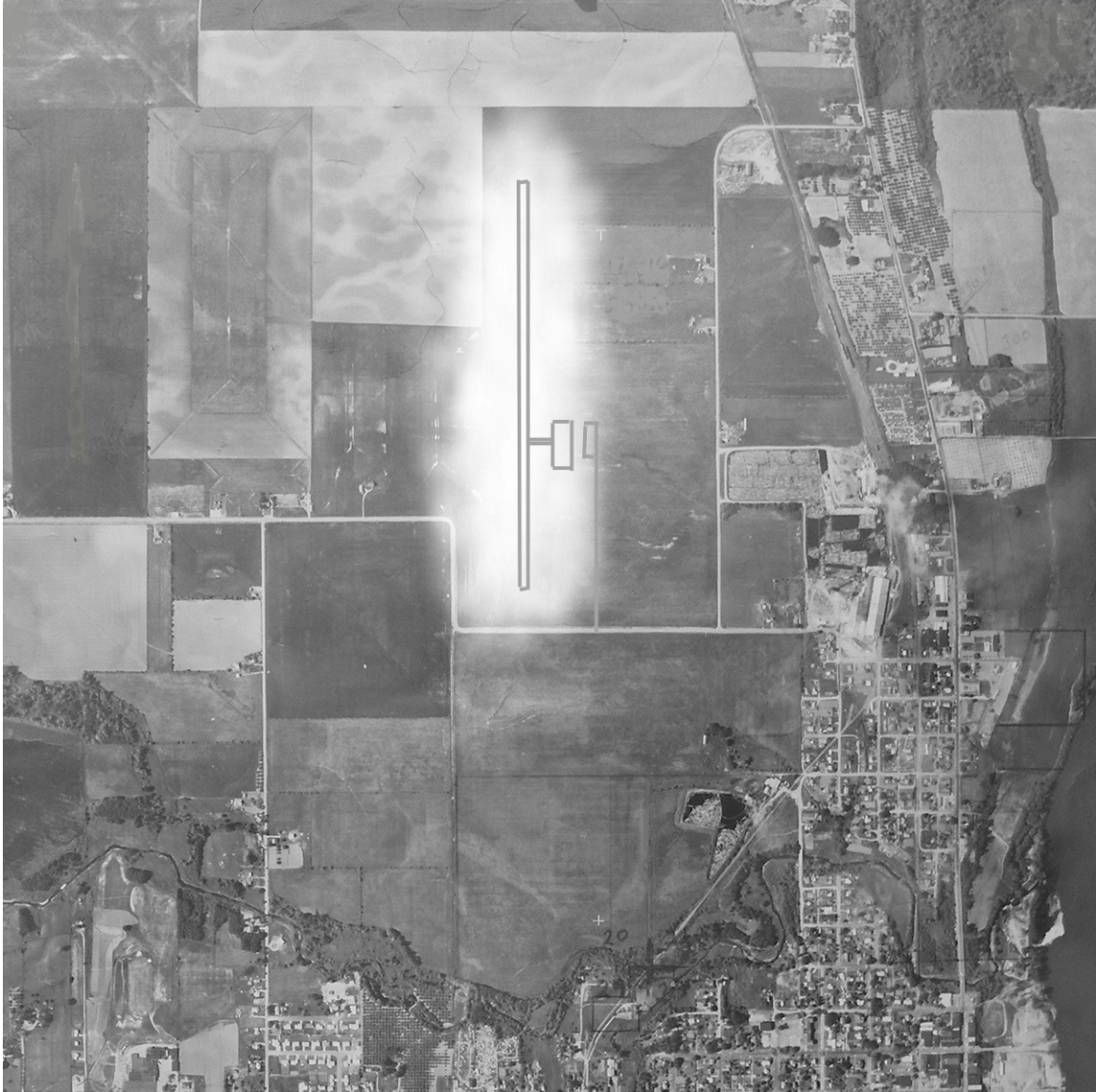


A Vision Realized



7S5

1961 - 1966

Origin of the Independence State Airport

Preface

The Independence State Airport was only a vision in the early 1960's. It was a vision in the minds of just a few dedicated, persistent individuals with a can-do approach to getting things done for their community. Knowing who to ask for help, forging ahead and staying involved, their vision was realized over a five year period as the airport for Independence evolved. Their efforts culminated quite successfully in 1966 with a dedication ceremony and the official opening of the airport..

It was my good fortune, as Supervisor of Airports for the State Board of Aeronautics at that time, to play a key role in the evolutionary process.

I prepared this document to show, in some detail, what took place from the pre-planning stage, through the complex steps of airspace clearance, site selection, inclusion in the National Airport Plan, concept development, generation of local funding, property purchases, financial decisions, qualifying for federal matching funds, airfield design, construction itself, and readjusting schedules in deference to processing delays and weather phenomena. It is also intended that this be a solid and accurate basis for future references to the beginning of the airport.

Documents and drawings in the files of the State Department of Aviation and Polk County were carefully reviewed as reference material, and I contacted persons from the 1960's era who had an interest in having an airport for Independence. My personal recollections were vital as well.

Excerpts which appear in italics on the pages which follow are quoted directly from the records that were researched.

Finally, I would like to salute the community leaders of the past who had the vision and foresight to know what a tremendous asset the airport would become for the City of Independence, for Polk County, and for the State of Oregon.

Glenn Plymate, February, 2006

Origin of the Independence State Airport

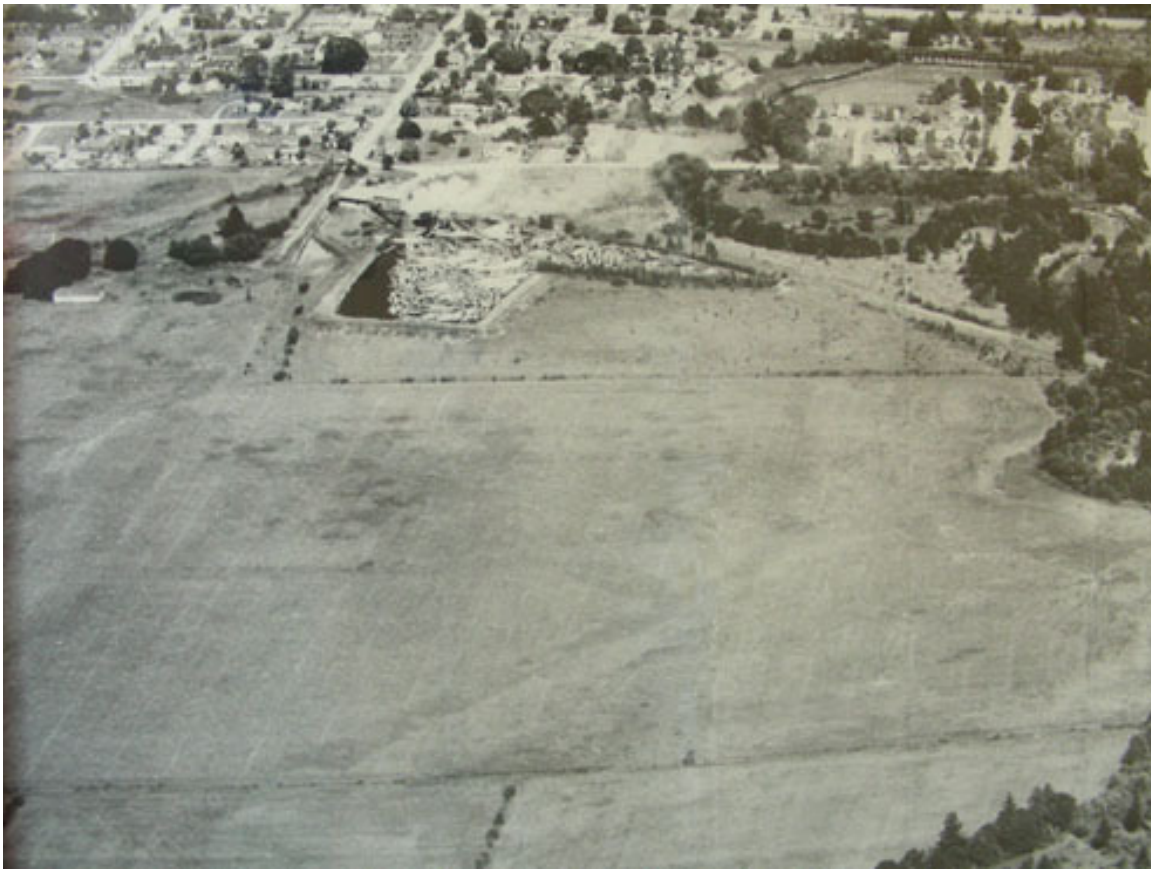
by Glenn Plymate

Supervisor of Airports, Oregon State Board of Aeronautics, 1962-1965

Urban Legend

For several years, a story about the beginning of the Independence State Airport has persisted, saying that it was originally developed *"as a place to land aircraft and report on the arrival of the 'On to Oregon Cavalcade,'"* which was a covered wagon train that arrived in Independence on August 15, 1959 as part of Oregon's Centennial Celebration of Statehood. This has become an urban legend that portrays a glamorous kickoff for what we now know as 7S5. But it is only partly true.

A *"temporary airport"* was prepared by local people as a place to land -- if any planes *did* arrive at Independence to cover the story. It would have been in early August 1959. A newspaper article dated August 11, 1959 *"reported a landing strip had been built in a field behind the shingle mill."* Records from the Oregon Department of Aviation files show, *"About three hours of blade work to remove the weeds and smooth out furrows was all that was needed to develop a perfectly useable dirt strip."*



Looking east toward the shingle mill (at the corner of Ash and Williams Streets). The field in the foreground is *"behind the shingle mill."* There was about 2,850 feet of open space between the tree line on the south [to the right] and the County Road to the north. -From Independence City Hall display photo, dated 1962

The story goes that the *"temporary airport"* was on land used for farming grass seed, owned by Edwin and Winifred Totten. This would have been logical since their land was part of some open grass fields *"behind the shingle mill."* To further strengthen the logic, it would have been down-time for the grass seed crop, between harvest in July and planting in the Fall.

However, there are no records that show the precise location of the *"temporary airport"* nor can anyone recall exactly where it was. But the Totten acreage extended north from Ash Creek about 2,850 feet to the County Road (which is now Hoffman Road). It was long enough for *"a perfectly useable dirt strip"* and had reasonable approaches. This property would have given the best access to the celebration, and the task of weed-removing and furrow-smoothing for the *"temporary airport"* would have been minimal. This location would have been about a half-mile south and east from the present airport.

There is no record of any airplane actually landing on the *"temporary airport"* nor can anyone recall that it was *ever* used -- not even during the 1959 celebration. By fall, the *"temporary airport"* would have disappeared when the soil was tilled and replanted for the next year's grass crop. For certain, it was never the site for the present airport.

The Actual Origin

The interest in aviation and the notion of having an airport in the area did not disappear, though. In 1961, planning agencies *"identified a heavy industry area just north[sic] of the highway into Independence, a light industry area adjacent to the west, and stated that in the same general area there should be an airport to serve the industries they wished to attract and one that would also serve the communities."*

On August 8, 1961, a meeting of the Mid Willamette Valley Planning Council; the Joint Monmouth-Independence Planning Commission; and Bob Dunn, Director, Oregon State Board of Aeronautics, was held at the Flamingo Café in Independence. The subject was the *"location and development of an air strip for the Monmouth-Independence area"* and a request was made for assistance from the State Board of Aeronautics *"to develop a plan for the airport, including its financing."*

There was much enthusiasm for the idea and things began to happen quickly. Only two days later, the request for assistance was presented at the regular meeting of the Oregon State Board of Aeronautics and approved on August 10, 1961.

FAA Assistance Requested

On September 1, 1961, the FAA Airport District Office in Seattle was informed of the desire for development of a state-owned airport in the area, and a site investigation was requested. The use of the State's contract engineering firm (Boatwright Engineering) and Board of Aeronautics personnel and equipment, including the State's airplane, was offered. The approximate location was described as, *"about a mile northwest of the center of the city of Independence and one and one half miles northeast of the center of Monmouth."* Mr. Dunn also advised of a staff reorganization and the addition of an airport engineer he hoped to have in place by November.

On October 10, 1961, a representative of the Airport District office *"conducted an investigation of potential sites for an airport to serve the Monmouth-Independence area."*

On December 12, 1961, the FAA issued notice of the proposed construction of the *"Independence-Monmouth Airport" ... "affecting the utilization of airspace"* and afforded the public an opportunity to submit comments prior to January 9, 1962.

Supervisor of Airports Position Added

Finding an airport engineer for the State Board of Aeronautics took longer than expected. I first heard about the position from Bob Dunn, and met with him on November 22, 1961. We agreed that, with my degree and experience as an architect, I met qualifications for an airport engineer, and that I would fill the position, being named as Supervisor of Airports. It would entail moving my family from Eugene to Salem but we were enthusiastic about this opportunity and would manage to relocate in time to start work on January 2, 1962. I was assigned responsibility for the State's 33 airports, interfacing with communities and the FAA and on airport matters, and planning and development of new airport projects. The *"air strip for the Independence-Monmouth area"* would be under my purview.

Airport Proposal Included in National Airport Plan

Notice of the airspace utilization evaluation and site investigation conclusions was given by the FAA on January 23, 1962, and it was *"recommended that Site No. 1 be approved for development as a Secondary-General Aviation airport to serve the Independence-Monmouth area in accordance with (their) recommendations for the 1962 National Airport Plan."* This was a key step in establishing eligibility for federal funding.

Airport Site Selected

By May 1962, the site had been identified, and conceptual planning was underway. The plan would ultimately take in approximately 83 acres north of the County Road and would include 53 acres owned by the Tottens. It would take the western 900 feet of a rectangular parcel which they owned north of the County Road, about 1,860 feet wide by 2,256 feet long running north and south. They retained ownership of the parcel they owned south of the road, and were asked for an easement for a clear zone over the area which may have been used for the *"temporary airport"* in 1959. Notably, there was no physical evidence of any air strip ever having been in the area.

Funds Pledged

The *"Independence-Monmouth Airstrip Committee"* acquired options for some 40 acres of the Totten property, and the City of Independence earmarked \$4,000 for *"airport acquisition."* *"Individuals and industries"* had pledged \$1,750, and the committee was soliciting participation from Polk County to add another \$4,000 or \$5,000. In late July 1962, the committee advised it was making a final drive for funds and would be *"ready to purchase the property."*

Detailed Planning Begins

Planning for the airport site took into account property that could be made available and have the least impact on land owners. The site was planned for the west side of the existing properties to keep from land-locking the parcels that would remain. Access was still available for the land owners from the County Road on the east, and the airport would have access from the County road on the south.

I prepared a conceptual drawing of the proposed airport, dated August 23, 1962. It served as the preliminary master plan and delineated the land required, including clear zones, a 3,000' x 50' runway, a parallel taxiway, an apron area, and an area for hangars.

Four parcels of land would be required to provide for a north-south 3,000' runway. The runway would be located 200' from the north boundary to provide for an overrun, and 500' from the south boundary to provide for a 200' overrun and clearance of 15' over the County road on the south with a 20:1 glide slope. A width of 500' would be required for clearance between building and fence lines, and 400' of additional width on the east side for a parking apron, hangar area, administration building, and access road.



Aerial photo, May 29, 1963. Overlay shows four parcels of land to be acquired. Note shingle mill about 1/2 mile southeast of proposed airport site.
-From Polk County archive photo

Between March and October 1963, the site was surveyed and property descriptions for airport land and clear zone easements were prepared. The State Board of Aeronautics agreed to supply \$5,000 for the land and the County agreed to provide \$2,500. An escrow account was established at the First National Bank of Independence with \$4,000 from the City of Independence, \$1,845 from private donors, and \$2,500 from Polk County. The total escrow fund was \$8,345. The State would pay its \$5,000 directly.

In order for the property to be eligible for federal aid as part of the project cost, the committee was advised it would be necessary for the land to be purchased directly by the Board of Aeronautics -- not purchased by the City-County and turned over to the State.

Land Purchased

By October 1963, options had expired but land acquisition continued. Meetings were held with each of the land owners and the original prices were, again, agreed upon. The owners were exceptionally cooperative in agreeing to sell off portions of their land to clear the way for airport development. The committee determined that title should be in the name of the State, and *"the City [of Independence] should do the routine maintenance and supervise the flying services and hangar rental."* Purchases were completed by the Board of Aeronautics by the end of February 1964, and payments were made as follows:

| | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| McKee - | 5.36 acres fee title (Tract 1) | 1,876.00 |
| | 8.035 acres clear zone easement | 0.00 |
| Wilson et al. - | 5.36 acres fee title (Tract 2) | 2,144.00 |
| Webb - | 5.36 acres fee title (Tract 3) | 2,497.76 |
| Totten - | 53.15 acres fee title (Tract 4) | 20,417.50* |
| | 6.42 acres clear zone easement | 0.00 |
| Title and recording fees | | 23.00 |
| | | ===== |
| Total | | \$26,958.26 |

The actual dimension of the property that resulted from the purchases was slightly longer and enabled us to increase the proposed runway length to 3,028 feet.

*(Mr. and Mrs. Totten requested their sale be treated as an installment sale. The City of Independence arranged to increase its commitment to enable the purchase on those terms. In addition to its initial deposit, and after an adjustment of \$906.16 was made, the City gave the Tottens a note for \$14,496.42, plus 6% interest, to be paid in three annual installments. Interest would add \$1,739.57 in costs to the City over the next three years.)

First-Phase Defined

Due to low traffic projections and because of local fund limitations, it was decided the runway surface for the first phase of development should be turf and that the parallel taxiway should be deferred to a later phase. A structural rock base would be essentially the same as that for a paved runway, which could be added later as needed. The estimate for the project, including a small administration building, totaled \$66,758.06.

Application for Federal Funding

A formal Request for Aid [federal funding] was submitted to the FAA by the State Board of Aeronautics on February 3, 1964. Although the FAA had initially recommended a runway length of 2,800', our application proposed a runway length of 3,028' *"so as to accommodate aircraft in the Beeccraft-18 category"* as the critical aircraft. My sketch of the proposed airport, dated January 31, 1964, was enclosed.

Monmouth Deleted from Airport Name

On March 3, 1964, the City of Independence sent formal notice that the airport *"shall be referred to as the Independence Airport instead of the Monmouth-Independence Airport. Since that City has decided not to contribute to the airport."* A response to the City on March 6, 1964 advised it had been some time since reference had been made to *"the Independence-Monmouth Airport"* and that official steps had been taken *"to delete Monmouth from the name"* and that *"on many occasions [we] publicly explained that the official name will be Independence Airport."*

Detailed Plans Submitted to FAA

Detailed plans were submitted to the FAA for review on April 24, 1964, with a note of urgency to get the project underway for the coming construction season.

FAA Funds Allocated

On May 16, 1964, the FAA notified the State Board of Aeronautics that \$39,580 had been allocated for the project, and outlined the steps for submitting a Project Application.

Project Application Submitted

A Project Application was submitted on May 25, 1964. It reported on funds expended for land acquisition and requested *"these funds be considered as a portion of the Sponsor's share of the project."* Authority to advertise for construction bids was requested *"so that the project may be completed during the coming construction season."*

Construction Bid Opening

Bids were opened on August 20, 1964. The low bidder was D.F. McKenzie, Contractor, Salem, Oregon. Authorization for allowing the contractor to proceed with the work was requested from the FAA District Office on August 24, 1964.

FAA Grant Offer

A Grant Agreement and Offer was received September 16, 1964 from the FAA's Airports Division, Washington, D.C. It stipulated 55.59% of the allowable costs would be paid by the FAA. Allowable items did not include the additional 28 feet of runway, runway end turnarounds, or lighting. Costs for these items would be the State's responsibility.

The Grant Offer limited the FAA's share to a maximum of \$29,775.00, and approved the project *"consisting of the following-described airport development:"*

Land acquisition for airport development, Tracts 1, 2, 3, 4, and for clear zones; construct aggregate-turf runway (approximately 50' x 3,000'), taxiway (approximately 30' x 225'), and apron

(approximately 120' x 200') including tie-downs and drainage; construct gravel access road (approximately 20' x 1450'), portion of perimeter fence (approximately 1335 lin. ft.) and segmented circle

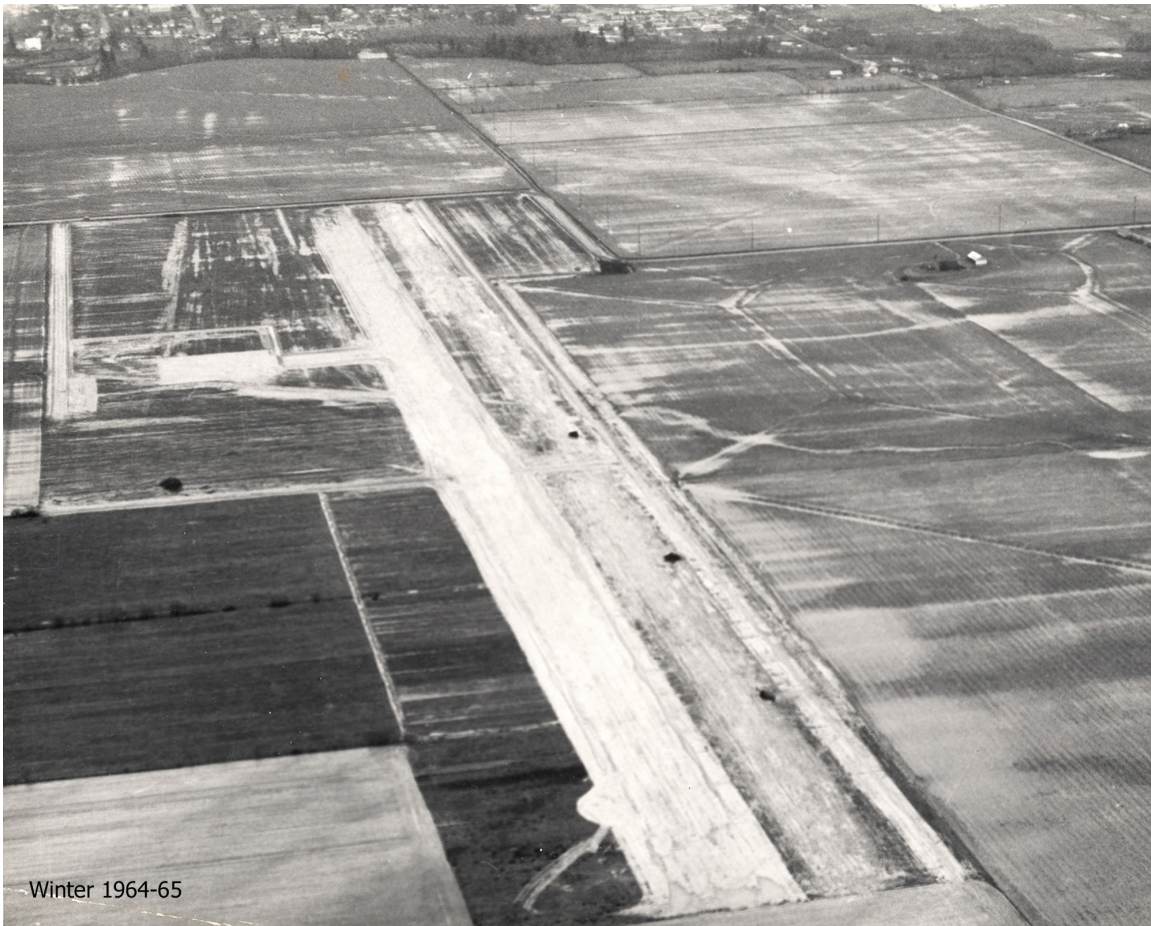
There was no time wasted. The Grant Agreement was executed by the State and returned to the FAA the same day, September 16, urging authorization to award the construction contract. Verbal authorization was given by phone, but not until October 5, 1964.

Notice to Proceed

A pre-construction conference was scheduled for 8:00 A.M. the very next morning, October 6, 1964. The contractor was given Notice to Proceed at the conclusion of that conference and work commenced.

First Landing

The honor of first landing at the new airport fell to me on October 15, 1964 on an inspection trip to the project site. I touched down in the Board of Aeronautics Cessna Skylane on the relatively smooth, freshly graded, but very dusty, strip of soil that was to become runway 16-34. It was an exciting and very satisfying moment. The contractor was doing a great job.



Independence State Airport under construction, looking south. No work in progress due to heavy rains.

Weather Stopped Work

Due to inclement weather the contractor was authorized to stop work on October 27, 1964. On November 3, 1964, the job was shut down for the winter, due to rain. The work was 27% complete at that point. Unfortunately, heavy rains and major flooding in the Willamette Valley during the winter of 1964-65 soaked the ground and did not allow work to resume until mid-1965.

Supervisor of Airports Position Vacated

During the period I served as Supervisor of Airports, two other new airport projects (Brookings and Cottage Grove) and two airport improvement projects (Hermiston and Joseph) were developed and completed with federal aid. With the Independence project nearly complete, I resigned from State employment, effective March 31, 1965, having been selected for a management position at the Oakland (CA) International Airport.

Project Completed

The "airstrip" was "still to[sic] soft from winter rains to work" until June 7, 1965. Work started by repairing "damage on runway caused by winter erosion & unauthorized use by aircraft." By the end of June, 510 truckloads of rock had been placed and rolled. The job was complete except for access road gravel and seeding of the turf, which was "to be done on fall schedule." Seeding took three days, starting on September 25. The access road took another two days, and the job was completed on September 29, 1965. The turf was established on the runway and airport was useable by Spring 1966. It was dedicated as the Independence State Airport at a ceremony held Sunday, August 14, 1966.

The surface of the runway, taxiway, and parking apron was turf (alta fescue) with an engineered crushed-rock base. The roadway was gravel. Drainage was provided to carry storm water south and east, and a segmented circle was placed west of the runway. Costs for the completed project are shown below.

Eligible Items:

| | | |
|----------------|-----------|------------------------------------|
| Land | 26,958.26 | |
| Construction | 18,587.85 | |
| Engineering | 5,134.50 | |
| Administration | 443.30 | |
| | ===== | |
| Subtotal | 51,123.91 | (FAA share, \$28,419.78 -- 55.59%) |

Non-eligible items:

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 28' of runway, turnarounds, and auto parking | 2,011.75 |
| Administration | 56.70 |
| Lighting (est.) | 4,000.00 |
| Water (est.) | 2,000.00 |
| | ===== |
| Total Project (est.) | 59,192.36 |

The project was funded as follows:

| | | |
|------------------------|-----------|--|
| Private Contributions | 1,845.00 | |
| City of Independence | 17,590.26 | |
| Polk County | 2,500.00 | |
| FAA | 28,419.78 | |
| State of Oregon (est.) | 8,837.32 | (excludes staff salaries and expenses) |

Summary

A need for the airport was determined in 1961 by local planning agencies and supporters to serve industries and communities in the area.

The State Board of Aeronautics was asked to assist with project development and a plan for financing. Planning, engineering, and construction of the airport was carried out by the Board of Aeronautics.

Funding was provided by business and individual contributors, the City of Independence, Polk County, the State Board of Aeronautics, and the FAA. Local funding was insufficient to take full advantage of the FAA's allocation of federal matching funds.

Property was acquired from four land owners, encompassing 83 acres. Cost of the land was \$26,958.26.

Total cost of the project was \$59,192.36. The FAA's share was \$28,419.78.

The airport opened with a turf-aggregate runway, and was dedicated on August 14, 1966.

Postscript

April 5, 1966, on my first visit to the Board of Aeronautics office since leaving a year earlier, Bob Dunn asked if I'd like to see the new airport now that it was finished. He knew of my deep involvement in its development and my special feeling toward turf runways. Of course I said yes -- most enthusiastically! So he took me to the State airplane, put me in the left seat, and said, "Let's go." In a few minutes we were over the new runway and it looked gorgeous. The landing was almost heavenly -- like caressing lush, green velvet. It was the payoff for all the days and weeks I'd put into the airport's development, and gave me a special appreciation for Bob Dunn and his extraordinary hospitality for an ex-employee.

It would be 21 years, some bigger airport projects and a couple of career changes later, before I made my next landing at 7S5. It was October 11, 1987. This time, on a paved runway. Also, there was a parallel taxiway, several hangars, an FBO building, and an airpark with 38 homes and hangars adjoining the airport with connecting taxiways.



Independence State Airport with adjacent airpark, 1989

-Photo by Clarence LaCrosse

My wife, Erral, and I were astonished. We were totally awed with how many changes there had been since 1966. And it would only be a couple of years before we became part of the ongoing changes by buying two airpark lots, and designing and building our very own private launch pad -- our hangar/home on Stinson Street -- at the Independence Airpark.

Agencies and persons involved in development of the Independence State Airport

Mid-Willamette Valley Planning Council

W. J. Kvarsten, Planning Director

Robert C. Gallop, Assistant Director

Herb Riley

Joint Monmouth-Independence Planning Commission

James H. Hart, Chairman

Al Noble
Clarence Thomas
Dr. Richard Brust

Oregon State Board of Aeronautics
Robert W. Dunn, Director
Glenn A. Plymate, Supervisor of Airports
Louis S. Bonney, Assistant Attorney General

Federal Aviation Agency
Richard T. Puckey, District Airport Engineer 1961-63
Ned E. Nelson, District Airport Engineer 1964-66
Joseph H. Tippetts, Director, Western Region
Charles J. Winger, Chief, Airports Division

Boatwright Engineering
Martin G. Boatwright, Professional Engineer

Polk County
Judge C. M. Barnhart
Marvin J. Weiser, District Attorney

City of Independence
Ray A. Dunkel, Mayor
Jack D. Mc Elravy, City Manager

First National Bank of Independence
I. D. Mix, President

Property Owners:

Tract 1

Levi H. McKee
Opal L. McKee
Gordon H. McKee
Ella Vera McKee

Tract 2

Allen C. Jones
Florence L. Jones
George J. Patrny
Ella S. Patrny
Delbert Morgan Wilson
Shirley Roe Wilson

Tract 3

Don Webb
Eva Webb

Tract 4

Edwin J. Totten
Winifred Clara Totten

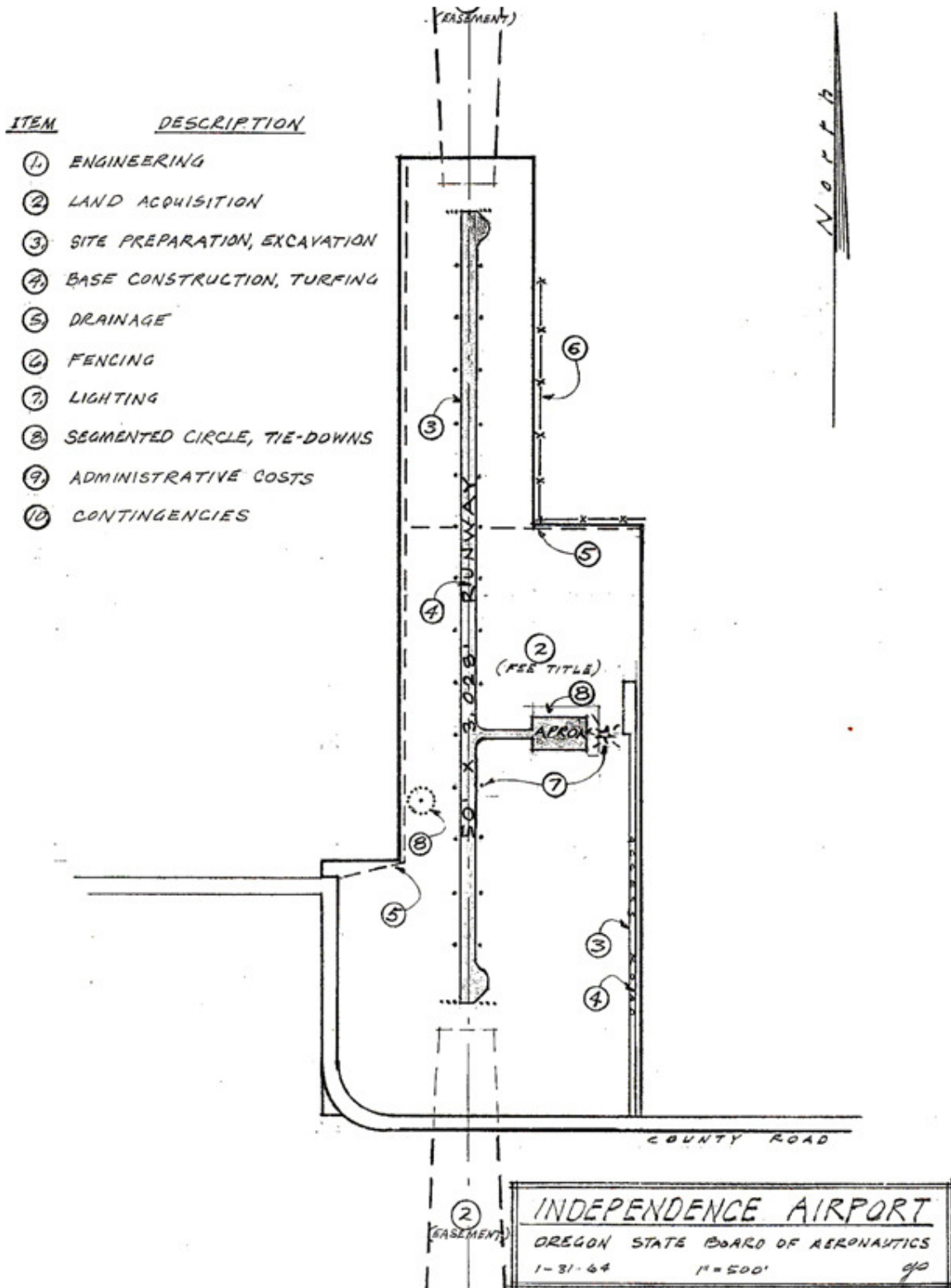
Construction Contractor
D. F. McKenzie

Sources

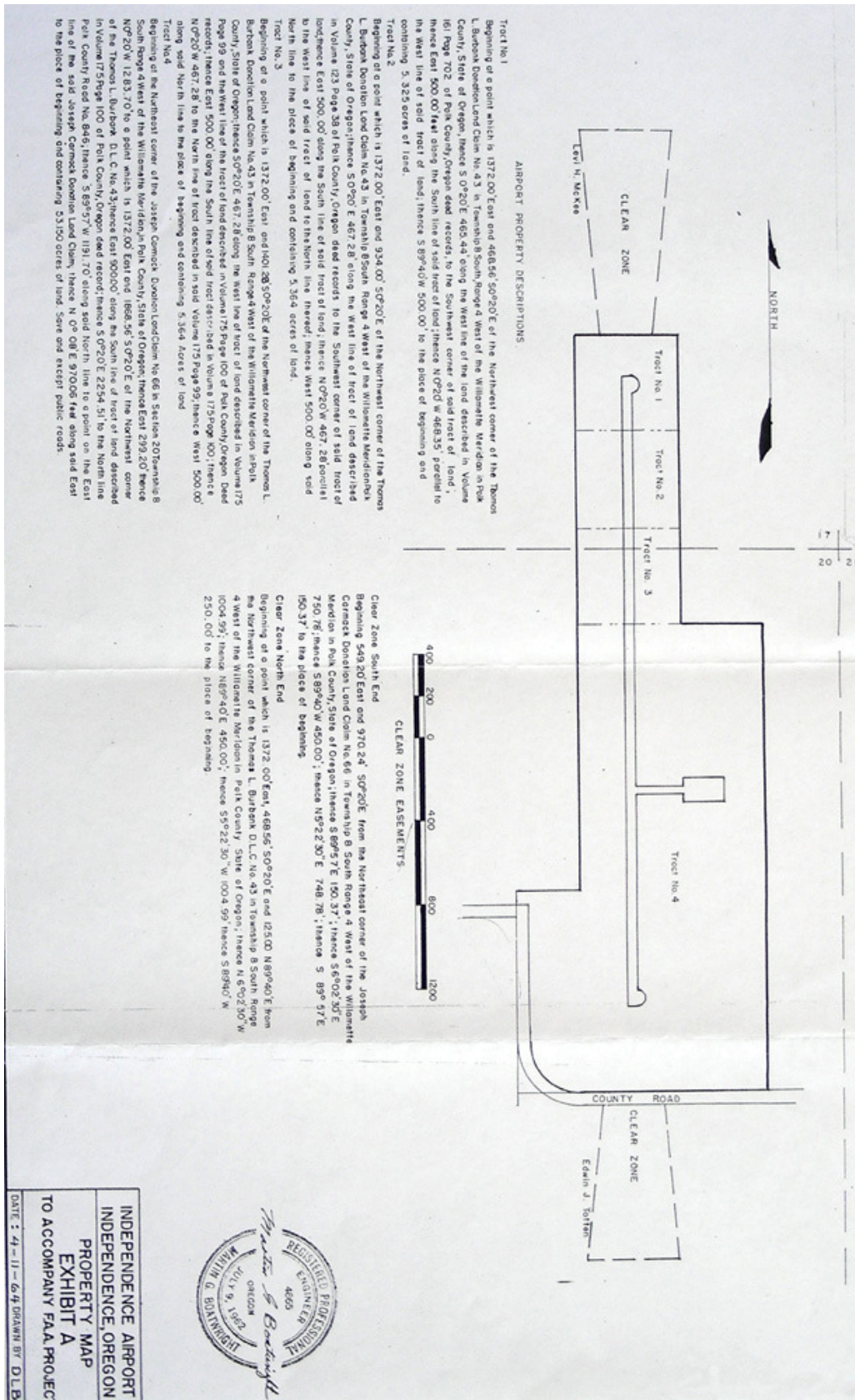
Oregon Department of Aviation - Independence files
John Pfaff, interviews, "From Grain Fields to Airpark" and Independence Enterprise news items
Tom Ritchey, interviews, documents from Polk County archives
Andy Andersen, interview
John Lorence, interview
John Titus, interview
Glenn Plymate, Pilot Flight Record and Log Book

Exhibits

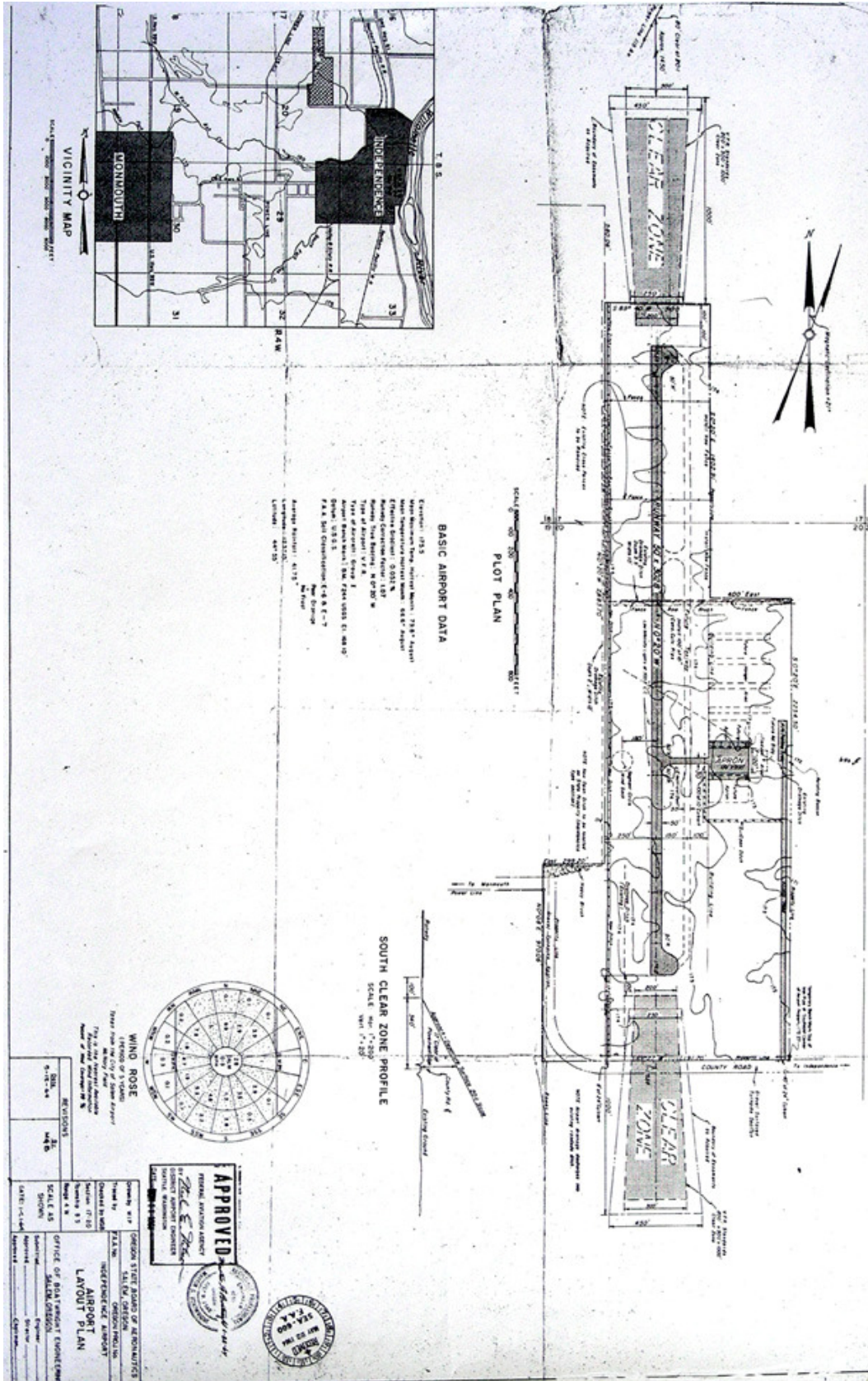
Page 14. Proposed Plot Plan, August 23, 1962, shows preliminary master plan for airport
Page 15. Sketch of project, January 31, 1964, shows runway layout and work items
Page 16. Property map, April 11, 1964, shows parcels of land and property descriptions
Page 17. Airport Layout Plan, May, 12, 1964, shows detailed plan for airport construction



Sketch of project, January 31, 1964, shows runway layout and work items



Property map, April 11, 1964, shows parcels of land and property descriptions



Airport Layout Plan, May, 12, 1964, shows detailed plan for airport construction