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Hometown History

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### Randolph County Airport

The Randolph County Airport is located a mile east of Winchester with a 4,000 feet paved runway that sends off hundreds of aircrafts each year. It also offers a famous, annual fly-in breakfast that is visited by people from all around the country. This airport has a vast history, as it was one of the first airports in the area. It has undergone many renovations and systematic changes throughout the years, but still continues the legacy that it started back in 1948.

The airport serves as a place for planes to land, refuel, and even a place to eat. They estimate that multiple aircrafts land and take off from the airport eighty-two times each week<sup>1</sup>.

Everett Cox was the reason for the rise of aviation in Randolph County as he founded the airport<sup>2</sup>. Cox was also the first person in the county to own a plane, an Ox5, and later moved up to larger planes that he flew around the country. This introduction of aviation in Randolph County started around the late 1920's and early 1930's, so the resources were very limited, so Cox had to use his resources to the best of his abilities. This included using empty fields to use as runways and vacant barns as hangars. The first semblance to an airport was a twelve-acre field that was rented out to use as a runway and was called Coxey's Airport. In 1936, a man by the name of Jim Retz leased his farmland consisting of 40 acres to the Works Progress Administration to build hangars, dig ditches, and level the runways, which ended up becoming

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<sup>1</sup> "Airport," in.gov, August 1, 2019. <https://www.in.gov/counties/randolph/departments/airport>

<sup>2</sup> The Historical And Genealogical Society Of Randolph County Indiana. Randolph County Indiana 1818-1990, 1991

the Farmland Airport. It had to close in 1937 due to the death of the manager of the airport: Robert Retz.

In 1948, forty acres of land were purchased, which is now known as The Randolph County Airport. The runway was 2,600 feet, paved with stones from the Ridgeville Quarry in 1961, but eventually 400 feet would be added. At the time, the cost for the runway was about \$1,700, but the runway today would cost close to \$169,000. In 1971, the airport would be sold and later be named the Cox Memorial Airport in honor of Everett Cox.

The Air Mail Service, fifty years ago, was a one day event where many post offices from all over from different cities brought their mail to this event to be shipped off. The location of the take-off field that was used for this event was just near the Winchester Mold Plant which was located east of town. The plane that was being used to ship all of this mail was forced to take off earlier than expected due to the efforts of trying to beat a headwind. This was the only Mail Day that the Randolph County Airport participated in.

The airport is quite famous for its fly-in breakfast. It began during 1950, while it was still Coxies Airport<sup>3</sup>. Many pilots and other individuals from different states around the nation have attended this annual event, giving it a high attendance rate. Although it was mainly a breakfast, people were able to pay for rides in the aircrafts. In 1988, the fly-in served a little over 1,100 meals and attracted 153 registered planes. After a little over 70 fly-in's, the Randolph County Airport still holds this event for the community and people all over the country.

The Randolph County Airport has also been home to many different activities such as pilot training, Civil Air Patrol, and aircraft shows. Pilot training began with Everett Cox who started instructing people how to fly in 1929 until the airport started offering flying lessons<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Journal, Herald. Aviation History. 1908/1956

<sup>4</sup> Hamilton, Joe. The Winchester Story. July 1962

Towards the end of World War II, the Randolph County Airport started a Civil Air Patrol program that was to go on small missions if necessary, but was eventually taken over by the Civil Defense. Randolph County also offered aircraft shows that were held at the race track and attracted people from all over. Even though the airport has ended these activities, they are the foundation of the Airport, shaping it to be what it has become today.

The Randolph County Airport has a multitude of history that has greatly affected Winchester and helped shape it into the town it is today. The Airport has aided in wars, been used for travel purposes, and has also been a source of entertainment. Even though the Cox Memorial Airport has gone through many changes since it was established in 1948, it still continues to serve the community and the people from all over the country.