



**TOMPKINS COUNTY AIRPORT**

**William J. Mobbs**  
Commissioner of Public Works

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RE : LETTER TO POSTERITY

21 December 1994

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN :

This letter is being written to accompany the contents of the New Terminal Time Capsule which is being placed behind the building's date stone this 21st. day of December, 1994.

As I write I cannot say whether the capsule will be opened by a future County legislator, a future airport manager or one of his/her staff, a worksite laborer of the company contracted to demolish the building, or, perish the thought, by nobody. Could it be that the time capsule gets interred in some future landfill site, perhaps in Dryden\*.

\*Research of local history will reveal details of a proposed DR-7 landfill site in Dryden in the early 1990's.

Assuming, as I must, that this letter will be opened at some future date, some 50, 60 or 100 years hence, I should further assume that its contents and the contents of the capsule will generate a certain amount of interest in the local community. With that in mind I will endeavor to make meaningful comments and predictions.

SOME CURRENT INFORMATION :

My Computer

I am using a vintage 1993 Personal Computer (PC) made by VTech Computers. It comes equipped with a CD-ROM drive, Microsoft Windows (3.1), a Microsoft Disk Operating System, 4 Mb of RAM, 210 Meg Seagate Hard Drive, and as home-based PCs go, was pretty sophisticated when I bought it last year. Of course, with the current rapid rate of computer development, it is likely to be obsolete within a few years. Already it is showing limitations.

Given that comment, I would not even want to hazard a guess of what computers might be capable of in 50 years. Of course, you will be able to interact with them by just using your voice and you will be able to access anything, anywhere, through a modem and order anything you want, have it deducted from your bank account by the vendor, and receive or send it by next-day-air to anywhere in the world by a supersonic jumbo jet. Beyond that, I just don't know.

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### The Airport Budget

The 1994 airport budget is enclosed. For 1995, which is the first FULL year of operating the new terminal, it is projected to cost \$ 1.2 million to run the airport, not including debt service. At a projected 5 percent average rate of inflation, by the year 2044 the cost of running the airport will have risen to \$ 13.1 million. If the future airport manager is frugal in his spending habits and can save half of his/her salary each year, he/she would become a millionaire in a mere 4 years !

### Politics

The November, 1994 elections have been memorable both for the democrats and republicans. For the first time in about four decades the republicans have a majority in the House and the Senate. If President Clinton isn't careful he could suffer the indignity of his predecessor, George Bush, and become a "one termer."

After 12 years of faithful service the impressive Mario Cuomo was ousted as Governor of New York by a virtual unknown, George Pataki. The upset was due, I believe, to voters crying out against the state of New York State rather than for what Mr. Pataki was selling. He made a lot of promises which some people have questioned and it will be interesting to see if he is able to deliver. Meanwhile, Mario Cuomo may be regretting not accepting a seat on the Supreme Court that was offered by President Clinton earlier this year. One might speculate if Mr. Cuomo may yet be elevated to another position among that august body should one arise, position himself for a run at the Presidency, accept a lucrative corporate job, or fade into the background.

### Other Current Topics

The biggest news story of this year has been the indictment of one O.J. Simpson for the murder of his ex-wife and her boyfriend. Mr. Simpson's name will be found in the Football Hall of Fame for some notable achievements. However, by the end of this trial, if it ever does end, he will have gained ten times more fame than he ever did as a football player.

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With the pre-trial hearings having lasted for over 6 months already, the vast majority of the population are bored silly by it all. Since Mr. Simpson is a millionaire several times over through endorsements, etc., it is interesting to me to see how much MORE JUSTICE his money is able to buy him over and above the ordinary murderer-in-the-street. My guess is that his money, if it lasts through the undoubtedly record-breaking long trial, will buy him his acquittal. Beyond that, because the acquittal will cause a major uproar, it may result in a change to the justice system, particularly as it applies to the selection of jurors. The reader will obviously detect that I think he is guilty !

Both the baseball players and the hockey players are either on strike or have been locked out. Negotiations between the players and owners in both cases have been protracted and tedious. For the ordinary man in the street it is hard to feel sympathy for either side when they are talking about how many more millions of dollars per year they each want to get. Now remember - this is 1994 when a million dollars is worth something ! For many of us New Yorkers our one regret is that the Yankees finally had a team that looked like it had a chance of winning the World Series and the season was cut short before they had a chance to prove it !

#### Airport Issues

At the time of writing the airport has just commissioned a Master Plan Update which will hopefully show us what direction we should head in for the next 20 years. By the time the capsule is opened perhaps another three or four Master Plans will have been completed.

The present Master Plan Update will, no doubt, address the question of what happens to the old terminal building and the even older hangar/office complex currently occupied by Taughannock Aviation Corporation, the local Fixed Base Operator. I have recommended removal of both buildings providing we can find a financially feasible way of replacing them with new. If not removal, then a great deal of money needs to be spent refurbishing them. That seems to me to be sending good money after bad. In another fifty years they will certainly have either been replaced or fallen down on their own accord.

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Over the past 2 years the airport has spent around \$ 350,000 to create an artificial wetland at the old Caswell Road Landfill to compensate for a wetland we filled for a runway extension project. We were required to deed the created wetland area to exclude future development so if Mother Nature has assisted us in that area, the wetland will still be there in 50 years for birds and other wildlife to enjoy.

My guess is that the newly extended runway, which is now 6,601 feet in length, will prove to be sufficient for future needs and that when this letter is read, it will still be at 6,601 feet.

Aircraft Noise is not the problem it once was thanks to legislation introduced by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) requiring airlines to gradually phase out the noisier aircraft and/or engines in favor of "Stage 3" types. Though this has dramatically reduced noise pollution around airports, I predict that there will be a demand for further "Stages" which will reduce noise still more.

One of the "coming" environmental issues for airports is that of air quality. After the individual states have tackled the problem of vehicular air pollution, I believe they will switch their attention to the unwanted pollutants from aircraft engines. The engine manufacturers will have their futures assured by continually producing more powerful, more economical, quieter, and cleaner engines. In 50 years, with pressure increasing to replace fossil fuels with another form of energy, aircraft engines may be powered by something other than kerosene.

The new terminal building aircraft parking area incorporates a state-of-the-art retention system for propylene glycol (the substance which is currently being used to de-ice aircraft in the winter. Vast sums of money are being spent at all those airports that are affected by snow, ice, and frost during the Fall, Winter and early Spring. My prediction is that before much longer one of several things will happen :

- Someone will invent an environmentally-friendly de-icing fluid which can be sprayed on and which can just run off into the environment without having a detrimental effect.
- Airlines will agree to use re-cycled de-icing fluid (as they currently do in Europe) and that will reduce costs to a level where de-icing can continue to be done with substantially the same materials.

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- A different means of de-icing may take the place of propylene glycol, such as hot air or laser beams.

In this, our first year of operating the new terminal, questions exist such as :

1. Will the Terrazzo Floor last as long as the building ? Will the hairline cracks that appeared shortly after opening remain as hairline cracks as the architect and contractor have predicted, or will they open up and require major repair work ?
2. Will the wooden benches that were designed to assist in giving the building the appearance of an old railroad station ever be considered to be comfortable ?
3. Will the clock which we are having made by a local manufacturer still be there in 50 years and will it be keeping good time ?

#### Pondering the Future of Aviation

The Airline Deregulation Act of 1978 has really shaken up the industry and wreaked havoc among all U.S. carriers. Airlines that were instrumental in forging the route structures of early commercial aviation such as Eastern and Pan Am are no more. Like the dinosaurs of 65 millions years ago, they were unable to adapt to changing conditions and died off. Other stalwarts such as TWA, US Air, and Northwest are struggling to adapt. Some will make it, some will not.

The deregulation act spawned a whole string of low priced start-up carriers. Entrenched carriers such as United, American and Delta were big enough and resourceful enough to weather the storm until they could find a way to compete. Those major carriers finding a way to compete, plus changing conditions, resulted in the demise of most of the new start-up carriers.

But now, some 16 years after deregulation, the cycle has started again. More low price carriers which have found their own way to survive. This time they are serving a much broader section of the traveling public whose accountants are insisting on more attention being paid to the bottom line. With more and more people demanding

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low fares without the frills, the major carriers are beginning to realize that the future will see a dwindling of the high-yield airline tickets and that their only future lies in finding a way to match their overhead costs with those of the low-price new airlines.

Some say that United, American and Delta are too big to go under. But Pan Am and Eastern were up there in terms of size. More likely, like all other industries and nature in general, it will depend on their ability to adapt and those they don't will not survive. On a very personal level, since US Air and Continental are both tenants of the new terminal, I hope they can adapt. I don't think TWA, who moved out of our terminal in September, will be able to adapt and will follow in Pan Am's footsteps.

I predict a much slower growth in airline travel than the 5 percent per annum the FAA predicts. I think the growth will come in leisure traffic and that business travel will stay fairly flat. FAX machines, teleconferencing, and budget constraints have had a very negative effect on business travel. Improvements in communications have shown people how to get their business done without having to suffer the aggravations associated with airline hub-and-spoke operations, weather and technical delays, and the sheer boredom of hanging around airports. Unfortunately much of what used to be exciting about air travel has vanished in favor of getting people from A to B in the most cost-efficient manner, regardless of whatever negative aspects are associated with that.

Perhaps, when all airlines are offering nothing but no-frills, cheap, air travel, there will be a back-lash and they may have to return to some form of service and comfort for their customers.

The only supersonic passenger aircraft in commercial service is the Concorde which runs across the Atlantic from London and Paris to a very few U.S. destinations. It has been in existence as a aircraft for almost 20 years now and though there has been talk of a replacement, not much has been done to actually produce one.

So that leaves the question of what type of aircraft will exist in 50 years time and what will we have to do to airports to accommodate them ? There have been vast changes in aircraft design over the past 50 years. Is there any reason to suppose that changes over the next 50 years be any less sweeping ?

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The major breakthrough in aviation to this point came with the jet engine transforming the slow-paced industry which existed up to then into one involving a speed which has caused the world to shrink. Though nothing seems to be on the horizon, we may be in for another major improvement which renders the jet engine obsolete.

If not that then I think we can look forward to cleaner, quieter aircraft. The small commuter aircraft will be replaced with jet aircraft of the same size which will be cheap to operate and satisfy the customers needs for speed and comfort. On longer trips I believe there will be very large supersonic aircraft, if someone can solve the problem of the sonic boom.

The advent of the Global Positioning System (GPS) will obviate the need for most of the present day navigation aids. All air carrier airports will have doppler radar or something similar to detect the more hazard properties of storms such as wind-shear. There is a logical future for vertical take-off aircraft such as the one being tested now. With the ever-increasing pressure from communities for airports to become environmentally friendly, it makes a great deal of sense to develop aircraft that can lift off straight up into the air instead of long take-off runs over densely populated areas.

Finally, coming back to Tompkins County, I do not see the airport growing much over the next 50 years. For one thing, there is little room for growth. For another thing, I believe this community will limit growth so that it does not become like many other communities.

The present terminal should be adequate for a few years. Eventually the ticker counter space will probably require the extra 50 percent growth that has been allowed for in the design. Eventually, perhaps, even a second baggage carousel may be needed but that should be much later.

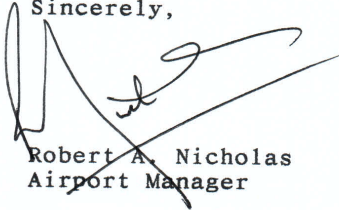
My concern is more with how to accommodate vehicle parking. I can see us reconfiguring the present parking lot to eventually eliminate almost all of the parking lot landscaping. Eventually, we will probably have to expand everything to the southeast, moving all the hangars that presently run up the side of the airport service road. The aircraft ramp and perhaps the passenger hold room may also have to be expanded in the same direction. The biggest problem will be what we do with the displaced hangars and control tower.

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If it is indeed 50 years from now that the time capsule gets opened I will either be dead or so senile (at 99 years of age) to not care whether the contents of this letter comes in for public ridicule. Building the new terminal was a fun project and being the airport manager here in Tompkins County has been a very rewarding and interesting job. I am delighted that fate brought me to this part of the world.

I look forward to contributing much more to the future of this great little airport but expect to retire long before the fifty years is up ! Hopefully I will be around long enough to see if some of my predictions will come to be. If there is a discovery in the future which allows people to communicate with the hereafter, let me know how the rest turns out.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert A. Nicholas", written over a printed name and title. The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive.

Robert A. Nicholas  
Airport Manager

(January 1989 - ??? )