

LISBON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MOMENTS IN HISTORY – APRIL 2021

LISBON'S COBLEIGH AIRPORT



Airport and Army photos/Courtesy Sugar Hill Historical Museum



Lisbon's Cobleigh Airport was located in a field between the old Young-Cobleigh Tavern (pictured at left and still standing) and Henry Pond along Route 302 just outside Lisbon Village. The airfield was located on land owned by the Hanno family, who at the time owned the old tavern and surrounding fields. The air field was first licensed by the

state and federal government in 1925. In 1922, a 45-year-old Littleton physician and surgeon, Dr. Arthur Downing, was the first person to land a plane on that field.

The first Lisbon settlers who built log cabins near Henry Pond, a Revolutionary War fort, the first church, the first schoolhouse, the landmark stagecoach stop first known as Young's Tavern, and thousands of militia and spectators from Lisbon and area towns attending annual musters on the surrounding fields up to about 1860, never expected there would be airplanes buzzing overhead and landing in the fields, thrilling spectators with stunts, and offering sightseeing flights. It did happen, though, and there was a flurry of activity at the Lisbon airport during the 1930s.



Newspaper articles tell of the busiest years of the little airport in Lisbon. In the summer of 1930, the Cobleigh Airport was dedicated and opened by Wesley Rumery and Donald Brastow of Kansas City, Missouri. Rumery was a Vermont native, and Brastow was from Maine and had learned to fly in Missouri. They came to Lisbon in their new 150hp Waco three-seat, open-cockpit biplane. Rumery piloted the plane from Kansas City with the assistance of pilot Catherine Henegar. The flight from Kansas City to Lisbon took 18 hours and 25 minutes. The Lisbon Manufacturing Company on South Main Street (formerly Parker Young

Co.) put the word “Lisbon” on its roof, so the pilots would know when they were in Lisbon. They saw it from an altitude of 3500 feet and knew they had made it. A large crowd was at the field for the dedication and opening, and the plane was busy all day taking people for rides. The plane and pilots stayed for the rest of the season while taking paying customers for rides. The image above was taken at Cobleigh Airport, but there is no caption on the back. It may be a photo of Rumery and Brastow, who were 22 and 24 years old at the time. In the 1930 Census, Rumery is listed as a manager of a flying school in Missouri, and both he and Brastow were lodgers in a home in Marshall, Missouri, which isn’t very far from Kansas City.

There was a local airport boom at that time, as the State of New Hampshire was busy inspecting airports in Lisbon, Twin Mountain, Woodstock, and Whitefield that summer.



A large painted tin sign advertising Cobleigh Airport is one of many treasures in the Lisbon Area Historical Society Museum collection.



An aerial view over the Cobleigh Airport vicinity on the outskirts of Lisbon Village shows Henry Pond (at tip of wing), the winding Ammonoosuc River, railroad tracks, and over the west side of the river towards Bishop Road and beyond.

In September of 1930, Cobleigh Airport advertised flights and unsurpassed views in any direction a customer chose. Long flights to Littleton, Woodsville, Sugar Hill and “Barnet Dam” were \$5. Local flights over Lisbon and vicinity were \$3. A popular sightseeing flight was to fly over the new Comerford Dam on Fifteen Mile Falls in the Connecticut River between Monroe and Barnet. In October, Rumery and Brastow flew from Lisbon to Boston in 1 hour and 23 minutes. The next month, they flew back to Missouri for the winter.

In the summer of 1931, the two pilots returned to Cobleigh Airport. New lower rates were offered for flights, and flying lessons were offered at Cobleigh, as well as an air taxi service to any point in New England. By July, four students had signed up for lessons, three from Vermont and one from New York.

The first fatality at the Cobleigh Airport occurred on Sunday, July 19, 1931. A 21-year-old pilot from Concord, N.H., was with a student pilot from Montpelier, Vermont, who was at the controls of a plane owned by Donald Brastow. The plane was taking off just before dusk and was at about 100 feet in the air when it nosedived into a cornfield beside Henry Pond. When onlookers approached the plane, both occupants were unconscious. Lisbon’s Dr. Perry Boynton and Nurse Ellen Bone of the Lisbon District Nursing Association, were with the ambulance when it took the student pilot and pilot to Littleton Hospital. The pilot died from his injuries.

That same week, there was an advertisement in the newspaper that a flying service from Springfield, Massachusetts had an \$11,000 plane available for instruction and short hops, long rides, and charter trips for parties of four. Also, that summer, Edward Spooner, a former resident of Sugar Hill, landed his 5-seat plane on the Cobleigh airfield and had available two “ships” for

student work and passengers. Other pilots had their planes available at the airport that summer for instruction and passenger services. Some were advertised for sale, such as an Ox Eaglerock, a 3-seat, long-wing open biplane in good condition with dual controls and a new motor for \$1,050. There was also a Gypsy Moth 2-seat, folding-wing open biplane, in tip-top condition with dual controls for \$1,400.

At one time, there was a small billboard on the edge of the airport advertising that flights were available to Sugar Hill, Littleton, Barnet Dam, and Woodsville. It also advertised flying instruction and that all equipment was state and federally licensed and that the pilots were licensed. Other posters advertised scenic rides and a million-dollar thrill for a \$5 bill.



People are shown looking at planes on the Cobleigh field c.1930. In the background is the huge barn that used to stand across the main road from the tavern building. The barn was destroyed by a strong windstorm in July of 1932.



In September of 1931, five hundred soldiers from the 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment of the Army pitched tents on the airfield on their way back to Fort Williams in Maine from Fort Ethan Allen in Vermont. The regiment's band of 50 musicians gave a concert in Lisbon Square to thousands of spectators.

By the spring of 1933, the airport was also used as a home field for the Lisbon Tigers, a new town baseball team. A boys' 4-H competition was also held there, and a traveling circus under a big top along with a midway set up with rides used the field one summer.

In October of 1933, a weekend-long air circus was put on by the New England Air Circus Association. It was reported that over 2,000 people were in attendance and 500 cars lined the main road. Five airplanes performed stunts and raced. Tickets were also sold to those wanting an airplane ride. Prizes for competitors were donated by Lisbon merchants George Brummer, Family Drug Store, Fred Parker's store, and Goudie Hardware. The pilots stayed at The Moulton on South Main Street, and an aviation ball was held at Franklin Hall on North Main Street. The air circus company had registered and received certification from the State of New Hampshire Public Service Commission for a period of one year, something they must have done annually. In the summer and fall of 1934, the air circus returned, and the crowd was thrilled by airplanes flying upside down and doing other stunts, and there were parachuters.

In July of 1935, an announcement was made that Cobleigh Airport would be the station drop for air mail service to the White Mountain area twice a day on route from Burlington, Vermont to Boston. The president of the company that had the government contract and a representative from Washington D.C. landed at the airport to meet the Lisbon postmaster. Rita (Hanno) Collyer, then a political correspondent in Washington D.C. and owner of the old Young-Cobleigh Tavern was instrumental in working with politicians to have the Lisbon airport used as an air mail drop. Other area airports wanted to be chosen, too. If Cobleigh was used as an airmail drop, it was short-lived.

In the fall of 1935, the air circus returned. One of the planes climbed 4,000 feet, shut off the motor, and then put the plane in a dive before pulling it back up and doing a number of other stunts. Another stunt was a free-fall delayed parachute jump.

In October of 1935 an air ambulance landed at the airport to take a Lisbon woman suffering from rheumatoid arthritis to mineral springs in Michigan. Also, that October another airplane meet was held with over 1,000 spectators.

The focus of reporting on local airports shifted to the Twin Mountain, Whitefield, and St. Johnsbury (VT) airports, and the Cobleigh Airport had less newsworthy activity.

A New Hampshire Planning and Development Commission advisory committee stated in 1940 that no existing airport in New Hampshire was fully adequate, and funds from federal, state, and local governments would be used to improve them. It appears that the era of the Cobleigh Airport had come to an end by 1940 as it is not on the list of the 37 existing New Hampshire airports and fields considered to be part of a State airway system proposed in 1939 by the NH Legislature.

*We hope you appreciate receiving these monthly Moments in History. We welcome your comments as well as suggestions for possible topics for future Moments. Please feel free to share any of our Moments in History with relatives and friends, and have them email us if they would like to receive them in the future at [info@lisbonareahistory.org](mailto:info@lisbonareahistory.org). For more about us and to read past Moments in History, go to [www.lisbonareahistory.org](http://www.lisbonareahistory.org). We are also on Facebook. Thank you.*