

Welcome to the  
Manitowish Waters Airport (D25)



**HISTORY**

## The Manitowish Waters Airport

### D 25 Identifier

You can search the world and you will not find an equal or even close to equal, a small airport that is as neat, clean, unique and supported by only 600 or so residents.

This did not come about by accident. It was intentional and reflects the character of it's citizens and the dedication of many people-past and present.

In the beginning:

In 1945 the residents of the town,(about 175) thru its Town Board, decided to create an airport. The reason was a newly passed federal law called the Airways and Airport Act, which created a trust specifically for the advancement of Aviation in the United States. Each state was given a grant (Based on a formula) to be used by their aviation department. Spending levels on approved projects were: Federal-90%, 5% state and 5% sponsor. The Federal Trust Fund was funded by an aviation fuel tax and a passenger ticket tax. This is still true today(2003) . Although the trust fund did not distribute all the money it was required to do because of recent budget difficulties, Congress used the cash to help balance the Budget.

In the Manitowish Waters project, land was purchased and a 3 runway design was provided.

Runway 22, 4, ( 220° Southwest ,40° Northeast,) was created. About 2800 feet long, it ended about 800 feet south west of U.S.51. This was to allow a proper 20 to 1 glide slope that cleared the trees and power lines at U.S. 51. The ground was leveled and could be used as an overrun up to the highway when landing on 4. Also it could be used as a take off point for runway 22 giving a total of about 3500 feet for take off to the south west. It was turf(grass) as it is today.

Another runway was 90°, 270°. This was a short 1600 feet and not smooth nor level and we had numerous accidents and overruns(into a stump field) so in the 70's it was closed.

The third runway was not built. It was to be approximately the same direction as our present hard surface new runway 14, 32.



A so called "Terminal Building" was built of concrete block and wood. It was approximately 60 feet long by 40 feet wide with an office 15 feet by 20 feet at one end and above it a "sleeping area", or storage space, later turned into an office.

No Hanger existed other than this building.

The first operator of the airport was Robert Spargue, whose father in law was Ted Daniels, the towns first postmaster. He had a Cessna 170 that he kept in the hanger part and sold gas, during the summer months. In the winter the airport was closed. Due to the lack of traffic plus other obligations, Mr. Spargue left after a year or two. Harold Barkstrom took over as Manager. He had a BT-13 air force trainer that he gave rides in and used it for charter work. Again, lack of traffic did not allow for him to continue and he left.

It is now about 1950.

The town Board hired who they could to mow the grass and gas up any airplane that landed. Pay was \$25.00 per week for 3 months, June, July, and August. After that there was no service and snow closed it for the winter.

In about 1952, 3 people in Manitowish Waters bought an airplane. A65 HP, J 3 Cub. Cal LaPorte, Adolph Mussatti each had a private license and B.C. Roemer who had a solo license. The airplane was flawless in "like new condition". Total price? \$450.00 with a set of airplane skis thrown in! They bought an unassembled kit hanger from Mr. Daniels that Mr. Spargue had and erected it for use with, the Cub, releasing the large hanger for use by an operator.

After a few years they traded the Cub for an 8A, 65 HP Luscombe rag wing. Instead of cruising at 75 mph they now went cross country at 105 mph! The upgrade costing \$250.00 again with a set of skis.(about \$83.00 each partner)

After more years of pleasure flying, circumstances dictated that the partnership sell the airplane and dissolve. B.C. Roemer bought the small hanger they built, and later B.C. bought a used V tail, Bonanza that he used in his business. No other hangers were built. There were only two airplanes based here. B.C.'s and Mr. Robbel who owned the telephone Co., had a tri pacer. B.C. plowed the runway thru January and when the snow got too deep-the airport was closed. This plowing allowed a bit more usage for the Bonanza.

The turning point:

As the years went by traffic picked up. We had private DC3's occasionally land with out problems. We did have a problem with a B25 (or 26?) which Mr. Hutchinson, President of the Carpenter's Union of New York was flying (a Bomber of WW2). This was a fast landing, heavy airplane and always landed on 4 so as to have extra field length to stop. It still was a challenge and took a very experienced pilot as you can

surmise . Our problem was he would use the brakes a lot and would tear up the nice grass we had. You could see it roll up behind the tires. It was infrequent landings and we were thankful.

About 1976 Woodruff airport wanted to expand and to raise their required 5% they asked the surrounding towns to contribute money. The towns were to add this amount to their budgets at the Annual Meeting. Manitowish Waters amount was to be \$10,000.00. This was brought up at our town meeting and I was shocked that Woodruff would even ask us as we had our own airport which sure could use that money. I pointed out to Chairman Palmer Hanson that if he gave that money to me I would multiply it by 20 for a total of \$200,000.00 to be used on our airport. I certainly was opposed to giving it to another airport. Up until this time the town Board "ran" the airport. There was no airport committee, so Chairman Hanson appointed me to head the airport committee and to pick two more people for a total of three. I chose Peter Bartling and Emil Wanatka, Jr., both were pilots. This was a volunteer committee. We had no budget. All travel, calls, stamps were on us personally. Zero town money. In fact we never did get the promised \$10,000.00 -Not a penny. After a series of discussions- we never did hold a meeting, we decided we would black top the present 22-4 runway so we would have year round availability. After a lot of meetings, discussions, phone calls etc. with the State Aeronautics Dept., they sent an engineer to look things over. They said we would have to move the telephone co. as the buildings were too close for a non-precision approach. The cost to do this was just too much so we looked at a completely new runway. That's how 32-14 came into being. The airport owned almost all the land and giving us the flexibility of two more wind directions to land into was very attractive. The state estimated the total cost of about \$900,000.00 with our 5% share at \$45,000.00. My challenge was to get this job done without any indebtedness, bonds, or anything on the tax rolls. Zero—nothing.

About this time the old School House was offered for sale by the town. After bids were received and accepted, vandals got in and ruined everything that could be hit with a baseball bat. All windows were out, rain came in and ruined the tile floor. It was just a big mess. The buyer backed out or else the town had to restore it to when he bid. With no bidders in hand they advertised again. I bid with the provision that the money would go to the airport. These moneys plus the interest this earned(over about 12 years) plus some pulp wood sold off the property gave us our share. As this was an estimate, I personally guaranteed any additional money needed from the town to fund this improvement.

After many ,many trips to Madison to meet with the Aeronautical Bureau etc., over a period of 15 years, many people including Al Nelson, and Clifford Phillips, and later Jerry Jensen represented the Town Board on the committee.

Shortly after I formed the airport committee and after one of my reports to the Town Board a gentleman approached me and asked for a job---- Airport Manager. Seeing we needed someone I "hired" him. He received no salary-only gas sales and tie down fees. No Town money at all. He was an AT&T telephone technician from O'Hare airport in

Chicago, now retired. Name: Ed Gillespie. All pilots and persons who used the airport during his tenure enjoyed the best service the airport ever had including today. He was on duty almost 24-7 and service was his goal. He also helped oversee the construction of the airport as you see it. As chairman of the airport committee I felt I had to constantly check to get things done right. Not that I wanted to but someone had to do it. I personally demanded that the power lines on north 32 be buried. They went thru the approach area of 14. It got done. I also demanded and got the fencing, the fence markings on the approach to 22. I determined where the fence crosses 22 approach was located. (Some wanted it at US 51 – others at runway end.)

Chuck Blanchard, Ed Gillespie and myself determined where the Hanger area should be, what type of hanger were allowed etc. Results? 4 Buildings, almost alike, neat, clean, beautiful! Each of these buildings are a separate condominium. They are owned by private individuals as a condo. They lease the ground from the airport. They pay taxes like any other property in town. But before all these buildings were built something else happened.

Mrs. Elizabeth Cherne and her daughter Sarah, president of the Cherne trust, wanted a meeting with Mr. Gillespie airport manager. He invited me to the meeting in the old hanger-office. (50 years old) The Cherne's, who own a home here are very community minded and have contributed moneys to many organizations in town. They wanted to give the airport a small grass cutting tractor. At the time we were getting a lot of government surplus equipment and I suggested that we really didn't need a tractor but we sure needed a new terminal building. The meeting was interesting if not shocking but cordial and ended with a requirement that I had to present the request in a formal manner and it would be considered by the Trust Committee.

At this time I am no longer connected to the airport in any capacity. In fact I have been a resident of Nevada for 5 years, but I felt that if I could help the airport that I should. Of course I had no budget or moneys from the town. All expenses were my personal costs. The presentation to the Cherne Trust involved and required a 3 view drawing- Floor plan, estimated costs etc. As during the runway creation I did not have legal counsel. All paper work was completed by me. I contacted Becher Hoppe (built the new runway) and they furnished the drawings, cost estimated etc. In time the package was ready and I mailed it. It was accepted by the Cherne Trust with conditions. After much consulting with Becher Hoppe, State aeronautical bureau, it was a real challenge to build with a lesser amount than I requested. In fact, we had to redesign the building to fit the finances. I had to get about 2/3 more money than the trust money to build it. This was done by shifting the trust moneys into grants (state) for various projects parking, apron, etc. and we received many donations of money for our airport. A plaque with names is on view at the building. Also many people donated labor, which was greatly appreciated. The end results? Nothing short of Beautiful! And all at no tax increase or indebtedness.

I am responsible for the design (good or bad) of the building. I rejected some "rectangle Box" type of building as not being suitable for the image of Manitowish Waters.

We hope you enjoy our efforts to create the finest small airport in the world. Thanks should go to the residents of Manitowish Waters.

This report was produced by B.C. Roemer, past airport committee Chairman for 17 continuous years, appointed and reappointed by 9 Town Boards.

Historical advice by: Calvin G. LaPorte.

A foot note:

The "Conditions" that the Cherneys required were not easy to fulfill:

- 1- They cut my \$150,000. request to \$100,000.
- 2- They wanted "leverage"- I should double or triple their money by getting more people to donate.
- 3- They wanted a guarantee that the building would be maintained and kept clean, neat and orderly.
- 4-They wanted a guarantee that the airport would exist and not be closed or abandoned. Time period for all guarantees: 20 years.
- 5-There were other details concerning the payment's etc.

So as to not hold up the project I:

- 1-Had to live with \$100,000.
- 2-I rejected this because I didn't want to dilute the name "Cherne" with a bunch of lesser donations. I got "leverage" by matching state funds. I suggested we could put a bust of Mr. Cherne in the building. They emphatically rejected that because he would not have wanted it. I then designed the present plaque. I wrote all of it except my name-which was added by the airport committee. (Richard Indermuehle Chairman)

The trust committee accepted the above. I received no more moneys.

- 3-I gave them my personal guarantee.
  - 4-I gave them my personal guarantee.
- I do not know if the town guaranteed the above later on.

B.C.



To local pilots it is "Home".  
To guest pilots it is "Destination".  
To all pilots, after a long flight, it is a Most Welcome Sight.

## Manitowish Waters Airport in Breaking Fog



*Photo by P. Roemer in 1980, before construction of our hard surface runway.*



# Pilots & Passengers

## Arriving & Departing Views



"THANKS FOR VISITING US"

Please come back to this beautiful "Hideaway" soon!

The residents of Manitowish Waters