

History

The Mississippi Aeronautics Commission was created by the 1946 Mississippi Legislature and the organizational meeting was held on July 17, 1946. Mr. C. A. (Bud) Moore was appointed as the first Director, serving in that position until he retired in 1976. The Commission was an independent state agency until 1990 when it was placed under the Mississippi Department of Economic and Community Development and remained there until 1992 when it was combined with the other transportation agencies in the state to form the Mississippi Department of Transportation.

Mississippi Aviators

Fred and Al Key set the Federal Aeronautique Internationale world's sustained endurance record flight at Key Field, Meridian, Mississippi, in June, 1935. The Key brothers flew a Curtiss Robin airplane named "Ole Miss" for 653 hours and 34 minutes (over 27 days) without landing. The four hundred and thirty-five (435) refueling contacts during the flight, with over 6,000 gallons of fuel being transferred, pioneered current air-to-air refueling methods. Their record still stands and the "Ole Miss" is on permanent display in the National Air and Space Museum.

Roscoe Turner of Corinth was an outstanding aviation pioneer. He was one of the first racing pilots in the country, setting a transcontinental record with four passengers from Los Angeles to New York in 1929. In 1938, he won the Cleveland Air Races and was a three-time winner of the Thompson Trophy Race. In 1952 he received the Distinguished Flying Cross and is one of the few civilians ever to receive this high decoration.

Mississippi's rich aviation history includes other famous aviators, such as John C. Robinson, "The Brown Condor", who gained international fame as a pilot during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Astronauts Fred W. Haise, who served as lunar module pilot for Apollo 13, and Stuart Roosa, command module pilot for Apollo 14, also called Mississippi home.

Aviation Firsts

The first commercial aerial application of insecticides in the nation took place on the Robertshaw's Plantation in Heatherton in September 1924.

The first record of an airport in the state was Payne Field at West Point. During World War I, a military Advanced Aviation School was located there and used 125 Curtiss JN-4 airplanes to train 1500 pilots from May 1918 to March 1920.

The first state municipal airport was located at Jackson and is still in operation as Hawkins Field. Runways at Hawkins Field at Jackson and Key Field at Meridian were the first to be paved and lighted in the state and the work was accomplished in the mid 1930's under the Works Progress Administration.

During World War II, military aviation training bases were located at Jackson, Meridian, Laurel, Clarksdale, Columbus, Indianola, Grenada, Greenville, Greenwood, Gulfport, Madison, Natchez, and Pascagoula. Columbus Air Force Base remains a military airbase but the remaining airports now serve civil aviation.