

History of Westchester County Airport



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Welcome to the Westchester County Airport Tower Museum, which was established by County executive Andrew P. O'Rourke in 1988. The museum is located in the original control tower, which served the airport from 1947 until 1968, when the new control tower across the runway was opened. Today this building houses International aviation Service, one of five fixed-base operations at the airport, which service and maintain aircraft.

Westchester County's first airfield was established in 1922 in a hayfield in Armonk. In the late 1930s, the increase in flying's popularity and the inadequacy of local landing fields led the Westchester county government to survey 64 sites for a full-service county airport. The County Board of Supervisors selected this 503-acre site between Rye Lake and the Connecticut border in December 1941.

Before the airport could be built, however, World War II began, and the land set aside for the airport was appropriated by the U.S. Army.



Leslie Quinn refueling a B-24 World War II Bomber, c. 1944.



Dedication ceremony at Westchester Airport when the ribbon was cut by aircraft propeller, February 13, 1945.



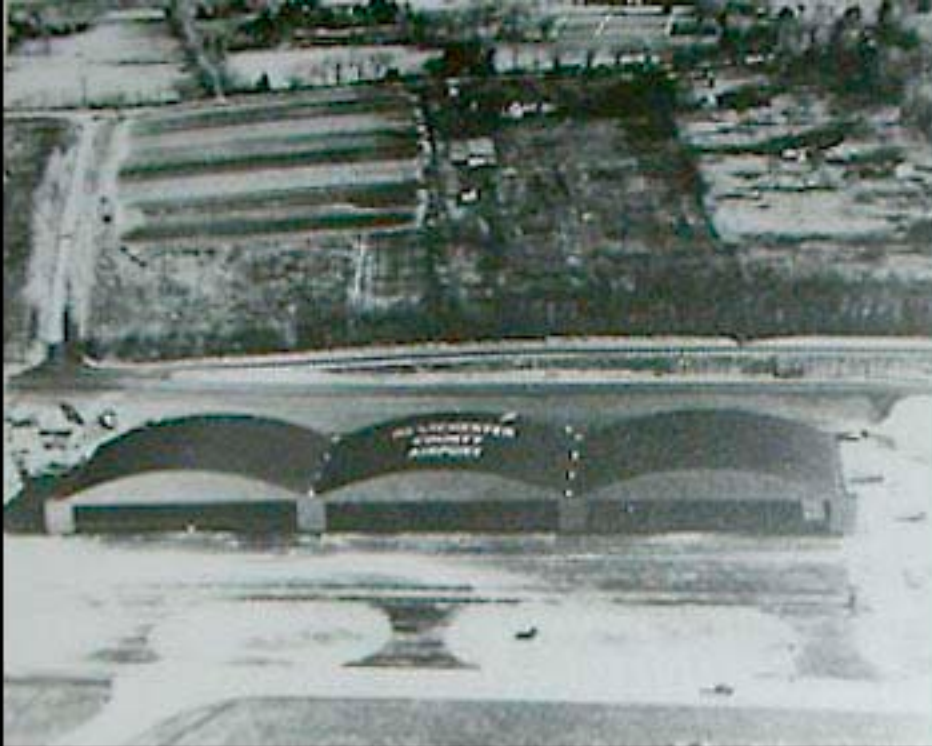
Westchester Airport temporary headquarters located on the South side of the airport, c.1945.



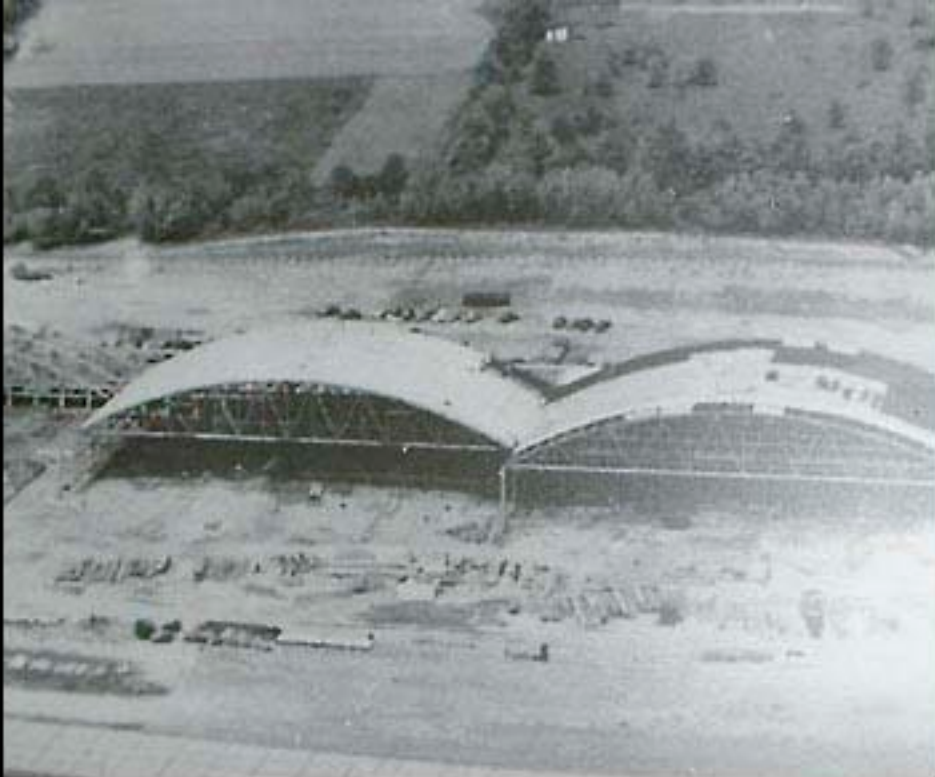
The first building constructed by Gulf in 1947 contained Hangar A, the control tower now housing the Museum, a restaurant and offices. In the “cab” of the control tower, Civil Aeronautics Authority (CAA) air controllers were on duty around the clock to guide incoming and outgoing flights. A new control tower was constructed in 1968 to improve the controllers’ view of the runways.



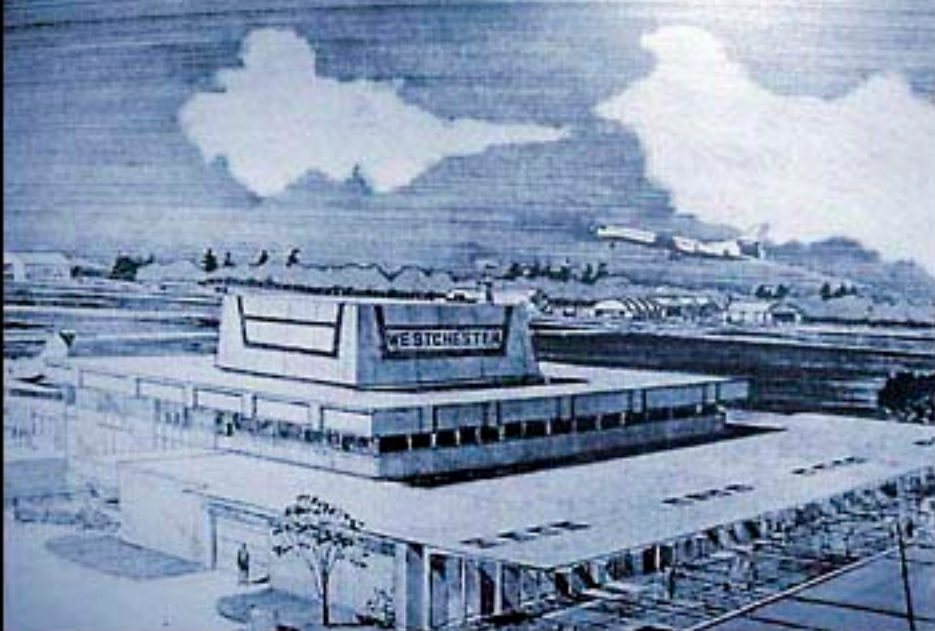
North American Airport Corporation's five-seater twin engine Cessnas used for charter service for hunting and fishing expeditions, c. 1945.



Hangar D, the world's first cantilevered hangar, known as the "Flying Tiger's Hangar," was completed in 1953. Its 50,000 square feet of rentable office space was soon occupied by companies like Flying Tiger Line, Inc., which operated a "door-to-door" air cargo service.



Construction of Hangar D, September 1953.



Architectural rendering for proposed airport terminal, 1965.



105th Tactical Air Support Group at monthly dress parade, 1972.

SUBURBAN PEOPLE

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JUNE 1989



**NO PLACE
LIKE HOME**
Boxer Carl "The
Truth" Williams
plans to make
his new house
a knockout.



**BROADCAST
VIEWS**
News anchor
Steve Dunlop
has a message
about the media.



Corporate Angel Network's (CAN) Pat Blum, also a founder of the Westchester Aviation Association, and Jay Weinberg honored by the press in 1989 for their charitable works.



Westchester County Aerial View 1922



The first regular flights in Westchester county date from 1922 when Harry Rogers and Ruth Nichols, Westchester's first female pilot began flying near Rye Playland. In 1927, Nichols and Rogers gained fame by making the first non-stop flight from New York to Miami.

During the 1920s and 1930s, a number of small airfields sprang up around the county. They were located in Scarsdale, Valhalla, Courtlandt, Bedford and Armonk. Seaplane bases were established in Prot Chester, Dobbs Ferry and Peekskill.



The first "Westchester Airport" in Armonk operated from 1922 to the late 1960s. (Ray Johnson Collection)



The Armonk Airport was the largest and most successful of the county's early airfields. People came from all over the area to fly with Clifford Peyton, one of many "barnstormers" who thrilled the public with stunt flying and took paying customers up for rides. Charles Lindbergh thrilled the crowds when he flew into Armonk in 1928 in his B-IX Brougham. Armonk Airport operated through the late 1960s.



Amelia Earhart Putnam, who lived in Harrison, was the first woman to fly alone across the Atlantic Ocean. On June 27, 1932, the Town of Harrison honored her with a parade and a ceremony at the Town Park where a bronze plaque featuring a propeller was unveiled. More than 500 guests dined and danced that evening in her honor at the Westchester Country Club. (Ray Johnson Collection)



Charles Lindbergh flew into Armonk Airport on August 5, 1928, to visit Mr. And Mrs. R.M. Lewis of Bedford Center. Although Lindy's arrival had been kept secret, word slipped out, and over 1,000 spectators cheered the hero when he landed. The next morning the local newspaper reported that he waved good-bye, donned his helmet, climbed into the "Lone Eagle" and "made a beautiful getaway." (North Castle Historical Society)



Barrett Field in Armonk was located opposite MacDonald Avenue along Bedford (now Old Bedford) Road, and became a great recreational attraction in the 1920s and 1930s. It later became Armonk Airport and then Westchester Airport, but was popularly known as Armonk Airport.

Hundreds of automobiles crowded Old Bedford Road on their way to the airport. In the words of the North Castle Sun of October 10, 1924, "Last Sunday represented the largest crowd of visitors seen this year...The human herd is certain to increase as the years go by." (Ray Johnson Collection)

The Westchester County Board of Supervisors recognized the need for a proper airport and solicited several reports on the subject in the late 1930s. However, in early December 1941, the Board rejected the Civil Aeronautics Administration's survey recommending that the county buy land and construct a small civil airport. After Pearl Harbor, the Board reversed itself when the federal government brought strong pressure to construct an airport for fighter planes to defend New York City from enemy attack. The Civil Aeronautics Administration recommended the present site near Rye Lake, and the county purchased the land for approximately \$300,000. The U.S. Army opened the airport in late 1943, but since the war was winding down, the airport was never actively used by the military.

In 1942, County Executive Herbert Gerlach put the airport under the direction of the County Departments of Public Works headed by Commissioner James Harding. The North American Airport Corporation, backed by Gulf Oil Corporation, was given the concession by the County to finish the airport and operate it.

Although the airport opened in February 1945, it was three years before the first commercial flight took off from Westchester Airport.