



PROPOSAL FOR A LINCOLN, NEBRASKA AIR HISTORY MUSEUM

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Summary

The interest of aviation in the Lincoln area has always been strong. From the earliest days of powered flight the footprint of the airplane has been seen in various parts of the city. North of Lincoln Memorial Cemetery, the now gone Page Field offered many Lincolniters their first up close view of an airplane. A non-descript brick building north of Havelock was once a hangar for a flight school at Union Airport. An odd-looking semi-truck once hauled Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles to their silos east of the city down "O" Street and in many years past a small chapel was built to help serve an Army Air Field that was rushed to completion during some of the darker days of World War II.

To describe Lincoln as an important center of aerospace history is perhaps an understatement. Many stories came from the history here; many more have been lost to time. Many in our community do not know of what came before, of why Lincoln has a very long runway or why the Goodyear Plant in Havelock was built.

We propose that a museum be either leased or built to commemorate Lincoln's memorable aerospace history in the Lincoln Air Park area.

A tentative name proposed would be the "Lincoln Air History Museum"

We believe with enough support, dedication and teamwork, such a museum could become a cultural gem of the city of Lincoln and bring new motivation, focus and possibly development to the Northwest Lincoln area.

[A Brief History](#)

The City of Lincoln has long played an important and interesting role in the development and maturity of aviation in not only Nebraska but the United States as well. A Wright flyer was seen over the Nebraska State Fair of 1910 and soon after the First World War barnstormers became a more frequent sight in Nebraska's skies. During the 1920s, Lincoln became a home to aircraft production. Lincoln Standard Aircraft Company became one of the first in the city (where famed aviator Charles Lindbergh utilized a Lincoln Standard airplane to learn to fly while E.J. Sias helped found the Lincoln Aeronautical Institute, now partially an antique mall, near 24th and "O" Streets). Arrow Sport airplanes, once quite famous nationally, were built in Havelock by the Arrow Aircraft Corporation. These rolled off the production line until the advent of the Great Depression. The same company helped establish Arrow Airport, a property near Lincoln's old city landfill that operated light aircraft for many years after.

Nearby Union Airport would open in 1939, built by E.J. Sias, the Lincoln Airplane and Flying School moved to that location after a start at Lincoln's Municipal Airport. Union Airport existed until 1964 and its remnants can still be seen today.

By 1939, the small 160 acre Lincoln Municipal Airport had been operating for ten years providing very early United Airways service as well as being an Air Mail stop. With war looming in Europe, it was not long until the Army Air Corps decided to build Lincoln Army Airfield in 1942, finishing the base to serve as a mechanics training school in mere months. Over 10,000 mechanics and several thousand aircrews would see Lincoln before the base closed in December 1945.

By the next year the Nebraska Air National Guard stood up and became only the second Air National Guard group in the country, followed by the activation of Naval Air Station Lincoln in 1948, Lincoln would soon boast a large military contingent.

In 1952 the Air Force announced that Lincoln Air Force Base would reactivate and operate B-47 bombers and KC-97 propeller air-refueling tankers. Lincoln's west apron was soon built, at the time the largest concrete construction job ever undertaken in the state while the air base soon became home to over 6,000 airmen and officers, over 10,000 dependents and became a solid part of the Lincoln economy while its nuclear armed bombers stood a role of deterrence during the high years of the Cold War.

By 1966, the Air Force relinquished the base back to Lincoln and the Lincoln Airport Authority took control of what became known as Lincoln Air Park. With the advent of Duncan Aviation in Lincoln, a growing commercial airport and a healthy general aviation market, Lincoln soon became less known for the rumble of jets than the buzzing of Cessnas and regional airliners.

Today looking back upon the history of Lincoln aviation, its impact here as well as nationally was profound. Lincoln's runway was once an alternate landing site for the space shuttle orbiter, an Army Corp of Engineers study called Lincoln AFB one of the most important SAC bases of the early Cold War and the soft roar of KC-135 Nebraska Air National Guard tankers is consistently heard and felt throughout the city.

Discussion

Proposals for an air museum in Lincoln are not new. An Arnold Heights Neighborhood Comprehensive Plan denotes the possibility of an “Aerospace Museum” in the Air Park area. With plans for new Northwest 48th Street 4-lane development, new growth along that corridor, Lincoln Airport Authority future plans for more rail-to-road centers and other developments, we believe this would be an ideal time to move forward with creating a new museum in the area.

At the present time, we believe an ideal location would be a relatively historic construction related to the former Lincoln Air Force Base/Lincoln Army Airfield due to adequate space available in the area. A larger “hall” venue could provide multiuse capabilities and some outdoor acreage could offer static aircraft display space.

In terms of conflicting missions, the Nebraska State Historical Society keeps records in the subject but this is aimed primarily at researchers, scholars and students whereas the Strategic Air and Space Museum offers an immense history of Strategic Air Command as well as science education, but it offers a more nationwide interest rather than that of Lincoln’s.

Mission

A suggestion for three main areas would include

- **Public Display and Education** - To present information gathered in a form understandable and enjoyable to the public. This presentation should be educational but also entertaining for such a museum to succeed. Fresh displays and exhibits should be presented often to ensure repeat visitors. Most of all, the mission should be to provide a sense of pride and inspiration in Lincoln’s aviation past.
- **Archives and Records** - To collect exhibits and preserve records for future generations in both physical and computer form. Such records would complement, but not compete with archival records of the Nebraska State Historical Society.
- **Internet Presence** - Due to the rapidly changing technology and also the way the public now gathers information over Internet sources, a great deal of attention should be paid to establishing a full web presence that would allow visitors to gain access to aviation records and histories.

Costs/Fundraising

Consideration for a possible lease with the Lincoln Airport Authority, Lincoln Housing Authority or private party should be noted in addition to operating overhead consisting of insurance, utilities and office/operational supplies.

Depending on the building, repairs may be needed and maintenance figures might vary, depending again on lease, rent or purchase.

Fundraising to cover initial costs and ongoing maintenance could possibly be provided by sponsorships, grant opportunities, internet crowd-funding campaigns and other traditional forms of fundraising.

Admission costs could be discussed later.

Multi-Use Potential

One might consider that a museum could offer the Arnold Heights Neighborhood or Northwest Lincoln area the following possibilities

- Senior Center
- Rental Hall
- Temporary/Traveling Exhibit Space
- Neighborhood Meeting Space
- After-hours meeting space for clubs

Example of Development

Mission: “To preserve, educate and inspire visitors in the history of Lincoln’s aviation heritage”

- Exhibits:
 - **Early Days** **1903 – 1940** **“The Blue Frontier”**
 - Lindbergh
 - Lincoln Standard Aircraft
 - Arrow Aircraft
 - Lincoln Flying Institute
 - Air Mail
 - United Airlines
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 - **World War II** **1941 – 1946** **“Training For War”**
 - Mechanics School
 - Union Airport
 - Arrow Airport
 - Arrow Sport

▪ **The Cold War** **1947 – 1967** **“Force For Freedom”**

- Lincoln Air Force Base
- Atlas-F ICBM
- U.S. Army 6th Missile Battalion/43rd Artillery
- -Huskerville
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▪ **Post-Air Force Aviation** **1968 – Present** **“Emergence of Private Aviation”**

- LAA Acquisitions
- Private Aircraft Development
- Goodyear Global Distribution Center
- Commercial Aviation in Lincoln
- Air Park Development
- Arnold Heights

- Temporary Exhibit Area
- Education Center/Classroom
- Conference Room/Meeting Space

Potential Stakeholders

- Lincoln Airport Authority
- Lincoln Housing Authority
- Lincoln Parks and Recreation
- Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
- Lincoln Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Preservation Association of Lincoln
- Arnold Heights Neighborhood Association
- Other area Neighborhood Associations
- Duncan Aviation
- Silverhawk Aviation
- Hillaero Air Modification Center
- Lincoln Composites
- Nebraska National Guard
- Experimental Aircraft Association Local Chapter
- Air Force Association Local Chapter
- University of Nebraska – Lincoln
- Nebraska State Historical Society
- Lincoln Air Force Base Online Museum
- Local Air Park businesses
- Veterans Groups

What We Can Offer

The Lincoln Air Force Base Online Museum currently has a number of Cold War and World War II related exhibits and items of historical interest. We have conducted mini-museum events in the past as well as public speaking engagements. In addition we have compiled a great deal of digital research and have a website that supports up to 500 hits per month. Some of our articles include models, blueprints, booklets, photographs and other related displays.

The webmaster is very willing to consult on such a project. He carries a degree in computer technology as well as a bachelor's degree in Hospitality, Restaurant and Tourism Management which a capstone course working with the National Park Service Minuteman Missile National Historic Site emphasized conducting tours, developing lesson plans and working with the public. Aside from this, he has volunteered at the Strategic Air Command and Aerospace Museum, the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission and the Lester Larsen Tractor Museum.

Via our Facebook presence, others have expressed their interest in a museum as well.

Where To Go From Here

The above is merely an outline suggestion, far from a rigid set of parameters, from our small organization. Missions could be changed, exhibits amended and other ideas expanded upon for the good of a museum. One method to move forward would be a public meeting with potential stakeholders to expand upon different ideas for such a museum. From there some sort of organization could be established to help bring about a museum via regular meetings. The key would be to usher an atmosphere of open opinions and multiple viewpoints to make something like this work.

Conclusion

Lincoln, Nebraska is home to a great number of niche museums including the Telephone Museum and the Roller Skating Museum. An aviation museum in Northwest Lincoln, provided effective support and funding, could help enhance the culture of the city as well as bring in tourism to an area (Northwest Lincoln) that, aside from air shows, tends to be lacking in this area. Increased development including grocery, gas, restaurants, four-lane road enhancements as well as a close proximity to Interstate 80 in our belief today offers a solid foundation for a museum to prosper in the area. Distinctly different in mission from the Strategic Air Command and Aerospace Museum, a Lincoln Air History Museum could cooperate with that museum to create an aviation-themed tour of attractions in the Eastern Nebraska area.

Finally, Lincoln's rich aviation heritage is beginning to fade more and more each year with little information easily available to explain "what was". At times aviation was truly the pride of the city and in many instances remains so today. Few cities nationwide can claim the aerospace related achievements Lincoln has, and we believe it is time to bring the story to the local and traveling public.