

THE HISTORY OF TUSCOLA AIRPORTS
(Excerpts from a history project by Jerry Adkisson)

Some sort of aviation activity has been going on, in and around Tuscola, since the early 1930's. One of the early impromptu flying fields at Tuscola was Dan Ponder's pasture, located just east of Ervin Park. Howard Cooper used to fly his 1929 Swallow Biplane in and out of the pasture visiting his girlfriend, Kathryn Tudor. Howard and Kathryn were married in the summer of 1938. They were living in



Pesotum, so Howard would fly Kathryn down to Tuscola when school started up in the fall for her to finish high school. Eventually Howard built a semi-permanent airport at the east edge of town, on the Wayne Steven Farm around 1939. In 1941, Howard enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force and was later assigned to the British Overseas Ferry Command, based at Maidenhead, England. He returned to Tuscola in 1945.

Howard Cooper



Kathryn and Shirley Cooper



Howard Cooper

After Howard left for the war, P. L. (Paris Leslie) Cooper, Howard's brother, started building a new airport on the west side of town, at the junction of Rt. 36 and Rt. 45 around 1941. P. L. was a Minneapolis-Moline implement dealer, and he used this new facility for both the airport and his implement parts and repair service. The airport was referred to as, "Cooper Flying Field." Cooper leased the land from Lester Smith and lived in an old farm house on the property where Bud Rice is located. Two of his early students were Earl Stoops and Willis Winn. In the early days of WW II, homeland security was of great interest. Two high school boys, "Red" Giles and his brother, Stan, were hired for the job. They slept in the airport every night from October 1942 until May of 1943.

In 1945, Howard Cooper returned to Tuscola and by the early 1950's built a new strip two miles east of Camargo on the south side of Rt. 36. Howard and P. L. embarked on many flying escapades, and the Cooper Brothers soon became the "Aviation Legends" of this part of the state. Clyde Sturgell also got involved with airplanes around this time and had a large collection of Military Surplus aircraft stored at

Cooper Field. At the end of WW II aviation activity really started to increase. Many returning servicemen were pilots and were anxious to rent, buy or borrow an airplane to get back in the air. Many men wanted to learn to fly on the GI Bill. P. L. and his wife, Leone, went their separate ways in 1947 or 48. Leone had the airport, the automobile dealership and implement dealership. She operated under the name of "Cooper Sales & Service" and leased the airport to Earl Stoops. Stoops hired Earl "Skeezix" Adkisson to work for him.

Meanwhile, P. L. had remarried and built the Cooper Motel on Rt. 36 in the early 1950's. Their son, Darren has an auto sales business on the lot across the highway.

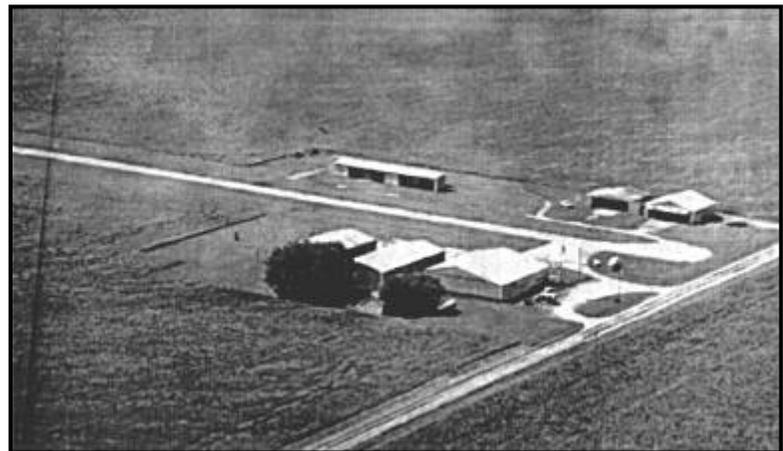
Spraying fields became popular and Earl Stoops was heavily involved in this business. On September 28, 1952 Earl's death was a great shock to Tuscola and the aviation community when his plane crashed during a spraying at the end of the day.



Skeezix Adkisson

The death of Earl Stoops, left Tuscola without an airport. After the Tuscola field was closed, Leone Cooper converted in into a trailer park. Due to the construction of the new chemical plant west of town (Petro), construction workers needed temporary housing. She had over 50 trailer spots to rent in 1953.

During the winter of 1952-53, Skeezix contacted Claude Ware about renting some land a mile and a half west of town to start another airport. Tuscola's fourth airport was in business by April of 1953. Claude was an avid fan of aviation and agreed that Tuscola should not be without an airport. The "Okaw Spray Service" was started by Roy Thompson and planes were purchased and housed at the airport hangars. In 1954 Claude Ware purchased a new plane and had a new hangar built for it. Two years later, P. L. Cooper,



Willis Winn and Skeezix added four more T-hangars to the east side of Claude's hangar.

Willis Winn took over management of the airport in the early 1970's. Jud Nogle is now the manager and President of the property. Nogle and Black run a maintenance and inspection business in their two buildings. Pilots can land and take off on grass or the paved strip. **Tuscola Airport Improvement, Ltd. (T.A.I.L.)** is a not for profit private airport dedicated to public use leased on land owned by Ware Farms, Inc. Jerry Adkisson is the assistant manager. Delores Adkisson is the secretary and directors are: Jim Higgins, Mick Schumacher and Lea Amdor.