



Kent 36, a Piper PA-44 Seminole, flying over the newly reskinned and painted hangar in 1984. Courtesy Kent State University Libraries, Special Collections and Archives.

A Century of Flight

“Kent State University ownership of the airport has had its ups and downs,” state the co-authors in the preface of *A Century of Flight at Paton Field: The Story of Kent State University’s Airport and Flight Education* (The Kent State University Press, 2019). “Fortunately, there were individuals who provided vision and leadership to set an early course.”

Aviation enthusiasts William D. “Bill” Schloman, BS ’98 (graduate of the Kent State flight program, former airline captain and current flight simulator instructor at Kent State) and his mother, Barbara F. Schloman, MA ’89, PhD ’98 (professor emeritus and former associate dean of University Libraries at Kent State) highlight many of those visionary leaders in their extensive history, which was researched and written over five years and published in time to celebrate the airport’s centennial in 2020.

“As we uncovered stories of a rich and varied past, we also determined that the airport’s longevity establishes it as the longest-surviving public-use airport in Ohio,” note the co-authors. “What also became clear is that, for the first decades, this is a regional story that mirrors the development of aviation at that time.”

The book, which the Schломans researched by interviewing more than 70 people and tracking down a vast number of online resources, recounts the tragedies, trials and triumphs that advocates of the airport and KSU flight program experienced over the years.

It also details three key decisions, made after Kent State entered this story, which contributed to the airport’s existence today:

In 1939, KSU President Karl Leebrick applied for Kent State to participate in the government-sponsored Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP), which led to state funding for the university’s purchase of Stow Field in 1942 and prepared the way for collegiate aviation in Ohio. This brought in Andrew W. Paton [pronounced “Payton”], who created Kent State’s first flight-training curriculum in 1946 and established a vision for the role the airport could play in a university-run program.

In 1963, KSU President Robert I. White, influenced by Paton, created an airport study committee that recommended the university take over flight training and use the airport as an educational facility—bringing it under total university control and eliminating the problems caused by using a contracted operator. The recommendation came to fruition in 1966 with the establishment of Kent State’s flight program and a new role for its airport. Andrew Paton’s vision became a reality and the hangar and airfield bear his name.

In 1973, KSU President Glenn A. Olds, lacking funds to address acute maintenance and capital improvement needs, sought FAA funding after exhausting all other possibilities. Accepting federal funding obligated the university to honor assurances agreed to with

the FAA, saving Paton Field later from threats by two different university administrations. Implementation of the long-overdue improvements recommended in this first FAA master plan began in the early 1980s. These were the last significant changes until another FAA master plan was approved in 2016.

As the co-authors also observe in the epilogue, “It is worth reflecting, too, on the thousands who experienced aviation on the airport’s property over its hundred-year history. Some were in the crowds at the aerial exhibitions. Many others had their first airplane ride. For flight students, the memories of learning to fly at this field are indelible. This story underscores Andrew W. Paton Field’s rich legacy.” ⚡

A Century of Flight at Paton Field: The Story of Kent State University’s Airport and Flight Education is available at The Kent State University Press, kentstateuniversitypress.com and on Amazon.

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