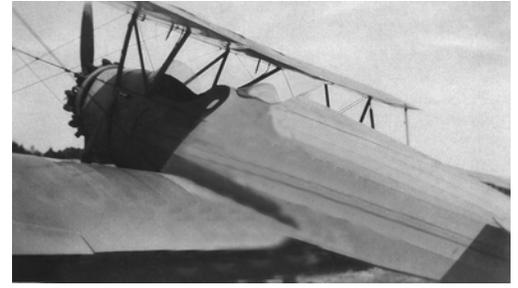


# The Fairmont Flying Service



During the period from 1938 to the United States' entry into WW 2, the Civilian Pilot Training Program (CPTP) taught thousands of people, regardless of race or gender, how to fly.



Students attending colleges and universities all over the country could take flight instruction near their schools. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the CPTP became the War Training Service (WTS), a screening program for potential pilot candidates.

Gordon Robinson, a 1942 Spaulding High School graduate, had received his instructor's pilot license at the age of 19 and joined the War Training Service (WTS) as an instructor for Norwich University Cadets.

Robinson entered the US Army Air Corps in 1944 as a fighter pilot; after discharge, he returned home with both commercial and private plane instructor's licenses.

Meanwhile, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known as the GI Bill, provided WW 2 veterans with unemployment benefits, money for education, and low-interest loans for homes, farms, and small business. The GI Bill also covered tuition for flight training, and veterans all over the country took advantage of this program.

Seeing an opportunity to use his training and experience, Robinson and his father-in-law,

Peter Lemieux, in 1946 finalized purchase from Elmer and Violet Mugford, 80 acres of land located on Rte. 14 south of the village of East Montpelier. The site was a level, narrow stretch of property, parallel to the highway. In the 1870's, it had been the site of a fairground.



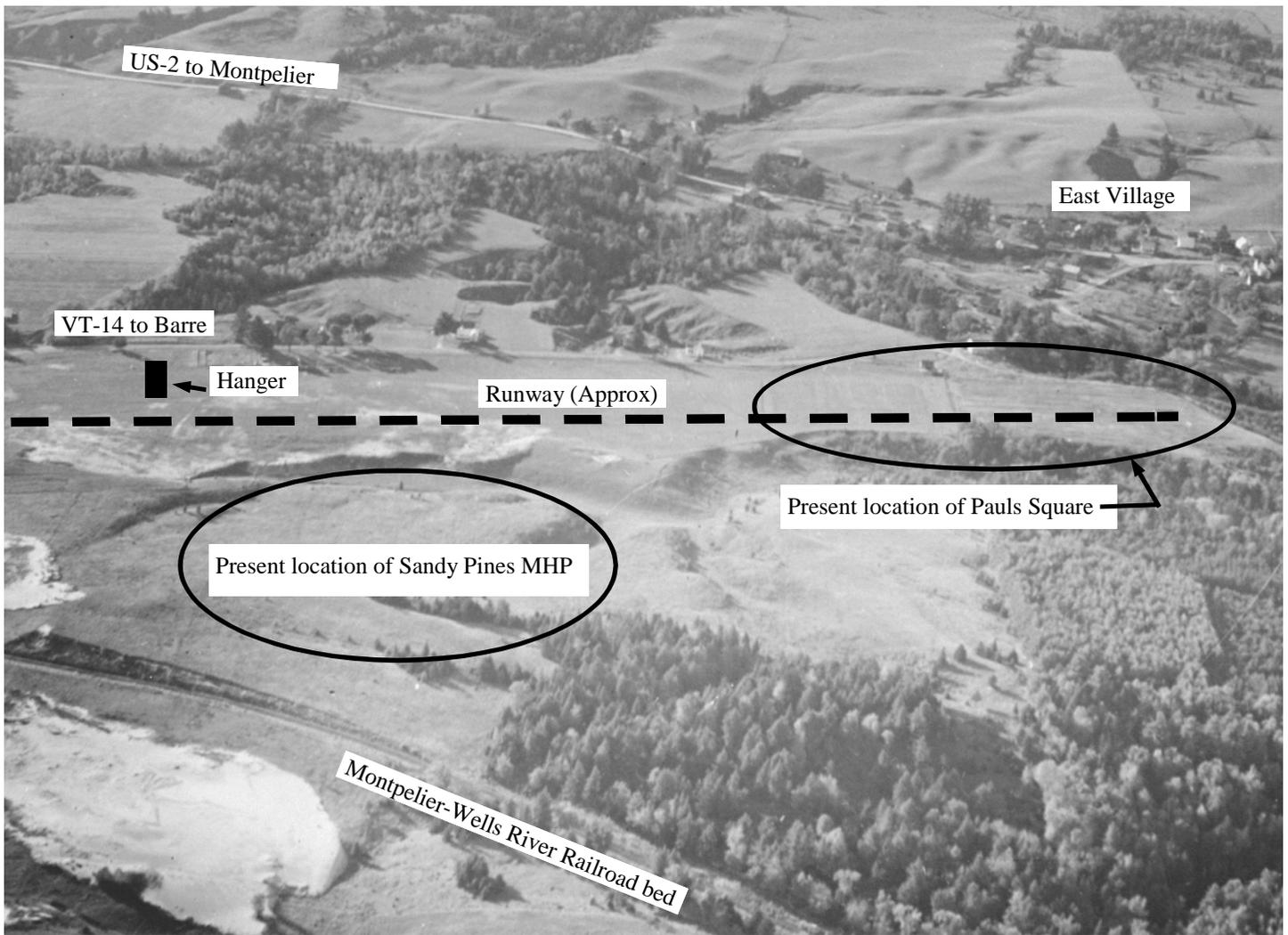
Gordon Robinson and Peter Lemieux

Jones, Maxfield, and Gove in their book *Vermont's Granite Railroads* tell us that the first two days of service between Montpelier and Plainfield by the brand new Montpelier and Wells River Railroad, September 17 and 18, 1873 "saw large numbers of passengers being shuttled between Montpelier and the Washington County Fairgrounds in East Montpelier."

Lemieux and Robinson founded the Fairmont Flying Service at the old fairgrounds site, taking the name from the Montpelier and Well River Railroad station of the same name located a bit south of the airstrip on Vermont Rte. 14.



Peter (l.) and Emilie Lemieux with an unknown man.



Charles Colbert, another son-in-law of Peter Lemieux, joined the staff. He held commercial and private plane instructor's licenses. Work began on an 1850 foot landing strip and



an airplane hangar. Peter's son Daniel remembers helping prepare the hangar's foundation before he was drafted in May, 1946.



Among the fleet of airplanes was a WACO bi-plane (a trainer), two Piper Cubs, a Piper Cub Cruiser, a Taylorcraft, and a Vultee

BT-13 Valiant. The latter attracted student pilots because of its more powerful engine. Pilots called it the "Vibrator."



Business was brisk, according to Daniel Lemieux: veterans could learn to fly under the GI Bill, airplane rides were offered, and the Civil Air Patrol used the field.

John Mekkelsen took flight instruction at Fairmont; David Coburn, Wayne Morse, Elaine and Stanley Fitch, and Charles Ormsbee, with children Marilyn and Richard Ormsbee, (among many others) went for rides over the countryside.

Emilie (Mrs. Peter) Lemieux ran a concession in a corner of the hangar office, while Elaine Lemieux Robinson acted as receptionist and scheduler. E. Montpelier resident Gordon Boisson, a veteran and licensed Airframe & Engine mechanic, was available for repairs.

Fairmont also had a franchise to sell the Hockaday Comet, a two-seater light cabin aircraft first flown in 1944.



But business slacked off as government rules changed, and as early as 1948, Peter Lemieux and Fred Joyal of East Montpelier built a car race track at the site. It was also used for carnivals and fireworks.



On March 1, 1955 the property was sold to Carleton Tenney, who opened a Ford tractor dealership. Tenney sold to Eugene Baker, who ran a used furniture shop. Later records show new owners, with the property divided and used for other businesses, homes, and Sandy Pines Trailer Park.

Today the landscape has changed but the sturdy hangar is a reminder of the Fairmont Flying Service.



In the sixty years that have passed since the airfield closed the hangars has been used for a number of businesses. The Paul's Square housing development was built on the north end of the site. Sandy Pines mobile home park occupies the east portion. A used car dealership and credit union office are recently added uses.

References:

*Across the Onion*, Ellen Hill and Lyn Blackwell  
 Archives of the Barre-Montpelier *Times Argus*  
 Archives of the State of Vermont  
 Ormsbee Family diaries

With special thanks to:

Daniel Lemieux	Conrad Ormsbee
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 Hockaday Comet— San Diego Air and Space Museum  
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 All others are courtesy of the Lemieux family