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Thousands watch as plane lands in Arkadelphia

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Thousands watch as plane lands in Arkadelphia

By Wendy Richter
For the Siftings

On Saturday, May 25, 1918, a major "first" occurred in Clark County--it was the first time an airplane landed at Arkadelphia. Several thousand people gathered to watch the event. The plane arrived from Eberts Training Field near Lonoke. To the amazement of those seeing an airplane for the first time, the pilots, who were being trained for military service, performed many stunts that might be used in combat situations.

Clark County's connection to air travel extends to an even earlier time, though. Interestingly, in 1909, almost ten years prior to the first plane's flight to the county, Frank Morehead and Oscar Love of Gurdon had constructed what some be-

lieve to have been the first airplane built in Arkansas.

According to the book, "Clark County, Arkansas: Past and Present," the American Legion sponsored a visit of Trump Airways in 1926, the first passenger service company to visit Arkadelphia. Then, in 1931, Jack Smithson, who worked for the Johnson Oil Company, bought an airplane and built a small hangar.

Efforts to build the Arkadelphia airport began in the midst of the Depression in 1933 when the federal government allocated \$25,000 for that purpose. The new airport was east of the Ouachita River, across from Arkadelphia. On April 24, 1934, Charles M. Taylor became the first to land on the new airfield.

Another air-service related "first" occurred in

1938, with two planes arriving in Arkadelphia to pick up the area's first airmail. Faunt Smith drew a special cachet which was printed on the left half of each envelope mailed to commemorate the event. Three bags of mail went on the plane: one from Arkadelphia, one from Amity, and one from Alpine, for a total of about 600 to 700 pieces. From Arkadelphia, the plane traveled to Hot Springs before returning to Little Rock.

For additional information about Clark County history, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum (www.clarkcountyhitory.org or 230-1360) or the Clark County Historical Association's Archives at the Ouachita Baptist University Library (www.obu.edu/archives or 245-5332).



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

The first plane to land at Arkadelphia occurred on May 25, 1918, drawing thousands from the area.

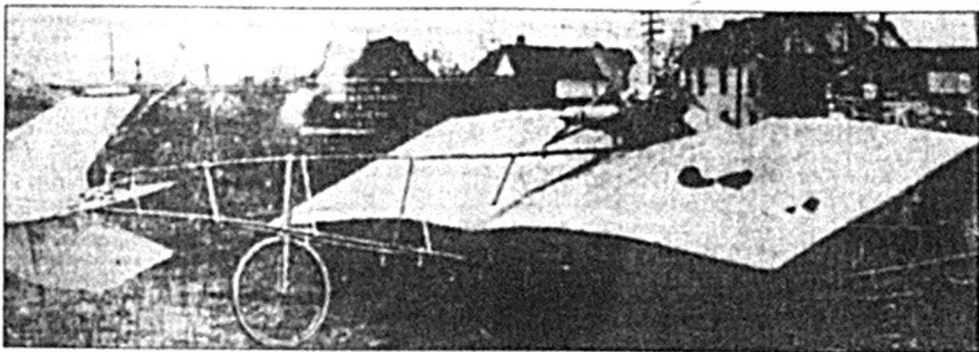


PHOTO COURTESY OF CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

This plane was built in 1909 by Frank Morehead and Oscar Love of Gurdon.