Aviation History Through Photos

A look at some of the photos displayed in the LaGuardia Air Traffic Control Tower Exhibit

Photos courtesy of FAA, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, the Library of Congress, NASA
New York: A Rich Aviation Heritage

In aviation's earliest days, Long Island, New York, particularly the central area of Nassau County known as the Hempstead Plains, proved to be an ideal flying field – treeless, flat, and with only tall grasses and scattered farm houses.

During aviation's infancy, this area became known for its intense aviation activity and was recognized as the center of the aviation world. By 1910, Long Island hosted several aircraft factories and three airfields from which the world's most famous aviators set a significant number of aviation records.

The Island, ideally located on the eastern edge of the United States, at the western edge of the Atlantic Ocean, and adjacent to America's most populous city, also made it the ideal focal point for most of the early transatlantic and transcontinental flights.
LaGuardia Airport
1929 Gala Amusement Park is transformed into the Glenn H. Curtiss Airport – later renamed North Beach Airport
1937 New York City takes over the airport and begins a major expansion project
1939 New York City Municipal Airport opens
1939 New York Municipal Airport opening day celebration on October 15
1939 New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia looks out from the first aircraft to land at the new airport on December 2.
1939 A TWA stewardess departs the first aircraft to land at the airport
The original control tower is on top of the Central Terminal Building.
1940 A Pan American Airways Clipper is the first aircraft to land at the new Marine Air Terminal
1940 An inside view of the Marine Air Terminal
1947 The Port Authority of New York/ New Jersey leases New York Municipal Airport and renames it LaGuardia Airport
1948 CAA begins operating the air traffic control tower
1949 The Brooklyn Dodgers return to LaGuardia after beating St. Louis in the National League pennant race
Late 1940s a motorist passes underneath a landing aircraft
A nickel buys a close up view of the airport
1951 The “Sheep Run” serves auxiliary passengers
1952 Helicopter mail service begins between LaGuardia, Newark, and New York International airports
1958 President Dwight D. Eisenhower is greeted by children
1964 The airport dedicates its $36 million upgrade, including a new, 150-foot high control tower.
1962 John Glenn and Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson arrive at the airport
Long Island Aviation Firsts
1909 Wilbur Wright makes first powered airplane flight over Manhattan
1910 Glenn Curtiss sets a new speed record flying from Albany to New York City in 2 hours 32 minutes
1911 Harriet Quimby obtains her pilot’s license at the Moisant School at the Hempstead Plains Aerodrome, the first American woman to earn an Aero Club of America Aviator’s certificate.
1918 Operating for the Post Office Department, the U.S. Army flies the first regular air mail service between Washington, DC, and New York City
1922 At Curtiss Field on Long Island, Bessie Coleman makes her first appearance in an American air show.
1923 Leaving from New York, Lieutenants John Macready and Oakley Kelly make the first nonstop transcontinental flight.
1927 Leaving from Roosevelt Field, Charles Lindbergh makes the first nonstop solo flight across the Atlantic.
1929 At Mitchel Field, James Doolittle is the first pilot to use only instrument guidance to take off, fly a set course, and land
1933 Wiley Post departs Floyd Bennett Field on the first solo flight around the world
1939 Pan American Airways initiates the first scheduled transatlantic flights from New York to Paris
Those Daring Young Women and Men
1903 Orville and Wilbur Wright at Kitty Hawk, NC
1909 Louis Bleriot
1910 Julia Clark
1910 Eugene Early makes the first take off from a ship
1911 Henry Atwood flies over the White House
1912 Pilot Tony Janus (left) takes off with Captain Albert Berry, who made the first parachute jump.
1922 Lillian Boyer aerial acrobat
1923 First aerial refueling
1927 Ruth Elder
Historic Aircraft
1940 Lockheed Electra
1948 Boeing Stratocruiser
1951 CAA experimental agricultural aircraft
Early Airports
1930s New York’s Floyd Bennett Field
1935 Pan American Airways marine terminal, Dinner Key, FL
1940s Chicago Municipal Airport
Late 1940s Washington National Airport
1945 New York’s Idlewild airport
The Early Passenger Experience
1920s Ensuring the proper weight and balance prior to takeoff
1920s Loading passengers and mail onto a Fokker transport
1930 United Airlines hired nurses as the first airline stewardesses
1930s Air France stewardesses
1930s DC-2 passenger seating area
1940s Passenger meal service onboard a Pan American Airways Sikorsky S-42
1920s Customs inspection
1950s Carry-on baggage inspections
1950s Passenger waiting area at Los Angeles International Airport, CA
Early Air Traffic Control
1929 Archie League, the first air traffic controller, on duty at the St. Louis airport
1933 Archie League guides an aircraft to a safe landing
1935 A consortium of airline companies establish the first airway traffic center at Newark, NJ
1936 Controllers work the board at the Chicago airway traffic center
1936 Earl Ward (left) organized the first group of federal air traffic controllers
1936 The first radio equipped tower at the Newark, NJ, airport
1940s Controllers manage air traffic by moving “shrimp boats” along a map.
1940s The first effort to automate air traffic control using slats
1940s Women begin working as air traffic controllers
1940s Controllers at work at the Washington airway traffic center
1948 Radar revolutionizes air traffic control
1951 Working the lights at Washington National Airport’s tower
Before the FAA
1927 First N-1 with William MacCracken, Jr., Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Aeronautics (left) and his deputy Clarence Young
1927 The first U.S. federal pilot’s license
1927 First federally issued aircraft type certificate
1929 Airway radio station, Oakland, CA
1920s Airway inspectors
1946 CAA Experimental Station, Indianapolis, IN
1944 CAA Region 5 Civairettes Club, Kansas City, KS
1958 CAA becomes FAA