

The End of Service to Hong Kong

Atkins Light DC-6B
model heading for
the NWAHC

Airplane models meet fashion models: a runway show

Centerfold: North
Central's Convair
340

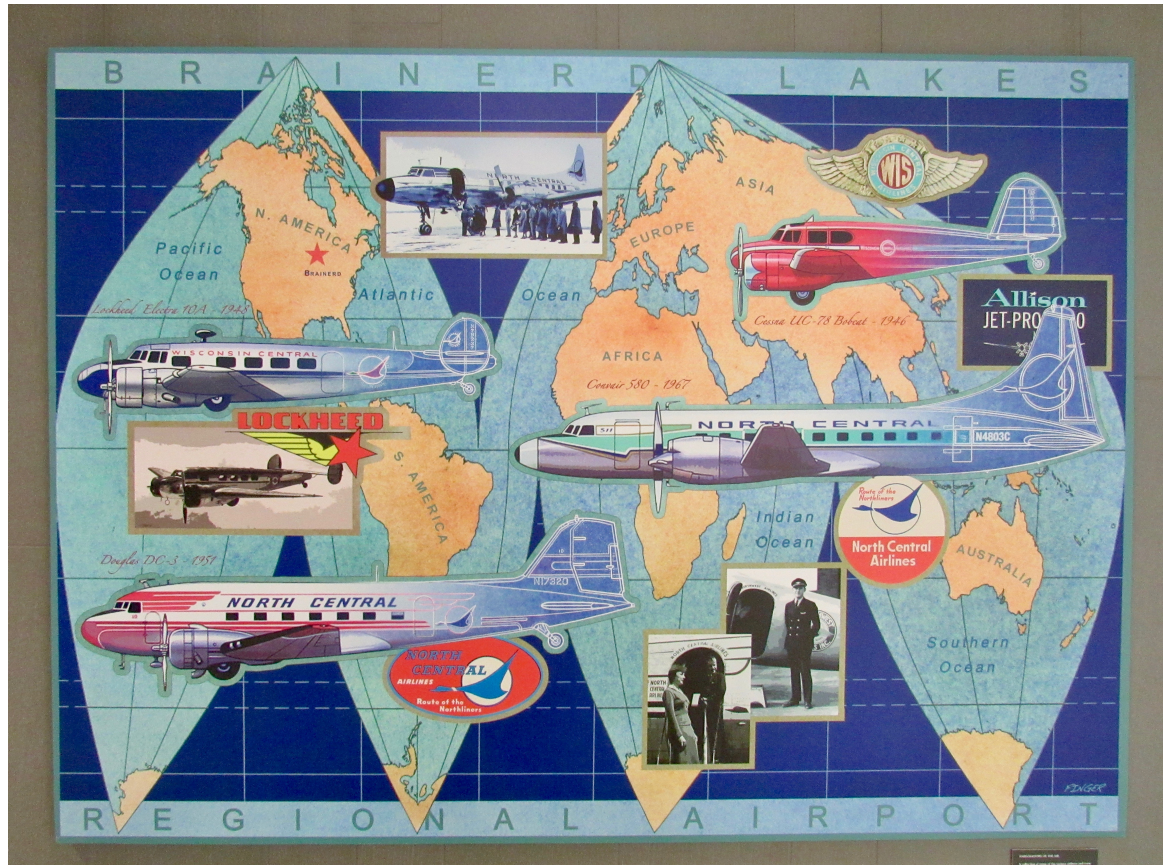
Our Mission:

To preserve and display the memory of Northwest Airlines' colorful history.

To tell the stories of carriers merged and allied with NWA, and the stations and regions they served.

To show how the legacy of NWA carries on into the future.

The Quarterly Journal of the Northwest Airlines History Center



This illustration by Ron Finger of REDPINE Studios, Baxter, MN is on display near BRD's baggage claim.

70 years of service to the North Country Gateway by North Central and its legacy

--by Scott Norris

Many parts of the United States make claim to being the “Nation’s Playground,” but few spots deserve the title as much as the glacial-lake studded region of north-central Minnesota, running 100 miles north to south and 200 miles across. From fishing, swimming, bicycling, auto racing, and golf in the summer to hunting in fall, and snowmobiling, skiing, hockey, and ice fishing in winter, there’s no end to outdoor activities. Nationally-acclaimed resorts such as Grand View Lodge, Madden’s, and Breezy Point have been serving guests for over 100 years. Indoor activities are well-represented, too, with multiple options for fine dining, antiques, and arts and crafts. And two nearby Ojibwe reservations have built casino complexes for gambling and live entertainment. When a Minnesotan talks about going “Up North” to a cabin or campground or second home, this is probably where they’re going.

But his area didn't start out as a vacation paradise – European settlement didn't start in earnest until after the Civil War, when big timber interests helped force through treaties to uproot the Ojibwe. The Northern Pacific Railway built its initial line from Duluth to Fargo in 1872, putting its locomotive repair shops where the line crossed the Mississippi River. In the 1890s a north-south line connected International Falls to Minneapolis via Brainerd, making the new town a bonafide rail hub.

Brainerd: to page 8

Flight Plan

From the Executive Director



Happy Anniversary! As you read this, September marks the 1st anniversary of the Northwest Airlines History Center's (NWAHC) inaugural service at the Crowne Plaza Aire Hotel. It has been a smooth ride since September 28th, our first flight date, and based on the month-over-month increase in visitors we've recorded, our location is easy to find. Thanks to Bob DuBert and Chuck Huntley, our displays are being arranged more thoughtfully with informative signage.

The pre-September 2017 closure of the museum was hard on all the volunteers; no volunteer opportunities and no public to interact with. It is gratifying that over the past year, our ever-enthusiastic volunteers have returned, plus new volunteers have joined our ranks. All in all, the museum operation has taken off and based on visitor comments, the museum is becoming a recognized destination for the general public, in addition to Crowne Plaza Aire Hotel guests.

Starting in mid-September, the NWAHC's archive facility at Flying Cloud Airport will become an approved learning site for graduate level archivist students from the University of St. Katherine, in St. Paul. The St. Kates students will put in approximately 400 hours of collection processing as part of their Masters of Library and Information Science (MLIS) studies. As the backlog of items in the NWAHC's archive is processed more interesting historic airline items will become available for display in the museum. The plan is to begin rotating new displays and stories through the museum in 2019 and there are some remarkable items and stories that need to be told. Stratocruisers and scarves, travel posters and models – there is a rich history of Northwest Airlines' – and its legacy partners – that hasn't been seen or told yet.

Lastly, Chuck Huntley, has resigned from the Board of Directors. Chuck has an already busy volunteer schedule and committed to a 2-year stint on the Board. Two years have passed, and Chuck turned out to have been serious about his self-imposed term limit. On behalf of the entire Board of Directors, thank you, Chuck, for your help and willingness to help elevate the Northwest Airlines History Center towards a more professional level of operation. CAVU.

Have items you'd be interested in donating to the NWAHC?

Click the online form at our new
website, or contact us at
bruce.kitt@nwahistory.org.



THE NORTHWEST AIRLINES HISTORY CENTER, INC.

We are an independent, not-for-profit 501(c)(3)
corporation registered in the State of Minnesota.

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Henry V. "Pete" Patzke (1925-2012)

Executive Director: Bruce Kitt

Museum Director: [open]

Directors: Bruce Kitt, Fay Kulenkamp, Bill Marchessault,
Vince Rodriguez, Jeff Schwalen

Collection Manager: Bruce Kitt

Retail Sales: Fay Kulenkamp

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Preflight Briefing



From the Editor

You might say my enthusiasm for aviation was a case of prenatal imprinting. I was born at Cherry Point Naval Air Station during the Vietnam War, where my father was a Marine working on avionics, and where my parents would visit Cape Hatteras and Kitty Point. From as young as I can remember, a passing aircraft would always yank my gaze up to the sky, and at the age of 5 my mother locked my mind's focus in place with a set of timetables she'd gathered on a trip. From that point on, airline schedules would be my quiet tutor in geography, world languages, sociology, creative writing, artistic design, and mathematics. And when my family broke up, the knowledge of what was going on in the sky, where, when, and who, was my stability who helped me figure out who I was.

And who am I? I got my degree in management from the University of Minnesota - and graduated into the Gulf War Recession when airlines weren't hiring. But I have worked with trucking and railroading, production planning and procurement, and plenty of sales and marketing. My "day job" is at an educational publishing company where I wear many hats, including advertising, trade show management, and new-account prospecting. My wife is a 7th-grade English teacher, and our daughter has just entered 7th grade at Yinghua Academy, a Mandarin- language immersion school.

"At night" I've used our experiences when we adopted our daughter in China, as well as our continuing family travels, to publish the website weninchina.com, where I encourage middle-class folks to take a trip across the Pacific by providing nuts-and-bolts advice on how to get around, what to eat and see, and what it feels like in other cultures. I've written several dozen airport guides for it, too, as well as a series of articles I call "Transpacific Pioneers" - which of course includes quite a bit of NWA history, and I'll be using some of those for future articles here.

The Brainerd Lakes area is where I knew I wanted to set my first story as Editor of REFLECTIONS. My grandparents' cabin was just north of Nisswa, and my sister and I would stay with them from the late 1970s through the late 1980s. My first job was at Grand View Lodge, and my first unaccompanied flight was from there in 1982, on a Republic Convair 580. Recent upgrades at BRD are beautiful, and I'm eager to return!

I owe great thanks to Bob DuBert and Chuck Huntley for their encouragement to come on board, and for the considerable groundwork they've put in to the successful relaunch of Museum operations, and more recently, the all-new northwestairlineshistory.org website. We'll be adding lots of digital content there, so please visit often!

I hope you enjoy this issue. Cross check and prepare for departure! --Scott

VISITING THE MUSEUM

Current schedule:

Wednesday - Thursday 11 am - 6 pm
Friday-Saturday 11 am - 5 pm
Closed Sunday-Tuesday, and major holidays.

Admission is FREE

(Special events may incur a charge.)

Directions:

FROM MSP INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT:

Use the Metro Blue Line light rail from either Terminal 1 or Terminal 2. Take the southbound train (towards the Mall of America) and exit at the American Boulevard station, which is the stop immediately beyond Terminal 2. The Crowne Plaza Aire Hotel is immediately east, across the street from the station. Trains run every 10 minutes and fares are \$2.50 peak / \$2.00 off-peak. A ticket is good for 2.5 hours of unlimited travel, so depending on the length of your visit to the museum, a separate return ticket may not be necessary.

FROM THE TWIN CITIES METRO AREA:

Head toward MSP International Airport.
From I-494, get off at the 34th Ave. S. exit (second exit east of Hwy 77/Cedar)
Go south on 34th Ave. S. for one block to American Blvd.
Turn left onto American Blvd.
Crowne Plaza Aire Hotel is on your right. Free parking is available on the top two floors of the hotel's ramp.

The museum is on the third floor, across from the Fitness Center.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

\$30 level - receives the REFLECTIONS digital edition early access via email

\$35 level - also receives the REFLECTIONS print edition via U.S. Postal Service

Compass Readings

Fashion runway show incorporates vintage elements from the NWAHC archives

FLY is an aviation-inspired exhibition and runway show to be presented on Friday, September 28 by The Hues Company, a Minneapolis-based subscription and lifestyle brand created to connect people of color around the world interested in all things health, beauty, and wellness, to launch a new clothing line, Airline Brat. The runway show will showcase "aviation couture" inspired by international travel, the airline industry, and the history of flight.

Special Guest Designers will include Oceane Thea of Theacouture, Jummy Oye of Jummy's Corner, and Anyse Mellott of Anyse Fashion and Design.

The event will also feature an exhibition of memorabilia from Minnesota's rich history in the airline industry provided by the Northwest Airlines History Center.

A luxury consignment pop-up, provided by Keisha's Closet, will feature items for sale from Chanel, Christian Louboutin, Yves Saint Laurent, and more!

For tickets and to learn more about The Hues Company, visit www.huesbox.com or contact brandpartnerships@huesbox.com. A portion of ticket proceeds will be donated to the Northwest Airlines History Center.



End of the line for Hong Kong Service

Northwest Airlines started service to Hong Kong in 1966, using Boeing 707-320s from Tokyo Haneda. In the jumbo jet era, NWA would serve the famous Kai Tak airport from Tokyo Narita, Seoul Gimpo, Seattle, and even briefly nonstop from Minneapolis in 1997-1998. NWA Cargo jets were also frequent visitors.

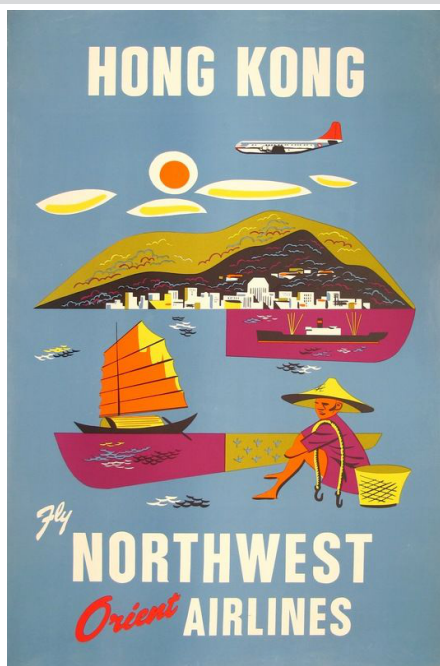
After the move to Chep Lap Kok, NWA continued its daily service to NRT with the Boeing 747-400. Delta experimented with smaller Airbus A330s on the Tokyo route but ultimately cut the link in 2014. DL also ran nonstops to Detroit from 2010 to 2012 with Boeing 777-200LRs, and to Seattle from 2014, shifting between 777s and A330s.

Delta's final departure from SEA will be October 2, and from HKG Oct. 4.

The cut of service to Hong Kong is offset with the introduction of two new Transpacific routes: Seattle to Osaka Kansai, beginning in 2019, using the 767-300ER, and Minneapolis/St. Paul to Seoul Incheon, commencing April 1, 2019, with Delta's newly refurbished 777-200ER equipment. Both new routes will be operated under the recently-implemented joint venture between Delta and Korean Air.

Look forward to the March 2019 Reflections for a feature article on NWA's Transpacific services from MSP, including the HKG route.

Compass Readings



NWA would never serve HKG with the Stratocruiser; during the propeller era, arrangements were made with Hong Kong Airways to transfer passengers at Taipei.



N664US at Kai Tak Airport, Oct. 14, 1997
Image by Torsten Maiwald via Wikimedia Commons, GNU 1.2 license

Captain Atkins' demonstration model for anti-collision lights heading to the NWAHC Museum

A great many people in the NWA family had a chance to meet Captain Bill Atkins: he started with the company in 1945 and retired in 1992, at #1 on the Pilots' seniority list. Bill flew nearly every type in the fleet, save the Constellation and the Airbus, from the DC-3 to the 747.

Bill was also an electrical engineer and keen observer of crew behavior; he put these talents to work to address the growing problem of inflight near-collisions by developing and testing a pulsed warning light system. North Central and Northwest were early adopters, and Minneapolis-based Honeywell produced the Atkins Light - which is still standard equipment today.

The metal DC-6B model Captain Atkins used to illustrate his concept to airlines and private operators, government bodies, and even NBC's Today Show, is being donated by his family to the NWAHC.

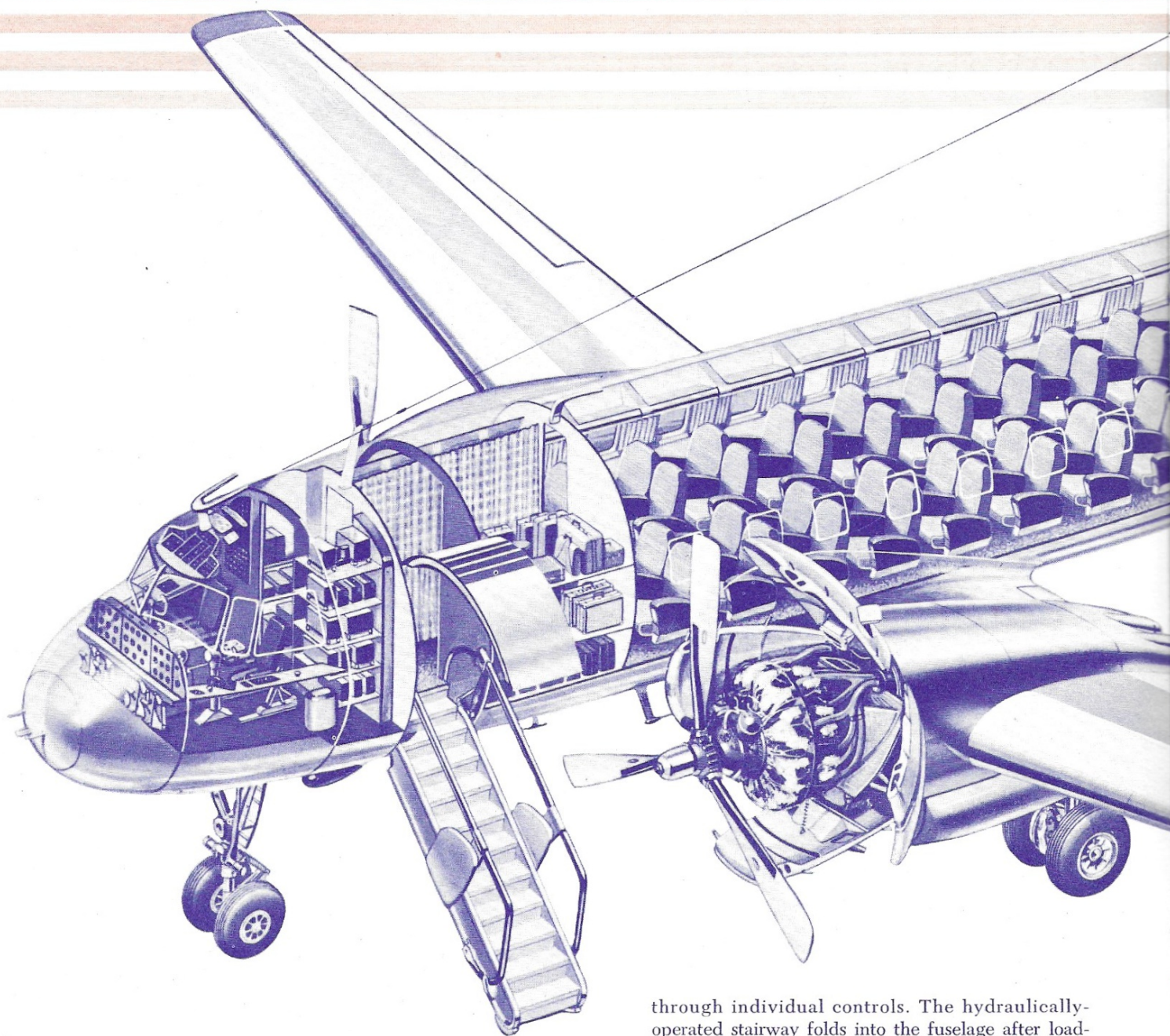
Restoration of the model is being handled by Jim Striplin of Hartford, AL (<https://www.facebook.com/jimstriplin.restorations>), who estimates the work will take inside of one year. Jim has brought many large-scale aircraft models back to museum-quality condition for both public and private collections, and his overhaul processes can be as intricate as those used on a full-sized airliner: from chemical and bead-blasting paint stripping to metallurgical diecasting and milling new parts.

Jim's quote for the work is \$2,500, which is being underwritten by retired Northwest pilot Bob Horning and his wife, Sue. When the model is completed and ready to be given its place of honor at the Museum, we will also present a full feature on Captain Atkins and his invention.



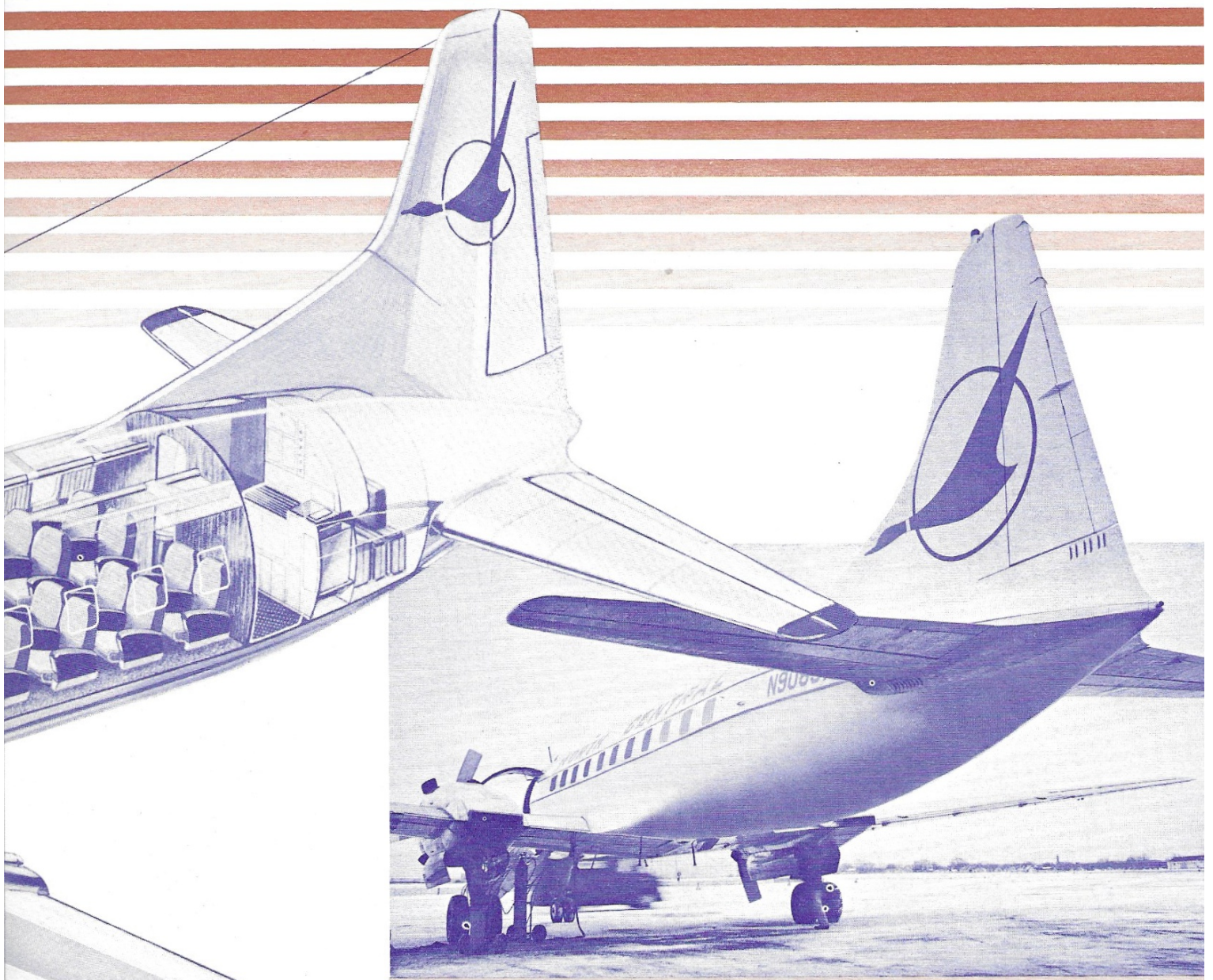
Centerfold: North Central's new Convair 340, as shown in their 1958 Annual Report. The 340 wouldn't make it to Brainerd, though: the improved CV-440 took over on the route after the DC-3 was retired.

CONVAIR 340



The Convair 340, North Central's third major equipment change in 11 years of scheduled operation, features weather radar to seek the smooth routes and pressurization to insure passenger comfort at high altitude and when ascending or descending. More than 20 cubic feet of fresh air per minute, conditioned for temperature, is supplied to each passenger

through individual controls. The hydraulically-operated stairway folds into the fuselage after loading. A spacious carry-on baggage rack is located ahead of the passenger compartment on the left side. The increased wingspan—105 feet, 4 inches—coupled with a new flap system, gives the Convair outstanding performance for operation into smaller airports. North Central's special exhaust system modification reduces the Convair engine noise level by more than 40 per cent.



View of the Convair 340 looking toward the 28-foot tail section. Tricycle landing gear keeps cabin level when aircraft is at rest.



Main passenger cabin, richly furnished with 44 wide, upholstered seats, thick carpeting, individual controls for air conditioning.

Feature Article

Rail and river access gave a market to the timber in the region, and a big paper mill was sited in town. But by the 1920s the big stands had been stripped – making the view of the thousands of lakes in the region all the more evident. Railroads could bring tourists in as easily as they hauled lumber out, after all. Post-World War II, the national highway system made the Brainerd Lakes area a two-day drive from most of the Midwest and Great Plains; a cool getaway from summer heat – and the camping and resort business exploded.

While an early airfield started in Brainerd in the 1920s, it was not sited well for expansion, and had to close. From 1945 to 1947, the city and Crow Wing County purchased 900 acres to the east of town, created an airport commission, sought Federal and state funding assistance, laid out a two-runway field, and built a hangar, offices, and a Fixed Base Operator.

The combination of potential resort and industrial traffic, relatively short air distance to Minneapolis (yet 4 hours by auto on two-lane roads), and a willing CAB attracted Wisconsin Central to begin service in 1948 on its Minneapolis – Duluth route, using its Lockheed Electra 10A.

By the end of 1949, Wisconsin Central was running two flights per day in each direction. After the carrier's move to Minneapolis, name change to North Central, and route award to Grand Forks, the entirety of the Lakes Region gained coverage, with two departures each day in winter and four in summer, calling on Brainerd, Bemidji, Thief River Falls, and Grand Forks with the dependable Douglas DC-3.

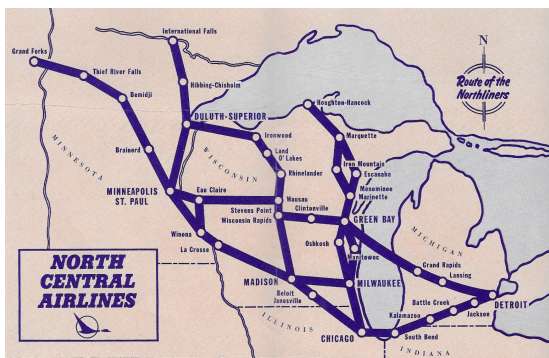
North Central served vacation markets no other carrier could access, and their flight times allowed for same-day national connections as well as convenience for local traffic originating in places like Chicago and the Twin Cities. In the 1950s summertimes, Brainerd was emplaning up to 300 passengers per month.



From Wisconsin Central's December 1949 timetable.



From North Central's August 1956 timetable.



This pattern continued well through the 1960s. Convair 440s started to displace DC-3 service by 1967, and in 1969 all flights into BRD were using the upgraded Convair 580, whose Allison 501-D turboprops would become one of the signature background sounds of the Northland.



BRainerd and Bemidji
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751-5012 — Bemidji
OR SEE YOUR TRAVEL AGENT
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North Central acquired Southern in 1979 to become Republic Airlines, and for the summer of 1980 increased departures from Brainerd to six per day! By the next year, RC had reverted to three flights per day to MSP. Those flights were getting full, however, with enplanements in 1982 topping 15,000.

MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL, MINN. (CDT)					
\$ 722a	755a	Daily	890	0	PJet
927a	1000a	Daily	690	0	PJet
1106a	1140a	Daily	892	0	PJet
1255p	130p	Daily	924	0	PJet
356p	430p	Daily	894	0	PJet
925p	958p	Daily	694	0	PJet

From Republic's July 1980 timetable. Some flights routed through Bemidji.

BRainerd, MINN. (CDT)					
835a	908a	Daily	691	0	PJet
1040a	1118a	Daily	891	0	PJet
105p	141p	Daily	899	0	PJet
530p	608p	ExSa	895	0	PJet
830p	905p	Daily	693	0	PJet

As traffic grew in the early 1980s, local tourism backers hoped to encourage Republic to bring in DC-9 equipment. The original terminal struggled to handle passengers waiting for Convair flights, so a new building was constructed in 1982-83 immediately to the west, and the original structure was converted into a café, meeting space, and FBO waiting area. A generously-sized security checkpoint and holdroom were included in the new terminal, as well as a ramp leading up to a door where a loading bridge would be installed. The airport's primary runway was also lengthened and widened, which did help attract private business-jet traffic. Republic, though, ultimately decided not to deploy jet equipment.

In 1982, a second carrier started service to BRD: this was Mesaba Airlines from nearby Grand Rapids, Minnesota, and they were just starting to stretch their wings with their sole Beech 99. Mesaba would pick up Essential Air Service authorities in the first half of the 1980s as Republic and Ozark withdrew from smaller Upper Midwest markets, adding more Beechcraft, then Swearingen Metro and Fokker F-27 equipment. In 1985 they became a Northwest Airlink partner, and true national-carrier competition had finally come to Brainerd.

On January 9, 1983, flight RC 927 arriving from Minneapolis at 7:41 pm after a 45-minute delay in the Twin Cities due to winter weather, was involved in Brainerd's most serious incident. From the NTSB report:

Flight 927 carried out a nonprecision instrument approach to runway 23 at Brainerd-Crow Wing County Airport. The airplane touched down about 1,725 feet beyond the threshold of the 6,500-foot runway. The touchdown was made with the right wing down and with the right main gear about 37 feet from the right edge of the 150-foot-wide runway. The airplane continued to the right and the right propeller struck a 2- to 3-foot high snowbank which was located between the right edge of the runway and the runway edge lights. The No. 1 blade of the propeller separated and entered the cabin.

One passenger was injured fatally and 1 passenger was injured seriously by the propeller blade.

The Convair, registration N8444H, remained at Brainerd, hanged and under a tarp, during the 9-month investigation. It was not returned to service, but sold to Jay Dee Aircraft Supply and parted out. Snow removal and lighting improvements were quickly implemented.



The original terminal was renovated to service general aviation as well as a cafe.



All photos this page by author - the Convair and Beech taken in 1982 with my new Kodak Disc camera - if only I'd asked for a cheap 35mm then!





The summer of 1986 saw Brainerd's peak count of airliner movements as Republic swapped out its 580s for Jetstream 31 and Saab 340 equipment under the Republic Express brand (with 5-6 departures daily), and Mesaba (with 3 daily flights) competed to feed the dual hubs at Minneapolis/St. Paul. But after the September 1986 RC-NW merger, duplication was cut, and BRD would average 5 departures in summer; 3 in winter through the rest of the 1980s and 1990s.

Mesaba was the Airlink provider to BRD, using F-27 equipment right after the merger, transitioning through Dash 8 turboprops, and finally the Saab 340, which would last through the merger with Delta. XJ did not ever consider using British Aerospace RJ85 jets on the run to MSP, as the stage length was uneconomical.



Brainerd did see (briefly) another competitive service in 1992 with Swearingen Metro operator AirVantage, who by night flew small packages under contract to UPS, and by day used the same aircraft for passenger service. AirVantage did not have any major-carrier marketing arrangements, or really any kind of advertising to build awareness, so the service was short-lived.

While tourism powered the economy in the small towns beyond Brainerd, the city itself relied on abundant jobs in the Burlington Northern railroad repair shops in the center of town, and the paper mills on its northeast corner. This combination served the region well from the 1950s through the early 1980s, but in 1985, nearly all of Brainerd's rail shops were shuttered, with nearly 1,000 staff laid off. The north-south tracks were pulled out a few years later. The paper mill closed in 2013, with over 500 workers laid off.

Adding to the pressure, a highway bypass was constructed to the west of the city, pulling merchants and theaters out of downtown, and cutting driving time from Minneapolis by a half-hour. The loss of business traffic plus the faster driving times led Delta to conclude that Brainerd would not be a viable station after their retirement of the Saab 340 fleet at the end of 2011.

Instead of that being the end of the story, however, the Brainerd Lakes region rallied with investments:

- * The abandoned railbed between Brainerd and Bemidji was turned into the Paul Bunyan State Trail, pulling in bicyclists for 3 seasons and snowmobilers and cross-country skiers in winter.
- * Hotel and resort development is at its strongest pace since the 2008 recession.
- * Crow Wing County and the City of Brainerd built a new runway for BRD, installed a jetbridge in 2012, and upgraded the 1982 terminal.
- * EAS funding was sought and attained, at about \$1.7 million per year - leading SkyWest to start twice-daily CRJ 50-seat jet services to MSP.

And the investments are bearing fruit: annual passenger counts have grown from the 15,000-16,000 range in the mid-2000s to just over 19,000 in 2017.





Image courtesy Google Maps.

Above and below images courtesy Brainerd Lakes Regional Airport.



I met with Steven Wright, BRD's airport director, in June to tour the airport and discuss the challenges and opportunities facing Brainerd Lakes:

REFLECTIONS: There has been criticism by some anti-tax politicians and lobbyists about EAS funding; that travelers can simply drive up from the Twin Cities and that airports in smaller communities have to stand or fall on their own. How does Brainerd respond to those remarks?

WRIGHT: The Regional Air Service Alliance recently did an economic impact study showing that the commercial air travelers coming here spend about \$20 million annually - that's in hotels and rental cars, dining, shopping, and the like. So that's an invest one dollar, earn ten back, each year situation - but without that subsidy, there's no service and no payoff. As loads continue to increase, the subsidy burden is reduced. If we had summer weather year-round, we wouldn't need subsidy: the flights are full. But that EAS lifeline keeps our service intact during the winter to reduce risk to SkyWest and improve confidence to our local businesses to keep investment and employment.

REFLECTIONS: Why did Brainerd choose to spend their funding on a jet operation like SkyWest, instead of a Cape Air or Boutique Air where the cost per departure would be cheaper? How does jet service differ from perhaps more frequency with a Cessna 402 or Pilatus PC-12?

WRIGHT: Mesaba was profitable year-round with the Saabs: 34 seats with multiple departures was perfect for our market. But the Saab and the CRJ have more of that mainline airline cabin feeling, and of course all the marketing advantages that come with operating for Delta. Sitting in a 402 isn't much different than being in a car, and we are moving too many travelers through here for a 9-seater to make sense. Really, we would end up wasting the subsidy because the service wouldn't generate the loads needed for our community's needs.

REFLECTIONS: How has improved highway access affected passenger loads from Minneapolis?

WRIGHT: Our biggest origin-destination airport is still MSP. But what travelers are saying is that they're taking a Southwest or Spirit to get to the Twin Cities, and then connecting onto SkyWest for the final leg. A "\$9 Spirit special" with a \$150 final leg to make it here. Because our EAS subsidy helps us keep the fare affordable on that hop, we're getting traffic that wouldn't consider renting a car for a longer drive.

REFLECTIONS: SkyWest also operates for United and American, and they already have staff on hand here. How realistic is a Chicago flight?

WRIGHT: In fact, Denver and Dallas are some of our bigger O&D markets - but it would come down to aircraft availability and the connecting schedules. They could route a DEN-BRD-ORD in the morning and ORD-BRD-DEN in the afternoon, for instance, but we're up against all the other places SkyWest could put that aircraft, like Des Moines or Memphis, where extra frequency might bring more profit. We'll keep talking, though.

REFLECTIONS: So would you rather see SkyWest upgrading MSP flights to the CRJ-700, or adding a third CRJ-200 frequency?

WRIGHT: Absolutely a third frequency - having only two flights makes for awkward transfers, and local travelers tell me they sometimes need to rent a car just to get home, because they don't want to spend six hours at MSP. The added potential domestic and international connections would actually increase the likelihood of more passengers using the service, because of convenience. That is our #1 objective.



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The MSP Airline Collectibles Show and Sale

Saturday, October 13, 2018 9 am - 4 pm

Best Western Plus Hotel

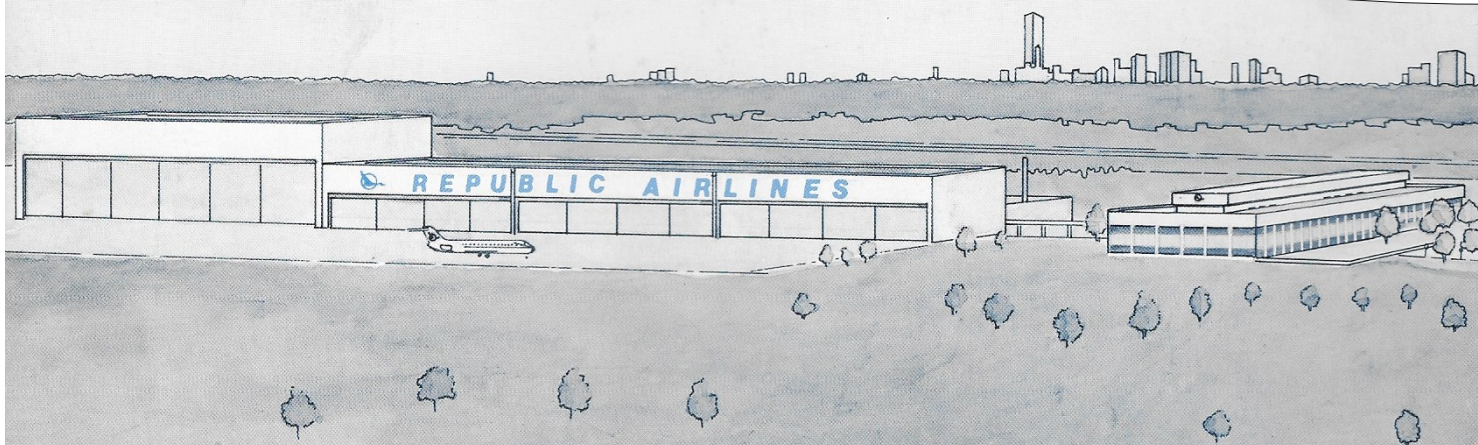
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