



Nebraska State Historical Society

Proposal for a Nebraska Aviation Heritage Museum

2019

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Summary

The interest of aviation in Nebraska has always been strong. From the earliest days of powered flight, the “sky” print of the airplane has been seen supporting ranchers in the Sandhills to providing America with trained bomber crews to fight in World War II near such localities as McCook, Grand Island, and Fairmont. Helicopters engaged in the support of law enforcement along I-80, while part of America’s “mailed-fist” during the Cold War made its home in Omaha and Lincoln. Today, Nebraska is home to a number of firms dedicated in the pursuit of aerospace technology and maintenance. Single-engine airplanes still buzz above quiet communities statewide and because many of the Cornhusker State’s runways and tarmacs now stand silent, and we feel it is time to preserve and interpret that history for the public before it is lost.

Nebraska’s look towards the skies have long benefited national programs, from agriculture to space. To describe Lincoln and Omaha as important centers of aerospace history is perhaps an understatement. While some affix the term “fly-over country” to the Midwest, it was there that some of that technology evolved. Nebraska’s World War II efforts helped create the world’s strongest and most capable Air Force, and after the war the requirements of the Cold War made it a hub of aerospace command, control, communications and strength.

We propose that a museum be established to commemorate Nebraska’s memorable aerospace history in Lincoln Air Park. A tentative name proposed would be the “Nebraska Aviation Heritage Museum”.

We believe with enough support, dedication, and teamwork, such a museum could become a cultural gem of the city of Lincoln and showcase the extensive history of flight in Nebraska.



The proposed location of a Nebraska Aviation Heritage Museum the former Lincoln Air Force Base Chapel

A Brief History

The state of Nebraska has long played an important and interesting role in the development and maturity of aviation in the United States. 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 and Omaha became homes to early aircraft production.

In Lincoln, Lincoln Standard Aircraft Company became one of the first in the city (where famed aviator Charles Lindbergh utilized a Lincoln Standard airplane to learn how to fly) Arrow Sport airplanes, once quite famous nationally, were built in Lincoln by the Arrow Aircraft Corporation. These rolled off the production line until the advent of the Great Depression.

The role of women in Nebraska's early aviation history cannot be overstated. Evelyn Sharp soloed at age sixteen and later became the youngest woman in the United States to receive an aviation transport license. She became a flight instructor in 1940 and was involved with the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron, perishing in a crash in 1944. Grace Elizabeth Clements joined Sharp in what became the WASPs service while Dorothy Barden of Bridgeport, Nebraska became renowned for parachute packing after a stint as a jumper in the 1930s.

Omaha became home not only to today's Eppley Airfield but Aksarben Field, North Omaha Airport, South Omaha Airport and the military's Offutt Field. AviaBellanca Aircraft got their start in Omaha before moving east, while air shows in Omaha during the early 1930s demonstrated then state of the art aircraft including the Ford Tri-Motor.

As World War II got underway, U.S. Army Air Corps (soon U.S. Army Air Forces) selected 11 fields throughout the state of Nebraska at locations near Scottsbluff, Alliance, Ainsworth, McCook, Kearney, Grand Island, Harvard, Fairmont, Bruning, Lincoln, and Scribner. Meanwhile B-26 and later B-29 (including the "Silverplate" B-29s which conducted the atomic missions over Japan) were built at Martin's Omaha Bomber Plant. Core crews of what became the 509th Composite Group were selected from members in training at Fairmont Army Airfield. Nebraska, along with its airfields, ammunition production facilities and other training establishments, became a major force in America's arsenal against the Axis forces.

After the war ended, military establishments in Nebraska scaled back dramatically while civilian interest in aviation took off. Towns statewide maintained (and continue to do so) airfields for the great post-war propeller driven airplanes such as the Cessnas, the Pipers and the Beechcrafts.

The Cold War reinvigorated Nebraska's national role in defense including designating Offutt as headquarters for the Strategic Air Command, re-activating Lincoln Air Force Base, developing communications facilities, missile bases, radar sites, and post-attack command and control facilities to ride out a nuclear war. While the Nebraska Air National Guard became the 2nd unit to stand-up nationwide, Naval Air Station Lincoln established a Naval Reserve presence at Lincoln for some time. Army units deployed anti-aircraft missiles near Lincoln and Omaha while the National Guard later became involved with medical airlift missions via Huey and later Blackhawk helicopters.

Entering the 21st Century, Nebraska continues to make aviation history through astronaut Clayton Anderson and a continuing mission of deterrence at Offutt Air Force Base. While the "Wild Blue" of Nebraska's skies hasn't changed since that Wright Flyer took flight in Lincoln in 1910, the dreams and dedication of the Cornhusker state's aviators continues on much as it had during the 20th Century.

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 a rail-to-road transportation hub and other developments, Northwest Lincoln is growing and we believe this would be an ideal time to move forward with creating a new museum.

At the present time, we have located a possible venue in the former Cold War-era chapel (note: NOT the World War II era chapel located on NW 48th Street). This larger “hall” venue could provide multiuse capabilities and outdoor acreage could offer static aircraft display space. Ample space for parking is available.

In contrast to neighboring states, Nebraska lacks an institution dedicated to the preservation of aerospace heritage. The Iowa Aviation Museum is located in Ankeny, Iowa while the Kansas Aviation Museum is located in Wichita, Kansas. Aside from the Strategic Air Command and Aerospace Museum and exhibits at the Harold Warp Pioneer Village, there are no other museums with a strong aviation presence in Nebraska.

Mission

A suggestion for four 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 often utilized to ensure repeat visitors.
- Most of all, the mission should be to provide a sense of pride and inspiration in Nebraska's aviation past.

- **Archives and Records**

- To collect artifacts, create exhibits, and preserve records for future generations in both physical and computer formats. Such records would complement, but not compete with archival records of the Nebraska

- **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.

- **Multi-Use Potential**

- Due to sustained funding concerns, ideally this location could be utilized for multiple use such as a public meeting place for outside organizations.



An intact hangar at the former Fairmont Army Airfield

Example of Development

Mission: "To preserve, educate and inspire visitors in the history of Nebraska's great aviation heritage"

□ Exhibits:

- Early Days 1903 – 1940 "Pioneering Flight: Wings Over Nebraska"
 - Balloons / Wright Fliers
 - World War I / Orville Ralston
 - Evelyn Sharp / Women Aviators
 - Nebraska's Rural Aviators
 - Lincoln Flying Institute / Lincoln's aircraft manufacturing
 - Early Omaha aircraft manufacturing / airport
- World War II 1940 – 1946 "Training for War: A National Role"
 - Nebraska's Army Airfields
 - Martin Bomber Plant
 - Nebraska's Atomic role
 - Huskerville
- The Cold War 1947 – 1975 "The Cold War and the emergence of Civil Aviation"
 - Lincoln (Air Force/Navy/Guard)
 - Nebraska's Cold War installations
 - Offutt and the Underground Command Post
 - Emergence of Private Aviation
- Later 20th Century and Today 1968 – Present "Above and Beyond the Wild Blue"
 - Private/General Aircraft Development
 - Agricultural Aviation
 - Evolution of Commercial Aviation
 - Nebraska's flying future

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



Airmail in Omaha during the 1920s

Costs/Fundraising

Consideration for the lease with the Lincoln Airport Authority should be noted in addition to operating overhead consisting of insurance, repairs, utilities, promotional needs, and office/operational supplies.

Repairs for the chapel are necessary, especially replacement of the roof and patching a few leaks. The chapel possesses newer furnace/air conditioning equipment. A temporary structure exists directly north of the original structure, a recommendation would be for this structure to be removed to restore an "original" look to the structure. National Register of Historic Structure certification needs consideration.

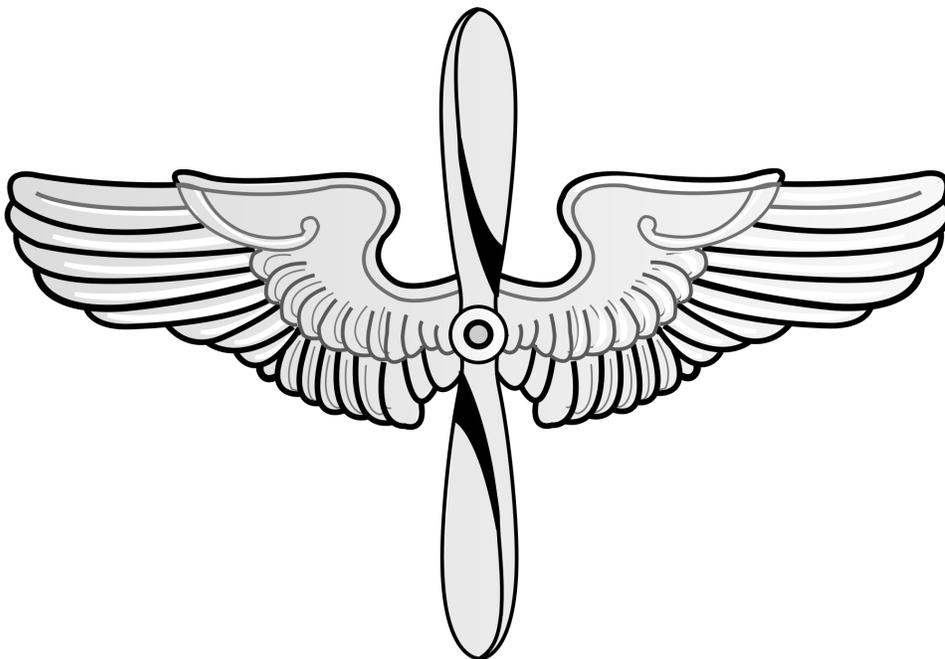
Fundraising to cover initial costs and ongoing maintenance could possibly be provided by sponsorships, grant opportunities, internet crowd-funding campaigns and other traditional forms of fundraising.

Admission costs could be discussed later.

Multi-Use Potential

One might consider that a museum could offer the Arnold Heights Neighborhood, Northwest Lincoln, and the State of Nebraska the following possibilities

- o Senior Meeting Center
- o Rental Hall
- o Temporary/Traveling Exhibit Space
- o Neighborhood Meeting Space
- o After-hours meeting space for clubs such as Experimental Aircraft Association, Boy/Girl Scout groups, Lincoln Public School/University clubs



Potential Stakeholders

- Air Force Association Local Chapters
- Arnold Heights Neighborhood Association
- Duncan Aviation
- Experimental Aircraft Association Local Chapters
- Hillaero Air Modification Center
- Kawasaki Industries
- Lincoln Airport Authority
- Lincoln Housing Authority
- Lincoln Parks and Recreation
- Lincoln Chamber of Commerce
- Lincoln Convention and Visitors Bureau
- Lincoln Composites
- Lincoln Air Force Base Legacy Project
- Local Air Park Businesses
- Nebraska Aviation Council
- Nebraska Aviation Trades Association
- Nebraska Civil Air Patrol
- Nebraska Department of Transportation, Division of Aeronautics
- Nebraska Museums Association
- Nebraska National Guard
- Nebraska State Historical Society
- Nebraska State Patrol
- Other area Neighborhood Associations
- Omaha Airport Authority
- Omaha Police Department
- Preservation Association of Lincoln
- Reserve Officer's Training Corps
- Silverhawk Aviation
- University of Nebraska—Lincoln
- University of Nebraska—Omaha Aviation Institute
- Veterans Groups

Potential Funding Sources:

The Ethel S. Abbott Charitable Trust
Lincoln Convention and Tourism Bureau (Matching Funds)
Duncan Family Trust
AIAA Foundation Classroom Grant Program (STEM)
Humanities Nebraska
Experimental Aircraft Association
Lincoln Community Foundation
Federal Aviation Administration

What We Can Offer

The Lincoln Air Force Base Legacy Project currently has a number of Cold War and World War II related exhibits and artifacts 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. A book about Lincoln Air Force Base is currently under peer-review before publication.

The project manager is very willing to consult on such a project. He carries a degree in computer technology and a bachelor's degree in Hospitality, Restaurant and Tourism Management from the University of Nebraska. He currently is the site supervisor for the Ronald Reagan Minuteman Missile State Historic Site in North Dakota and worked for the National Park Service at Minuteman Missile National Historic Site in South Dakota. 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.

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 small number of museums including the Nebraska History Museum, the Lincoln Children's Museum and the National Roller Skating Museum. An aviation museum in Northwest Lincoln, provided effective support and funding, could help enhance the cultural vitality of the city as well as bring in tourism to the Northwest 48th Street area. Increased development including grocery, gas, restaurants, four-lane road improvements as well as a direct path to Interstate 80 inspires our belief today in a solid foundation for a museum to prosper in the area. In addition, a Nebraska Museum of Aviation could cooperate with the Nebraska National Guard Museum and the Strategic Air Command and Aerospace Museum to create an aviation-themed tour of attractions throughout the Eastern Nebraska area.

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

Timeline

February 2019— Museum Interest Meeting/Forum

2019— Establishment of a non-profit entity, board of directors/leadership
Pursuance of 401c3 Status
Gain entry into chapel building, begin limited clean-up
Limited construction of displays
Fundraising for repairs
Offutt Air Force Base aircraft deployed to Lincoln for one year

2020— Further repair work
Soft opening of museum
Development of association, grant-writing requirements
Next Lincoln Air Show? (Typically Every 4 Years)

2021— ???



Proposal for a Nebraska Aviation Heritage Museum

PURPOSE: The Nebraska Aviation Heritage Museum, hereinafter referred to as the Museum, is a worldwide association of aviation enthusiasts and supporters of the aerospace history of Nebraska, USA. The purpose is to perpetuate the legacy, history and memory of Nebraska's aviation heritage, including early 20th Century aviation, World War II, the Cold War and the development of civilian aviation.

MEMBERSHIPS: The association shall accept membership from those who demonstrate an interest in Nebraska aviation history. Ethnic background, race, national origin or religious belief shall never be a condition for membership.

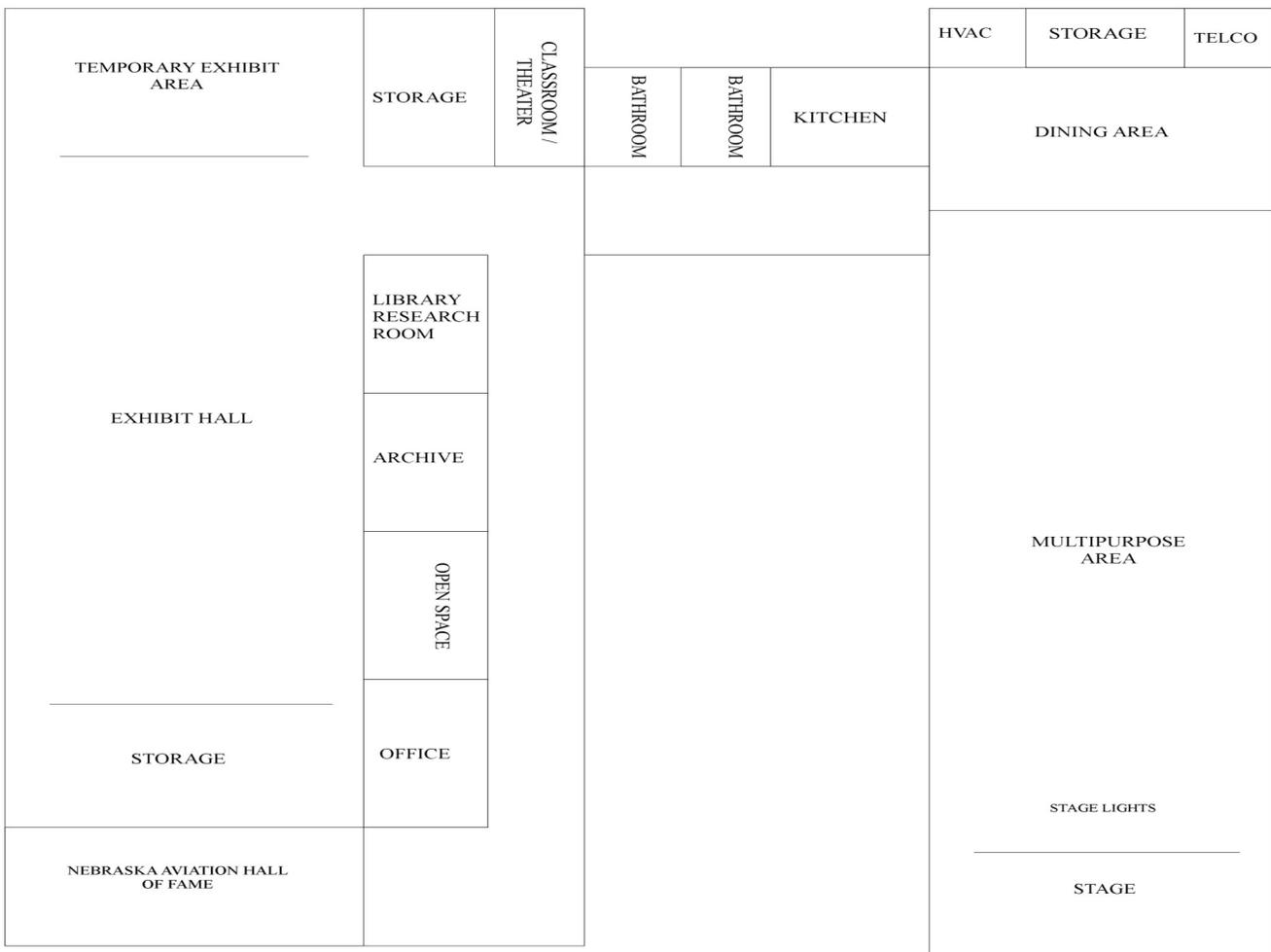
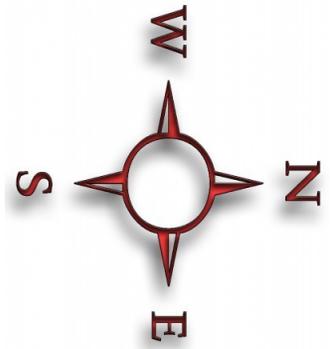
OPERATIONS: The museum shall operate as a non-profit educational organization. It may or may not be endorsed by the State of Nebraska, the Lincoln Airport Authority, or other organizations. The Association shall be apolitical and support no candidate or party for election to public office. No member shall receive compensation except for reimbursement of actual expenses on behalf of the Museum

MEETINGS: From time to time the Museum may conduct Business Meetings to provide governance and act on behalf of its membership. Such gatherings shall not exclude any category of members.

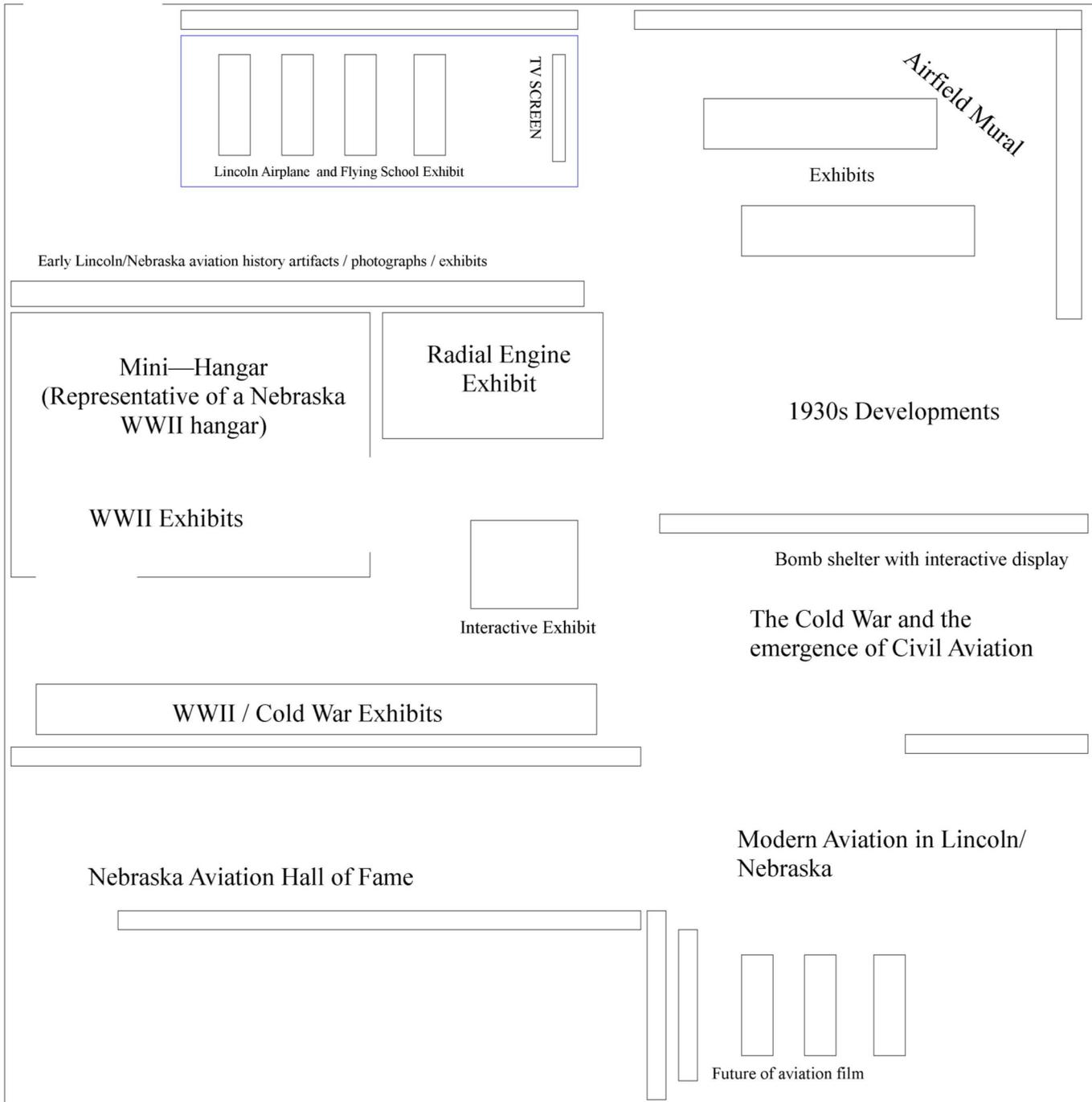
GOVERNANCE: The Museum shall be governed by an elected Board of Directors. Officers included within this board shall be a President, a Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer. These officers shall be chosen by majority vote of the membership present at a Annual Meeting. In case any office becomes unable to discharge his duties, the President shall appoint another Association member to replace him until the next Business Meeting. The President shall function as the Executive Officer of the Association and shall be responsible to the membership for the conduct of the Museum. In case the President is absent or incapacitated, the Vice-President shall be empowered to act in his stead. The President shall appoint appropriate committees to in support of the Museum as may be required from time to time. In case of an office vacancy, the order of succession shall be Vice-President, Secretary as appropriate to fill the vacant office.

DUES, DONATIONS, FEES: The Museum may or may not levy annual or periodic dues upon the membership. Donations to the Museum and registration fees shall be used only to operate and maintain a museum, to publish and distribute correspondence and newsletters, to operate and maintain the Museum website, to plan and activate the program for future events, for aviation or military related charities, military history purposes, or other works as deemed worthy by the Museum.

AMENDMENT & PERPETUITY: These rules may be amended by the affirmative vote of 51% of the membership present at a Annual Meeting, provided that the purpose of the Museum and its class of membership shall be inviolate. The Museum shall continue in perpetuity until dissolved by a majority vote of the membership. By-laws shall be created and amended by the Board of Directors as required.



Idea for Exhibit Hall layout



Notes: