

PITSTOP IN CLOVIS...

AN EXPLORATION INTO
CLOVIS' HISTORY WITH THE
TRANSCONTINENTAL AIR
TRANSPORT



CLOVIS MUNICIPAL AIRPORT



TAT flight map
(Photo courtesy of Clovis Municipal Airport)

Pitstop in Clovis: An Exploration into Clovis' History with the Transcontinental Air Transport

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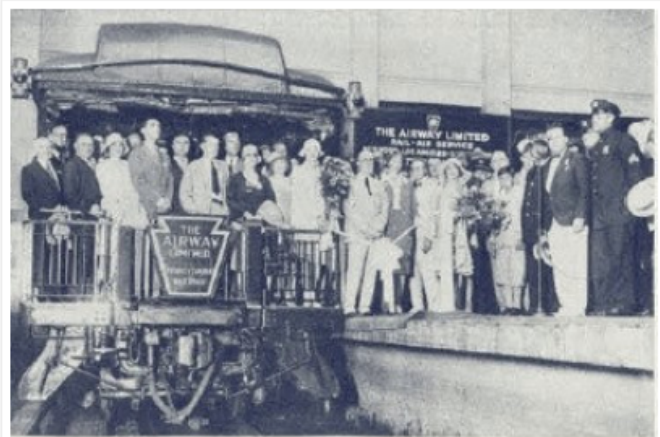
Clovis Municipal Airport

OUR JOURNEY BEGINS...

In 1929, Transcontinental Air Transport (TAT) successfully completed the first flight of its kind: a route connecting New York City to Los Angeles. Nowadays thousands of passengers fly this route every day in a matter of six hours. In 1929, however, the journey was much more complicated. TAT's route consisted of two overnight train rides, two flights, and a total of nine landings across the United States. The total itinerary took 48 hours to complete. For the journey, TAT relied on already existing systems like the Pennsylvania Railroad and Santa Fe Railway in creating their route, and one of their central hubs was the small town of Clovis, New Mexico. Clovis' involvement in this inaugural flight, supported by both the Santa Fe Railway and what is now Cannon Air Force Base, provides the city with a rich history in aviation and a strong infrastructure for the current Air Force Base and Clovis Municipal Airport. This article details the overall journey of this inaugural flight and gives you further insight into Clovis' involvement with TAT.

A THANK YOU TO TWA MUSEUM!

This article is adapted from a blog post from the Transcontinental and Western Air (TWA) museum located in Kansas City, Missouri. After partnering with several different airlines, TAT eventually became TWA. The original article, written by Wayne Hammer and edited by Larry Dingman, can be found at www.twamuseum.com/blog.



Passengers of the TAT inaugural flight
(Photo courtesy of State Historical Society of Missouri)

ROUTE OVERVIEW

Almost 100 years ago, the Transcontinental Air Transport (TAT) inaugurated its legendary train/plane service between New York and Los Angeles. On July 7, 1929, roughly 50 passengers, including notable names like Amelia Earhart, boarded a train at New York City's Pennsylvania Station for an overnight trip to Columbus, Ohio. Once there, two Ford Tri-Motor airplanes flew them further west. After four en route stops, they arrived in Waynoka, Oklahoma, where the Santa Fe Railway train transported them overnight to Clovis, New Mexico. From Clovis, two other TAT Tri-Motors were boarded for a three-stop flight, terminating at the Grand Central Air Terminal in Glendale, California (near downtown Los Angeles).

HISTORY OF TAT

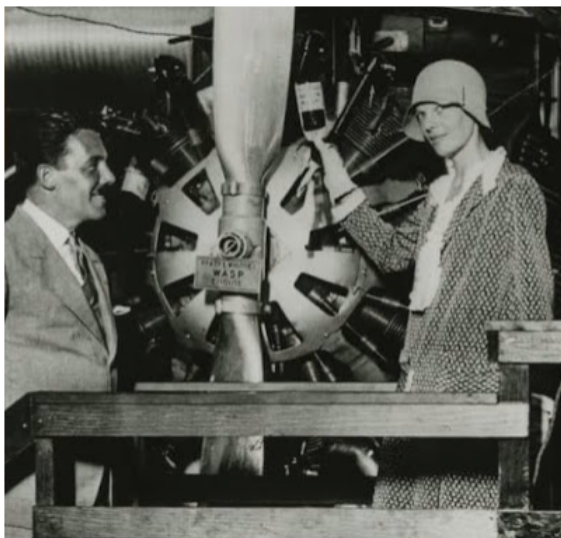
Transcontinental Air Transport (TAT) was founded in 1928. Their expressed purpose was to establish a fast, safe, and comfortable means to travel across the United States. It would be accomplished by using a combination of TAT aircrafts and the established Pennsylvania Railroad and Santa Fe Railway, which pinpointed Clovis as an integral part of this inaugural flight.

To best understand the formation of TAT, we need to examine what the world was like in the spring of 1927. Passenger air travel in the United States was in its infancy, mostly scattered and experienced by only a select few people. Then in May 1927, Charles Lindbergh completed his historic flight from New York to Paris. A wave of air travel enthusiasm swept the country, and some people



Charles Lindbergh, C.M. Keys, and Paul Henderson
(Photo courtesy of SHSMO)

of vision seized the opportunity. Not long after Lindbergh's return home, a small meeting took place at the Engineers' Club in New York City. Colonel Paul Henderson, former Assistant Postmaster General and then Vice-President of National Air Transport, started the meeting by drawing a map of the United States on an envelope. He added a line across the map, identifying a route of logical stopping points, to be traveled by train and airplane. Others in the room included C.M. Keys, an aviation executive, banker, and an early proponent of passenger air service in the United States, and Charles Lindbergh. Less than a year after that meeting, Transcontinental Air Transport (TAT) was born.



Amelia Earhart on July 7, 1929
(Photo from the Collections of The Henry Ford)

NEW YORK, NEW YORK

On July 7, 1929, The Pennsylvania Railroad Airway Limited prepared to depart for Columbus. At 6:05 PM, Charles Lindbergh sent a message from Los Angeles to New York that activated a huge bell at Pennsylvania Station, signaling the train's departure. As the train rolled west, TAT prepared two Tri-Motor aircrafts in Columbus, awaiting next morning's arrival at 7:55 AM.

COLUMBUS, OHIO

On July 8, 1929, passengers officially entered the TAT network in Columbus. The city of Columbus developed their airport with TAT in mind and constructed two runways (the longer being 3,500 feet). It was a big day in Columbus. Despite rain, 3,000

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

Pennsylvania Station was demolished in 1963. While the underground tracks and platforms remained, new buildings replaced the station's above-ground structure, including Madison Square Garden and office towers.

spectators were on hand to watch the two Tri-Motors take off to the west with a report of clear skies ahead. So at 8:15 AM (only 20 minutes after the Airway Limited's arrival), the Tri-Motors were on their way to their next stop, Indianapolis, Indiana.

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

The original terminal building remains today at the southeast boundary of the John Glen Columbus International Airport. TAT's original hangar still stands.



TAT aircraft prepares to depart
(Photo courtesy of TWA Museum)

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

During the 180-mile flight from Columbus to Indianapolis, it's

likely that many passengers unfolded bound maps provided by TAT. Since the Tri-Motors typically flew at 5,000-6,000 feet or below, the maps were useful in spotting cities and landmarks along the way. Here's something interesting: Starting in October 1929, passengers flying TAT were treated to the first in-flight movies! When tired of map reading, you could look at a screen in front of the cabin to watch some newsreels, supplemented with the cartoon adventures of "Oswald, the Lucky Rabbit," which is believed to be Walt Disney's inspiration for Mickey Mouse. The scheduled 9:13 AM arrival into Indianapolis took place at Stout Field. Already an existing airfield, necessary improvements to the runways were made to have a hangar and terminal facility built. Passengers spent just 15 minutes at Stout Field before becoming airborne again, heading to Lambert Field in St. Louis, Missouri.

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

Stout Field was used briefly as an Army Air Corps base during World War II and today contains commercial buildings and is home to divisions of the Indiana National Guard.



Viewing in-flight movies in 1929
(Photo courtesy of SHSMO)

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

Leaving Indianapolis at 9:28 AM, passengers likely got hungry during the two-hour flight to St. Louis. Because the first "hostess" was not hired until 1935, TAT "couriers" offered refreshments. These versatile young men provided a variety of passenger services, including baggage handling, passenger pick-up, and cabin meal services. A 12:03 PM scheduled arrival brought passengers to Lambert Field in St. Louis.

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

Lambert Field is today the site of the St. Louis Downtown Airport and is one of the Midwest's major airports.

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI

After another 15-minutes stop, TAT passengers left St. Louis at 12:18 PM for the 227-mile leg to Kansas City. As mentioned earlier, a luncheon was served aloft, prepared



TAT "nerve center"
(Photo courtesy of SHSMO)

by the Fred Harvey Company. The "Harvey House" was among America's first successful restaurant chains, known to many in the mid-western and western United States. Harvey's company also provided meals aboard the Santa Fe Railway (to be ridden by passengers later that evening), with one of its locations in Clovis, New Mexico. Kansas City Municipal Airport was reached in about 2.5 hours. After their 15-minute stay, passengers were headed to the next stop: Wichita, Kansas.

WICHITA, KANSAS

Leaving Kansas City just after 3:00 PM, the aircraft reached Wichita in a little under two hours. It became a long day for the passengers aboard the two Tri-Motors that left rainy Columbus that morning. At 5:11 PM, they were once again in the air.

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

The Kansas City headquarters building is today the home of the Trans World Airlines (TWA) museum.

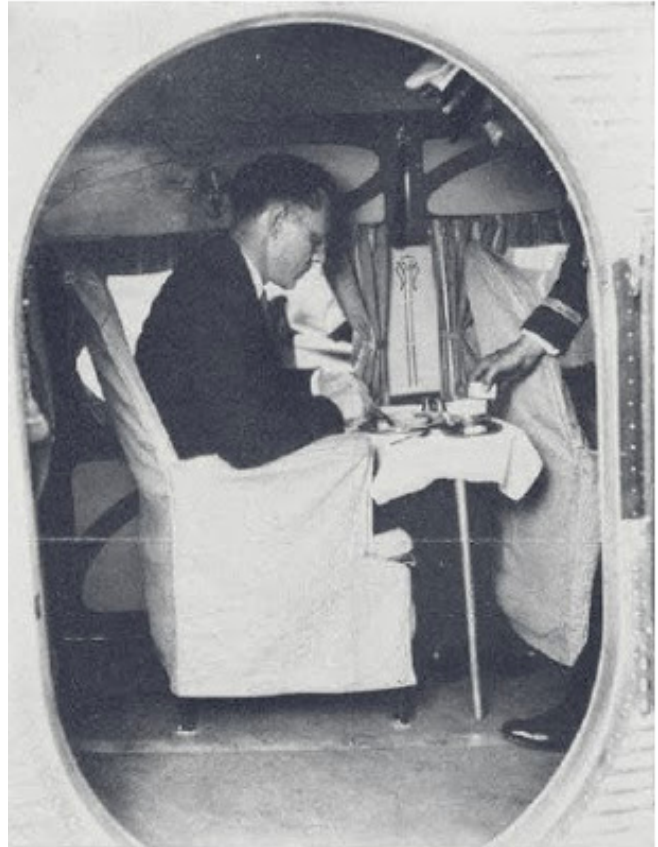
FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

The site of TAT's Wichita stop eventually became Wichita Municipal Airport in the 1940s and today is the home of the Kansas Aviation Museum and Kansas Aviation Hall of Fame.

WAYNOKA, OKLAHOMA

A 6:24 PM landing in Waynoka ended the day's flying. Passengers had by now logged over 1,000 air miles and five takeoffs and landings, all in an 11-hour period. All passengers and their baggage were directed to TAT's "Aero Car," a luxury 16-passenger trailer (with very comfortable seating) that was pulled by a Chrysler

Roadster. The Aero Car headed to Santa Fe Railway's Waynoka Station. There passengers ate dinner at the Harvey House restaurant before boarding their overnight train at 11:00 PM for a 300-mile journey to Clovis, New Mexico.



TAT courier serves lunch
(Photo courtesy of SHSMO)

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

Waynoka's railroad station (built in 1910) still stands and is on the National Register of Historical Places. It serves as a museum and the home of the Waynoka Historical Society.



Aero Car
(Photo courtesy of SHSMO)

CLOVIS, NEW MEXICO

On July 9, 1929, Santa Fe Railway's "Missionary" pulled into Clovis at 8:20 AM. Clovis' railway station housed a Harvey House restaurant, which still stands today, so TAT passengers had breakfast there. After breakfast, it was time again to board the "Aero Car" on a five-mile drive west to the TAT airport in Portair, New Mexico.



Passengers arrive in Portair
(Photo courtesy of Clovis Civic Center)

PORTAIR FIELD, NEW MEXICO

As mentioned, most airports in TAT's Western Division were developed and maintained by TAT. For the airfield near Clovis, TAT literally bought a town. Blacktower, New Mexico, measured about one square mile and had been abandoned several years earlier. There were a few buildings in Blacktower, including a railroad

station that had never been used. TAT remodeled that station into an airport terminal building, demolished other buildings, and plowed a mile-long east-west runway and sealed it with oil. TAT also felt that Blacktower was no name for an airport city, so they renamed it Portair.

Here's the really odd thing about Portair: Clovis used to be in the Central Time Zone! Back in 1929, the Mountain Time Zone began just west of Clovis. The U.S. government would make life simpler several years later by putting all of New Mexico on Mountain Time. At Portair Field, two fresh Tri-Motors and crews awaited to continue the inaugural trip on to Albuquerque, New Mexico.

(Daily Through service effective from New York)

The schedule and meal arrangements for the through route between New York and San Francisco, Cal., are given below. Passengers will be ticketed from New York to San Francisco on convenient connecting train service to and from Clovis. Any combination of rail and air service included in the through fare.

Pennsylvania Railroad THE AIRWAY LIMITED Eastern Time		Atch., Topeka & Santa Fe Ry. <i>Sleeping car ready for occupancy at 8.00 P.M.</i>	
Lv. New York (Penna. Sta.),			Central Time
N. Y. *	6.05 PM	Lv. Waynoka, Okla.	11.00 PM
Lv. North Philadelphia, Pa.	7.50 PM	Ar. Clovis, N. M.	8.20 AM
Lv. Washington, D. C.	6.50 PM	<i>Transfer to Portair by Aero Car</i>	
Lv. Baltimore, Md.	7.30 PM	Transcont'l Air Transp. Inc.	
Ar. Port Columbus, O. † ...	7.55 AM	Mountain Time	
Lv. Port Columbus, O.	8.15 AM	Lv. Portair, N. M. Landing	
	Central Time	Field	8.10 AM
Ar. Indianapolis, Ind.	9.15 AM	Ar. Albuquerque, N. M.	10.17 AM
Lv. Indianapolis, Ind.	9.28 AM	Lv. Albuquerque, N. M.	10.52 AM
Ar. St. Louis, Mo.	12.03 PM	Ar. Winslow, Ariz.	1.12 PM
Lv. St. Louis, Mo. † ...	12.18 PM	Lv. Winslow, Ariz. † ...	1.27 PM
Ar. Kansas City, Mo.	2.47 PM	Pacific Time	
Lv. Kansas City, Mo.	3.02 PM	Ar. Kingman, Ariz.	2.51 PM
Ar. Wichita, Kansas.	4.56 PM	Lv. Kingman, Ariz.	2.46 PM
Lv. Wichita, Kansas.	5.11 PM	Ar. Los Angeles, Cal.	5.52 PM
Ar. Airport, Okla. (Landing		<i>(Grand Central Air Terminal, Glendale, Cal. Passengers will be transferred by Aero Car to and from the central section of Los Angeles.)</i>	
Field) § ...	6.24 PM		
<i>Transfer to Waynoka by Aero Car</i>			

San Francisco passengers upon arrival at Los Angeles will be given the option of using overnight trains either from Los Angeles or Glendale, or they may remain overnight in Los Angeles and proceed by Maddux Airline plane morning service from Glendale Airport to San Francisco. Transfers will be provided by aero car between Glendale and the central section of Los Angeles. Tickets for whichever plan is selected by passenger will be furnished by the Transcontinental Air Transport, Inc.

*Dinner and breakfast on Pennsylvania Railroad Dining Car. †A new station stop at Fred Harvey Service. §Transfer to Harvey House, Waynoka, Okla., where dinner will be served. ¶Albuquerque, Airport—Fred Harvey Service.

Apply to any Pennsylvania Railroad agent for full information

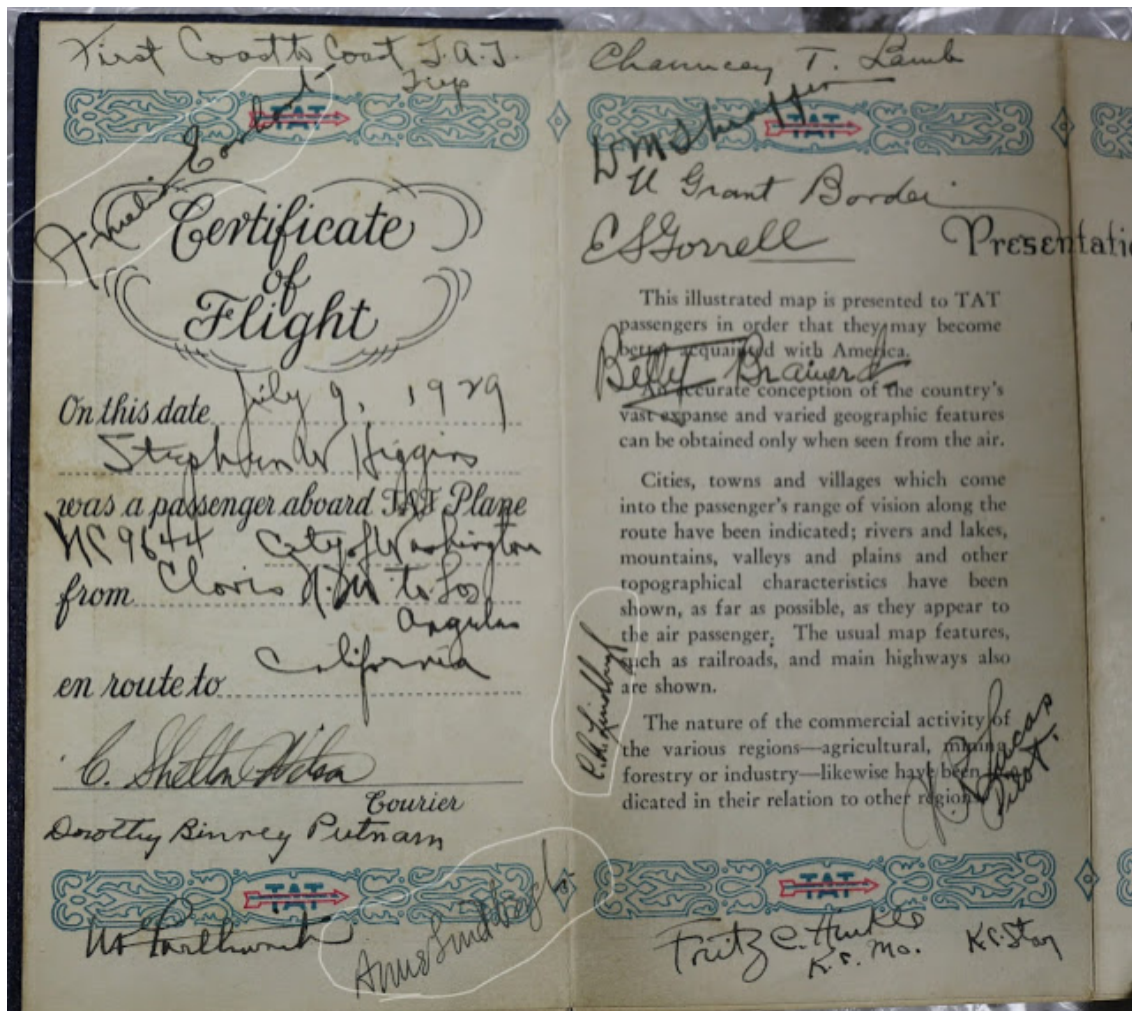
P E N N S Y L V A N I A

Itinerary showing time change
(Photo courtesy of TWA Museum)

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

As was the case with the previous air/rail interchange at Waynoka, the stop in Clovis was no longer needed once complete coast-to-coast air service was initiated by the newly formed TWA in 1930. Amarillo, Texas, then became the stop between Wichita and Albuquerque. Portair Field, however, continued to function as a municipal airport serving Clovis until the outbreak of World War II, when it became Clovis Army Air Field. In 1948, it was recommissioned as Clovis Air Force Base. In 1957, it was renamed Cannon Air Force Base and housed various bomber groups during the Cold War Era and the Vietnam War. Cannon remains an active air force base today.

The document below is one of the most historically significant items in the TWA museum's archives. Each passenger received a map upon boarding his or her TAT flight. Each map contained a space to record flight details. This map belonged to passenger S.W. Higgins, who received it upon his boarding in Clovis on July 9, 1929. There are several autographs, including Amelia Earhart, Anne Lindbergh, and Charles Lindbergh. Were they signed in Clovis? There is no way to be sure. And what about the signature on the lower right labeled "Pilot"? Was he the captain from Clovis? Or maybe he was Lindbergh's co-pilot?



TAT flight map
(Photo courtesy of TWA Museum)

ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

As the Tri-Motor approached Albuquerque, the eastern ranges of the Rocky Mountains began to appear. The picturesque scenery meant that the Tri-Motors had to fly at altitudes higher than passengers experienced the previous day. Cruising up to 8,000 feet (once in a while, even higher) was sometimes required. "Ear popping" became a larger issue, so TAT's resourceful on-board "couriers" provided plenty of chewing gum and advice on how to best handle the more pronounced effects of pressure on passengers' inner ears. It should also be noted that pressurized airplane cabins were still ten years into the future, so cruising at 8,000 feet was still within the average person's oxygen comfort zone. The flight flew just north of the Sandia Mountains and south of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains to make its approach into Albuquerque.



Albuquerque's terminal lounge area
(Photo courtesy of SHSMO)

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

Today, the grounds of Oxnard Field continue to be used by Kirtland Air Force Base for general purposes.

Sitting at an altitude of 5,200 feet, the airfield at Albuquerque was the highest in TAT's system. The existing airport buildings had a

unique Spanish-style pueblo architecture, and in keeping with that theme, TAT constructed a pueblo-styled terminal of stucco and hollow tile. It was a handsome building, containing a central lounge area, fireplaces, a dining facility, restrooms, and even showers.

WINSLOW, ARIZONA

We now head to Winslow, Arizona, the second-longest air leg of the journey. Time and distance: 2.5 hours, 240 miles. In clear weather, passengers on the Tri-Motor were treated to some awe-inspiring scenery. After flying over the San Mateo Mountains, the flight passed over the Painted Desert just east of Winslow.

A 1:12 PM arrival brought TAT passengers into Winslow for what had become a routine 15-minute stopover. The airfield was owned and developed by TAT. Charles Lindbergh himself played a major role in the design of Winslow's airfield, and TAT constructed a pueblo-styled passenger terminal and hangar on the field's east side.

KINGMAN, ARIZONA

If the weather was good and your Tri-Motor flew its preferred route, the 186-mile flight from Winslow to Kingman clearly was a

sightseer's delight. Nearing Flagstaff, Arizona, the eastern reaches of the Grand Canyon could be seen to the north. As the plane continued west, the canyon turned southward, offering even better views. The airfield in Kingman was reached in about two hours. Upon landing there, passengers were officially on Pacific time. Kingman was yet another 15-minute stop, and the next leg (covering 300 miles in just over three hours) would be the last. The destination: Glendale, CA.

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

The site of the 1929 field is today the Winslow-Lindbergh Regional Airport.

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

Today, the site of TAT's airfield is a commercially developed area near downtown Kingman. The original terminal building still stands and is used for commercial purposes.



TAT's Tri-Motor in Kingman
(Photo courtesy of TWA Museum)

GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA

A 2:46 PM departure from Kingman was the ninth and final one of the journey. The airfield at Glendale (serving Los Angeles) lay ahead. Departing Kingman, the landscape again changed as the mountainous terrain gave way to the Mojave Desert. The desert landscape gave way to the lakes and rivers embedded into the lush green mountain range. Again, assuming clear weather, Mount Wilson and its iconic observatory were easily spotted. Shortly thereafter, the mountains disappeared as the plane descended over Pasadena, CA.



Flying over the San Gabriel foothills
(Photo courtesy of SHSMO)

A 5:22 PM touchdown in Glendale marked the end of the journey. The Grand Central Air Terminal (GCAT) in Glendale stood about ten miles north of downtown Los Angeles. TAT used GCAT for only seven years, moving then to the nearby airport in Burbank.

In the 1950s, the Walt Disney Company rented an industrial building at the airport for use by the company's design staff. Some years later, Disney rented the original terminal building for use by the development teams for Disney World and Epcot Center. Finally, in 1997, the Disney Company bought all the original airport land. In doing so, Disney planned to create the Grand Central Creation Campus (GC3), envisioned as a location for Disney and other creative companies to house offices.

FAST FORWARD TO TODAY

After several years of planning, construction of GC3 moved forward and today is a huge complex of buildings, including those serving several divisions of Disney.

THE FUTURE OF TAT

This grand experiment of Transcontinental Air Transport evolved quickly, changing soon after it started. On November 16, 1929, TAT merged with Maddux Airlines, resulting in the formation of TAT-Maddux Airlines. Maddux brought with it several Ford Tri-Motors, legendary aviators, and a west coast route network. As a result of the latter, TAT-Maddux extended its coast-to-coast service to additional west coast cities, including San Francisco (with flights from Glendale). But, there was an even bigger change to soon come.

Herbert Hoover's Postmaster-General, Walter Folger Brown, envisioned mail and passengers being profitably carried by a small number of large airlines. He felt this would best move mail and people by air while allowing the government

to carefully regulate mail contracts. In 1930, Brown held a conference mandating that several airlines merge to form a limited number of large airlines. To that end, Brown insisted that Western Air Express and TAT-Maddux combine. The deal, which closed in July 1930, resulted in the formation of Transcontinental and Western Air (TWA).



Passenger aboard inaugural flight
(Photo courtesy of TWA Museum)

In retrospect, TAT had little choice. The timing of TAT's initial existence was poor as the stock market crash in November 1929 and ensuing Great Depression rocked the country. TAT's ridership (consisting mostly of wealthy individuals who could afford high fares) dropped noticeably. The September 1929 Mount Taylor crash also damaged TAT's image. And while this article mostly highlights the triumphs of the TAT experiment, there were many setbacks. Delays, cancellations, missed train/plane connections, and a series of minor to moderate accidents were widely noticed. Some even commented that TAT stood for "Take A Train". During its relatively short life, TAT did not turn a profit, showing a \$3 million loss at the time of its merger with Western Air Express. Despite this, it would be shortsighted to consider TAT a failure. The determination, ingenuity and courage of many gave birth to and maintained its short but significant existence.



TAT brochure
(Photo courtesy of TWA Museum)