

Visit the DW Airport on October 14

by Lynne Belluscio

Join us on Sunday October 14 at the airport on Asbury Road for a 90th anniversary party. Ninety years ago, the skies over LeRoy were filled with airplanes. On the final day of the official opening of Don Woodward's airport, the huge, tri-motor Fokker the "Friendship," surrounded by fifteen other planes, completed a final fly over. The crowd roared and it was the beginning of the historic but unfortunately brief aeronautical legacy of the DW Airport. To commemorate this event, the Historical Society will hold an anniversary party at the DW hangar on Asbury Road. Like the opening in 1928, the party is free and open to everyone. Refreshments served. I don't expect the 60,000 people that showed up in 1928, so parking should not be a problem. Unfortunately there won't be an airshow - the airstrip was decommissioned in the 1950s. But we have invited the Genesee County Model Airplane Club to bring some of their airplanes to be on exhibit. And, weather permitting, there will be kites to fly and lots of balsa wood gliders for the kids. Brian Duddy's model of the airport will be on display, as well as many of the programs, ribbons, and photographs. Even the signed photograph of Amelia Earhart will be on display and the wicker and leather chair - - one of four that were used for passengers aboard the Friendship. The scenes from the movie "Amelia" will be playing which includes the full sized model of the Friendship that was constructed for the movie, which now is on display at the Canadian Bushpilots' Museum in Sault St Marie, Canada. We're also hoping to show the movie of Russell Holderman flying loops in the glider at the airport. The hangar will be open between 2 and 4 on the 14th. Come have your photo taken with our Amelia "look a like."

Eventually, we hope to install a permanent exhibit in the lower level of the airport tow-



er. Right now I am looking for a way to paint the "shadow" of the Friendship on the area in front of the hangar. The plane had a wingspan of 72 feet and a length of 53 feet and was powered by three Wright Whirlwind 200-horse-power engines.

Amelia Earhart was not at the opening of the airport in October, but she arrived on January 24, 1929 and visited the Friendship for the first time since her flight across the Atlantic. In conjunction with Amelia Earhart's story of the airport, the Zonta Club from Batavia, will have an exhibit. Their mission is to empower women around the world to achieve their full potential. Each year they award scholarships to 35 women pursuing Phd./doctoral degrees in the fields of engineering or aerospace related sciences. Known as Amelia Earhart Fellowships, they are awarded on January 11, each year - - a day dedicated to Amelia Earhart, who was a member of Zonta.

A couple of weeks ago, a cast iron model of the Friendship became available on Ebay. Apparently only a few of these toys have survived and have commanded very high prices. The owner agreed to lower the price and the Historical Society obtained it for the future exhibit. It is similar to the one that Amelia holds in the photograph.



The high school band on opening day sitting under the wings of the Friendship

Brian Duddy's book, "Wings Over LeRoy" and Russ Holderman's "From Kittyhawk to the Moon" will be available for purchase.

There is so much history associated with the airport and the hangar, that I have talked with the State Office of Historic Preservation and hope to apply for National Landmark designation. It might take a while to fill out all the paperwork, but it certainly deserves to be recognized.

We have received notes from a couple people who were at the opening of the airport. Marion Hillman who is 98 remembers being at the airport, and God willing she plans to visit on October 14. Please



Opening Day 1928



Gathering under the wings of the Friendship.

contact us at historicalleeroy@gmail.com or call the office at 585-768-7433 if you know of someone else who was at the airport that day.