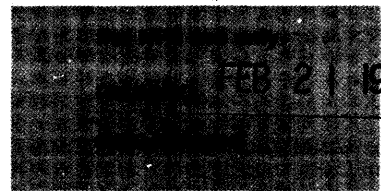


OLD NO. 10-1018
EXP. 12/31/81

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections



Substantive Review

1. Name

historic LARSON BROTHERS AIRPORT

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number 4790 Highway 150 not for publication

city, town Town of Clayton vicinity of _____ congressional district _____

state Wisconsin code 55 county Winnebago code 139

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<u>N/A</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Leonard Larson

street & number 4838 Highway 150

city, town Winchester vicinity of _____ state Wisconsin 54947

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Winnebago County Courthouse

street & number 415 Jackson Street

city, town Oshkosh state Wisconsin 54901

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1984 federal state county local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin

city, town Madison state Wisconsin

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Larson Brothers Airport is situated in the town of Clayton, between the farming communities of Winchester and Larsen. Surrounded by fields of corn and clover, it is set back behind a cluster of frame farm buildings, 350 feet from Highway 150. The nominated property includes a six-plane hangar and a sod landing field. Both are reached by a private dirt road lined on the east by¹ a row of cedar power poles, erected in 1930 to service the hangar with electricity.

The hangar is situated at the end of this road in a grove of oaks and hickories. It is a one-story rectangular building of frame construction with a gambrel roof, vertical lap siding, and fieldstone foundations. The east façade is comprised of six sliding doors which open the entire façade on tracks extending north and south from the building on cedar poles. On the south façade there are five multi-paned window lights and on the west façade there are four, all added in 1928.² On the north façade is an attached chickenwire pen. The interior has a concrete floor added in 1933.³ Distinguished by heavy beams and pegged construction, the undivided interior remains unaltered and maintains the same high level of functional integrity as the exterior. The overall building size is 52 by 60 feet.

The sod landing field is an open piece of grassy land gently rising to the north. It is approximately 80 rods long, leveled and cleared of trees to accommodate landings from the north and take-offs from the south. Portable markers indicate the principal runways when in use. Unassuming in nature, the field is an integral part of the nomination in terms of original and present use. In connection with the hangar, it evokes the early period of Wisconsin aviation when planes were constructed of wire and canvas.

Excluded from the nomination is the cluster of frame farm buildings that front on Highway 150. These include a house, garage, barn, several corn cribs, and a mobile home. The house, originally a workshop for the airport, has lost integrity as such and is therefore excluded. The other farm buildings have no association with the operation of the airport and are architecturally undistinguished.

-
1. Leonard Larson; May 31, 1983 interview.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1922,¹ 1924² **Builder/Architect** Knute Johnson³

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph) PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1922–1934

The Larson Brothers Airport was the first airport in Winnebago County and one of the earliest Wisconsin airports outside Milwaukee. It housed the first Wisconsin agency selling government approved planes, and for twenty years served as a center for state aviators. Maintained and ready for use in its original condition, the Larson Brothers Airport represents one of the earliest forms of airport design in Wisconsin.

TRANSPORTATION

The first airport in Wisconsin was established at Milwaukee in 1919, followed soon after by similar facilities at Green Bay, Janesville, LaCrosse, and Racine.⁴ Among these early airports was the Larson Brothers Airport which opened in the town of Clayton in 1922. It was the first of three in Winnebago County, followed by Oshkosh Airport in 1927 and Whiting Airport in the town of Menasha in 1928.⁵ Of these three airports the Larson Brothers Airport is the only one maintaining its original hangar and sod landing field. The Whiting Airport closed in 1930, the hangar now converted to retail use and the field subdivided. The Oshkosh Airport remains in use as Wittman Airport with greatly expanded facilities and paved runways.

The Larson Brothers Airport was developed by four young farmers: Roy (1895–1929), Clarence (1898–1929), Newell (1900–1933), and Leonard Larson (1903–). They began by clearing an 80 rod runway behind the barn of their family farm. In 1924 they built a six-plane hangar modeled after designs in an aviation magazine. At first they only gave lessons and ran a flying circus, touring county fairs and "barnstorming" throughout the Midwest; with the construction of the hangar they were able to accommodate transient as well as local aviators.⁶ They also built and serviced planes, forming the Roy Larson Aircraft Company in 1926.⁶ It was the first recognized agency for the distribution of government approved planes in Wisconsin.⁷ In 1927,⁸ the Larson brothers incorporated all their activities under the name Wisconsin Airways.

While modest in size and appearance, the facilities were comparable to those in more metropolitan areas. The Larson Brothers Airport also enjoyed a state-wide reputation in spite of its rural location. Students Clyde Lee and Merle Zuehlke went on to instruct and manage at airports in Milwaukee, Lee attempting a trans-atlantic flight to Oslo in 1932.¹⁰ Major James Wood of Wausau and Howard Morey of Madison began airlines with planes purchased here. Morey wrote:

"During my acquaintance with Roy Larson, we discussed and finally concluded arrangements for the purchase of a new Waco 9, powered with an OX-5 engine. At the time of this negotiation, a corporation was formed with an associate of mine, Edgar N. Quinn. Together we formed the Madison Airways Corporation and leased what was later to become known as Royal Airport, Madison, Wisconsin.The Waco 9, purchased from Roy Larson, was used for flight training, local flights, and a very limited charter function."¹¹

9. Major Bibliographical References

Larson Brothers Airport file; Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.
 Leonard Larson; May 31, 1983 interview.
 George Hardie, Jr. (Historian, Experimental Aircraft Association Museum); June 2, 1983 interview.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 38

Quadrangle name Oshkosh NW, Wisconsin

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A

1	6	3	6	9	1	7	0	4	8	9	5	8	5	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

1	6	3	6	9	1	7	0	4	8	9	5	1	4	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

1	6	3	6	8	9	6	0	4	8	9	5	1	4	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

1	6	3	6	8	9	6	0	4	8	9	5	8	5	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

The west $\frac{1}{2}$ of the east $\frac{1}{2}$ of the southwest $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 18, Town 20, Range 16, excluding the southern 350 feet (to include only the landing field and hangar).

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	county	code
state	N/A	code	county	code

state	N/A	code	county	code
state	N/A	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Peter J. Adams

organization N/A date October 6, 1983

street & number 537 E. Wisconsin Avenue telephone (414) 722-1422

city or town Neenah state Wisconsin 54956

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification



The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Director, Historic Preservation Division, SHSW date FEB. 13, 1984

For NPS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
	
Keeper of the National Register	
Attain:	
Chief of Registration	

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

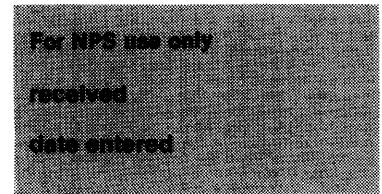
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"Speed" Holman, Lowell Bayles, Douglas Davis, and other prominent aviators frequently landed for repairs. Elwyn West, another pioneer aviator, stored his plane there:

"At this time we started flying at Fairs & Picnics together, and I continued flying with (the) Larson Bros for the next several years, barnstorming throughout Wisconsin and Northern Michigan."¹²

In 1924 Roy Larson also flew from this airport barnstorming the state for the LaFollette-Wheeler presidential campaign, and in 1928 flew passengers and supplies to President Coolidge's camp on the Brule River.¹³ By 1932 the Larson Brothers Airport had achieved sufficient notoriety amongst state aviators to be lionized in the Milwaukee Journal as the "first airport in the state."¹⁴

Ultimately the rural location contributed to the airport's decline. After 1930 sod landing fields gave way to cinder runways, which in turn were paved and lengthened as planes increased in size and power.¹⁵ The high cost of these improvements caused numerous small airports to close, the fields returning to farms or lost to city expansion. The rapidly changing technology also transformed metropolitan airports, removing all traces of their modest origins.¹⁶ In the face of these changes the Larson Brothers Airport continued operation until closed by federal mandate at the outbreak of World War II.

ARCHITECTURE

The Larson Brothers Airport also represents one of the earliest forms of airport design in Wisconsin. It was begun only three years after Milwaukee's Butler Airport (now James Currie Park), the first such facility in the state.¹⁷ Under the direction of the Larson brothers, Knute Johnson built the hangar in 1924. The Larsons also worked with him cutting and planing the heavy beams used in its construction. Johnson, a local barn builder, used his traditional skills to adapt the illustrations in an early aviation magazine of the Larsons. The result was a "modern" shell applied to a conventional superstructure. On the outside the east façade slides open on metal tracks as did the prototypical Butler hangar.¹⁸ On the inside the joists and rafters are anchored by wooden pegs, as were countless barns in the Larsen-Winchester area. Only two changes have been made: in 1928 window lights were cut through the south and west façades, and in 1933 a concrete floor was poured. These minor alterations, which occurred during the airport's period of significance, in no way effect its integrity. Maintained in nearly original condition and ready for use, the Larson Brothers Airport is a fine example of this early period in Wisconsin airport design.

Since World War II Leonard Larson has maintained the airport for his family's use. A workshop originally associated with the airport has been omitted from the nomination for loss of integrity (see Item 7).

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

LARSON BROTHERS AIRPORT; Clayton, Winnebago Co., Wisconsin

Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page 2

For NPS use only
received
date entered

FOOTNOTES:

- ¹Neenah Daily News & The Times; July 13, 1923.
- ²Leonard Larson; May 31, 1983 interview.
- ³Ibid.
- ⁴George Hardie, Jr.; June 2, 1983 interview.
- ⁵Neenah Daily News & The Times; July 13, 1923.
Oshkosh Daily Northwestern; October 24, 1977.
Neenah-Menasha This Week; August 11, 1982.
- ⁶Appleton Post-Crescent; December 3, 1953.
- ⁷Oshkosh Daily Northwestern; December 14, 1929.
- ⁸Register of Deeds, Winnebago County Courthouse; July 18, 1927.
- ⁹George Hardie, Jr.; June 2, 1983 interview.
- ¹⁰Larson Brothers Airport file; Historic Preservation Division, Wisconsin State Historical Society.
- ¹¹Ibid.
- ¹²Ibid.
- ¹³Oshkosh Daily Northwestern; December 14, 1929.
- ¹⁴Milwaukee Journal; July 31, 1932.
- ¹⁵George Hardie, Jr.; June 2, 1983 interview.
- ¹⁶Ibid.
- ¹⁷"Milwaukee's First Airport," George Hardie Jr.; Historical Messenger, Milwaukee County Historical Society; March, 1954.
- ¹⁸Ibid.

←700'→



Dirt Path



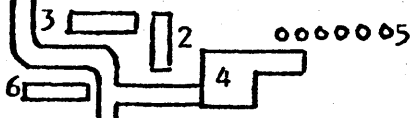
←2400'→

LARSON BROTHERS AIRPORT
Town of Clayton, Winnebago Co., Wisc.

- Key:
- 1 Hangar
 - 2 House
 - 3 Garage
 - 4 Barn
 - 5 Corn cribs
 - 6 Mobile home
 - Boundary

Dirt Road

←350'→



HIGHWAY 150