The History of Aviation in Clarksville

Mr. Charles Arrington, a researcher of aviation history, gave our group a history of flying and local airports at our July meeting. Charles obtained the aviation history collection of materials of the late Ed Peck, who was a Clarksville Historical Society member until his death in 1998.

The Southern Indiana area had its first brush with flight in 1906, when Horace Wilde flew a hot air balloon up and down the Ohio River for more than five hours and landed at Glenwood Park, just across Silver Creek in New Albany.

A man named Ernest Mason had the first airfield in our area, at the site of the old U.S. Steel factory on Charlestown Road in New Albany. Mason had three Curtis "Jenny" airplanes, and gave rides and lessons. He operated for two or three years, but ended up crashing all three planes and stopped his flying service in 1923.

Mr. Aviation of the 1920's was Russell Beeler. Russell was born in Silver Hills and learned to fly in 1919. In 1924 he went to an airfield in Texas to join a class of the Army Air Service. One of his classmates was Charles Lindbergh and the two became fast friends. Lindbergh graduated and became a military pilot, but Beeler returned to New Albany before finishing the class.

Beeler's airfield, the area's second, was at Carter Avenue and the present Brown's Station Way, at about the site of the old Roberts Strack veneer mill. He opened it in 1927 and taught local aspiring pilots to fly. Some years ago, Ed Peck spoke to our group about memories of his early air adventures at this field.

In 1928 Beeler moved his operation to the other end of Carter Avenue, toward Eastern Boulevard. He called it Jones Field, apparently after the name of the man who rented him the land. About the same time the Curtis Aircraft Company purchased 125 acres across Eastern Boulevard from Jones Field. They set up the Ohio Falls Airport Company at the current site of Value City and had a flying school and service. Before they could build hangars, the 1929 stock market crash brought an end to the company's plan to develop a major area airport. Had the depression not halted the operation, it may have grown into the Louisville International Airport of today.

Beeler took over the Curtis Company land and moved across Eastern Boulevard. He built two hangars and renamed it Wilson Field, although some recall it being called "Midway Airport."
Throughout the 1930's Beeler gave rides and taught students to fly. After the start of World War II the government closed all airports that did not have a control tower. When the war was over and private flying resumed, Beeler sold the airfield to Charlie Bush. Bush operated it until 1953, when "Hap" Happel took it over. Happel later moved his operation to the Progress Way area, and currently runs the Clark County Airport.

Some of the members recalled one of Beeler's hangars being used as a skating rink in the late 1940's. Many long-time residents still remember the fields that now hold Value City and Hallmark Apartments as "the airport."

Mr. Arrington will return to give our October program on Rosie the Riveter.

**Museum Receives a Copy of Deed**

Mrs. Frances Gabel Brown has donated a facsimile copy of the *Deed of Cession of the Old Northwest Territory to the United States of America, executed by the Commonwealth of Virginia, March 1, 1784.*

The copy of the cession was presented to Mrs. Brown's father, John D. Gabel, who was a member of the George Rogers Clark Delegation from Kentucky and the Old Northwest Territory States at a Virginia commemoration of the event on November 17-19, 1927.

Mr. Gabel was a Hanover professor and also served as the Superintendent of Schools of Jefferson County, Indiana.

Virginia ceded all the land she had claimed north and west of the Ohio River to the United States, except the Illinois Grant and Clarksville, on October 1, 1784.

The facsimile itself is now seventy-five years old.

**The Warden's Rejoinder.**

**The Charges, the Spite Work of Abel Ewing, a Disgruntled Deputy Warden Who Resigned.**

**A General Denial of Peculation.**

The editor of the News, who is home today from the legislature, called on Warden Patten, in reference to the charges referred to in the dispatches from Indianapolis.

Warden Patten in a running interview said: "I absolutely deny any charge reflected on my honesty and integrity as a man or official..."

[Editor:] What about cruelty to prisoners?

"I have punished convicts, I have whipped them, and as long as I am warden I expect to whip the incorrigibles. We do not use the cat-o-nine tails. We have a leather strap cut into course threads on the end which will make a convict smart, but with which no man could make a man's skin bleed. There is no truth in the blood story."

[Editor:] Did you up hang prisoners by the thumbs by the hour until they fainted?

"I have hung men up by the thumbs. They are made to stand on tip-toe, so they ache across the back, and if they let themselves down it hurts their thumbs. They are never put up over fifteen minutes. Two or three rogues have pretended to faint, to escape punishment and it is the only ground for the charge."

(From The Evening News, 14 January 1893)
The Story of Clarkville's Blackhawk Stewart
by Don McDonough

Some years ago when I was very young (around twelve), together with some friends I hunted the Clarksville riverbank for arrowheads. These were great days for my fellow adventurers and me and now are fond memories. The river would recede after some yearly flooding and wash the riverbank away, leaving many treasures.

We would find, along with the arrowheads, bone fishhooks and needles, pieces of pottery, lead musket balls and metal buttons from uniforms. We also found polished stone axes and celts (used for skinning animal hides) as well as stone pestles and mortars used for grinding corn.

There were the ruins of a house on top of the hill that we were told were the remains of the old Kelley farm. I seem to recall a single doorway remaining, along with a stone foundation. The 1937 flood had played havoc with the dwellings near the river.

Recently, I found and read in the Indiana Room of the Jeffersonville Library the Stewart family history. After reviewing those pages I immediately reverted back to those pleasant days of my youth. The history of this family captured my interest and attention and I now relate to those who read this an amazing story for history buffs.

It all began with the birth of Robert "Blackhawk" Stewart in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania on March 16, 1780. How he came by the name of Blackhawk is unknown to me, but he was of Indian heritage. He was brought to Kentucky in 1784 and the family settled on Harrod's Creek near Louisville.

After the death of his parents, he moved to Indiana Territory in 1798 and settled near Charlestown in Clark County at a location given in the article as "Nineteen-Mile Creek."

After a time he moved to Clarksville.

He later married Rosanne Long, who was born in 1795 in Kentucky. The marriage took place in Clark County Indiana on November 23, 1811 and the presiding minister was the Rev. James Ferguson of the Methodist faith. The couple would have ten children:

Anderson Stewart, born in 1812 and died at 73 in 1885.
Rebecca Stewart, born in 1817 and died at 64 in 1881.
Robert Stewart, Jr., born in 1819 and died at 17 in 1836.
Elizabeth Jane Stewart, born in 1822 and died at 21 in 1843.
Isaac F. Stewart, born and died in 1824.
William John Stewart, born in 1825 and died at 34 in 1859.
Mariah, born in 1828 and died at 39 in 1867.
Amelia Ann Stewart, born in 1830 and died at an unknown age.
Andrew Jackson Stewart, born in 1832 and died at 55 in 1887.
Mary Louise Stewart, born in 1833 and died at 79 in 1912.

The elder Robert Stewart acquired many acres of land that ran from the Ohio River to about present-day Gutford Road, with Silver Creek as the western line and State Road 131 as the eastern one. He and John McCulloch were the two largest landowners in the area.

Stewart gave his eight surviving children some of his land as each married and built homes of their own. Some of the streets in Clarksville are still named after his married daughters and their portioned areas - Emery Lane, Hale Road and Taylor Drive. I knew this area well, since I became the mailman there. Many of the people who still live there are direct descendants of Robert and Rosanne Stewart. There are many I know personally, such as Jack Dierking, Joe Ryan, Lester Bottorff, Betty Kaelin Stemler, Bill and Bob Adams, and Jane Applegate Inman. Also related are the Hales, Longs, McBrides, Graysons, Sherrods, Maloneys, Clapps, Emerys and many other families.
Robert Stewart's wife, Rosanne, died in 1858 at the age of 63 years. Robert "Blackhawk" Stewart died in 1871. He was 91 years old. They are both buried in the Stewart family cemetery on Blackiston Mill Road behind the old K-Mart building.

One foggy day I walked among the gravestones there. They are mostly illegible, and I thought, "What a shame this is so overgrown with tall grass and weeds." Several days later I drove by and the cemetery was neatly manicured, I imagine by some of the many family members located here. It was mentioned in the family history papers that Mrs. Ivy Stewart Detrick had devoted much of her time tending and caring for the Stewart cemetery.

The life of Blackhawk Stewart can best be told by his obituary in the New Albany Daily Ledger in its January 19, 1871 issue. The headline reads, Death of an Old Pioneer of Clark County:

Mr. Robert Stewart, one of the first settlers of Clark County, died at the residence of his son, half a mile above the large bridge over Silver Creek, early last night at the advanced age of 96 years. Mr. Stewart settled in Clark County over 50 years ago where he accumulated considerable land, but which he divided among his children some years ago, since which time he had made his home among them.

During the career of Mr. Stewart he was a tower of strength among the democracy of Clark County, and in his younger days, he was a fearless and bold champion of the wrongs of the people. Having been prominent among the people of Clark for many years, he made an extensive acquaintance and gained many warm friends as well as many bitter political enemies. His extreme age compelled him to retire from active life and for several years past he took no part in politics except to cast his ballot at elections. The many warm friends of the deceased will regret to hear of his demise, although he had lived many years over the allotted years of three score and ten.

(To be continued in the next issue.)

NOTICE

Our September meeting will be the annual picnic at the Clark Cabin on September 11th. It is for members only, but each member may bring a guest. The society will furnish the food. Each person will need to bring a lawn chair and a beverage. We will have ice, cups & coolers there. Jeanne Burke will give us a tour of the cabin and we will have door prizes.

August meeting

on the 14th at 4:30

Second floor of the Municipal Center

Speaker: Dani Cummins - An update on the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Events

REMEMBER THE NEW MEETING
TIME OF 4:30