

THEY WANTED WINGS
CHAPTER FOUR
1940-1945

COUNTY AIRPORT BECAME REALITY IN 1940s

On February 16, 1940, Door County saw the use of an airplane in a lifesaving situation. Aussie Oleson and his brother, Henry, were cutting down trees on Henry's farm on Washington Island when a tree fell on Aussie, breaking two of his vertebrae, a rib and his ankle. Aided by his brother, he walked over a half mile to his home. Pilot Wally Arntzen from Escanaba was called, and Oleson was transported to the hospital there, where he was expected to stay for three months to recover.

The Advocate carried a front page story which sounds as if it came from the pen of Sumner Harris: "Thus again the need of airplane service between Washington Island and the mainland was demonstrated. The actual flying time between Washington Island and Escanaba is between 15 and 25 minutes, contrasted with the usual long time required to get a patient to Sturgeon Bay via boat and ambulance.

"In this case, perhaps the difference in time did not necessarily mean the saving of a life, but time often counts when a person is suffering with a broken back." The story went on to say that in the winter, a plane could land on Detroit Harbor with skis, but Islanders were worrying about what would happen if the airport was plowed up, because of the lack of funds to maintain it.

In March 1940, it was announced that Jack Hadden, the "Flying Fish Peddler," who concocted a plan to fly fish from Door County to St. Louis, was going to replace the plane he cracked up in Decatur, Illinois, with a new one. Hard luck seemed to pursue Hadden; in November, 1939, the plane he had just completed for the fish flights burned up in a hangar in St. Louis. Then, evidently, he'd cracked up another plane intended for the venture.

Records have yet to be found to prove Hadden actually shipped some fish by the first plane. The only evidence uncovered so far is a photograph brought in by Chester Ostram Jr. which shows Chester Ostram Sr. loading fish boxes into what seems like an older plane which looks like a Stinson Jr. or other corrugated metal sided plane.

In April 1940, Dr. Dan Dorchester arrived home from St. Louis where he had visited relatives and brought further news. Hadden would christen a new plane, the "City of Sturgeon Bay," to carry fish to St. Louis and it would be the largest single engine plane to land in Door County.