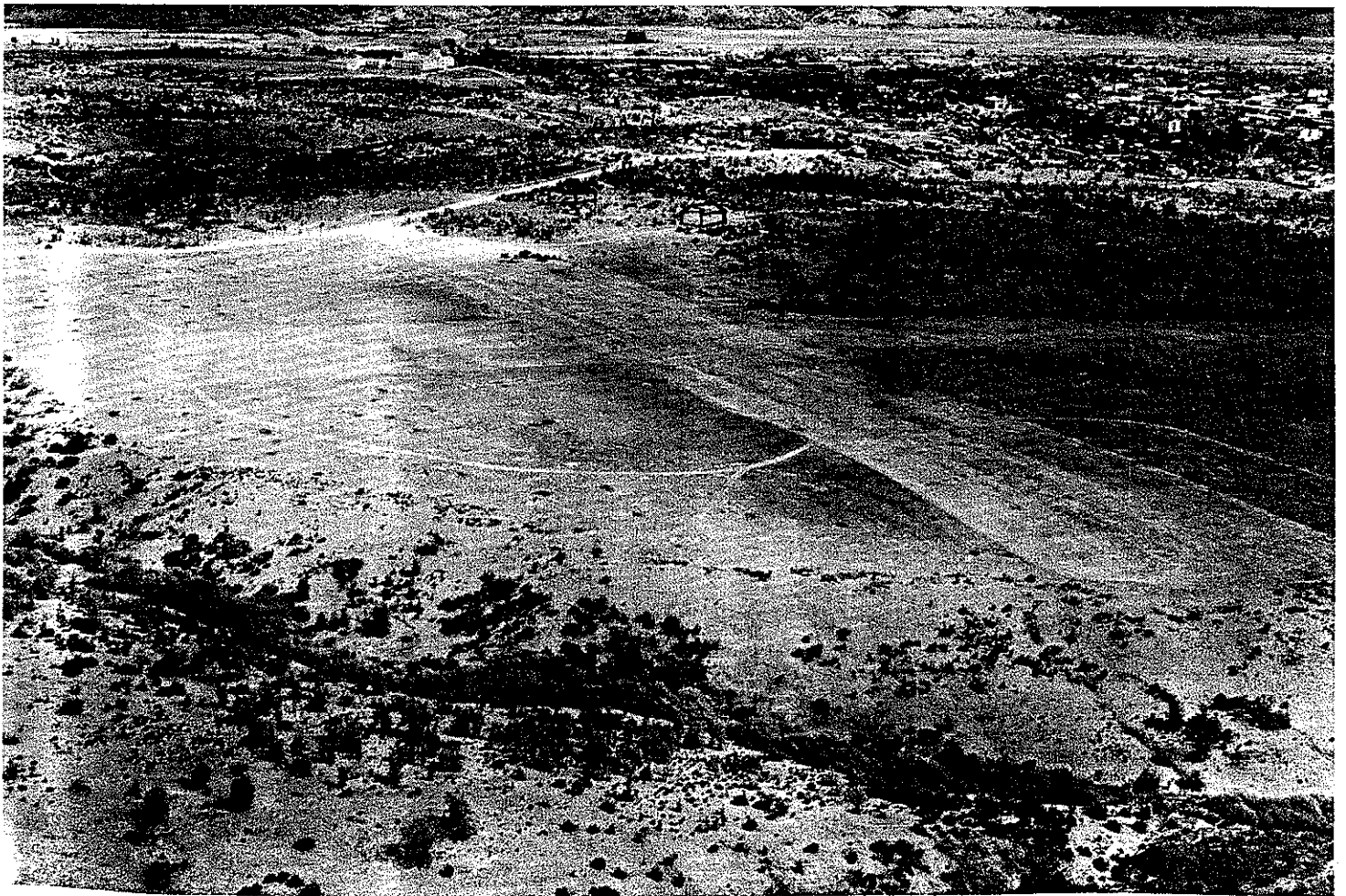


BENTON FIELD

60th ANNIVERSARY



BENTON FIELD

In the "Twenties" Era, Redding area fliers were already using a field on top of Johnson's Hill beside the Centerville Road (now Placer Street) as a landing strip. It was a rocky flattened area with manzanita bushes for tie-downs. By this time a north-south mail route had been established and Valley Air Service, Inc. urged the City of Redding to provide an airfield for their northern terminus.

Lieutenant John Benton, a member of a prominent Redding pioneer family and prominent Army aviator, was killed in Buenos Aires on a goodwill flying tour of South America in 1927. That same year the U.S. Department of Commerce began the erection of beacon lights every thirty miles through the Sacramento Valley and north through the Sacramento River Canyon.

December marked the end of a year long study by the aviation committee of the Redding Chamber of Commerce to determine the feasibility of the city owning an aviation field. People locally were already calling the landing strip "Benton Field" in honor of the dead aviator. A real estate developer, Grover Oaks, had been dealing with the owner of the property on Johnson's Hill and the City Council voted unanimously to buy the 461.85 acres of property for \$8500. The dedication of Benton Field was held over the July 4th weekend in 1929 to become Redding's first city owned airport. The highlight of the dedication was to be the Yellowstone Air Derby from Redding to Boise, Idaho. The towns along the way would provide landing strips for the contestants to stop and refuel. At the last minute Boise withdrew its support and an airshow at Benton was held instead. Gerald Brandt, who later became a World War II general, was at that time the commander at Crissy Field in San Francisco and spoke at the dedication.

When it looked as if air mail was going to be a success the City of Redding was persuaded to grade the landing strip and give it a light coat of oil. Next a small hangar was built and gasoline service was installed. The city furnished a building and a weather station was set up by the U.S. Weather Bureau after equipment was purchased for the sum of \$1 from the Mountain Copper Company. The City was also persuaded to include space for a radio station and passenger facilities in the building.

Rose Flying Service was established by the owner Ollie Rose with a Travelaire Biplane and a Ryan b-1 monoplane. On a flight with 2 passengers in 1932 he and his passengers were killed while searching for a person lost in the woods near the airport.

William Withrow was the airport operator for the City of Redding from 1932 to 1941 and named his operation Redding Flying Service. Redding was midway between Seattle and Los Angeles on

the Pacific Airway so a few planes stopped for fuel and to stay overnight. Many of aviation's famous such as Paul Mantz the stunt pilot, Clyde (Upside Down) Pangborn, Ernie Smith and Emory Bronte (the first civilians to fly from the mainland to Hawaii), Hap Arnold, and James Doolittle landed here. Mail planes also stopped for fuel and weather clearances before taking off. Standard Oil Company's Ford Trimotor, reputed to have hot and cold running water, and Richfield Oil Company's planes stopped here frequently. William Randolph Hearst used Benton Field as a base when staying at his Mc Cloud River home during the thirties. Columbia Pictures used Benton to film scenes for a movie about testing a new plane.

In 1941, with the beginning of the war in Europe, many military airplanes were refueled in Redding because flight training was on the increase. With the entry into World War II after Pearl Harbor, aviation on the Pacific Coast with the exception of military and regularly scheduled airlines nearly ceased. There was a restricted zone 150 miles from the coast and Redding was in this area.

In 1945 with the restrictions lifted, Alma Hinds came to Redding and, with her partner Don Hemstead, started H and H Flying Service.

Alma started flying in 1939 while a resident of Corning. She got her license in 1941 and her commercial and instructor's rating in 1942. She graduated in the second WASP (Women's Air Services Pilot) class and then joined the Army Air Corps 6th Ferrying Group in Long Beach. From June 1943 to early 1945 she ferried airplanes throughout the United States for the Army Air Corps.

The airstrip was still dirt when she started H and H which contained the old United Airlines hangar and former weather bureau office. The "fleet" consisted of two airplanes, a Piper Cub and a Cessna Skymaster. For a period of time these were the only two planes at Benton Field.

Business was brisk from the start. Many returning veterans were attracted to aviation using their G.I. education benefits. Alma acquired sole ownership of the business in 1947. At one time, Alma had as many as 200 students. Charter flights and fire spotting for the U.S. Forest Service also helped to keep the crew busy seven days a week. Alma and Merv Adams pioneered dropping supplies to fire fighters in the early 1950's. This was a recorded aviation "first."

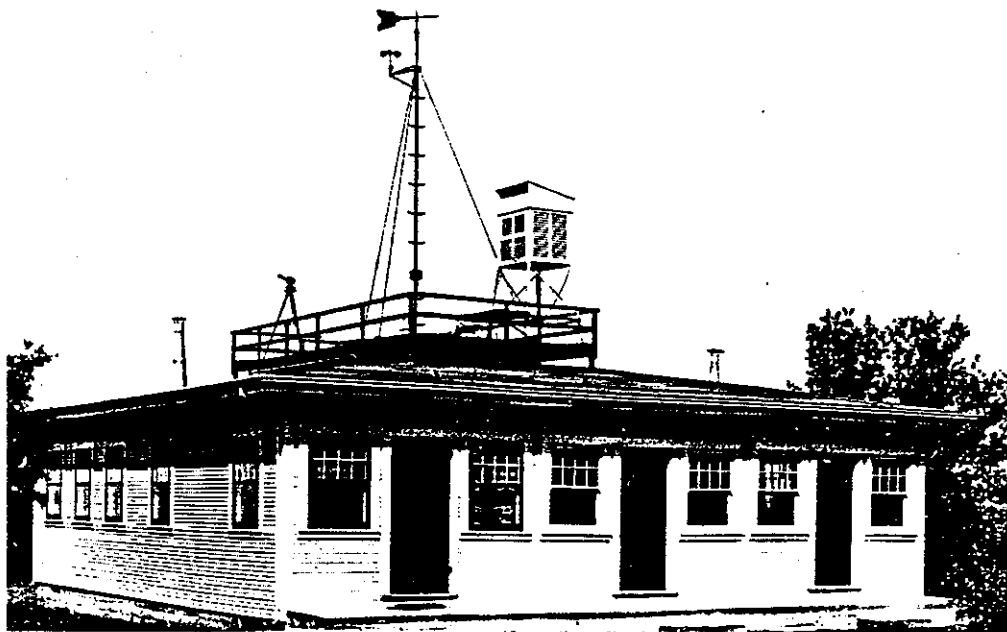
In the late 50's and early 60's the Optimist Club of Redding had an annual fly-in breakfast and "airshow" at Benton Field. These were later taken over by the Exchange Club and ultimately moved to Redding Municipal Airport.

The business was sold in 1968 to Eugene Calachini. When he acquired a partner, Michael Todd, the name was changed to Cal-

Todd Aviation. In May 1983 the business changed hands again when it was purchased by Steve Miller and the name was changed to Hillside Aviation. Steve has instituted an annual Airport Day which is held each year on Father's Day. The EAA has a pancake breakfast, airplane rides are given, the 99s sell soda pop, static displays are provided and some demonstrations are given.

The California Highway Patrol has made it their flying headquarters for Northern California, Mercy Air Ambulance has made it their home base and a new business park has begun across the street. The Mt. Shasta Chapter of Ninety Nines International Organization of Women Pilots meets at Hillside aviation and has their unique "compass rose" painted in front of the buildings. Chapter 15 of EAA has their base of operations in buildings on the west side of the field and has their annual Octoberfest in that area. Until recently, the Civil Air Patrol also met here.

Over the 60 years since this field was dedicated it has been called Redding Airport, Redding Municipal Airport, Benton Field, Benton Airport and currently Benton Airpark. It still has a unique quality among airports...it is almost downtown. Efforts over the years to close it have met with failure. The site has a considerable historic significance in aviation and provides a very necessary facility for aviation in Redding. Plans are in the works at present for a 200 foot threshold on the 2,350 foot runway and repaving improvements to the taxiways and tie-down area.



U. S. Weather Bureau building, Benton Field.