

DEAD COW INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

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Library Hours:

Tuesday and Saturday
10 to 4 pm.

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Officially named the Westport Airport, but affectionately called Dead Cow International, this privately owned public-use airport is located at Pawnee and Kessler, just east of the intersection of Pawnee, West Street, K-42, and the 235 exits. The airport consists of one 30 foot wide asphalt runway, one grass runway, a spacious office/shop building, a ten-bay hangar, and a windsock. It has no control tower or runway lights; however, pilots contact the Eisenhower National tower when taking off or landing. The little airport provides small aircraft fuel and maintenance and is the home of Westport AG Sales & Service. It is also well-known location for the restoration of vintage aircraft. In addition, both the Westport Airport, and the Westport Auxiliary Airstrip, at 1801 W. 47th Street, provide emergency landing options for Eisenhower National Airport.

So, why the nickname *Dead Cow*? There were two separate incidents that led to the name. Originally, the property doubled as a cow pasture. The northwest corner of the pasture was a bit boggy, especially after a shower. One rainy night, a mama cow gave birth to a stillborn calf in the marshy area. No one noticed until days later when a pilot commented about the awful stench. The poor baby's carcass was found, and the comment was made, "We should call this place, "The Dead Calf Airport."'" Sometimes a stray cow or even the entire herd would wander onto the runway, and a pilot would have to fly down low to shoo them off before he could land. Several years after the calf incident, a pilot flying a vintage Fairchild PT-19 came in for a landing after dark. There was a sickening thud; he knew he'd hit something. He checked the plane over, and didn't find any damage, so he didn't report the collision. The dead cow was found the next morning, but the culprit didn't admit to hitting it until several years later. And so, the official, unofficial name of Dead Cow International became a permanent part of the airport's name and logo.

One can't really discuss the Dead Cow Airport without talking about the family who created and maintain it. It all began with Earl and Jesse Brown Long who inherited the family farm from Jesse's side of the family in 1945. The farm was located where the Auxiliary Airstrip is now. The Dead Cow property was added as extra pastureland a few years later.

Their oldest son, Earl Long Jr., was born in 1914. Earl took an interest in aviation. He built his own airplane for about \$1800 by using parts

“cannibalized” from wrecked aircraft. In 1946, he built an airstrip on the Pawnee property stuck up an airsock and called it the Westport Airport. He believed that “aviation was the way of the future.” The older he got, the more of a local character he became. He was a well-to-do businessman, yet lived in a dilapidated trailer at the airfield; he became an archaeology buff, traveling around the country, collecting artifacts; he ran repeatedly for local public offices, although he never won; he flew all over North and Central America collecting a trove of hair-raising stories; and he could often be seen driving around town with his dog riding on the top of his car.

Earl Jr.’s sons, Earl III, Richard, and William, grew up on the farm, and at one point it was their job to move the cows from the farm to the north pasture. They would walk them west on 47th, then north on West Street, a three-boy cattle drive. It’s a nice bit of irony that the place that the cattle drive ended was the location of Dead Cow Airport. Earl III earned degrees in math and physics from the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology. He got his pilot’s license in 1971 and is still an active pilot. He worked at Boeing for 10 years as a flight test engineer on the B-52, and he also worked on both the SRAM and ALCM missiles. And, of course, on the side he rebuilt wrecked aircraft. Earl’s parents divorced in 1978. In 1979, Earl’s mother, who had worked at Cessna, and as a side job, rebuilt wrecked planes to sell, deeded the airport to her sons, Earl III, Richard, and William. Today, Earl operates the airport and Richard maintains the Auxiliary.

After a lifetime in aviation, Earl has some great stories to tell; some of them even made the news. Here are two stories that were reported by the Associated Press:

Many years ago, Earl owned a Twin Beech Model 18, a small but sturdy cargo plane built in Wichita during WWII. In 1947, when the airborne branch of the Army became the U.S. Air Force, Earl’s old Beech was the first plane assigned to the new branch of the military. It has the serial number AF-1 (Air Force One) stamped on its fuselage. Earl sold the plane. Several years later, the new owner belly-landed it in a field in Indiana, and the old bird lay there among the weeds for years. Then in 2009, Earl was commissioned by the owner to “resurrect” it, fly it to Wichita, and clean it up to become a public aviation monument at the Yard Surplus Store just east of Old Town. So, Earl flew it to Dead Cow, then restored the exterior of the plane, especially the shiny aluminum body. The only way to deliver the plane was to tow it on city streets from Dead Cow to the store. Earl and his crew removed one wing so their load wouldn’t be quite so wide, then hooked the plane to a flatbed truck to make the trip to The Yard. No one thought to notify the Wichita police. Sure enough, the cops stopped them, but instead of a ticket, they got an escort. And today, that plane sits in all its glory outside The Yard.

Earl’s best-known adventure also involved a twin-engine Beech 18. In 1986, he and a copilot were delivering the plane from Wichita to buyers in New Zealand, and all was well as they flew west from Dead Cow Airport across the U.S. Then suddenly, over the ocean about 250 miles from Monterey, California, one of the engines quit. They had to turn around. They skimmed along about eight feet above the waves with the Coast Guard following them, just in case. They made it to Monterey, but the airport was at a much higher altitude than they were able to maintain; they spent about two hours burning fuel so they could climb high enough to land. The entire airport shut down for them! It took about a month to find another engine and get it installed, and then they were able to complete the trip. Not only did national news outlets report the nail-biting landing, but Paul Harvey, legendary news commentator, reported on it. You can listen to the actual Paul Harvey broadcast with video highlights by going to “1986 Flight from Dead Cow International to Dairy Flat, New Zealand” on *YouTube*.

Earl still repairs, restores, and flies twin and single engine aircraft. He currently owns a Beech Bonanza, a 2-seat Spezia, a gyrocopter, and a Cessna 185 that he’s restoring. Earl is also involved with the local Jayhawk Wing of the Commemorative Air Force (CAF), a national organization that restores WWII aircraft, and flies the vintage craft at airshows. The CAF has its own hangar that serves as a museum and workshop for the restoration of several WWII planes. The CAF is located on Dead Cow International Airport property.

June Johnson

NEW ADDITIONS TO OUR LIBRARY COLLECTION

SUNFLOWER 1968	R-210 LY
Home Buyers Guide - Homes 1968-1970	R-210 SG 279
Home Buyers Guide - Homes 1972	R-210 SG 279
Multiple Listing Service Comparable Book 1998	R-210 280
We Should Soon Become Respectable: Nashville's Own Timothy Demonbreun	R-430 208
To Care for the Sick & Bury the Dead	R-430 207
The Kiplinger History	G-K 047
A Short History of the Keplinger Families	G-K 048
History of the Fellow-Reeve Museum; A Legacy of Friends' Journeys	R-210 SG 278
History and Genealogy of the Wagner-Waggoner-Wagoner family	G-W 136

ANNUAL MEMBERS MEETING WAS HELD IN MAY

Thanks to all members who returned proxy forms, our Annual Meeting was a terrific success.

Rex Riley was elected to another term as president and Jim Scharnhorst was reelected as treasurer. We are delighted to be led by these two capable men.

After the meeting, all present enjoyed refreshments provided by Francene Davis Sharp and Twila Ackley Brown. Many thanks to these ladies, the refreshments were such a treat!

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2020-2021

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Library open Tuesday & Saturday 10 – 4 Email library@mhgswichita.org

Please see the Google calendar or our Facebook page for details.

GENEALOGY ROUNDTABLE	DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION
Second Tuesday @ 1:30 to 3 pm Lively discussion of genealogy topics Led by Julia Langel	Fourth Tuesday @ 1:30 pm Get help preparing your lineage society application Led by Twila Ackley Brown
PHOTO MYSTERIES	
Third Tuesday @ 1:30 to 3 pm In June, “Introduction to photo editing with GIMP” Led by Vince Hancock	

Midwest Historical and Genealogical Society

P.O. Box 1121

Wichita, Kansas 67201

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