B.H.

More and more people were throwing support toward the bond issue. In January of 1966, the Industrial Development Committee of the Chamber of Commerce strongly endorsed the proposal to "construct a new 6,500 foot runway, thus making it possible to land the commercial 'jets' at Lewiston." The Committee also sent a message regarding the "Genesee concept", adding that "the present Nez Perce County-Lewiston Airport best serves the entire Lewiston-Clarkston area due to its central location."

As the bond election drew closer, the fate of the airport's growth hung on the balance. There were a few citizens in early 1966 that were recalling some even tougher battles. They remembered the maneuvering to establish the airport for the region in the first place. And they had good reason for reflection. William Hughes had passed away. On February 26, 1966, the City Commission voted unanimously, recommending the Airport Commission consider renaming the Airport "Hughes Field" in honor of Bill. From the official minutes of the Commissioners meeting:

Commissioner Wood requested that it be part of the official record of the City of Lewiston to announce that William P. Hughes, former City Engineer of the City of Lewiston died in Los Gatos, California. Chairman Wise stated that a floral tribute had been sent to California and that a Resolution was prepared and would be read. Chairman Wise eulogized Mr. Hughes by stating that Mr. Hughes was ever aware of the problems of transportation of this City and he was a great and dedicated servant of the people of this City. Mr. Hughes gave 29 years of his life for this City. Resolution Number 66-3 was read commemorating Mr. Hughes for his 29 years of service to the City of Lewiston. Commissioner Olin moved that Resolution Number 66-3 be approved; seconded by Commissioner Wood and carried. This Resolution was sent as a night letter to Mrs. Hughes in California.

In spite of the sentimentality and education efforts, in spite of the high need for the new runway, supporters were again disappointed. The bond election failed. During the next meeting, Commission Chairperson Wise commended both the Airport Commission and the Airport Improvement Citizens Committee for their presentations to the voters. While adding that new legislative tools were needed to finance such airport improvements, he did say
that the "need for a new runaway was not weakened by the defeat of the bond proposal."

By midyear, not only were the runways too short, but their condition was deteriorating. On top of that, new Federal regulations placed year-around restrictions on the airport. The problems were snowballing. As the restrictions increased, the ability of the airline to effectively use the airport decreased. This resulted in fewer flights and reduced service. The reduced service made for less customer satisfaction and less use. The frustration kept growing, and the Lewiston Morning Tribune was scolding the constituents for voting down the airport improvement bond issue. On June 8th, Bill Hall wrote:

Residents of this community are discovering first hand what all the shouting was about a little more than a year ago when advocates of an airport bond issue warned that the Lewiston Airport must be replaced or modernized. The runways at the airport are quite literally falling apart. That fact is slowly but surely costing this community its air carrier service...The prediction of no more purchases of propeller-driven aircraft has proven correct, with one notable exception. West Coast is purchasing the little piper Navajos to serve drinkwaters like Baker, Oregon and perhaps Lewiston, Idaho, that can't cut the mustard...Meanwhile, Lewiston, a city that pioneered in small-city commercial aviation, seems destined to return to its aviation childhood and the humiliating prospect of seven-place planes providing inadequate shuttle service while the rest of the world roars by in jets.

West Coast calls its little Piper Navajos "mini-planes." Maybe that is apt. Perhaps they are meant to serve mini-cities with mini-visions and mini-futures.-B.H.

By early 1968 some of the region's leaders had given up hope. There was certainly activity going on...names of businesses seemed to come and go...Arrow Aviation, Konen Construction, and even Ag-Air. The Airport Commission seemed tied up with the mundane affairs of running an airport...fire codes, safety codes, and fee structures. Finally, in February 1968, the City and County issued a joint press release:

...The City of Lewiston through its charter, as approved by the State Legislature, maintains certain dedicated funds for specific purposes such as the perpetual care fund for the cemetery, the police retirement fund, the parking meter fund, working capital fund, etc. Each of these funds are invested in stocks, bonds, interest bearing certificates or straight savings accounts. The City of Lewiston has the responsibility to invest these funds wisely and to assure maintenance of the Capital invested. Therefore the City of Lewiston has legally
determined that these funds can be loaned on interest to
match funds put up by the Federal Government for the
construction of the needed improvements at the airport.

In plain English, the governing bodies had found an innovative
way to provide the funds to match the Federal Grant. The total
funds would provide the runway needed for continued aviation
growth.

By March, the attorney had drafted a City/County finance
agreement. Preliminary engineering drawings were complete and off
to the FAA for review. In April 1968, Mr. Otto Brammer,
Chairperson of the Nez Perce County Board of Commissioners was
opening his mail. The most welcome letter in the pile of
 correspondence that day was from the Federal Aviation
Administration. The FAA was informing him that $721,035 was now
allocated for the Lewiston airport improvement project! The total
included money for the actual runway (to be called Runway 8/26) as
well as modern high intensity runway lights, land acquisition,
taxiway construction, relocation of roads, and even fencing!
Ironically, one of the people who had exhibited the most
frustration over the obstacles overcome was no longer around for
the good news. Robert Anderson had resigned, citing "personal
reasons". Once more, Elmer Heitman assumed the role of Acting
Airport Manager. It would be another three years before a
professional was once again managing the airport.

The news of the runway project created headlines. The media
also covered the announcement of an airline merger. Several
companies, including West Coast had bonded to form Air West. With
all the attention focused on large airlines and large projects, one
smaller bit of correspondence from May 1968 probably went
unnoticed. This was the letter from "little" Sun Valley Airlines.
It almost predicted the future of the airline industry. It hinted
at the evolution of small community airline service exactly 10
years from the date of the correspondence. Sun Valley Airlines was
seeking an intrastate airline certificate before the Idaho Public
Utilities Commission. The President of the Airline wrote to Mr.
Paul Wise, Mayor of Lewiston:

I regret that it was necessary to make the formal
application in advance of any extensive publicity
regarding our intentions. Since our previous service has
been seriously impaired by the excessive competition of
a subsidized airline, it is vital that our proposed
intrastate commuter airline have State regulation and
protection to succeed.

Sun Valley Airlines cannot and does not intend to
establish head-on competition with any local or trunk
airline, but rather to schedule convenient additional
flights to improve the level of air service to any city
served. By its very nature, a commuter airline can fill
the gap that exists in the daily schedules of large
aircraft and your community has nothing to lose and
everything to gain from an extensive Idaho commuter
airline network.

We solicit your active and vocal support, in view of
the fact that we are a private enterprise receiving
absolutely no Federal Tax-based subsidy and will depend
entirely upon passenger and freight revenues for our
continued services. As a matter of Interest, West Coast
Airlines receives approximately 5 million dollars
annually in Federal Tax subsidy as an incentive to serve
small communities. This support is not available to
intrastate airlines, but is reserved solely for regional
airlines.

"WINGS OVER IDAHO"

Air West DC-9 at Lewiston
(Courtesy of Lewiston Morning Tribune)

Very few people in 1968 could have picked up on the content of
the letter, and what would happen if the Federal airline subsidy
ever stopped. There is no record of what, if any response the City
of Lewiston had to Sun Valley Airline's request. The letter may
have been lost in the enthusiasm of being back in the potential of
the large carrier industry. Whatever the Sun Valley-based
airline's intent, the airport improvements were necessary. But the
idea of an airline operating in an open marketplace without
subsidization was the wave of the future.

And the future looked bright. As the 1970s arrived, the
Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport was once again reaching
an amazing period of growth. Guiding the airport was Clyde Martin,
a well respected, professional aviator. The new runway was fully
functional, and everyone seemed to be on board. The DC-9s were
making regular appearances and again, boardings of passengers were
on their way up.
1970s...A Regional Threat

Frank Sullivan had been working steadily through the Chamber of Commerce on many of the vital issues effecting the airport. And he had never quit "bugging" the Air Force either in his quest for an airplane. One that could be a permanent display at the airport. His efforts were not in vain. He was there the morning Larry Leach brought the T-33 in to Lewiston.

The weather in early March 1970 was nothing unusual. After all, the Northwest was known for its fog. Captain Larry Leach of the Idaho Air National Guard got up early March 31st. He looked out of his window and finished his coffee before heading off to Gowen Field. His "mission" on this day had very little to do with the world situation. Today, he was taking the Air Force's oldest operational jet to Lewiston on its last flight. He was glad that the T-33 "T-Bird" at least wasn't heading for the bone yard to be cut up for scrap metal. The fog had finally lifted and Captain Leach finished his preflight on the old training plane.

Larry was very familiar with the old T-Bird. "She" had come to life in the Lockheed plant in Burbank, California in 1952, delivered to the Idaho Air National Guard in early 1953. She'd been there ever since. She wasn't glamorous by any stretch of the imagination. But she was a beautiful airplane and had helped many a pilot from the Guard keep his flying skills finely tuned. The old trainer lifted off from Gowen field easily that morning enroute to Lewiston, still nimble, still agile after 18 years of almost
continuous flight.

The City of Lewiston had prepared the final "resting" place for the T-33. A 12-foot pedestal right at the main entrance to the airport would display the T-Bird at a rakish angle that would make "her" look as though she were still in flight. D.D. "Buzz" Lyle, Chairperson of the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport Commission was on the aircraft parking ramp. He could hear the familiar "whine" of the T-33 turbine as it gently touched down on runway 26, then taxied into the terminal area. Buzz was there to accept the airplane for the City and County. Larry Leach jumped down from the cockpit and shook the open hand of "Buzz". He reached over and patted the warm aluminum skin of the T-Bird, quietly telling her, "Good Job", then left to help arrange for the display.

The decade of the 1970s had to be confusing to just about everyone. Rumors had it that the airline industry was to be deregulated. Few people understood what that rumor was all about. The memories of Zimmerly and the transformation of his airline into the goliath West Coast were still fresh. But an understanding of what the growth and mergers meant for route structures, airline service, and air carrier economies of operation were far from scientific.

Emotions were to run high in the most bitter challenge to the airport yet. Much attention had been paid to the process of updating the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport. It was made possible with people's dedication, Federal grant funds, and local investment. But the few well meaning people in the Moscow-Pullman area advocating a new, combined, "quad-cities" airport on the Palouse hadn't given up either. Local aviation leaders in the Valley understood the fine balance between weather, technology, economics, engineering, and the future role of airports. They argued against the "quad-cities" airport. That didn't stop Palouse effort either. In late 1971, several municipalities, governmental entities, and even private businesses lobbied for and obtained Federal grant funds to do an engineering study of the proposal.

Had William Hughes been around in September 1972, he'd probably have shaken his head in disbelief at the results of the study. The top of the page of the Lewiston Morning Tribune, contained the headline: "Consultants Favor Hilltop Site for Regional Airport". The consultant armed himself with numbers and figures that lacked participation from the Lewiston regional market. With out realizing it, the consultant also appealed to the emotions of people dreaming of uniting a larger region. With a monumental investment in infrastructure, the engineer told his audience, "If you build it, they will come." Building the large airport will result in improved airline service for the whole region. And the cost was estimated at a "reasonable $9 Million." Many leaders went into "sticker shock."

Much of North Central Idaho was also disbelieving. On one hand, rumors of airline deregulation were predicting large changes in small community airline service. On the other hand, the region
was asked to consider a significant investment in an airport to serve airlines that economists were predicting may not be there in a deregulated environment.

Lewiston Mayor Ronald F. Jones understood though. He was critical of the effort almost right away. He pointed out the "lack of information about Idaho, Clearwater, and Lewis Counties in Idaho and Asotin and Garfield County in Washington." Jones added, however, that he believed the Lewiston airport is a "feeder airport, not a main" hub. Mayor Jones was also criticized the lack of information about weather on the Palouse. "The Moscow-Pullman [Airport] is closed more often during the winter than Lewiston-Clarkston," he stated.

The debate almost came too late. The FAA paid for much of the study. That meant the report would be taken very seriously by those doling out the Federal airport improvement grants. In fact, the FAA took the report so seriously that even their own planned improvements to the Lewiston airport were not safe. The report had to either be verified or disproved. The fight was on and emotions would flare.

Lewiston's leadership apparently believed that airport improvements were now more important than ever if the community's lead role in transportation was to be maintained. The Instrument Landing System, or ILS, with its state-of-the-art electronic precision glide path and runway alignment guidance were slated for installation in August of 1972. Coupled with plans for a runway approach lighting system, the age of technology appeared to have arrived. The combinations of the ILS and the lighting systems could bring airplanes in for landing when the visibility was almost as low as 2,500 feet. Similarly, traffic had increased sufficiently to warrant the installation of an FAA owned and operated air traffic control tower. That news reached Airport Manager Clyde Martin in September 1972. With all those advantages, the FAA's support for the "quad-cities airport" must have seemed ludicrous to the lay person.

Letters began flowing into the offices of the Federal Aviation Administration, the City of Lewiston, and Nez Perce County. The letters objected to the recommendation of the Quad Cities Airport Master Plan. Letters came from airport users, citizens, business people, Aviation Committees, and regional chambers of commerce. All were unanimous. "How could this be happening?" they wanted to know. It didn't make sense with all the investment in the existing regional airport, the great flying weather, the improvements in progress. Then, it seemed for a while, that the only way to "kill" the concept was to become part of the effort to study it. An "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em" type of approach was advocated by some. In early 1974, the Lewiston City Council was asked to help fund additional study. Correspondence was exchanged with the technical committee chairperson on the Palouse, and representatives were selected to provide the information for North Central Idaho.

By early February 1974, cracks were forming in the tenuous alliance advocating the new airport. Pullman Council members began
raising the same kind of concerns addressed years earlier by Chet Moulton, Director of Idaho Aeronautics. The February 27th Lewiston Morning Tribune reported on the deliberations:

Council member Helen Austin wondered if the regional airport was even a practical idea, considering how many regional airports had failed in other areas. "It seems we may be barking up the wrong tree," Mrs. Austin said.

Tempers started to flare, when Lewiston insisted that its present airport should be considered as a potential site for the Quad-Cities Airport. Elected officials in Pullman considered this line of thinking "small". Lewiston Mayor Leonard Williams summarized the valley's feelings, saying "I think the whole valley down here is dead against it...why all the hassle about an airport on top the hill? We can take 707s and 727s down here...the runway is long enough."

Then in October 1974, Darrell Manning, Director of the Idaho Transportation Department, helped put things into perspective and helped the Valley realize importance of keeping their airport. The occasion was the dedication ceremony for the new Lewiston Air Traffic Control Tower. The midday sun warmed the air and a soft
breeze allowed the flags to gently flutter. Lewiston's high school band was playing in the background before Mr. Manning stepped up to the Air West podium. Then, without using the buzz words "hub" or "multi-modal transportation" that would become too familiar twenty years later, Mr. Manning spoke, and over a hundred citizens listened. The Tribune reported:

With a coordinated effort, Lewiston can become "a significant transportation exchange point." Idaho's Director of Transportation Darrell Manning of Boise said here Thursday. Manning was the guest speaker at dedication ceremonies for the new air traffic control tower at the Lewiston Airport. The tower, commissioned September 2, was built and is operated by the Federal Aviation Administration.

"Lewiston has a great potential in this. It has a major airport, rail, and highway transportation and soon... a port."

His was a voice of reason and the words were reassuring for the local leaders looking for new allies in its common sense battle to retain its regional airport.

"Headline Stories from the early 1970s" Lewiston Morning Tribune

And the battle still raged. Charges of "mis-leading", "mis-interpretation", and "mis-perception" were exchanged. Then, in December of the same year, Hughes Air West announced flight cutbacks, adding fuel to the fire. Air West, which had provided
money for the Quad-Cities Airport study, was accused of retaliation over Lewiston's refusal to participate in the new regional airport. Terry Aston, Air West Vice President for Planning told Lewiston that the cutbacks should not have been a surprise, adding "that Air West had been pushing for a quad cities airport since 1970."

His words and Air West's action were called many things, including an "inverse chicken and egg" concept. The results of decreased service were again reflected in decreased airline boardings. By September 1975, boardings were dropping by four or 5 percent every month.

Yet another review of the Palouse airport was underway by a new consulting firm. The review was being conducted by James Taylor who promised an "unbiased study", attempting to keep things above the emotional level. He released his report in April 1976, concluding that "a new regional airport should not be considered by the region, affected states, or the Federal Aviation Administration, and that any reference to a new regional airport should be deleted from State and Federal Airport System Plans." In his summary, Mr. Taylor concluded that the "Lewiston-Nez Perce County Airport can be expanded and improved as required to serve commercial air carrier needs of the region for the foreseeable future."

Airport Manager Martin gave the new study his "stamp of approval," saying that "generally speaking, it's a good report and well done. It may be that refinements may be needed, but any errors that are in it don't change the final result." Almost anticlimactically, the Federal Aviation Administration finally "dubbed" the airport...a regional airport. City council Member Dale Gordon made this announcement after a meeting in Salt Lake City with representatives of the FAA. "[They] consider the Lewiston Airport a regional airport." The FAA also said that "if the City of Lewiston were to engage in future actions to build a new regional airport, then funding for the current one would definitely be in jeopardy."
1975-1993

Beyond the "Field of Dreams"

Air West had become a corporate reality by early 1968. From there, it continued to grow, far beyond anything anyone back in the days of Bert Zimmerly could have imagined. Similarly, no one would ever again make Hughes' innocent mistake and describe the airport as complete. Both in services and facilities, the challenge for the new leadership was to keep the airport current. The airport had made some significant changes. Some people hoped that new runway would insure air carrier service.

But little attention was paid to the rest of the airline industry and how its evolution was affecting local, small community service. The Federal government, since the earliest days of the airlines had been foresighted in helping the fledgling industry grow. Subsidies to airlines had insured a level of airline service to a community...a level of service that was virtually guaranteed as long as the community insured that its airport was able to support the growth that the Federal government pushed. That support was taken so much for granted that it was impossible to picture the industry without Federal economic support. A glimpse of the "big picture" had been offered when Sun Valley Airlines wrote the Mayor, stressing that this company did not rely on the Federal subsidy system, instead relying on its business skills.

In 1978, the Congress of the United States passed what is now called the Airline Deregulation Act. It may have been the singularly most significant piece of legislation affecting the airline industry since the airmail routes were legislated. The 1978 law did several things. First, it took from the Federal Government its economic regulatory oversight of the airline industry. No longer would airlines be required to petition the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) for permission to serve a community. Conversely, the airlines would no longer be required to seek permission from the CAB to cancel service to a community. With the removal of the economic regulatory function went the removal of the subsidies the Federal Government had provided to the airlines. From the sunset of the law, airlines would have to make it on their own as any other private business would.

Debating the wisdom of the legislation proved fruitless. Lewiston had already witnessed airline mergers. To the small communities, these mergers would shrink in significance compared to turbulence of the deregulated era. Within the space of a few years, dozens of airlines disappeared in a frenzied search for
growth and economies of airline operations. In the Northwest, what had taken decades to create in the form of Zimmerly Air Transport, Empire Airlines, and West Coast Airlines quickly disappeared. In the space of a few years, West Coast merged with others to form Air West which became Hughes Air West, which, through more mergers became Republic Airlines. Republic was the most visible carrier in Lewiston during the Deregulation Era.

But deregulation was a fact. Also a fact was that Lewiston was the home of a regional airport. In terms of infrastructure, the facility could handle almost any kind of aircraft that Air West or even Republic could imagine operating in the regional market. For better or worse, that was the rub. The word "Market" had suddenly entered the picture. Until Deregulation, the Federal Government, with its subsidy system, had created a "Field of Dreams" approach to airport development.

The name for this "Field of Dreams" approach came from the motion picture of the same title, in which the star is told by ghostly voices, that if he built a ballfield, ball players would come. The voices kept telling him, daily, "If you build it, they will come." Finally, he built the ballfield, and the ghostly player did indeed arrive to play at his ballpark. Airport development people since the 1940s kept building their airports, under the assumption that the Federal Government would always insure that the airlines would come...and stay. Deregulation changed the rules. Instead of "If you build it, they will come", the Federal Government was now telling the airport owners and indeed the airlines, "If the market is there, they will come". More significantly for hundreds of communities, large and small, it translated into one challenging fact. If the existing airlines or airline in a community could not make a profit without the Federal subsidies, the airline was free to leave the community.

The airlines had built huge fleets of large jets, efficient only on long-haul routes. The fleets could only show a profit if filled to a capacity that markets such as Lewiston's could not provide. Trying to restructure their routes to be more efficient, airlines pulled out of communities and changed their routes. This resulted in route structure changes. These changes were perceived as poor service which resulted in smaller loads on the large aircraft. It wasn't enough to turn a profit. Around and around it went.

That is exactly where Lewiston found itself in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Republic Airlines was cutting back service in a futile attempt to turn a profit. The loads dwindled. The profitability was simply not there and Republic was ready to announce a withdrawal from North Central Idaho.

At the same time, the Deregulation Act of 1978 made it easier to start up a new airline. As the larger airlines pulled out of the smaller markets, a potential niche opened for other kinds of airlines. Across the United States, dozens of new airlines started up, almost overnight. Some of them armed themselves with aircraft logically more suited to smaller markets, looking for the niche vacated by the large-aircraft-airlines. Lewiston saw its share of
Remember Air Pacific?

Several now-defunct airlines passed this way briefly


These and other airlines and would-be airlines proposed service to Lewiston in the 1960s and 1970s. Some actually made it. Gem State Airlines, based at Coeur d'Alene, offered flights through Lewiston to other Idaho points for 11 months in late 1978 and 1979.

Sun Valley Airlines proposed flights to Lewiston in the late 1960s. Intermountain Aircraft of Boise offered service to Lewiston during a 1972 airline strike. Air Pacific of Portland offered freight service during the strike and eyed a passenger trade. But the strike ended and it withdrew.

Execuair of Richland came into Pullman-Moscow Airport with a flight to Boise in 1975, but that effort was short-lived. Tri-State Airways of Walla Walla also faltered along the way.

Big Sky, a Billings, Montana-based airline, tried trips between Lewiston and Missoula in the spring of 1979. Lewiston was a four-airline airport for that brief period until the Montanas airline decided the few passengers it garnered wouldn't sustain service. (The other airlines serving Lewiston at the time were Gem State, Hughes Airwest and Cascade Airways.)

Mountain West of Boise called at Lewiston briefly in the winter of 1980-81 before a series of troubles forced it to withdraw.

Reaching far back, there was Zimmerly Air Transport. It began intrastate service in 1944, then changed its name to Zimmerly Airlines. A year later Zimmerly became Empire Airlines.

Empire was purchased by West Coast in 1952. West Coast merged with two other airlines in 1958 to form Air West that subsequently became Hughes Airwest. That western regional airline was merged into Republic Airlines in 1980 and Republic pulled out of Lewiston last September.

The survivors?

Cascade Airways, Spokane-based Northwest regional airline that opened up shop in 1969, at present is the only airline serving Lewiston. It has, for the most part, consistently done so, although it suspended its Lewiston service for five months in the first half of 1976 and a couple of other times suspended service between Lewiston and Boise.

Cascade soon will be challenged by Horizon Airlines, a two-year-old regional line based at Seattle. Horizon is scheduled to begin service to Lewiston and to Pullman-Moscow March 15.

Reporting on Results of Deregulation
(Lewiston Morning Tribune)
start ups. Some of them survived, some didn't, and some learned to keep their focus on the market. Lewiston shared in the turbulence of the deregulated era. Airlines coming and going...Gem State Airlines, Big Sky, Northern Pacific, and so on. Operating an airline in good, stable economic times had always been a business requiring great marketing skills and economic endurance. But these were not stable, good times.

Along came soaring fuel prices during the middle east crises. The Gem States and Big Skys fell by the wayside. And no airline executive had "experience" or "corporate memory" to provide advice on running an airline in an industry without subsidies. The new niche carriers had no easy task figuring out how to "connect" themselves to major airlines at major airports that couldn't have cared less for the smaller markets and airlines.

Cascade Airways was one airline that seemed destined for greatness in the smaller markets. Born in the Northwest when the deregulation handwriting was on the wall, Cascade positioned itself to take over communities' air service needs when the "big guys" finally pulled out. So when 1978 came and Republic began its farewell bid to Lewiston, Cascade was ready, initiating service from the Valley to several connecting Cities.

However, Cascade also disappeared from Lewiston and the Northwest too. The company had been doing everything right, surmounting many deregulation challenges. Competition arrived in the form of Horizon Air, another start up carrier. Trying to be "everything to everyone", Cascade bought some large, fuel-inefficient jets, and began to fly between the small markets with the aircraft. The combination of their own mistake and competition sounded the death knell for Cascade. While some may have felt remorse, this was "survival of the fittest". Among other things, this was what Congress and the President had in mind with the Act of 1978. The airlines would have to make it on their own with the market acting as the economic regulator. The attention was focused on the state of the airline industry. As carriers flew in and flew out, public confidence waned. Boardings fell to all time lows at the Regional Airport, which created more negative attention.

The era of the late 1970s and early 1980s were not without physical airport improvements. Additions to and modernization of the administration building came. Safety enhancements were made also with the addition of Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting equipment, a fire station, and professional fire fighters of the Lewiston Fire Department. A new building to house the airport snow control, maintenance, and operations function was completed in 1985. Runway end identifier lights, visual approach slope indicators, taxiway lights, illuminated hold signs, illuminated taxiway guidance signs, illuminated distance remaining markers. ...the list went on and on. Runways were rebuilt, safety areas constructed, and taxiways reconstructed. Private investment soared too, and The Hillcrest Aircraft Company relocated to its new home in the "V" between the runways.
But just as important was the start of a new philosophy for governing the airport. In 1985, the Lewiston City Council and County Board of Commissioners abandoned their "Field of Dreams" approach and adopted an economic development philosophy. "If we can do something about our community's economic well being, if we can diversify our own industrial and commercial base through economic development, then we can do something about our own economies at our own regional airport." Takeoffs and landings had hit an all time low of about 40,000. And airline boardings had fallen to less than 22,000 per year. Marrying the airport with the economic development community, insisting that airport management integrate its activities with that of the community was the first step. Using business theories of airport administration was the next. Taking a marketing approach to managing the airport in every way was the result.

Hughes would not be too surprised. He had the vision to get the foundation started. The airport not only survived deregulation, his regional airport thrived in the competitive market. With new business people providing the policy guidance, airline boardings almost tripled, with each month seeming to set all time records. Fuel sales more than doubled as 1994 approached. Landings and takeoffs also set new highs.

With the wisdom of the City Council and County Board of Commissioners, the Airport had indeed survived deregulation. The community insisted on it. Just like the airport, had survived the regional threat...with the drive of people like Clyde Martin. Just like the airport had survived neglect with the drive of the "Frank Sullivans" and Chambers of Commerce. William Hughes was gone, leaving a glimmer of the dreams of things that used to be.
On The 50th Anniversary

As the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional airport reached its 50th Anniversary...1994, the facility was again assuming its proper role for the time. It was a role anticipated many years before. It had always been a Regional port. Now, it was part of the multi-modal transportation system that the leaders had envisioned. As the community reached new heights of economic growth through transportation...shipping through the Port of Lewiston, trucking through the major highways, and railroads, air transportation was bringing its contribution too.

![Inside the Administration Building Today]

(Photography Courtesy of Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport)

Record levels of passenger activity were reached in 1993 as more than 84,000 customers passed through the doors of the terminal building Hughes pressed for. More than 55 commercial airline flights per day buzzed in and out of the port. This commercial service was provided by Horizon Airline and Empire Airlines. Horizon, a northwestern originated airline grew out of the deregulation era shortly after Cascade was born, and eventually grew to be one of the largest, most profitable regional airlines in
the nation. Ironically, Empire Airlines "came back". This was a
different Empire though. The one serving the region in the 1990s
was also an Idaho-based airline like the one Bert Zimmerly
originated in the 1940s. The name is the only relationship. But
in 1994, the Lewiston-Nez Perce County Regional Airport is the only
small community airport in the Northwestern United States having
direct service to every hub in the Northwest including Boise,
Portland, Seattle, and Spokane. With the airline marketing
relationships feeding Northwest Airlines (successor to Republic
Airlines), Alaska Airlines, United, and Delta, there is virtually
no place in the world that passengers from North Central Idaho
can't reach by air. Today, more landings and takeoffs were
recorded by every sort of aircraft, civilian and military, than
ever before. And a newer industry, one that Hughes did not even
think of had emerged with Lewiston at its Hub...air cargo.

The doors opened to dedicated air cargo airlines. Federal
Express created a new air cargo complex in 1993. United Parcel
Service began shipping cargo in and out of small cities in
regions...by air...from the airport. It all became the touchstone
of the airport's role as the regional center for this very
versatile form of freight movement.

Besides providing vital aviation services to North Central
Idaho, the airport, along with its 22 business units, has a major
impact on the regional economy. A recent study showed that the
airport provides 222 jobs, including 57 seasonal opportunities.
The estimated annual payroll of the airport is over $3.2 million.
The airport business community purchases goods and services in the
region to the tune of approximately $3.3 million each year.
Visitors entering the region through the doors of the terminal building spend approximately $10.5 million annually. The combined economic impact of all the factors exceeds $33.5 million each year, pumped into the economy.

This could be what Hughes had in mind!