

HEINLEIN GENEALOGY

BELL FARM AND GREATER PITTSBURGH AIRPORT



Part of the airport's history is the fact that Pittsburgh is home to the 911th Airlift Wing, which originated as a defense base on the Bell Farm several years before Greater Pittsburgh International Airport broke ground. The official designation of the 911th Airlift Wing did not take effect until 1963.

Moon's history as an air-transport center began in the early 1940's. In the late 1930's and early 1940's, with the world involved in World War II, the United States War Department determined a need for an airfield in the vicinity of Pittsburgh. Cargo and passenger aircraft in the late 1930's were usually two-motored, and had a normal range of three to four hundred miles. Pittsburgh was ideally sited between New York and Chicago. At about the same time Allegheny County was involved in evaluating the existing airport in another part of Pittsburgh. It was surrounded by built-up areas; expansion to meet the needs of larger aircraft would have been prohibitively expensive. The War Department's request seemed to resolve the problem. The military had asked the County to determine the appropriate location and to assist in land acquisition. The Bell Dairy Farm, located in both Moon and Findlay Townships met the needs of a "large" piece of property, as well as being relatively level and elevated above much of the surrounding area. Several adjacent properties and the Bell Farm were acquired, providing a 1600-acre piece of land for the military's needs and for the future County airport.

Two decisions made by the federal and the county government, one at the beginning of World War II and the other near the end of the war, transformed Moon Township forever from a rural area to the suburban business and residential mix which exists today.

In 1941, the U. S. Government decided that a new military airport should be built in the Pittsburgh area, not only for stopover and refueling of long distance military flights, but to provide better defense of the then vital Pittsburgh steel-making center. The Allegheny County Commissioners were requested to make a study of potential sites for this facility, then to choose the best site and acquire the land for the Federal Government.

Moon Township's Bell Farm and adjacent properties were chosen for obvious reasons. First, these properties were on a higher elevation with gently rolling hills requiring less site preparation to make it suitable for airport use. Second, the land was all open farm country allowing for future expansion and finally only a few individuals owned the area thereby requiring less negotiation to complete the acquisition. A total of 1,600 acres was made available for the project, and in April 1942 construction of the military facility was begun. The total cost of the project was \$5,300,000.