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Regional Airport--Story With Many Chapters

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It is a long story. It is the story of a regional or single airport to serve Dallas-Fort Worth and the Southwest.

It has many chapters, thousands of pages and millions of words, both written and spoken.

It has many titles. Some of them are Amon Carter Field, Love Field, Midway Airport, North Texas Airport.

The underlying theme of the story is a simple one.

It involves only one subject, one plot:

A giant complex of asphalt and concrete, sleek modern buildings to provide airline service for the two cities, North Texas and the Southwest.

Many new chapters have been added to the story in recent years. Many old ones have been revived and revised.

While the new ones involve new characters and up-to-date scenery and props, they still are ghosts of the past, strangely parallel to events of a couple of decades ago.

RECITATION OF 22-YEAR-OLD POLICY

Even the recent controversy stirred up by Najeeb Halaby, Federal Aviation Agency administrator, was, in effect, a voice out of the past.

His comments about Dallas and Fort Worth working toward a common goal of a regional airport to serve this area merely was a recitation of a policy laid down by the government 22 years ago.

Halaby's statement put new life into the idea that somehow and somewhere a regional airport should be in operation between Fort Worth and Dallas to serve these two metropolitan areas.

Entwined throughout the story of aviation of this area is the tale of two cities, Fort Worth and Dallas, and each's quest for leadership in the air age.

The prelude was written in 1911 when an aerial circus moved into Fort Worth, introducing the airplane to the city where the West begins.

The event started the courtship between Fort Worth and aviation.

The romance blossomed during World War I, grew during the 1920s and 1930s and matured into a full bloom love affair at the start of 1940.

ANSWER GIVEN TO TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS

Aviation gave Fort Worth an answer to its transportation problems. It provided the city and this Southwest region a speedy link to other trade areas.

The airplane created a glamorous new era for Fort Worth. It was the crescendo to a past filled with history-making events for the city: the coming of the railroad, opening of the stockyards, the booming cattle, oil and gas lands of the West.

Commercial aviation came to Fort Worth in 1926 when a National Air Transport pilot landed his airmail plane here.

This opened the way for construction of Meacham Field, which began operations as a commercial airport a year later.

And it was that year, 1927, that the idea of a joint airport to serve Fort Worth and Dallas was presented.

The idea came from Dallas.

Fort Worth city officials promptly rejected the proposal.

A year later, Dallas purchased the Army airport, located in the north section of the city, and turned it into a municipal airfield, which became Love Field.

It opened the door for new and spirited rivalry between the two cities, trademarks for Fort Worth and Dallas almost from the time each was established.

The competition was keen but it was a healthy stimulus to the growth of the economy of each city and the areas each served.

With the development and refinement of the airplane in the 1930s came expansion and improvements at the airports serving Fort Worth and Dallas.

Competition and rivalry for business was in step with this growth.

INDUSTRY REVOLUTION IN MAKING

The airliner of those days was a twin-engine ship. Compared to present day aerial giants, it was small, carrying little fuel, few passengers and a small payload of freight.

Ships landed at Fort Worth's Meacham Field and moved to Love Field in Dallas or vice versa.

A revolution in the aircraft industry was in the making in the late 1930s.

And this revolution wrote the introduction to the story of a regional airport for the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

The four-engine airliner, a faster, heavier ship with more range, soon would replace the DC-3, creating major problems all along the line.

Extensive and expensive improvements would be needed at Meacham and Love Fields to handle the larger ships.

Airline companies were faced with a problem, too. The high cost of operating the larger aircraft made the dual landings at Meacham and Love Fields economically impractical.

FIRST CHAPTER GREW OUT OF DILEMMA

Out of this financial dilemma came the first chapter in the story of a regional airport.

Apparently no one person was responsible for the idea. It evolved from three sources.

One was the Civil Aeronautics Administration, the forerunner of the present Federal Aviation Agency. The others were the two major airlines operating at Meacham and Love Fields: American and Braniff.

The interest the federal government had in this matter is reflected in a letter dated Sept. 26, 1940, written by A. B. McMullen, then director of airports for the CAA in Washington.

The letter went to Hester Smith, airport engineer for the CAA in Fort Worth.

McMullen wrote that Fort Worth and Dallas each had requested federal aid for development and expansion of its municipal airports.

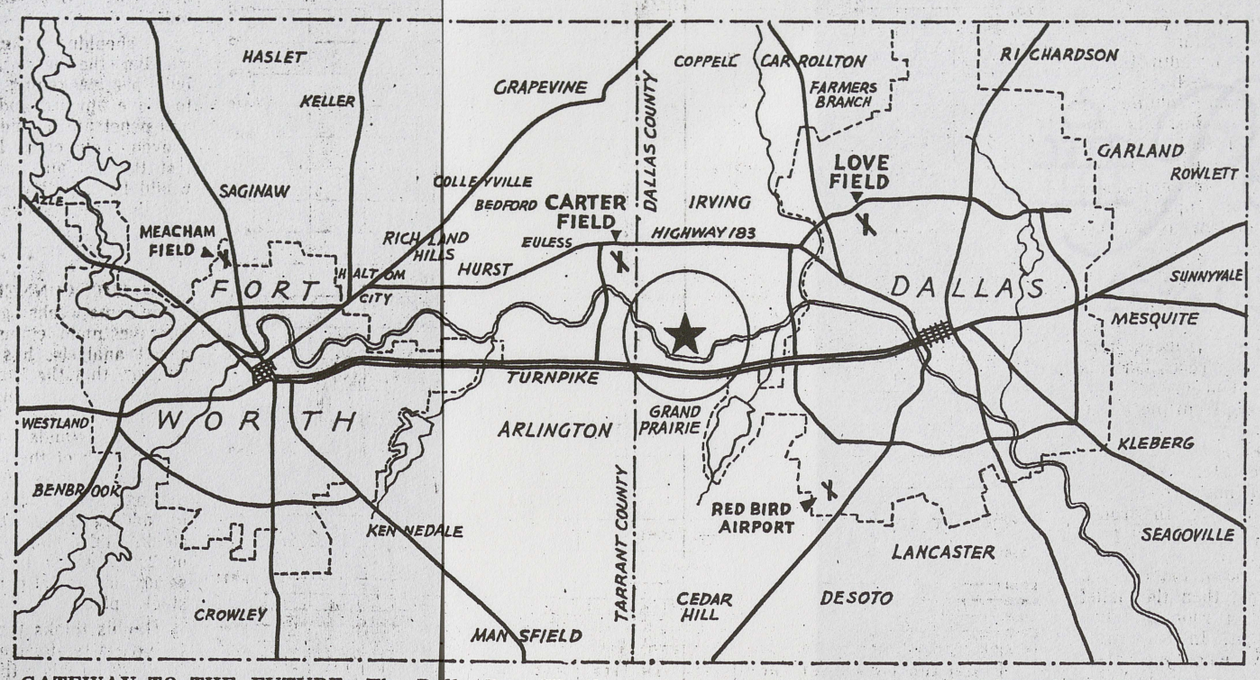
It was at this stage that McMullen raised the point that a regional airport, one to serve both cities and surrounding areas, might be the answer to the growing aviation problems.

McMullen asked that an investigation be conducted on the feasibility of constructing a combined airport.

GOVERNOR APPOINTED SPECIAL COMMITTEE

A few months earlier, then Gov. W. Lee O'Daniel appointed a special committee to study the airport needs of Texas and to write a plan on this subject.

The study would be submitted to the CAA to assist that agency in planning for airport development in this state.



—Star-Telegram Map by Winston Croslin

GATEWAY TO THE FUTURE—The Dallas-Fort Worth industrial-residential complex is the home of more than 1,600,000 citizens. It is one of the nation's fastest growing, most active business centers, one that must be served by air transportation. Aviation interests say a single airport, one operated as a joint venture, is needed to meet the needs of the future. The center of population of the two-county area is the point marked by the encircled star.

On Oct. 1, 1940, the state agency, known as the Texas Aeronautics Advisory Committee, met in Wichita Falls. The meeting had one objective: Study the proposal that a new airport be constructed between Dallas and Fort Worth to serve that growing, bustling area.

Officials of the committee and the CAA recommended that a new airport be constructed, saying such a project would be more economical than pouring additional funds into Meacham or Love Fields to meet the demands of the growing air age.

Dallas officials attending the meeting welcomed the idea. They suggested the airport be located nearer Dallas than Fort Worth, saying their city was the larger, had more airline business and should get preference in the establishment of the proposed airport.

Obviously, Fort Worth representatives bristled at Dallas' recommendation. The Fort Worth officials took the stand that an airport such as that proposed by Dallas would in effect be a Dallas field.

They contended that the two cities were far enough apart to merit separate airfields and that's the way they wanted it.

An impasse developed. The meeting broke up without a solution or answer.

CITIES' OFFICIALS AGREED ON CONCEPT

There was one glimmer of hope, however.

The CAA regional headquarters took on the job of arbitrator. Work was started to get the two cities together, to find a common ground on which the differences could be settled.

Numerous meetings, conferences and discussions followed.

And out of each came new chapters for the story.

Records show that Fort Worth and Dallas officials agreed on the concept that a joint airport would be useful for the two-city area.

Each city, however, had reservations and ideas on what role the proposed airport would assume.

Fort Worth wanted it constructed for military use only. The nation was in the throes of preparing for possible war. Military aircraft were becoming more numerous with each passing day.

Dallas agreed to co-sponsor a joint airport, whether it be military or commercial. There was one stipulation, though. Dallas wanted to retain all its commercial airline service.

Fort Worth had a stipulation to make also. An airport co-sponsored by Dallas and Fort Worth must be located on a site exactly halfway between the two cities.

REQUESTS FOR FEDERAL AID REJECTED

A modification was suggested and accepted. If a site could not be located that would place the proposed airport at the exact midway point, Dallas would not object to the location should it be slightly closer to Fort Worth.

In the late fall of 1940, the CAA rejected applications from Fort Worth and Dallas for federal aid in expansion of each city's airport.

And on Dec. 12, 1940, CAA Airports Director McMullen came to Fort Worth to explain the reason for the rejection.

He told representatives from Fort Worth and Dallas that the federal government was not trying to put pressure on either city or both for the construction of a joint airport.

But then he added, the government took the stand that use of federal funds to improve either Love or Meacham Fields would be a waste of money.

He said the government was ready to assist in the construction of a new airport, a regional airfield, to serve both cities.

And that statement issued more than two decades ago is strikingly similar to comments from top echelons in the Federal Aviation Agency today and from aviation interests in both Fort Worth and Dallas.

The Army entered the picture about this time, saying it was interested in the location of an airport between the two cities.

NO CONCRETE OFFER MADE

And in the background were the two airlines, American and Braniff, originators of the concept that one airport would best serve Dallas-Fort Worth.

CAA officials made frequent overtures to Dallas and Fort Worth to get busy on the idea of a single airport. No concrete offer was made from either Fort Worth or Dallas.

Determined to carry through with the project, CAA officials contacted Arlington to carry the ball.

American and Braniff re-entered the negotiations, buying the land necessary for an airport. The land was turned over to Arlington.

This was the same deal the airlines had made Dallas and Fort Worth, an offer spurned by the two cities.

Arlington thus became the owner of an airport site midway between Dallas and Fort Worth.

The CAA promptly recognized Arlington's position, allocating $490,000 for construction of an airport with runways 3,500 to 4,500 feet in length.

Fort Worth and Dallas got busy at this point. The idea that Arlington, then a city of 4,000, should own the airport destined to become the air hub for the Southwest, goaded officials of the two cities into action.

And with this came another chapter in the story.

[illegible] removed from the story in order that the underlying theme be not lost in a maze of complexities.

Soon after Arlington became a principal character in the story, officials in Dallas and Fort Worth stepped into the plot with a recrudescency that was heard in Washington.

This renewed activity produced concrete results.

Conferences and discussions led to formation of a tri-city pact in establishment of a regional airport.

In Fort Worth on Oct. 16, 1941, the plan moved from the talking stage to one of action.

Officials of the CAA, Arlington, Dallas and Fort Worth and the two major airlines agreed that:

1. The airport would be located midway between Fort Worth and Dallas.

2. The name of airport would be Midway.

3. The airlines would purchase 1,000 acres, deed the land to the three cities and execute a 50-year lease to use facilities at the field.

4. The CAA would build the landing strips.

5. A corporation would be formed to raise funds for construction of buildings, hangars, repair shops and a terminal.

6. Operation of the field would be in the hands of a seven-man board made up of one representative from each city and two from each of the two airlines.

SURVEY STARTED FOR POSSIBLE SITE

Apparently the federal government anticipated outcome of the meeting even before it was called. A few days before the session got under way Army engineers were surveying a possible site for location of a regional airport concentrating their activities in the Euless area.

When Fort Worth officials learned the site was two miles closer to Dallas than Fort Worth, an objection was raised. Fort Worth proposed a site a mile closer to Fort Worth.

Records show that the alternate site was surveyed but rejected because the cost of locating an airport there would be higher than that earmarked for the original plot.

Fort Worth agreed to accept the government's decision.

A draftsman at CAA headquarters was pushed into service to draw a sketch of the area, showing location of the proposed runways and terminal complex.

The sketch reflected the official policy of the CAA.

It showed the terminal building on the west side of the field. It was placed there to permit future expansion of the runways and because the west side location offered economy in construction.

The sketch depicted a network of highways linking Fort Worth and Dallas to the airport. These were not the official or designated routes for highways but merely products of the draftsman's imagination.

And, as will be shown later, this one point probably did more to scramble the story of a regional airport than any other factor.

Having worked with both sides in the airport questions, the CAA anticipated some points and took action to meet them head-on when they arose.

CHECK ORDERED ON TWO DISTANCES

One of these involved the distance factor.

About the time the sketch was prepared, an order was issued to check on the distance between the field and the Baker Hotel in downtown Dallas and Hotel Texas in downtown Fort Worth.

Dallas had a mile advantage from the air. Fort Worth had a one-tenth mile edge via then existing paved roads. Highway 183 was not in existence at that time. A gravel road, narrow and rough, was located along the approximate route of Highway 183.

The sketch and distance checks were presented to Fort Worth, Arlington and Dallas officials for approval.

The records show that Fort Worth readily accepted the plan.

Fred Florence, chairman of a Dallas aviation committee, expressed approval saying location of the field and the administration building fulfilled an agreement made between Fort Worth and Dallas a few months earlier.

About this time, the sketch prepared by the CAA draftsman was published. This was the sketch that depicted a direct highway to Fort Worth, leading directly from the terminal to the downtown area.

A proposed highway was indicated for Dallas but it was not a route with a straight approach to the terminal, comparable to that represented for Fort Worth.

Another chapter was in the making a stormy one that almost brought the story to an end.

TERMINAL BUILDING SITE PROTESTED

Briefly, here's what the records show:

Dallas officials objected to location of the terminal building on the west side of the field, saying that to place it there would give Fort Worth an unfair advantage.

Dallas said the terminal should be located at the north end of the field, favoring neither city.

Charges and countercharges from Fort Worth and Dallas erupted. Controversies grew, personalities clashed and new problems were presented.

An attempt was made to solve the matter, having a check made on cost and feasibility of a terminal at the north end of the field.

The report showed that the north side terminal would add $45,483 to the construction cost and would result in longer and more expensive taxi distance for airplanes landing at the field.

CAA records show that Dallas Chamber of Commerce officials and the Dallas city manager agreed and approved the CAA plans, calling for location of the terminal on the west side.

The lone dissenter, the record reflects, was Woodall Rodgers, mayor of Dallas.

Information was sent to Washington in February 1942 that the plan was ready for action.

Orders came back on Feb. 23 for start of construction.

NEW ROUND OF DISSENT DEVELOPED

A new round of dissent developed. Dallas objected to the location of the terminal. Again came charges and countercharges from Dallas and Fort Worth.

Arlington waded into the row. It was tiny in size but packed an explosive power that had been overlooked heretofore.

Officials of that midway city reminded Fort Worth and Dallas that it was the owner of the land on which Midway Airport was to be built.

Fort Worth and Dallas could use the field when it was completed but they should remain silent during the planning stages if they could not reach an agreement.

Meanwhile, Army engineers began work on the field, following the plan laid down by the CAA. Actual construction work began May 24, 1942.

Dallas took its protest to then Secretary of Commerce Jesse Jones. Fort Worth sent a delegation to Washington, too. So did Arlington.

A full-scale hearing was staged before Jones on March 22, 1943.

Jones told all factions that no decision would be made as to location of the administration building until after the war. Meantime, he said, the field would be used by the Army for training pilots.

DALLAS ANNOUNCED END OF TALKS

On April 1, 1943, Dallas announced that it was ending negotiations on the Midway Airport. The city would concentrate its efforts toward building Love Field into an airport to meet the needs of the future.

Three months later, Midway Airfield was opened and turned over to the City of Arlington for operation.

Official negotiations over Midway as a regional airport—those in which the federal government was involved—had ended. Midway was used as a military installation throughout World War II.

In 1947, Fort Worth turned to Midway as the site for a new municipal airport, acquiring the field from Arlington.

Plans were made to meet the postwar developments in aviation, plans that would provide a super airport for long-range, high-speed, heavy airliners needing long runways and approaches.

The dream of a regional airfield to serve Fort Worth and Dallas was not forgotten or shelved, however. A new name was suggested for the site, North Texas Airport, in hopes this would take some of the sting out of the intercity rivalry and encourage Dallas aviation interests to re-enter the proposal.

No fruition came of these dreams and Fort Worth went ahead with its own city planning.

OUT OF THIS WORK CAME CARTER

Out of this planning and work toward the future came the 2,000-acre complex now known as Greater Fort Worth International Airport-Amon Carter Field.

Dallas also began plans. Love Field was improved and extended.

Again the competition for leadership in the air age.

Another chapter went into the history book.

With each passing day came new developments in the aviation industry. Bigger, faster planes were produced, ships that could cross the nation in a few hours, ships that could fly nonstop from this area to either coast.

And then came the jets.

A new era, with giants in the sky. And with these planes came problems.

These problems, noise and long runways and glide paths, centered around Love Field, located in the middle of a plush residential section and busy commercial district.

Meanwhile, aviation interests in both Fort Worth and Dallas never gave up the idea that a regional airport would be the answer to the problems of the jet air age.

A giant of an airport is needed for this Dallas-Fort Worth area.

It is one of the nation's most productive areas in business, commerce, industry, finance, agriculture, oil and manufacturing.

It is one of the few, if not the only, landlocked centers of trade and commerce in the nation.

It must have adequate air transportation to compete with other areas served by water transportation.

An airport, one free of encroachments, one large enough to attract jetliners of today and the 250-ton ships now being designed, is a prime necessity. And soon.

POEM SUMS UP SITUATION

Where can such a site be found?

Aviation interests point to the land midway between Fort Worth and Dallas as the answer.

There are those in Fort Worth and Dallas who predict that unless the two cities come to some agreement in aviation, as they have done in other fields, they will find problems of the future air age so complex they can not solve them.

And should this occur the federal government may be compelled to step into the picture and forge a solution, one that would have to be accepted but one that would cause problems strikingly parallel to past events in the story.

As one leader summed up the situation, borrowing a line or two from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "Psalm of Life":

". . . Let us, then, be up and doing,

"With a heart for any fate;

"Still achieving, still pursuing,

"Learn to labor and to wait."