

# Mansfield Memories: The day Charles Lindbergh fooled Mansfield

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By Kevin McNatt and Andrew Todesco

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In a time when we take air travel for granted, it is hard to understand how early aviators thrilled and captivated Americans in the early 20th century. And among those early fliers, the best known was Charles A. Lindbergh.

Born in Detroit in 1902, Charles Lindbergh grew up mostly in Minnesota, the son of a US Congressman. An accomplished pilot, he was using his aviation skills in the Midwest by flying mail for the US Postal Service. His new plane, the “Spirit of St. Louis,” was ready for takeoff by 1927. On May 20-21 of that year Charles Lindbergh became the first aviator to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. He departed from Long Island, New York and landed in Paris 34 hours later. He earned instant international fame.



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America’s fascination was at a fever pitch when the 25-year-old pilot returned to the United States. Wealthy businessman Harry Guggenheim financed a barnstorming cross-country tour for Lindbergh in the summer and fall of 1927. Lindbergh visited all 48 states on the Guggenheim tour, stopping in 92 cities and delivering 147 speeches over the course of three months.

Excitement grew in Mansfield when it was reported that on the third day of his tour, Friday, July 22, 1927, Lindbergh would fly from Providence to Boston and pass directly over the town. He departed Providence at 12:35 p.m. A pre-arranged signal at fire alarm box 56 alerted a gathering at Lowney Field that the famous flyer had left Providence and would soon be passing overhead.

There was a “general rush of townspeople and autos” to Lowney Field, an open area on Oakland Street just north of (and opposite) the chocolate factory. The

field was chosen because its openness allowed for good viewing, and it was large enough to accommodate the considerable gathering of people and automobiles.



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then high above Worcester on his way to Boston. The plane that they had spotted was not the "Spirit of St. Louis." It was nothing more than a passing plane that resembled the famous aircraft. On that day, Mansfield was not a witness to history. Instead, we were miles off course.

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Everything seemed to go exactly as planned. A group of several hundred school children dressed in white spelled out "Mansfield" so that Lucky Lindy could see it as he flew overhead. Just before 1p.m. a "sleek monoplane" passed over Lowney Field, surely the "Spirit of St. Louis" flown by its famous pilot. The excitement must have been indescribable. The activities were directed by town manager William Plattner. He and Selectman William P. McDermott provided an ice cream cone for every child who participated.

But excitement soon yielded to disappointment. The townspeople learned that Lindbergh had actually flow from Providence over Woonsocket,