

Fairmont Airlines of The Past

Commercial airline flight is often romanticized and has frequently been the setting for movies and novels. The handsome airline pilot, the attractive stewardess, exotic destinations, and if you include exciting experiences, all of the elements of a thrilling movie or glamorous novel seem to be in place.

Could those historic accounts of Fairmont's initial entry on to the scene of regular airline service lend itself to at least the start of a movie or perhaps a novel? The year was 1959, local spirits were high, and here are some of the events leading up to Fairmont's first experience with regular airline service.

A headline in the November 21, 1959, edition of *The Sentinel* was "New Airport Ticket Office Completed; Airline Stewardesses to Visit City." The story went on to detail the upcoming events and the people involved. The new station manager, Bill Vance, was characterized as an unmarried Milwaukeean who had been with North Central Airlines since graduating from high school. It went on to tell of stewardesses that were scheduled to appear at the Monday luncheon meetings with Kiwanis and Rotary members. They were to provide information about the beginning of daily air service in Fairmont. In addition, the story went on to say "The young ladies also will be escorted to area towns where they will personally invite local dignitaries to be guests on the inaugural flights that day." The plot appears to be thickening on the way to that first scheduled flight slated for December 1, 1959.

Then, a North Central Airlines stewardess arrived on November 23, 1959. Her name was Miss Pat Rockstand and her goal was to go with Fairmont officials on a tour of area towns calling on "leading citizens" and inviting them to take part in the inaugural flight. She was accompanied by two airline officials as well as C. J. Meister of the Fairmont Chamber, Fairmont Mayor John Brandenhoff, KSUM station manager Phil Solberg, and Claude Swanson of *The Sentinel*. They rode in a new twelve passenger bus owned by KSUM called "Goliath." Although their visits were considered very successful, they were in fact late to almost every town due to the interest generated by their scheduled appearances and they had to postpone several stops until the following day.

In a later interview with the stewardess, Miss Pat Rockstand, she explained in detail the requirements of her position with the airline. For North Central Airlines, at that time, to be a stewardess you had to be at least nineteen and one-half years of age, be between five feet one inch and five feet six inches tall, and not weigh more than 125 pounds. In addition, a prospective stewardess must have had two years of either college or business experience. Of course, she could not be married.

As the date of the inaugural flight approached, Federal Aeronautics inspectors and North Central Airlines officials gave the site of the Fairmont Airport a final checkup prior to flight approval. One of the inspectors stated, "It is one of the finest airports it has been my privilege to inspect outside of the metropolitan areas." With FAA approval in hand, the airport was now officially ready for business.

The public was informed that anyone with questions about the airport could contact Mr. Bill Vance, station manager, by dialing 2198. He could provide information about the airport as well as scheduling air travel from Fairmont. Vance stated that all travel was by reservation and that reservations could be made on connecting flights to many other cities. Concerning luggage, anything over forty pounds would cost ½ of one percent of a one way fare. Luggage examples given included things such as binoculars, radios, cameras, and hat boxes. Ladies purses, however, were exempt regardless of size. Vance also provided an example of air fare from Fairmont to Minneapolis in 1959, the cost being \$8.69 one way and \$16.61 round trip. Other examples of one way air fares from Fairmont in 1959 included the following: Mankato was \$3.85; Chicago was \$36.40 New York was \$80.30; and San Francisco was \$136.18.

The inaugural flight of North Central Airlines from Fairmont was scheduled for December 1, 1959. Some of those fortunate enough to be included on that passenger list were Fairmont Mayor John Brandenhoff, Chamber Secretary Charles Meister, Chamber President Charles Zierke, Stokely Manager Ed Oleson, 3M Plant Manager L. W. Brown, *Sentinel* President Walter Mickelson, and a number of others referred to as local "notables" and "dignitaries." However, to the dismay of the local entourage, heavy weather grounded Fairmont's attempts to get its commercial air service off the ground on its initial endeavor.

Nonetheless, the second attempt two days later proved successful. Commercial air service finally arrived with a North Central DC-3 landing at Wold Chamberlain Air Field, now known as MSP International Airport, in Minneapolis after having taken off from Fairmont with nineteen Fairmonters aboard headed by Mayor John Brandenhoff.

Since Fairmont's initial venture into airline service, numerous other airlines have served the local scene. Those airlines having served the area included North Central from 1959 to 1977, Republic from 1978 to 1981, Mesaba from 1982 to 1984, Great Lakes from 1984 to 1992, and G. P. Express from 1993 to 1996.

What became of the main characters in this historic saga? The North Central stewardess, Miss Rockstand, was soon engaged to be married and, as a result, would have to leave her job as a stewardess. The status and direction of the airport station

manager, Bill Vance, was unclear. The local “dignitaries,” “notables,” and political figures involved at that time continued in their efforts to make improvements in Fairmont and Martin County. Flight service to and from Fairmont, including the status of the local airport, has continued to evolve.

Perhaps an imaginative mind, coupled with a certain degree of nostalgic creativity and a bit of embellishment, could create the setting for an exciting novel or movie. The characters, the setting, and the plot could probably use a little tweaking, but conceivably it might at least provide a developing plot for an episode of “*As The Corn Grows*” in Sweet Swine County.

For more information on this topic, or to become a member, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.



Route of the Northliners - **NORTH CENTRAL AIRLINES**

**With fast, daily multi-flight service
to more than 60 key cities in 9 states — Illinois,
Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota,
Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin**

Dear "First Flight" Passenger:

We were very pleased to learn that you shall be with us for our Inauguration Flight of North Central Airlines on Tuesday, December 1, 1959.

We have reservations for you on the first flight to Minneapolis from Fairmont. The flight leaves Fairmont at 9:18 A.M. and arrives in Minneapolis at 10:16 A. M.

The cost of the round trip ticket is \$16.61. Regulations require that you be at the airport 45 minutes before departure time in order to claim your reservation.

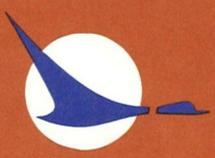
First flight Inauguration Plaques shall be sent to you after December 1. Our heartiest congratulations to you for being a part of this memorable area event!

Sincerely,

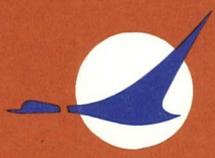
FAIRMONT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Darlene Allen, Secretary

da



**The scheduled community airline of
the North Central Region, with direct
connections to any destination**



NORTH CENTRAL AIRLINES

INAUGURAL FLIGHT PASSENGER LIST

December 2, 1959
Fairmont, Minnesota

FAIRMONT to MINNEAPOLIS
9:18 AM Lv. - Ar. 10:16AM

1. John Brandenhoff
2. Hugh Hudnall
3. William Brown
4. Charles Meister
5. Marjorie Pfiffner
6. Otto Kakeldey
7. Charles Zierke
8. John Haeckel
9. Ed Olesen
10. Claude Swanson
11. Phil Solberg
12. Lyle Barker
13. Edwin Melody
14. Wallace Peterson
15. Glenn Howes
16. Rup Hodgman

NORTH CENTRAL AIRLINES INC.

GENERAL OFFICES: 6201 THIRTY-FOURTH AVE. S.D. * MINNEAPOLIS 50, MINNESOTA

December 5, 1959

December 4, 1959

Mr. Jon Harty
District Sales Representative
North Central Airlines, Inc.
6201 Thirty-Fourth Avenue South
Minneapolis 50, Minnesota

Dear Jon:
Fairmont Chamber of Commerce
Fairmont, Minnesota

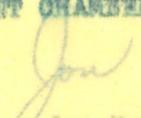
The Fairmont Inaugural group all report a wonderful trip to Minneapolis on North Central on Wednesday. We had a splendid trip and a splendid day!

On behalf of North Central Airlines, I wish to extend our sincere thank you for all the help and cooperation you so generously gave us during the inauguration party, the dinner, and the entertainment. This certainly is an outstanding event in Chamber activities for this year, and we want to thank you, Mr. Buttomer, Don Wright, Hank Thiele, and all the others who helped make our visit so enjoyable.

May we take this opportunity to wish all the people connected with North Central Airlines a very "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year." Don Wright, Hank Thiele, and the rest of our personnel that participated in the activities wish to say "thank you" for everything you did for us.

Very sincerely,

FAIRMONT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE


Charles J. Weister
District Sales Representative

CJM:dja

CC: Mr. Frank Buttomer

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CONQUAIR
SUPER NORTHLINERS
CONQUAIR

FAIRMONT CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

Presents This

First Flight Certificate

to

For Being A Passenger On The Inaugural Flight

of

NORTH CENTRAL AIRLINES

December 1, 1959

Chairman Aeronautics Committee

President