

Paton Field Centennial Moment--January

1920: Birth of the Airport

One hundred years ago in January 1920, plans were underway to create an airfield on the site of today's Kent State Airport. This was the Stow farm property of Rev. Edward J. Smith, a retired Methodist minister. Seeing an opportunity to capitalize on the growing interest in aviation, six investors took out incorporation papers in October 1919 for the Ohio Flying School and Transport Company. The company planned to convey passengers and freight, offer flight training and rides, and entertain with flying exhibitions and stunts. Aerial advertising and photography would also be offered.

The Men Behind the Ohio Flying School

The investors were young men of modest means and varied backgrounds. The president was Scott W. Worley, an insurance salesman. Vice president John F. Aston, a Massillon native, was the only pilot in the group and a World War I veteran with service in the US Army Air Corps. Secretary-treasurer was Edwin L. Manthey, the sole college graduate, with a degree from the Municipal University of Akron. Important to the Ohio Flying School operation was its chief pilot, Lt. M.A.C. Johnson, a wartime aerial combat instructor and former barnstormer.

The Ohio Flying School and Transport Company

By April 1920, the businessmen had constructed a hangar on Smith's property. The roof was painted a brilliant orange, as specified by the government to help guide transient pilots. A service station on the property was available for fuel and small repairs. Promotion highlighted that the field was a stop on the interurban railway that ran along Kent Road, providing connections with Akron to the west and Kent-Ravenna to the east.



Dale W. Platt Collection

The Ohio Flying School purchased five Curtiss JN-4 airplanes. This model had been used by the US Army in World War I to train 95 percent of its pilots and had become known as "old reliable." These five were part of a war surplus lot that had ended up in Canada and would be ferried to Stow by Aston and Johnson. These two aviators became the first to pass through the

newly established US aerial customs. Their route then took them along the shore of Lake Erie, over Niagara Falls to Buffalo, from Buffalo to Cleveland, and then to Stow.



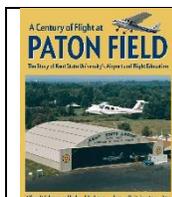
In May 1920, the Ohio Flying School opened for business and signed up over forty students for flying courses. Promotional efforts over the next months included being part of area events. In June, aviators from the Ohio Flying School did demonstration flying and stunts over a huge celebration in East Akron attended by 150,000 visitors. Later, a race staged by the Summit County Fairgrounds pitted Johnson in his “Jenny” airplane against a “powerful racing auto.”

Newspaper ads highlighted “Flying Every Day” and urged people to come out any time for a trip “Thru the Clouds.” first year, the Ohio Flying School reported carrying 586 passengers and flying 3,450 miles. Regrettably, this promising start ended when the economy took a downward turn, forcing the Ohio Flying School into foreclosure in December 1921.

Rev. Smith and his son Fred F. Smith determined to continue the business and serve the growing aviation needs of the area.

DID YOU KNOW?

The large house adjacent to the airport on Kent Road --today’s Cellar 59 Wine Bar--was built by Rev. Smith in the early 1900s. Its location on a knoll offered it a “magnificent” view of Kent, prompting Smith to call his home “Kentview.”



Excerpted from *A Century of Flight at Paton Field: The Story of Kent State University's Airport and Flight Education* by William D. Schloman and Barbara F. Schloman. (Kent State University Press, 2019). Used by permission. Available at the Kent State University Airport, from the [Kent State University Press](https://www.kent.edu/press/), and wherever books are sold.