

# FLIGHT COMES TO MATTOON

Aviation first came to Mattoon in the form of a grass runway and a small hanger on the north side of Lafayette Avenue, across from the I.O.O.F. Home. Several investors formed Mattoon Airport Inc. and built the rudimentary facility on a portion of land owned by the McFall family. The first two airplanes landed on June 11, 1930. A gala Grand Opening and Air Circus was held on July 12-13, 1930.



**CROWD ON HAND ESTIMATED AT OVER 20,000**  
52 Planes From Other Cities Participate; Traffic Jams Roads

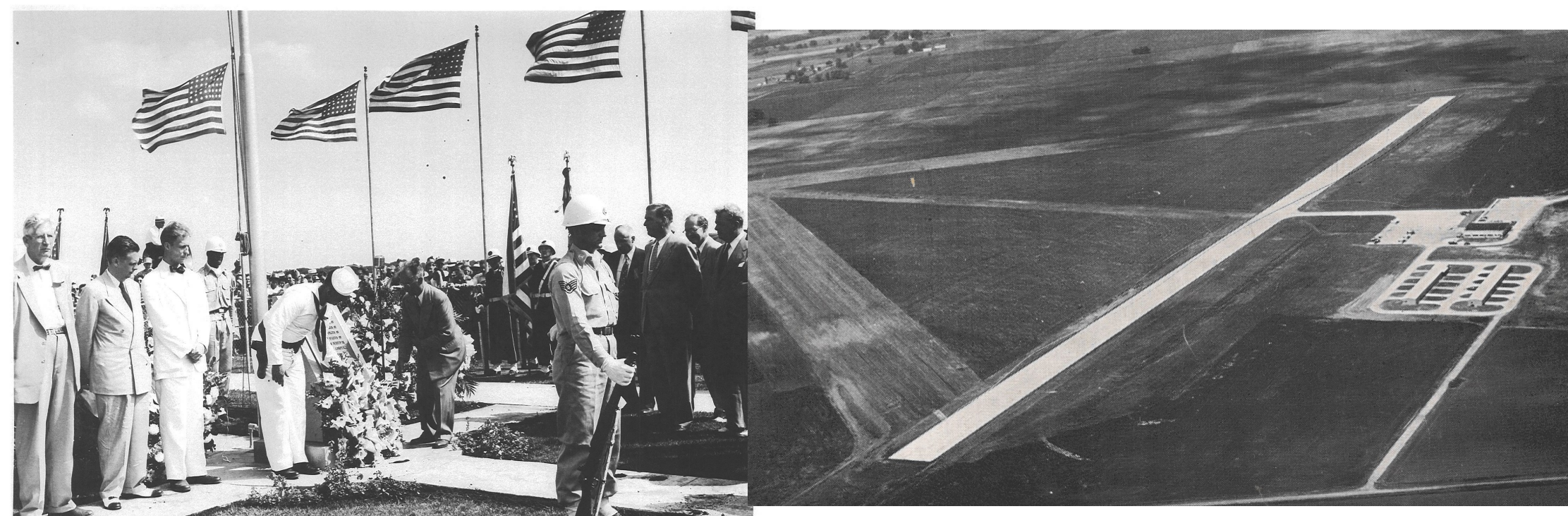
The expanding city soon encroached on the airport and in 1940 Carl R. Smith purchased 100 acres on the McCormick farm east of the Lerna Road and opened the Mattoon Airport. The airport held a Grand Opening on October 19, 1941. It was estimated that 20,000 came during the day to observe the more than 50 planes that flew in for the event. When opened the airport had a single runway, a large hanger and an operations building with a class room, repair shop and lunch room.

On April 1, 1945, Jim and Helen McBride, both accomplished pilots, assumed ownership of the airport. In connection with purchasing the airport, the McBride's gave the Mattoon Association of Commerce a 3 year option to purchase the facility if the plans for a municipal airport came about. The McBride's made several improvements to the airport, including adding additional hangers. They greatly expanded the flight school and in 1949 held a wildly successful airshow.



The days of a privately owned airport were waning. On April 10, 1946, the Coles County Airport Authority referendum was passed. The state approved the Authority and in December of 1949 approved the McBride site. Through the design period and acquisition of an additional 200 acres, the McBride's continued to operate the airport.

The Coles County Memorial Airport, dedicated to the veterans of the Korean War, was dedicated with great fanfare on July 4-5, 1953.



Ozark Airlines began daily service on February 2, 1955.



Today the airport consists of 870 acres. Runway 6-24 is 5800 feet long and 100 feet wide. Runway 11-29 is 6500 feet long and 150 feet wide. Runway 18-36 is an 1100 foot sod runway.

Since the opening day, the airport has seen many changes:  
1956-Runway 6-24, the second paved runway was completed.  
1965-The building housing the restaurant, Ozark flight agency and the Coles County Airport Authority offices was built.  
1972-1975 During this period several major projects were completed, including construction and lighting of a new 11-29 runway; improved taxiways, lighted aprons and other improved signage.  
1975- The Federal Aviation Authority installed an instrument landing system, known as ILS.

## Ozark ends flights here

There is no longer commercial passenger service. Ozark departed on April 1, 1980. Subsequently several regional airlines served the airport, United Express being the last of those. It ceased Mattoon operations in 2000.

