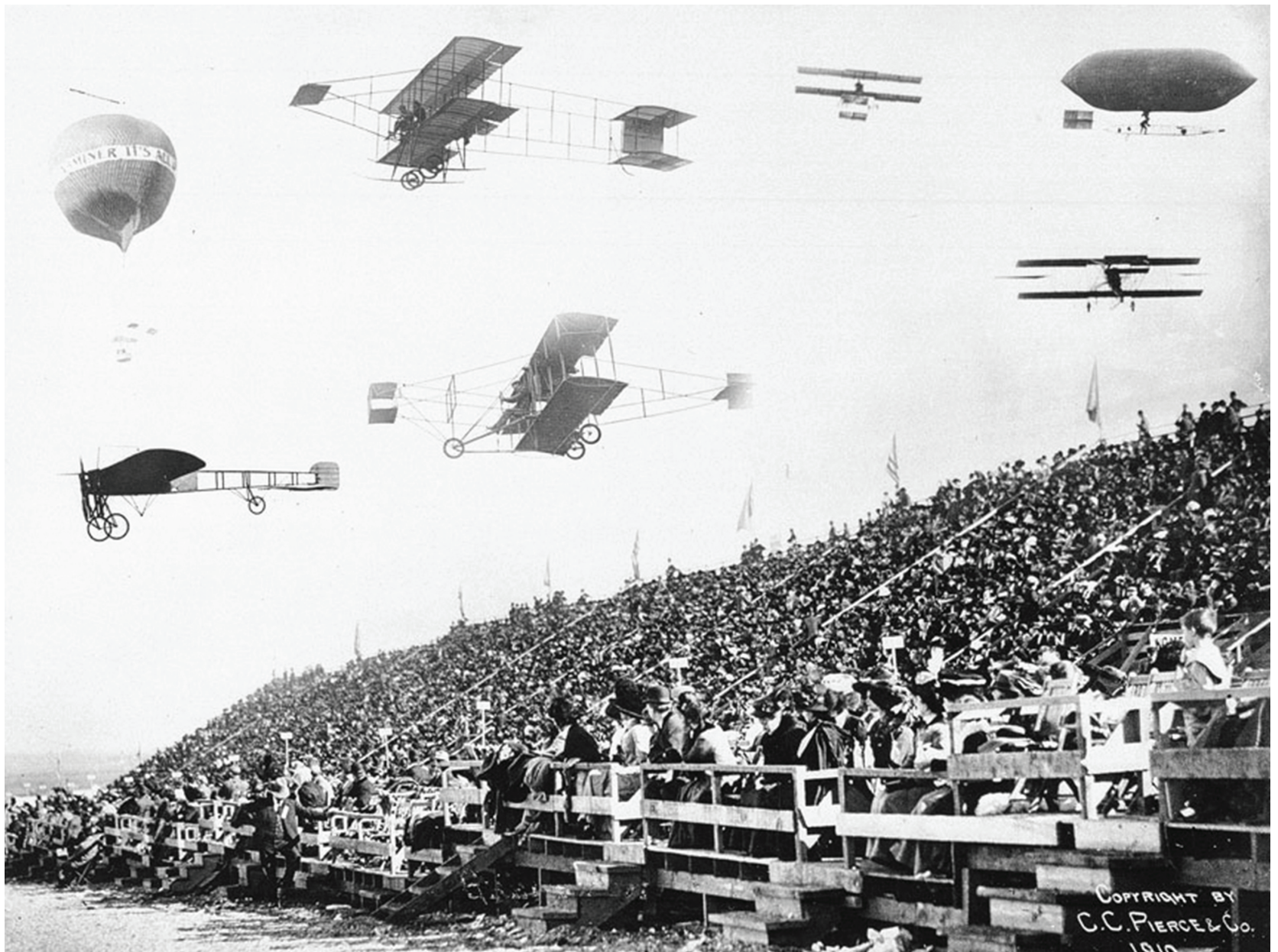


Long Beach Airport and Southern California: A Brief New Aviation and Aeronautics History (1900s - 1980s)



Overview

Long Beach Airport's (LGB) 100th anniversary on November 26, 2023, marks not only the establishment of the first municipally owned airfield in California, but also the time when aviation was beginning to capture the imagination of Americans and everyone around the world. Southern California has now for over a century been at the center of air and space flight experimentation and manufacturing, reshaping and challenging the region's economy, culture, demographics, environment, political landscape, and the human imagination.



LGB commissioned the Historical Society of Long Beach to produce an essay that provides a brief overview of the histories, significance and importance of Long Beach and Southern California aviation and aerospace activities from the 1900s to 1980s. An important component of this essay is the inclusion of a broader representation of who has been participating in making these histories. Included are hidden, overlooked and forgotten histories about women and people of color (Black, Latinx, Asian, Indigenous and other persons of color) who contributed to making Long Beach and the Southern California environs an aviation and aerospace industries center.

Hopefully readers will be inspired by the histories illuminated in this essay to pursue their dreams for the life and the careers they want.

For the full essay, visit lgb.org/100th or scan QR Code:



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Cover: A composite photograph of early model biplanes, a monoplane, a gas-filled balloon, and a dirigible (also gas-filled) hovering above or flying by bleachers filled with spectators at the 1910 Los Angeles Air Meet at Dominguez Hill, January 1910.

Image: [https://waterandpower.org/museum/Aviation_in_Early_LA_\(Page_1\).html](https://waterandpower.org/museum/Aviation_in_Early_LA_(Page_1).html),
Water and Power Associates.

Origins of Flying in Long Beach and Southern California

Boosters from Long Beach, Los Angeles and other cities in Southern California invested in placemaking. The region's clear skies, moderate climate and abundant cheap land became tools to promote aeronautics and aviation in the development of aircraft and airfields, as airports were first called, and in the attraction of aviators, air machine builders, risk-takers and entrepreneurs.

In 1910, a hill at Dominguez Ranch in what is today called the City of Carson was selected as the venue for the first official, major international air show on U.S. soil. The Los Angeles Times called the air meet "one of the greatest public events in the history of the West."

Image: John Garrett Collection. Don Berliner, "The Big race of 1910," Smithsonian Air & Space Magazine



With the sand offering a soft landing for air balloons as early as 1905, the city's seven miles of beach initially served as Long Beach's "airport." From about 1910 to 1919, biplanes performed landings and takeoffs at low tides amidst the ocean spray. *Image: Long Beach Airport*

The Golden Age of Aviation

Surplus airplanes no longer needed for World War I were available to buy cheaply for a new generation of risk-takers and entrepreneurs inspired to become aviators. After the war, Earl Daugherty returned to Long Beach and opened the Daugherty School of Aviation at Bixby Road and Long Beach Boulevard. Daugherty was instrumental in working with city officials to establish Long Beach Airport, with the groundbreaking taking place on November 26, 1923.



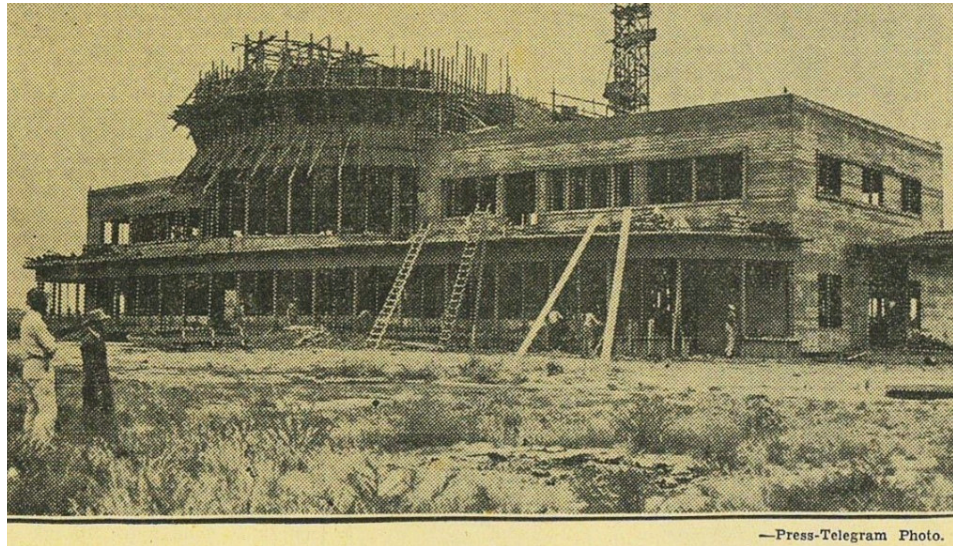
Earl Daugherty at the Long Beach site of his first aviation field where he began his successful flight training school and airplane operations at the Chateau Thierry Tract at Bixby Road and Long Beach Boulevard, named for where Americans fought their greatest battle in France during World War I, ca. 1919. *Image: Long Beach Airport*



Aerial view of the historic Long Beach Airport Terminal and administration building from the parking lot out to the airfield, ca. 1950s. *Image: Long Beach Airport*

World War II Launches Decades of Growth in the Aviation Industry, More Diverse Participants

The federal investment of funds to complete the Historic Terminal building in 1941 signified the growing importance of Long Beach Airport for civilian and military uses.



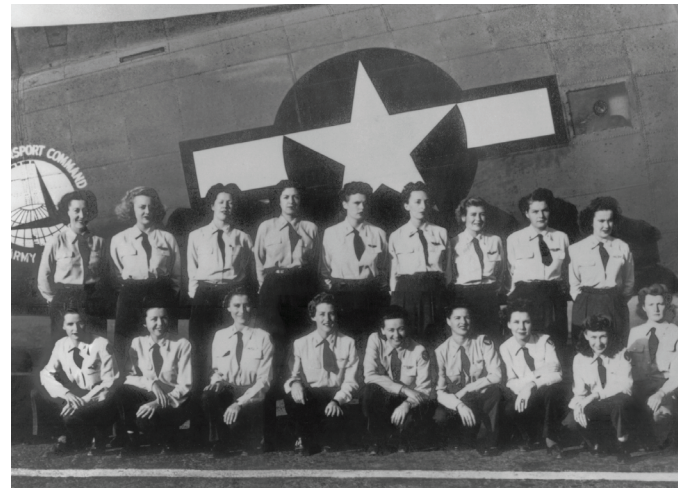
Long Beach Airport Historic Terminal under construction in 1941.

Los Angeles County, with Long Beach as a major hub, became known as the “Detroit of American aircraft,” due to the manufacturing activities that emerged in the 1940s. This opened up new opportunities for a broader composition of Americans to obtain jobs in the industry.



Dora Miles and Dorothy Johnson (left to right) at the Long Beach Douglas Aircraft Company factory in 1944.

Image: Historical Society of Long Beach



Aviators of the Women's Auxiliary Service Pilots (WASP) group in front of an airplane in Long Beach, CA, 1943.

Image: Long Beach Airport

Notable Aviators



Emory Malick. Malick began his interest in aviation with gliders around 1910 in his home state of Pennsylvania. He earned his pilot's license via training at the Curtiss Aviation School in San Diego from the Federation Aeronautique Internationale which is based in France. He became the first African American to earn a pilot's license in 1912.

*Image: Glenn H. Curtiss Museum
Hammondsport, NY*



Tom Gunn. Gunn was the first licensed Chinese American pilot in 1912. Here he is pictured (left) with one of the Eaton brothers at the Los Angeles Air Meet at Dominguez Hill, 1910. They are standing in front of a wood and canvas biplane.

*Image: California Historical Society Collection,
1860-1960, University of Southern California
Libraries Special Collections*



Bessie Coleman. Coleman was the first African American and Indigenous woman to earn her pilot's license in 1921. Coleman flew in Los Angeles and the Bessie Coleman Aero Club, named for her after her death, was a flight school established by pilot and aviation entrepreneur William J. Powell to train Black pilots.

*Image: Digital Collection of Los Angeles
Public Library*

Notable Aviators



Marie Dickerson Coker. Coker was a Hollywood entertainer and the only female member of the Five Blackbirds, a precision flight team that performed in Los Angeles in 1931. Coker is in the front row, third from the left with other members of the Bessie Coleman Aero Club, which organized the Five Blackbirds aerial shows and promoted aviation awareness in the Black community.

Image: National Air and Space Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution



Henry Ohye. Ohye was the first Nisei or second generation Japanese American pilot to earn a commercial license in 1933 and first Japanese American to solo across the Pacific Ocean. He was incarcerated at a camp in Gila, Arizona during WWII. He staged the Henry Ohye Trophy Race in Long Beach from 1965-1981. Left to right: kneeling, Henry Ohye (founder) and John Kenjo; standing, George Hattori, James Saiki and Richard Takeshiki.

Image: A.P. Photo. "Flyers to Greet Japan's Ships," Los Angeles Times, April 18, 1933, P. II, 16



Barbara Erickson London. London was the first WASP to receive the Air Medal for Meritorious Achievement as a pilot for completing four 2,000 mile deliveries of three different types of aircraft in slightly more than 5 days of actual flying. The Long Beach City Council in 2005 named the street near the Long Beach Airport terminal building, "Barbara London Drive" in her honor.

Image: Historical Society of Long Beach



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