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COLONEL HARRINGTON SPEAKS AT DEDICATION OF NORTH BEACH AIRPORT

The following address was delivered by Colonel F.C. Harrington, Work Projects Commissioner, at the dedication exercises at North Beach airport in New York City, Sunday, October 15, 1939:

The swift growth of commercial aviation in the past twenty years has presented to all of our large cities the problem of finding room within reasonable distance of the center of population for modern airports. The continual increase in the size of equipment used, with the consequent demand for longer runways and clearer approaches, has made it difficult to secure, without prohibitive cost, areas sufficient to provide the facilities which are required.

The problem in New York City was one of particular difficulty because of the concentration of population and resulting high land values. That it has been satisfactorily solved, as it is by this airport, was due largely to the foresight and energy of Mayor LaGuardia and other officials of the City of New York. The Mayor's experience as a war time flyer and his enthusiasm for aviation are, of course, well known to the people of New York. However, the enterprise could hardly have been carried to completion at this time had it not been that the WPA was able to join with the City in constructing the airport.

I remember quite clearly visiting this site with Colonel Somervell in the summer of 1937 before any work had been begun. At that time there was a small landing field which would be lost if placed within the present one.

The remainder of the area which lies before you today consisted of mud flats and of water which, in places, was more than thirty feet deep. On the other side of the adjoining arm of the East River stood Riker's Island, a gigantic mound of rubbish looking very different from what it does today. It required vision at that time to foresee the creation of the splendid facilities which we are now dedicating.

As is the case in many engineering projects of great magnitude, much of the work that has been accomplished at this site is not visible in the finished product. These broad level expanses which you see appear to have been formed by nature. However, this is not the case. The acres which form this landing field represent material brought from Riker's Island and placed here to create within close proximity to the center of New York City an area sufficient to provide facilities for air transport as it has now been developed.

One must have seen the growth of this airport to realize what has really been accomplished. The final results are worthy of the great metropolis which it will serve. The runways, the modern land plane hangars, the land plane terminal building will fulfill the air traffic needs of New York City, not only for today but for some time to come. The sea plane base will serve tomorrow's as well as today's needs in transatlantic air transport. If future expansion becomes necessary, the means are available.

It is, however, fitting that Colonel Somervell should describe the details of this particular project, since he and the members of his staff have actually carried it through. I congratulate them and the City upon what has been accomplished in executing the largest single project which the WPA has undertaken.

I would like to call your attention to the fact that this is not the

only airport project which the WPA has executed in the City of New York. We have constructed a magnificent field at Floyd Bennett which is providing very necessary facilities for private flying, and are working upon Miller Field on Staten Island whose use will be primarily military. Not only are these two airports essential to meet present demands, but undoubtedly others will have to be developed in the metropolitan area in the future to provide for the rapid growth of air transportation.

Since my position in the WPA places upon me responsibility for its operation upon a national scale, it seems to me fitting that I should comment upon the part which WPA has played nationally in providing airport facilities. In 1933, when the Federal government first intervened on a large scale to meet the problem of unemployment, the needs of commercial aviation were critical. Municipalities were not able to meet the expenditures required to provide airports for the transport planes which were being developed and placed in service. However, the work to be done on airport projects was of such nature that relatively large amounts of labor could be employed and therefore, in the earlier work programs carried on by the Civil Works Administration and Federal Emergency Relief Administration much work of this character was undertaken. Some of this was hastily and inadequately planned. In some instances locations were not well selected and in places, due to the urge of civic pride, airport construction was undertaken which was not really needed and which has not been adequately maintained.

The WPA was created in July of 1935, although its major operations did not begin until the autumn of that year. Upon the organization of WPA, with which I was at that time associated in the capacity of Assistant Administrator and Chief Engineer, steps were taken to coordinate and improve

the airport program. The Federal agency which at that time was charged with responsibility for developments connected with commercial aviation was the Bureau of Air Commerce of the Department of Commerce. Arrangements were worked out by the WPA that the Bureau of Air Commerce should give technical advice on airport projects, and a close working agreement with that body was set up and carried on until it was superseded by the Civil Aeronautics Authority. The law which created the Civil Aeronautics Authority in June 1938 contained a provision that no Federal funds should be spent on any airport project without the approval of the Authority. Therefore the desirability of the airport projects which we carry out is passed upon by an independent Federal agency. The airport program of the WPA as it is being operated today, therefore, represents a coordinated effort to provide an airport and airways system for the United States.

Up to July 1, 1939, WPA had spent more than \$134,000,000 of Federal funds on some 1,500 airport and airways projects. This sum represents one-third of the total amount which has been spent on all airport developments from 1911 to the present date. WPA workers have constructed 150 new airports and made extensions and improvements to some 500 others. In traveling the air routes of this country, whether along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts or on the great transcontinental routes, you will hardly find an important landing field on which WPA workers have not made improvements.

It would be exaggeration to claim that air transport would not have developed if the WPA had not been in existence. However, we can say that the existence of WPA was a fortunate coincidence for commercial aviation and that the WPA accelerated the development of airports by many years through the projects which it carried out.

Nor has the work which the WPA has done been entirely for the benefit of commercial aviation. Where unemployed labor was available adjacent to military flying centers, much work has been done that is an important contribution to our system of national defense, and many projects of this nature are in operation at the present time when the question of national defense is of paramount importance.

We place our airport program in a position of high priority in the WPA. Much of the work of airport development is of a nature which lends itself readily to execution by the unemployed, as large quantities of labor can appropriately be used on filling, grading, and draining the areas which are to become landing fields.

At the same time that these facilities are being provided, the work that is being done furnishes wages to the workers. Approximately three-fourths of all of the Federal funds which have been spent on airport projects have gone directly into the pockets of project workers in the form of wages. Work on WPA projects has enabled these men to support their families. It has maintained their skill and their self-respect. It has kept them fit for jobs in private industry, when private industry has such jobs. It has maintained purchasing power to stimulate the nation's business. The WPA workers who have done the actual physical labor on our airport projects are entitled to be proud of their contribution to the nation's progress.

The plan under which the Federal government will eventually join with states and municipalities to provide facilities for air commerce has not finally been worked out. It is obvious that the development of air transport facilities should be a cooperative enterprise. The exact nature and terms of this cooperation will evolve during the coming years. In the meantime the WPA

has filled a needed want in providing a means by which airports could be constructed.

I ask you to remember, however, that the airport program with all of its benefits, represents only a portion of the whole program of public improvements which has been carried out by the WPA within the past four years. There is hardly a city or town in the United States which is not a better place in which to live today because of the work which the WPA has provided for the needy unemployed. Water and sewer systems, hospitals, public schools, roads, parks, and playgrounds stand ready for use because of the labor of people who would otherwise have been condemned to the misery and deterioration of idleness. Furthermore, the benefits of the WPA program have extended beyond these tangible physical improvements into the fields of education, recreation, public health, research, and many others.

Public opinion in this country has, I think, given a definite answer that a work program is preferable to a dole as the solution of the problem of unemployment. There are a few people who will advocate today that unemployment should be met by a gift in money or in kind to an unemployed able-bodied worker. However, there is much criticism of the cost of the work program. I think it is not fair to count this cost solely as an expenditure without balancing against it the wealth which has been created. No private corporation counts its investment in plants and facilities as an operating expenditure. Its balance sheet shows these tangible assets on the credit side, and if you were to balance against the Federal expenditures on the work program the tangible wealth which has been created in physical structures, the sums currently used to indicate the cost of the program would be radically reduced. A further reduction would be made if a value were assigned to the intangible

wealth created in education, recreation, and health.

No one can for a moment doubt that there is worthwhile work to be done in this country. The discussion is largely over the method of doing such work. But whatever the method may be, it is certainly logical to combine the execution of the needed work with the provision of employment for the nine to ten million unemployed that we have in this country.

There is currently much publicity given to the fact that the European war situation will produce a business boom in this country which will solve our problem of unemployment. I feel that it is appropriate to sound a note of warning in this respect. In the years of the World War prior to our participation in it, the purchasing done in this country by the Allies did not abolish unemployment. Furthermore, the problem at that time was simpler than it is today because in the twenty odd years that have intervened there has been a large increase in our working population, coupled with developments in the direction of higher individual productivity, which have lessened the demand for labor.

I think it would be wholly unwise to assume that any developments in connection with the European War, or any conditions under which we may trade with the belligerents who can purchase our products, will remove this problem of unemployment. We are ill advised if we rely upon the tragic miseries of war-torn Europe to solve the economic problems of America.

In closing I wish to refer again specifically to the project which we are dedicating today. It represents a cooperative enterprise in which the greatest city of our nation has joined with the Work Projects Administration to create a magnificent facility to serve our newest form of transportation. The hackneyed jokes about WPA shovel-leaners are neither convincing nor

amusing when viewed against the background of such a project as this. The Mayor of the City of New York, the Work Projects Administrator, and all of their loyal subordinates who have made this result possible are to be congratulated. The City of New York has gained a great airport. Thousands of unemployed who worked upon it have gained a means of sustenance and support by dignified and worthwhile labor. Both are fortunate.