



A HISTORY OF THE WATERVILLE ROBERT A. LAFLEUR MUNICIPAL AIRPORT



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HISTORY

The first mention of airport in the city records appears in the minutes of the meeting of October 7, 1930 when Mr. Caleb A. Lewis and Mr. Marden appeared before the city government "relative to the proposed airport." At the same meeting a committee was appointed consisting of then Mayor Dubord and four members of the council "to investigate the matter of acquiring a municipal airport." On November 13, 1930 the committee submitted a comprehensive report, in which the proposed site was described, that the land could be purchased for \$4,700.00 and that necessary grading, runways and buildings could be built for the sum of \$16,755.00. In Mayor Dubord's report for the year 1930 he relates that a hangar and auxiliary building were built in the Fall of 1930 and that the airport work would be continued "in the Spring and pushed to completion." In the May meeting, 1931 the city appropriated \$3,000.00 for the purpose of constructing a new road from Oakland Road to the airport.

The official opening of the Waterville Airport was celebrated from June 25 through the 27th in 1931. At this time, the 106-acre airport consisted of four runways, two of which were 2000 feet long and two 1,800 feet long each. There existed one hangar (40' x 16' x 14'), and a small administration building.

Between 1933 and 1941, Waterville Municipal Airport began to shape into the airport it is known as today. Boston and Maine Airways (later known as Northeast Airlines) began a service route between Waterville, Portland and Boston. In 1935 the airport runways were reconstructed and runway lighting was installed. Within a year, B & M Airways had grown to eleven planes and six employees. Airport snow removal was now being accomplished and the airport was set at a value of \$95,000. In 1936 the Mayor of Waterville addressed the Council in connection with the future development of the airport in cooperation with the Federal Works Project Administration and outlined requirements of the Bureau of Air Commerce for night landings of the mail plane, apparently since Boston and Maine Airways was servicing this area. The extension of the NE-SW runway to 2500', the East-West runway to 2500' and the NW-SE runway to 2000', the installation of boundary lights and the clearing of other land adjacent to the runways was required. In the subsequent months various parcels of land were purchased to permit the necessary expansion of the airport. The total area of the airport with these additions was approximately 170 acres. By Council order of February 1, 1938, \$1,640.00 was taken from the temporary appropriation to pay for these additional parcels of land.

In 1940, and with thoughts then turning toward the possibility of war, the city voted to participate in further development of the airport in conjunction with the federal government and the State Defense Commission and "that all necessary expenditures to be paid by the City of Waterville be charged to the "Contingent Fund." The City, therefore, had title to the runways, safety strips and surrounding territory. Airways Incorporated had title to approximately twenty-five acres of land on the westerly side of the airport less the strip which it had conveyed to Waterville for purposes of the

new road. Mr. Wesley H. Marden was manager and inspector of the airport.

Between 1941 and 1942, the airport, because of the national emergency, came under the jurisdiction of military authorities. Civilian airline service was discontinued during this time. When the airport was returned to municipal control it had three paved runways: each 150' in width, the North-South runway 3994' in length, the NE-SW runway 3860' in length and the East-West runway 2305' in length.

During 1946, the Federal Airport Act became effective making available certain funds for the development of airports on a participation basis; 50% by the federal government and 50% by the city. Plans for an adequate administration building for the airport were presented by Architect Alonzo J. Harriman of Auburn, but with steadily increasing building costs and lack of availability of material no contractor could undertake the contract. At about the same time the incoming Maine legislature had indicated that the state might vote to participate in the Federal Airport Act to the extent of 257 contribution. Taking these factors into consideration, participation by the city under the Federal Airport Act was deferred.

Being pressed by its own obligation to supply housing for Northeast, by Airways Inc.'s insistence that Northeast would have to be housed elsewhere and Northeast's insistence that it be assured of housing space, the city on October 1, 1946 voted to undertake the construction of a suitable building at the airport. No contractor would undertake to build such a building due to scarcity of materials and attention was directed to available prefabrication structures. The decision was made to purchase a metal prefabricated building (Quonset), 20' x 40' when erected, at a cost of \$1,287.75.

In 1947 the Waterville Airport was named in memory of Captain Robert A. LaFleur, a U.S. Army Air Corps officer who was declared "missing in action" somewhere over Germany on July 2, 1943. By 1954, LaFleur Airport had conducted its first air show and by the mid-1960's Runway 5/23 had been extended to 5,000 feet, with the appropriate Runway End Identification Lighting (REIL) and Visual Approach Slope Indicators (VASIs) constructed in 1965. Waterville Airport's first Airport Layout Plan (ALP) was produced in 1968 with the following three years defining the locations and layout of a terminal area and general aviation hangar. The current ALP was produced in 1976 and presents, in addition to the ALP itself, drawings which detail the Part 77 imaginary surfaces and profiles of each runway end.

As can best be determined, an approximate sum of \$1,112,650 was invested in the development, improvement and maintenance projects at Waterville Municipal Airport between 1965 and 1977.