

Frank Peter Sheehan, Jr. (1900-1927)

By Jerry Long
c.2025



Frank P. Sheehan



“Daviess County Bicentennial Chronology: 200 Historical Events”, by Jerry Long, Daviess County, Kentucky, 1815-2015: Celebrating Our Heritage, Daviess County Bicentennial Committee (Evansville, IN: M. T. Publishing Company, Inc., 2015) pp.13 & 14:

1927, 2-14 Frank P. Sheehan is killed in crash of his airplane, the Kentucky Cardinal, on Frederica Street just south of 9th Street and the Carnegie Public Library. A few months before he had started the Kentucky Aircraft Company near Owensboro for the manufacture of his own planes that he had designed. His death terminated his company’s enterprise and ended dream of making Owensboro an airplane manufacturing center. The site of his plant on Daniels Lane near the L & N Railroad in 1934 was developed into a municipal airport that was dedicated on June 26 of that year.



Frank Peter Sheehan, Jr. was born in Louisville, KY on 4 August 1900. He was the son of Frank Peter Sheehan (1871-1907) & Ida Belle Gosson (1875-1914). Frank, Sr. was secretary-treasurer of the James Thompson Company of Louisville and the Glenmore Distilleries Company of Owensboro, KY. Frank, Jr. registered for the World War I draft on 19 September 1918 he was a student at the University of Michigan, in Ann Arbor, MI. On 1 March 1920 he was enumerated in the 1920 federal census. He was then a private with the US Marine Corps on the USS Arizona stationed at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. He was reported to be 19, born Kentucky and his US residence was Bowling Green, KY.

Frank P. Sheehan, Jr. came to Owensboro, KY in June 1923 looking for a location to build airplanes. He was killed in a crash of his airplane at Ninth & Frederica Streets in Owensboro, KY on 14 February 1927. He was buried beside his parents in Cave Hill Cemetery in Louisville, KY.



Frank Sheehan (1900-1927) & sister, Mildred Frances Sheehan (1903-1984.) On right Frank Sheehan in U.S. Marine Corps uniform about 1918.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 17 June 1923, p.10A:

Airplanes May Be Built In Owensboro

Frank Sheehan, of Dayton, O., is here looking for a location for making airplanes. He will this month complete a course in flying at the Dayton school. He has not yet located a place having a building barn suitable for a hangar. At the present time he does not wish to erect a hangar. He has bought thirty airplane motors from the government.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 29 July 1923, pp.1B: & 8B:

**LARGE AVIATION FIELD HAS BEEN
LAID OUT EAST OF OWENSBORO;
TO MANUFACTURE PLANES HERE**

Hangar That Will Accommodate Three Airships to
Be Built On Field Leased From J. Hunter Bell.
Frank Sheehan, Completing Aviation Course
At Dayton, Is Backing Project.

On a large tract of land owned by J. Hunter Bell, on the L.H. & St. L. railroad, east of the pumping station of the Indian Refining company, an airplane landing field has been laid out. The grass has been cut on the and the ground has been made as level as the top of a table. The land has been leased by Frank Sheehan, who is now completing his course in aviation at the Wright school at Dayton, Ohio.

Mr. Sheehan's home is in Louisville. He is well known in Owensboro. He has unlimited financial backing, it is said, and he plans to enter into the construction of airplanes in Owensboro. His associates have been in Owensboro several weeks, making arrangements for the field. The next step to be taken will be the construction of a hangar. This will be built on the northwest corner of the flying field, and will be large enough to accommodate three airplanes.

Has 30 Airplane Engines.

Mr. Sheehan has already purchased thirty airplane engines, and they have been delivered in Owensboro. Mr. Sheehan has plans for the construction of a new model airplane.

Several months' work will be required before a plane is completed. During the course of the work Mr. Sheehan will teach his assistants the art of flying. He has purchased two airplanes, and they will be flown to Owensboro. Mr. Sheehan will deal in both commercial and pleasure airplanes.

Owensboro in a few months will be listed as one of the few cities in the United States with an airplane landing field. An effort is being made by the department of commerce at Washington to get cities all over the country to establish landing fields.

See Extension of Flying.

Experts of the Bureau of Standards of the Department of Commerce believe that within the next ten years United States will see an extension of the use of aircraft for business and pleasure somewhat similar to the extension in the use of automobiles between 1905 and 1915. Airplanes will be used more and more for carrying mails and perishable goods, while it is not impossible that people of moderate wealth will find them useful for commuting, for business trips, and for week-end and vacation trips.

The effect of the airplane, developed as is expected, will be to extend very greatly the distance to which such trips can be made in a given period of time. This will permit commuting from distances of a hundred miles, while week-end trips can be made from New York to the Thousand Islands, from San Francisco to Yosemite, from Washington and Baltimore to the mountains of Virginia, and from Boston to the Maine woods.

If the vision of the experts materialize people whose business requires occasional visits to the city can live almost anywhere they choose, while some of our wealthiest men can spend their

winters in Florida and their summers in Nova Scotia, and still keep in touch with business interests in New York.

Great Possibilities.

All of these possibilities indicate a considerable extension of the city's influence. But it must be remembered that the airplane traffic will not be evenly distributed. The flying people go where landing facilities are provided. The town that first provides these facilities should become popular with aircraft and may in later years be the fashionable resort of the region. Good rail and motor roads, combined with beautiful scenery, have made the fashionable suburbs and summer resorts of today, and even so good landing fields combined with other desirable characteristics should help make the fashionable suburb and summer resort of the future.

What Field Should Have.

[note – parts of the next two paragraphs on the microfilm of the newspaper is missing]

The requisite dimensions, proportions, and equipment of landing fields have been thoroughly studied by experts and ___ modern knowledge on the subject is embodied in the National Aeronautical Safety Code ___ prepared under the auspices of the Bureau of Standards Safety ___ of Automotive E___

This code specifies first that the methods rating and ___ landing fields, the rating being in accordance with the facilities provided and being designated ___ number, while the grading is in accordance with the size and character of the landing area as is designated by a letter as an A1 landing field is one of the largest necessary size and equipped with all needed facilities, an A4 is a large field poorly equipped, etc.

Fields rated first. class (1) will have Hangar space, repair equipment, tools, etc.; supplies of fuel, oil, water, spare parts, telephone communication; hotel near, and convenient transportation to the metropolis for passenger and freight; attendants at all times; guards to enforce field regulations; obstacle lights. course lights, and night ground wind indicator; visible beacon; radio, both beacon and communication.

Second Class Field.

Second class fields, will have all of this equipment except the beacon and radio equipment. Third class landing fields will have mooring space with some tools and repair equipment nearby; supplies of fuel, oil, and water accessible; telephone nearby; good roads to the city; attendant available upon arrangement. Fourth class fields are those intended for emergency landings only. Any field that cannot qualify in one of the higher classes will be rated as fourth class.

All of these fields are required to have certain markings. There must be a white circle one hundred feet in outside diameter and four feet wide at the center of the landing area, and a white marker three feet wide and thirty feet long to indicate the normal landing direction, or direction of landing with no wind. This marker is placed over the circle and its axis passes through the center of the circle. There should also be a marker indicating the name of the field and its location. These are described in the code.

There must in addition be a wind cone to tell the direction and approximate velocity of the wind, and the boundaries of the field must be plainly visible. All of the markings should be concealed when the field. is not in use.

Graded According to Size.

The code also specifies the dimensions that landing fields of different grades must have, and the extent to which approach to them may be, obstructed. Any high obstruction at edge of the field is assumed to reduce the effective length of the field in that direction by an amount equal to

seven times the height of the obstruction. Thus a grove of trees fifty feet high would reduce the length of the field by 350 feet.

A grade "A" landing field shall have a runway of not less than 2,500 feet in any direction, and all approaches shall be clear of obstruction. Its landing area should be nearly plane and shall be firm in wet weather.

A grade "B" landing field may have a firm runway of 1800 feet in any direction or two runways at right angles and each 2100 feet long. These may be, arranged in L, T, or X shape. In the latter case, all approaches must be clear, but if the field is good for taxiing in any direction, a total of thirty degrees out of 360 measured from the center of the field may be obstructed.

For grade "C" the corresponding dimensions are 1200 feet if open in all directions and 1400 feet if limited to two directions. A total obstruction of ninety degrees is permitted, but the ends of the runways must be unobstructed. The surface must be such as to permit emergency landings in wet weather.

Grade "D" fields are intended for emergency landings only. They should have at least one unobstructed runway 750 feet long and 300 feet wide.

All of these dimensions apply to fields at altitudes of less than three thousand feet. For fields at higher altitudes, the dimensions will have to be increased, the extent of the increase to be prescribed by the agency which has to do with registering landing fields.

Landing Fields Registered.

The Airway Section, office of the Chief of Air Service, War Department, Washington, D. C., is the registering agency for landing fields in this country. Descriptions of all landing fields should be sent to that office, and they should be notified of any changes, or of the abandonment of existing fields. They are also prepared to furnish advice regarding the design and organization of landing fields.

The information furnished by that office is published by them and is available to aviators all over the country. Each field is separately described on a sheet that fits a small loose-leaf notebook. The description includes a statement of the grade and class of the field, its location and altitude, a map of the surrounding country showing the location of the field, statement of ownership, description of obstacles, and any other information likely to be useful. An aviator planning a trip can take with him sheets for all the fields he is likely to encounter on his trip and on which he is likely to want to make a landing.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Tuesday, 31 July 1923, p.7:

Frank Sheehan, who has leased forty acres of land for an aviation field Southeast of Owensboro, flew to Owensboro Sunday from Dayton, Ohio. Mr. Sheehan left for Dayton yesterday afternoon and expects to bring four more planes to Owensboro.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 23 August 1923, p.3:

The first extended commercial flight of the Frank Sheehan aviation company, operating at the new flying field at Doyle station, two miles east of Owensboro, was made Wednesday

afternoon when William R. Cavin, of the Central Motor company, flew to Boonville, Ind., and return.

Piloted by one of the Sheehan aviators, Cavin first went for a half hour ride from the field to Rockport and back to Owensboro. Delighted with the sensation his first air ride had afforded him, Cavin persuaded the pilot to fly over to Boonville.



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 1 September 1923, p.7:

SHEEHAN AVIATION FIELD

*Passengers will be carried
Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays
for the following rates:*

<i>5-Minute Flight . . .</i>	<i>\$ 3.00</i>
<i>10-Minute Flight . . .</i>	<i>\$ 5.00</i>
<i>Stunt Flight</i>	<i>\$10.00</i>

*Drive out the Hardinsburg Road and turn in
the Pleasant Valley Road*



Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, Sunday, 13 February 1927, p.1:

FRANK SHEEHAN, MISS BEAL WED

**President of Aircraft Cor-
poration and Popular
Girl Marry in Evansville**

Miss Ruby Beal, a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R. C. Beal, of 1615 Pearl street, and Frank Sheehan, president of the Kentucky Aircraft corporation, of Owensboro, were married at 4 oclock Saturday afternoon in Evansville by Rev. J. F. Rake, pastor of the First Baptist church, at his residence. Mr. and Mrs. Sheehan are registered at McCurdy, but will return home Monday and will reside in East Fifth street.

Mrs. Sheehan is a very attractive young woman, very popular in Owensboro, with a wide circle of friends.

She was a member of the 1926 graduating class of the Owensboro senior high school, played two years on the girls' high school basketball team and was elected captain for her senior year.

Mr. Sheehan has been in Owensboro in the aviation business for several years, and is now turning out the only airplane in Kentucky and one of the few in the United States.



Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 14 February 1927, pp. 1 & 2:

PLANE CRASHES KILLING SHEEHAN

AIRCRAFT CORPORATION HEAD FALLS 1,000 FEET; CRUSHED IN FRONT OF CITY LIBRARY

Wing of Plane Crumbles, Parts Fall Along Path of
Descent, R. E. Massie Barely Misses Being Struck
—Sheehan's Young Bride, Waiting for Ride, Covers
Face When Plane Drops, Is Prostrated When
Learns Tragic End.

**CARELESSLY THROWN CIGARETTE STARTS
FIRE, PLANE BURNS AFTER BODY REMOVED**

Frank P. Sheehan, 26, president of the Kentucky Aircraft Corporation, was instantly killed at 9:42 o'clock this morning, when his plane, "Kentucky Cardinal," No. 5, fell from an altitude of approximately 1,000 feet, striking the middle of Frederica street, directly in front of the city library. Mr. Sheehan was making his first test flight in the plane, which was completed here last week.

Sitting in the pilot's pit, the doomed driver's last thoughts were of saving others. With all his vocal powers he yelled warning to pedestrians and car drivers as he neared the earth.

Mr. Sheehan was scheduled to make the test flight Saturday afternoon, but decided to postpone it until Sunday afternoon in order that it might not interfere with his plan to marry Miss Ruby Beal, 18, formerly his secretary. Marrying in Evansville Saturday afternoon, Mr. Sheehan and his bride remained there through Sunday, again postponing the flight.

Mr. and Mrs. Sheehan reached Owensboro, on their return from Evansville, late last night and spent the night at Hotel Owensboro. They checked out about 7:30 this morning, left their baggage at their apartment and went to the aviation field, where preparations for the test flight were made.

About 9:30 the plane took off with Mr. Sheehan its lone occupant, flying first southward and then swinging back to the north and following a course over the Ohio river and then over Owensboro.

PLANE'S DESCENT BEGINS

Hundreds of persons on the streets were watching the plane as it sailed over the business section, and many saw it break up and fall. Hundreds quickly gathered at the scene of disaster.

Sheehan first seemed to have realized that his plane was in trouble after having made the circle over the Ohio river, near Triplett street, when he headed his plane in a swing toward the business district of Owensboro, in trying to turn it back to the flying field near Doyle station. As he made the turn a strip of canvas was said by eye witnesses to have been seen to fly off one of the wings.

The machine was then noted to drop several feet, but was again righted and it continued on a southwestward course, flying about 600 to 700 feet in the air.

Passing over the city hall, the noise of the machine attracted Fire Chief Cureton and a number of the fire fighters, who watched its flight. The distress in which the plane was flying was not then apparent from the ground. It was seemingly having a perfect trip, when, all of a sudden, the upper right wing of the machine snapped off and then lower wing of the same side broke away.

MASSIE'S LIFE ENDANGERED

Fire Chief Cureton stated that the plane was about over Seventh street when the wing first broke. There parts of the wings fell in John Lyne's yard, while the crippled plane keeled over on the left side and whirled over and over again until it fell at Ninth and Frederica streets.

As the crumbling plane continued its last precipitous fall between Seventh and Ninth streets, broken parts were strewn along the path of its descent. Residents in that section of the city found parts of wings in their yard, and R. E. Massie barely missed being struck by the ill-fated craft: as it fell to the street.

John Barker, manager of the Hotel Whitely, who saw service in the World war as an airplane pilot and was one of the first pilots in the U.S. Mail service between Washington and New York, who was close friend of Sheehan, was at the aviation field this morning to watch the trial flight. Barker stated that Sheehan asked him what he thought about the plane and he replied that he did not think the wing pins were large enough and that it should have a drift wire.

WIFE WAITING FOR RIDE

Before Sheehan started up on the trip, Barker stated that Kenneth Mattingly, one of Sheehan's co-workers, took a parachute out of the bag and handed it over to the flyer, but the latter declined to take it with him. Mattingly said afterwards that Sheehan would have had no use for the parachute. He never took one on flights.

Barker and those on the field were watching the flight of the plane and they noticed the ship take a dip and go toward the earth. The mechanics and those who have made study of the planes knew at once what had happened and they hurriedly got into their cars and rushed to Owensboro from the field.

Mrs. Sheehan realized that the machine was not under the control of its pilot when she saw it whirl over several times, and, throwing her hands over her face, cried out, "Oh, I hope he's not hurt." She was waiting to go up on the second flight with her husband.

The tragic end of their romance was known to Mrs. Sheehan soon after the plane crashed. She was prostrated by grief and was taken at once to her apartment on East Fifth street, which they had recently leased and furnished.

Future of Plant Unknown

Directors of the Kentucky Aircraft corporation state that they do not know at this time what effect the death of Frank P. Sheehan will have on the company.

Sheehan had caused the test flight to be reserved for him, wishing to pilot the plane on her maiden voyage. He was exceedingly proud of the "Kentucky Cardinal," which had stood the most severe tests and was regarded as one of the sturdiest small planes on the market. He entered the fusilage happy and smiling. He headed into the stiffest winds with confidence in the product of his factory. He held practically all of the stock in the industry which is building a handsome factory and hangars.

The sale of this plane had been arranged. A man was expected this week from Florida, who, if it stood its tests, was to buy it and take the agency of the company for that state.

Fire Chief Rushes to Scene

Fire Chief Cureton got into his car as soon as he saw the plane fall and upon arriving at the scene took charge of the situation. The fire chief found Sheehan's body in the wreckage of his plane, crushed and mashed in the driver's seat. It was with difficulty that the body removed from its plane.

An ambulance from Davis and Glenn undertaking establishment was rushed to the scene as an employe of the place saw the plane fall. Coroner Delbert Glenn, was with the ambulance but its services were not needed as Sheehan was dead after hitting the ground.

Someone at Junior High school, who saw the big red plane crash called the fire department and reported the machine as having bursted into flame. Fire did not follow the crash. However, in the large crowd that had gathered in the street after the accident, someone dropped a lighted cigarette which ignited the gasoline and oil that had covered the street ;burning up the frame part of the machine. The first trucks had already returned to their respective houses from the first alarm and it was necessary that one be sent from Central station to extinguish the flames caused by some careless person in the crowd.

Mr. Sheehan received an application blank from an insurance company last Thursday. The application with the letter accompanied it, explaining that it covered aviation risks, is lying on his desk at the office now.

Scheduled to Speak Tonight

In a recent speech before the Rotary club his address on aviation made such an impression that Mr. Sheehan was invited to address the Chamber of Commerce at a meeting scheduled for tonight, which was cancelled immediately after the tragic end of the intrepid flyer, who could not only pilot the ship with such practiced and steady hand, but with equal facility on the platform so visualize its future that the skeptic was persuaded of the practicability of nis product.

That he was really getting the ear of the nation aeronautically was emphasized in the February number of The Slipstream, published at Dayton, O., which magazine devoted to aeronautics, carried a lengthy article about the Kentucky Cardinal and Owensboro, the city where it is manufactured.

Besides his widow Mr. Sheehan is survived by a sister Miss Mildred Sheehan, of New York City; an aunt Mrs. Frank P. Downer, of Bowling Green, and : a cousin. Roy Morningstar, former editor of the Park City Daily News, Bowling Green, now engaged in the advertising business in Louisville, who with his wife and her sister Miss Louise Hines, of Bowling Green. saw the beginning of Sheehan's last flight.

The body was taken to the Davis and Glenn undertaking establishment where it was prepared for burial.

The funeral will be conducted from the residence of Rev. B. G. Hodge, on Fourth street, Tuesday afternoon at 3 o'clock. The body will be taken to Louisville for burial in the Cave Hill cemetery. The pallbearers will be Irvin Friend, Kenneth Mattingly, Charlie Rogers, Billy Boyle, Edwin Bell, C. D. Bowyer, H. H. Lindsay, and Allan Gunter.

Sheehan Drew National Attention

Although but 26 years old, Frank P. Sheehan had forged ahead with the characteristic intrepidity of youth, and under his skillful guidance the airplane industry had already turned national attention toward Owensboro.

From the time less than four years ago when he first beheld the city as a winged steed bore him through the air, his career had been one succession of triumphs.

His far-seeing vision had builded for the city what promised to become a major industry, and the lavishness with which he poured his wealth to its development would have speedily justified the publicity it had attracted.

Born and reared in Ohio, at the expiration of the World war, after serving as inspector of airplane engines, the late president of the corporation saw the almost limitless possibilities of airplane and after a survey of the country made Owensboro his headquarters.

Kentucky Cardinal, His Pride

From his experience and the advice of the best aeronautical engineers he developed a plane which he named the Kentucky Cardinal, and it was this child of his brain and pride of his heart that fell with him to earth today.

It had on numerous occasions been subjected to the severest tests, but until today had come safely through them, for the design was fundamentally different, and developed after more than two years of intensive research and actual flying experimentation, was believed to have embodied in its construction a larger element of safety that incorporated into the building of the ordinary airplane.

Stands Severe Test

Not long ago a "Cardinal" turned in landing on the flying field east of the city, but the tough fiber of its body and wings successfully withstood the shock and the fearless pilot unhurt.

Mr. Sheehan made a radical change in design from earlier planes in the control system of his ship, and to increase the margin of safety had eliminated many of the features builded into other machines.

While spending most of his time here for more than a year he was so engrossed in business that he was not widely known in the city, for he went about his duties with such absence of ostentation and such studied application that he had little time for the mere social side of life.

Daily he was at his factory, his hand guiding the destinies of the corporation, and his alert mind intent on developing the Kentucky Cardinal into the best airplane that skill and money could build.

His constant thought was focused on his production and the rising cluster of buildings to house the growing industry, which already included the manufacture of ten panes, with plans for others when facilities permitted expansion of his business.



**Sixty Years of Owensboro, 1883-1943, William Foster Hayes
(Owensboro, KY: Messenger Job Printing Co., 1944) pp.137-139:**

THE AIRPORT

As early as 1926 Mr. Frank P. Sheehan started an airplane factory, or what he intended to develop into such a factory, on a small tract of land a short distance east of Owensboro adjoining what is known as the old Hunter Bell property. Unfortunately this project, in its mere beginning, came to a sad and sudden end. Only three or four planes had been made when in the spring of 1927 Mr. Sheehan, flying perhaps the fourth plane constructed, met a tragic death. His plane, to the horror of a number of observers, plunged into Frederica Street a short distance south of the Carnegie Public Library. He was the first and perhaps the only Owensboro victim of an airplane accident.

Mr. Sheehan's death terminated the incipient factory enterprise, and there was no related activity at the site for several years. But in 1933 the property (29 acres), having passed into the hands of the Kentucky Aircraft Corporation, of which Mr. E. L. Newton was the principal officer, was leased by that corporation to the City of Owensboro for use and development as a municipal airport.

After several others had held the position, Mr. L. S. Cox, Jr., was employed by the city as manager of the airport. This was about 1940, during the administration of Mayor Harry C. Smith. About two years later, Mr. Walter G. Hoagland, Jr., became associated with Mr. Cox and they have continued to operate as a partnership under the name of Owensboro Aviation. Then in the fall of 1943 the Kentucky Aircraft Corporation sold all its assets, including the tract above mentioned, to this partnership.

In October, 1942, the city, acting through Mayor Fred Weir and Commissioner Glenn Lovern, bought from Junius Bell and E. C. Bell 127.62 acres of land adjoining the small airport, for the purpose of enlarging it. The purchase price was \$21,341.80. In the meantime Mr. Cox and his partner and employees had been putting the port in good condition and enlarging its facilities. An article in the local paper of May 31, 1942, states that the Aviation Company owned seventeen planes, besides which five others owned by different persons were kept at the airport. Under an arrangement with the Civil Aeronautics Authority ten students were then enrolled in a civilian Pilot Training course. Mr. Cox was and is the chief pilot and general manager of the airport. The company had twelve paid employees, including five flight instructors with government ratings. On July 20, 1943, 39 secondary war training service pilots were graduated at the local school, after a two months' course in secondary training.

For a year or more before that the alert Chamber of Commerce had been making independent efforts to secure the establishment of a larger and federal airport here. A committee

had been working on the plan and negotiations had been carried on with officials, in part by trips to Washington by the Secretary of the Chamber and by several prominent citizens. On June 14, 1943, excited interest was created by the announcement that \$600,000.00 had been allocated for the construction of a new airport for Owensboro and Daviess County and the allocation approved by the Aircraft Approval Board.

This sum was to be for construction alone and was awarded on condition that the city and county acquire and furnish a suitable tract of land, of about 600 acres, for the purpose. For several months following that announcement that subject was the chief one of local interest in our press and with the public. An airport board was created, of which Milford Purdy was chairman, and was sworn in by Mayor Weir October 7th. In November, the City Board of Commissioners pledged \$50,000.00 towards the purchase of a site. The airport board sought to raise the remainder of the necessary fund by popular subscription. It was thought at first that the site would cost \$200,000.00, but later it was said that the acreage might be reduced, and the price correspondingly to \$125,000.00. Over \$60,000.00 was in fact subscribed for the project by many individuals.

The whole enterprise became the subject of much controversy. A site near Rome was contemplated, and later one at Dermot. In both cases opposition developed, and in the latter a suit was instituted by owners of land at the proposed site to prevent its appropriation for the purpose.

Later, as per announcement of April 20, 1944, whether as a result of the delay or the controversy or both, or for whatever reason, the federal authorities withdrew their offer, and the whole ambitious project has come to an end, at least for the present.



A History of Owensboro and Daviess County, Kentucky,
Hugh O. Potter, Daviess County Historical Society, Owensboro, KY
(Montgomery, AL: Herff Jones-Paragon Publishing, 1974):

pp.127-128

In 1926 Frank Sheehan, twenty-six and the son of an early official of the Glenmore Distilleries, came to Owensboro from Louisville with a new idea for airplane construction and the money to give his dream a chance to come true. The plant was about three-fourths completed, at the intersection of the Pleasant Valley road and the L. & N. railroad, east of Owensboro, on January 23, 1927, when the Owensboro Messenger published a special section devoted to the new Kentucky Cardinal plane which was soon to go into regular production. Four experimental versions had been completed and by February 14, 1927, the first Kentucky Cardinal made in Daviess county was ready to be shown to prospective purchasers.

Sheehan and his secretary, the attractive Miss Ruby Beal, had gone to Evansville two days before and were married there. (She would later become Mrs. E. L. Newton, wife of a geologist who became wealthy when he was instrumental in opening the Birk City Oil pool, and lose her life in an automobile collision between Henderson and Evansville.)

On the morning of February 14, Sheehan climbed into one of his new planes and started a demonstration flight over Owensboro. The plane, built with a welded tubular steel frame, had been described by a New York University aeronautical engineer as being virtually crash-proof and of a remarkable design. But, something went wrong as Sheehan and his plane circled south from over the Ohio River and flew over the center of the business district of Owensboro. As the flying

machine passed over the post office at Fifth and Frederica eyewitnesses said they saw the right wings, top and bottom, suddenly tear loose from the fuselage.

Some people said Sheehan steered the crippled plane so that it would miss the homes and other buildings on Frederica street. Whether or not he maintained any control over its flight on the way down, the plane hit in the street, just in front of the old Public library at Ninth and Frederica (later the home of the Owensboro Area Museum) and a short distance from the then location of Owensboro Junior High school.

Frank Sheehan died instantly and Owensboro's first and only airplane manufacturing enterprise came to a sudden and tragic end.

pp.175-176:

The air age dawned in Owensboro in 1913 when Lincoln Beachey, pioneer aviator and stunt pilot, brought his primitive plane to the Daviess county fairground for an exhibition flight. From then until 1926, when Frank Sheehan came here from Louisville with a new idea for building airplanes with metal tubing instead of wooden frames, most flying around and above Daviess county was done by World War I planes, owned and operated by barnstorming pilots who made their way by presenting air shows and taking passengers for sight-seeing trips. Sheehan, who financed his own operations, including a temporary shop at Second and Triplett streets until two buildings could be erected at an airfield on the Pleasant Valley road at the L. & N. railroad, lost his life while test-flying one of his single-motored planes. The date was February 14, 1927.

The need for an Owensboro airfield was recognized by the city officials who leased the field for use by local individuals and firms. During World War II it was used for pilot training.

When Eastern Airlines agreed to add Owensboro to its service area in October of 1947, a movement was started to build a \$900,000 airport. With federal financial assistance assured, the city and county officials agreed to jointly underwrite the remainder of the cost of a modern terminal and field, with the city issuing \$400,000 worth of bonds. Both local governments cooperated to retire the bonds over a period of 20 years.

On March 1, 1951, Eastern passenger and freight service was inaugurated with proper ceremonies. It continued for thirteen years and twelve days, when Eastern withdrew in order to concentrate on longer, more profitable flights with its new and larger jet planes. In October 1955 Ozark Airlines had begun serving Owensboro and when Eastern was permitted by the federal aviation authority to abandon Owensboro, it took over the task of serving the Owensboro area's air transportation needs as the sole regularly scheduled carrier.

In addition to Ozark, two local air services operate from the Owensboro-Daviess County Airport and a number of industrial firms and individuals use the field as their aviation base of operations. Over the years the field has been enlarged, runways lengthened and instruments have been installed at federal expense to make the field safer and more useful.

As a result of Frank Sheehan starting an airplane factory in Owensboro, a number of young men became interested in flying. One of them, Thomas K. Mattingly, who served Eastern Airlines for 40 years as a maintenance supervisor in St. Louis, Chicago and Miami, was the father of Astronaut Thomas K. Mattingly, II, who piloted the Apollo 16 command module around the moon in April of 1972 while his crewmates landed and conducted various experiments before rejoining him for the trip back to earth.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 4 December 1980, p.4:

Readers write: Pilot Sheehan researched

Editor: I am currently doing a research paper on Frank P. Sheehan, the airplane pilot who crashed his plane on the corner of 9th and Frederica in 1927. I have a considerable amount of information on the subject. However, I am always interested in any personal accounts regarding Sheehan. If you knew Sheehan, worked for Sheehan, or just have some information you feel might be of some interest, I would be more than delighted to talk with you.

The most important items I am searching for are any pictures concerning Sheehan. These could be pictures of Sheehan, his airplane factory, the plane crash, his planes (Kentucky Cardinal), or his wife, Ruby Beal Sheehan. I only wish to make copies of the originals and return the originals to their owner. If anybody has any information or pictures, please leave your name at the Kentucky Room of the Public Library or contact me at home.

Tommy Igleheart 115 W. 20th St., Owensboro.



**Owensboro: The City on the Yellow Banks, Lee A. & Aloma W. Dew
(Bowling Green, KY: Rivendell Publications, 1988) pp.136 & 141:**

Another new type of transportation technology had already captured the fancy of the citizens of Owensboro. For several years the people of the Yellow Banks had read about airplanes, and had followed the development of this new invention from the first flights of the Wright Brothers in 1903. Airplanes became a feature of cartoons, advertisements, and even Christmas, with Santa Claus adopting this new mode of travel—but few in Owensboro had ever seen one. Thus, when it was announced that a "barnstormer" named Lincoln Beachey would bring his airplane to Owensboro as the special attraction for the County Fair in 1913, it guaranteed a crowd. Beachey treated his audience to all sorts of "stunts," and the people of Owensboro, as with the rest of the nation, were awed by the marvel of flight. For the next dozen years, "barnstormers" were the only flyers to visit Owensboro, while larger cities built airports and the Post Office began an airmail service. All this changed in 1926 when a visionary young man named Frank Sheehan arrived in Owensboro from Louisville with the idea of building airplanes with frames made of lightweight metal tubes or pipes, rather than the wooden frames customary at that time.

Sheehan set up a temporary office and workshop at Second and Triplett streets, and began construction of a factory on Pleasant Valley Road east of the city, where he announced he would begin production of his modernistic aircraft, the "Kentucky Cardinal." Soon the first prototypes of the Kentucky Cardinal were assembled; and it was a remarkable aircraft, a far cry from the flimsy-looking planes of World War I vintage to which most Owensboroans were accustomed. The "Cardinal" was a single-engined craft, with sleek lines which even today would be recognized as an efficient design. For the late 1920's it was revolutionary indeed, and many who saw it predicted success for Sheehan, and the development of Owensboro into a major aircraft manufacturing center.

These dreams came crashing down on February 14, 1927 when Sheehan, taking one of the new aircraft up on a test flight, fell to earth and was killed, crashing his plane into Frederica Street directly in front of the Carnegie Library. A fatal flaw in the aircraft's design had cost Sheehan his life and Owensboro its hoped-for position of primacy in the booming aircraft production business.



A young man with a vision of the future came to Owensboro in 1926 with the idea of building airplanes with frames made of lightweight metal tubes or pipes rather than the wooden frames customary at the time. Frank Sheehan's modernistic aircraft was called the "Kentucky Cardinal" and is seen in this rare photograph.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 9 September 1989, pp.1A & 8A:

Man wants to rebuild plane

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

Frank Sheehan's Kentucky Cardinal may fly again after 70 years.

Sheehan, president of the Owensboro-based Kentucky Aircraft Corp., pinned his future on his airplane design, called the Kentucky Cardinal. The model he was testing at 9:30 a.m. on Feb. 14, 1927, crashed at Ninth and Frederica streets in Owensboro.

Sheehan, a 26-year-old ex-barnstormer, died in the crash. And Owensboro's fledgling aviation industry died with him.

Now an emergency room physician and former fighter pilot from Brownsville hopes to rebuild the Cardinal and fly it above the crash site.

"It might be a real kick to retrace his route on Valentine's Day," Dr. James S.W. Wilson said Friday. "Maybe 1997 would be a good date to shoot for."

Wilson, Ralph Fentress, a Grayson County aircraft restorer, and Jim McCormick of Owensboro plan to build two full-scale models of Sheehan's Cardinal.

One, Wilson said, would be built exactly like the one that crashed on Frederica Street. It would be offered to the Owensboro Area Museum. The other would be modified to meet Federal Aviation Administration standards so it could be flown, he said.

Wilson said the museum-quality biplane would cost between \$35,000 and \$55,000. The other would cost from \$75,000 to \$100,000, he said.

The Cardinal was a 24-foot-long two-seater with a wing spread of 29 feet. Empty, it weighed 1,000 pounds. It had a 90-horsepower engine, could travel at speeds of 105 miles per hour and had a cruising range of 400 miles.

Sheehan's asking price was \$1,980.

"It was kind of heavy for its day," Wilson said. "It was mostly wooden, but there was some metal, some steel in it."

Today's version would be classified as an experimental aircraft, he said. The Cardinal could not be built for sale, he said. Construction is expected to take three years.

Don Boarman, director of the Owensboro Area Museum, said, "We certainly would want it. It would be a board decision, though, because there would be expenses involved. I don't know if we could suspend it from our existing ceiling."

The Sheehan story is "a significant part of our history," Boarman said.

"So much of it has been lost. The plane belongs here. And we're enthusiastic about it." Wilson is also researching the Sheehan story for a book he's writing on the history of aviation in Kentucky. It has romantic undertones that have made the crash date ironic.

Sheehan, son of a former Glenmore Distilling Co. executive, had served in World War I as an airplane engine inspector. In 1923, he moved to the Owensboro area to fly newspapers from Evansville to Henderson. Then he and Kenneth Mattingly barnstormed through 31,000 miles of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi.

A show they performed here in 1923 drew 3,000 people.

Two days before the crash, Sheehan married his secretary, 18-year-old Ruby Beal, former star of the Owensboro High School Red Angels basketball team. She was a bride and widow within 48 hours. The mix of joy and sorrow made the legend grow.

On Valentine's Day, they were moving from the Hotel Owensboro to their new apartment. Sheehan left for a few minutes to test the fifth plane off his assembly line, one that had been bought by a Florida man.

The bright red Cardinal was waiting at the company's hangar in a field by the railroad tracks on Daniels Lane. As always, Sheehan waved off the parachute. He promised his bride a ride when he returned from the test run.

Advertisements called the plane "almost crash proof." It was built of spruce and balsa wood and "high-quality steel."

Sheehan flew south into a stiff wind. Then he turned over Triplett Street, heading back toward the Ohio River. As he began to circle over the river and head back to the 30-acre airfield, a strip of canvas ripped from one of the wings.

Hundreds of people on the streets stopped to watch. Firefighters estimated that Sheehan was flying at 600 feet. Then over Seventh Street, the upper right wing snapped off. Seconds later, the lower right wing followed.

Mrs. Sheehan could see the plane tumbling miles away. "Oh, I hope he's not hurt," she cried.

Sheehan yelled from the sky for people to clear the street.

At 9:42 a.m., he slammed into Frederica Street, just south of Ninth Street.

Hundreds of people rushed to the scene. As Sheehan's body was being taken away, someone dropped a cigarette into gasoline on the street, and the plane wreckage was engulfed in flames.

"I hope death finds me in the cockpit of an airplane when my time comes," Sheehan had once said. He wanted to be cremated and his ashes scattered to the winds from a plane. But his family buried him in Louisville's Cave Hill Cemetery.

He was to have addressed the Chamber of Commerce that night on the future of the aviation industry in Owensboro – a future that ended with his death.

"This area would have been totally different industrially today if he had lived," Wilson said.

None of the 10 Cardinals that were on the assembly line that day is still in existence, he said.

Wilson spent months locating the patent and plans for the plane in Washington. In rebuilding it, he said, he has to be careful not to build in the same flaw that caused the fatal crash.

So Wilson will build the plane first as a computer model and let the computer search for flaws in the design.

Wilson said he took his first airplane ride 50 years ago as a 4-year-old in Grayson County. In 1962, he was a combat pilot and was shot down in Vietnam. His flying career ended with the injuries suffered in that crash, he said.

"But I still fly some," Wilson said. "I want to take that plane up. Aviation is not a coward's game. I was born at the wrong time. If I had been born soon enough, I would have been in World War I with a scarf around my neck, goggles on my face in an open-cockpit plane."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 13 September 1989, p.7A:

READERS WRITE: Sheehan crash recalled

Editor:

The article in Saturday's Messenger-Inquirer on Frank Sheehan caused many memories to come flooding back, as I recall that tragedy quite clearly.

I was a student at the old junior high school, just south of the crash site when word came about the accident. Many teachers and pupils rushed out to see it, but our teacher, Mrs. Foley, told us to stay seated, so I did not see the crash site. I recall part of the poem I wrote (back then) but I cannot recall it all. It went like this:

"The "Kentucky Cardinal No. 5 crashed to earth one fatal day. Frank Sheehan, the pilot, was killed in this plane as it crushed his life away.

"His bride of two days saw the fate of her mate as she stood at the flying field three miles away. She jumped in a truck and started to come, but Sheehan was being taken away."

It was a day of great excitement for the young students, but one of sadness for the teachers.

A piece of the canvas from a wing was salvaged by one of my sisters, and many times I've looked at it and recalled that day very clearly.

The paper ran a picture of Mr. Frank Sheehan and he was a very handsome man. It was quite some time before I could dismiss this tragedy from my young mind.

Opal I. Frakes 3924 Brentwood Drive, Owensboro



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Thursday, 31 May 1990, pp.1C & 6:

Pilot races with time to find past

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

Jim McCormick, an Owensboro pilot and former hydroplane racer, learned to fly at the airfield Frank Sheehan built more than 60 years ago. And for the past 35 years, McCormick has been intrigued with Sheehan, his company and the biplane it built, the Kentucky Cardinal.

This year, McCormick is trying to bring as many of the old Kentucky Aircraft Corp. employees as he can find back to Owensboro for a day or two of discussions about the company and its planes.

Eventually, McCormick hopes to build and fly a replica of the Cardinal. And he wants to write a book about Sheehan and his company.

But time is working against him.

Sheehan died on Valentine's Day, 1927, when his plane crashed on Frederica Street, just south of the intersection with Ninth Street. And the youngest of his employees are now around 80.

"I want to get them together before it's too late," McCormick said Wednesday.

He's tracked down Irvin Friend, now 85, who was vice president of the company. Friend will be returning to Owensboro for a visit, McCormick said.

In 1947, when McCormick was 14, he began taking flying lessons at the airfield by the railroad tracks on Daniels Lane. That was the field Sheehan had built. The buildings where the Kentucky Cardinals were built 20 years earlier still stood on the edge of the field, he recalls.

Sheehan, who died at age 26, is a colorful figure in local aviation lore. The son of a former Glenmore Distilling Co. executive had served in World War I as an airplane engine inspector.

In 1923, he was flying newspapers between Evansville and Henderson. Later that year, Sheehan and Kenneth Mattingly, another partner in Kentucky Aircraft, barnstormed through Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi.

A couple of years later, they began building planes. The Cardinal was a 24-foot-long three-seater with a wing spread of 29 feet. Empty, it weighed 1,000 pounds. It had a 90-horsepower engine, could travel at speeds up to 105 miles an hour and had a cruising range of 400 miles.

The asking price was \$1,980.

It was built of spruce and balsa wood with "high-quality steel." Advertisements called it "almost crash proof."

But "almost" doesn't count.

On Feb. 14, 1927, Sheehan and his 18-year-old bride, the former Ruby Beal, checked out of the honeymoon suite at the Hotel Owensboro, which is now being razed.

They were to move into their new apartment. But Sheehan's fifth plane was coming off the assembly line and he wanted to test it. So they drove to the field east of Owensboro.

He promised his bride a ride when he returned. But Sheehan didn't return. And the heartbreak became a local legend.

"My mother went to school with Ruby Beal," McCormick said. "And I grew up with Roy Newton, her son by a second marriage."

Sheehan was flying at 600 feet above Owensboro when the upper right wing, and then the lower, snapped off. He yelled for people to clear the street just before he crashed and died at 9:42 a.m.

Sheehan was to have addressed the Chamber of Commerce that night on the future of the aviation industry in Owensboro - a future that died that morning.

A few months later, the company's assets were sold to Robertson Aircraft Corp. of St. Louis, McCormick said. Legend says Charles Lindberg negotiated the sale. McCormick is looking for evidence to either prove or disprove that.

He wants to build a model of the plane for the Owensboro Area Museum and then build a replica he can fly.

Last year, Dr. James S.W. Wilson of Brownsville was in town talking about similar plans. Both men plan books and articles on Sheehan and his company.

What McCormick needs is a set of plans for the Cardinal. They are not on file with any agencies in Washington, he said.

"There's rumored to be a set of plans around here," McCormick said.

Anyone with information on Sheehan, the company or the plane can contact McCormick, Shelia Heflin in the Kentucky Room of the Owensboro-Daviess County Public Library or Dillus Moseley at the Owensboro Area Museum.

"I'm doing this in conjunction with the museum and the library," McCormick said. "This is a part of Daviess County history we need to preserve."



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 17 February 1992, pp.1C & 3C:

Day of dreams ended in flames

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

Valentine's Day 1927 went down in local history as the day dreams died.

Ruby Beal, 18-year-old former star of the Owensboro High School Red Angels - as the girls' basketball team was then known - went from bride to widow in less than 48 hours.

And Owensboro's dream of becoming an airplane manufacturing center crashed into Frederica Street in front of the Owensboro Museum of Fine Art that Monday morning.

Frank Sheehan, 26-year-old president of the newly founded Kentucky Aircraft Corp., had planned a test flight of the fifth plane off his new assembly line on Saturday, Feb. 12.

But that was the day he married Beal, his secretary, in Evansville. They honeymooned there Saturday night and returned to the Hotel Owensboro Sunday afternoon.

Monday morning, the couple checked out at 7:30 a.m. They were to move into their new apartment. But the bright red Kentucky Cardinal No. 5 biplane - there were 10 on Sheehan's assembly line - already had been sold to a Florida man who was on his way to Owensboro to pick it up.

Someone else could have tested it. But Sheehan, a former barnstormer, wanted to do it himself. The Sheehans stopped at the Hotel Whitely across from Union Station to pick up John Barker, the hotel manager and a friend of Sheehan's.

Then they drove out to what was called Sheehan's Field, a new airport with a sod runway near Doyle Station – at Daniels Lane and the L&N tracks.

It was chilly and windy that day. Kenneth Mattingly, Sheehan's partner, took a parachute out of a bag and handed it to him. But Sheehan, who never used a parachute, waved it away.

Smiling, he climbed into the cockpit and promised his bride a ride as soon as he finished the test run.

The biplane was 24 feet long with a wing spread of 29 feet. Empty, it weighed 1,000 pounds. Its 90-horsepower engine powered it at speeds up to 105 miles per hour with a cruising range of 400 miles.

The asking price for the plane that advertisements called "almost crash proof" was \$1,980. It was built of spruce and balsa wood and high-quality steel.

With employees and friends waving, Sheehan lifted off at 9:30 am., flying south into a stiff wind. Then he turned above Triplett Street, heading back toward the river.

As he began to circle over the Ohio to head back to the 30-acre airstrip, people watching from the streets below saw a strip of canvas rip from one of the wings.

The plane came over downtown heading toward the southwest. Airplanes were still a novelty then. Hundreds of people stopped to watch.

Fire Chief E.E. Cureton and several firefighters were among those watching. They estimated the plane was flying at 600 to 700 feet and thought it was a perfect flight.

When Sheehan was over Seventh Street, the upper right wing snapped off. Seconds later, the lower right wing followed, part of it landing in a yard.

Out at the airfield, Ruby Beal Sheehan and the others saw the plane begin to tumble. As they ran for their cars, she cried, "Oh, I hope he's not hurt."

Those on Frederica Street heard Sheehan yelling for them to clear the street.

Hillard Gary, a trucker for Koll Grocery, was heading south on Frederica at 9:42 a.m. Suddenly, 10 feet ahead of him, just south of Ninth Street, the Cardinal smashed into Frederica. Gary braked and missed the wreckage by a couple of feet.

People came running from Owensboro Junior High across the street and the Carnegie Library. As the ambulance from the Daviess and Glenn undertaking establishment pulled up, hundreds of people began arriving from all over the city.

Cureton took charge of the scene and directed the work of removing Sheehan's broken body from the wreckage. After Sheehan was removed, the crowd moved in closer for a look. Someone dropped a lighted cigarette into the gas and oil on the street and the wreckage was engulfed in flames.

Back on Sheehan's desk was an incomplete aviation insurance application he had received shortly before his wedding and meant to fill out later.

Roy Morningstar, a cousin, recalled a conversation with Sheehan. "I hope death finds me in the cockpit of an airplane when my time comes," the aviator had said.

The Chamber of Commerce canceled its meeting that night. Sheehan was to be the guest speaker, talking about the city's future in the growing aviation industry.

He was the son of a former Glenmore Distilling Co. executive, a Louisville native who had served in World War I as an airplane engine inspector.

In 1923, Sheehan and Mattingly came to the area to fly newspapers from the Evansville Press to Henderson. They later barnstormed, carrying passengers some 31,000 miles in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee and Mississippi without an accident.

A show they put on here in 1923 attracted a crowd of 3,000.

Sheehan had said he wanted to be cremated and have his ashes scattered to the winds from a plane high above the earth. But he was buried in Louisville's Cave Hill Cemetery.

Ruby Beal Sheehan later remarried, this time to E.L. Newton, a local oil producer. In 1932, a son, Roy, was born.

But tragedy waited. On Nov. 3, 1946, the Newtons were returning to Owensboro from an afternoon in Evansville. About half a mile north of Ellis Park, a car pulled directly into the path of the Newton car. There were three cars involved before the chain-reaction wreck ended and three people were dead.

One of them was 37-year-old Ruby Beal Sheehan Newton.

A few years later, Owensboro and Daviess County abandoned Sheehan's old airport for a modern facility on the other side of town.

And it's been years since anybody's talked about manufacturing airplanes in Owensboro.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Monday, 17 February 1992, p.1C:

Story inspires plan for book, replica

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

Jim McCormick has been fascinated by the Frank Sheehan story as long as he can remember.

His mother went to school with Ruby Beal Sheehan, the pilot's widow. McCormick grew up with Roy Newton, her son by a second marriage. And McCormick learned to fly at Sheehan's old airfield east of town in 1947 when he was 14.

Through the years, he has become probably the greatest authority on Frank Sheehan and his airplane manufacturing business.

The retired unlimited hydroplane racer and Edward Peck, a Louisville aviation historian, are writing a history of Sheehan's Owensboro-based Kentucky Aircraft Corp. And McCormick wants to build a replica of the company's Kentucky Cardinal biplane.

But there's a problem. He can't find a copy of the blueprints anywhere.

McCormick's research has taken him to Plantation, Fla., where he found Irwin Friend, now in his late 80s, who joined the company in the beginning when Sheehan started it in New York.

"He came with him as vice president when Sheehan moved here," McCormick said.

"I've collected a great amount of history" on Sheehan and his company, he said. "The only thing I don't have are the plans for the actual airplane. And there is no way to replicate it from the pictures I have."

McCormick has checked every place he can think of. The Smithsonian Institution doesn't have them. None of Sheehan's associates who are still living have them.

"I've heard rumors of a set in an attic on Fifth Street," he said. "But I'm not going down Fifth Street knocking on doors. The building where the planes were designed is on Fifth Street. But it doesn't have an attic."

Anyone who knows where to find the plans can contact McCormick at Hunter-Douglas Components Division - 926-6665.



Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY, Sunday, 16 June 1996, p.2B:

A magnificent man and his flying machines

Aviator could have changed state's history

By Byron Crawford, Columnist

OWENSBORO, Ky. – This story line could have been scripted in I Hollywood:

The Roaring Twenties, a wealthy, handsome young pilot, a beautiful woman torn between two business partners who loved her, a Valentine's Day tragedy that altered aviation history, and even a sunken treasure.

Dr. Jim Wilson of Louisville, author of the forthcoming book "Near Misses – The History of Kentucky Aviation," stood on the bank of the Ohio River at the end of Daniels Lane in Owensboro last week, looking over the spot where he thinks several 1920s-vintage aircraft engines and pieces of planes rest on the river bottom.

Wilson, an aviation physiologist and decorated fighter pilot, thinks that the death of Frank P. Sheehan Jr. in a 1927 plane crash in Owensboro may have been the most significant event in Kentucky's early aviation history.

If Sheehan had lived, Wilson says, Owensboro almost certainly would have become one of America's important aircraft-manufacturing centers. Sheehan, the multimillionaire son of a Louisville distiller, loved flying even as a child. He studied engineering at the University of Michigan, served a stint in the Marine Corps and was a barnstormer in the early 1920s.

By 1925 he had started an airplane-manufacturing company in Owensboro that would build a plane of his own design – the red and gray "Kentucky Cardinal."

Full-page ads and banner headlines in the Owensboro Messenger-Enquirer heralded the opening in 1927 of Kentucky Cardinal Aircraft Corp., the state's first airplane factory. Thirty acres on the eastern edge of Owensboro surrounded the hangars, machine shops and airstrip where three-seated, bi-wing planes would be assembled and flown.

"Sheehan was already headed toward monoplanes," Wilson said. "He had a bunch of patents. He was an engine expert and knew a lot about alloys and controls. His ... design concepts were far ahead of their time. His idea was an airplane in every cow pasture, and an assembly-line operation just as Henry Ford had done with automobiles. And he had the money and the brain to do it."

By February 1927, the Kentucky Cardinal factory had 35 employees. Five planes had been built and about 10 others were in production. Romance had blossomed between the 26-year-old Sheehan and his 19-year-old secretary, Ruby Beale, who was among Owensboro's prettiest young women.

She had been romantically involved with Sheehan's partner, but she chose Sheehan when he proposed marriage.

The quiet wedding took place on Feb. 12, 1927. Two days later, on Valentine's Day, Ruby Sheehan waited near the airstrip while her new husband took one of his planes up for a test flight. He planned to take her for a ride in the plane later, but he never returned.

There was a malfunction, a crash and fire. Sheehan died instantly after yelling to onlookers to move away, just before his plane went down at Ninth and Fredric in Owensboro. He is buried Louisville's Cave Hill Cemetery.

Ruby Sheehan eventually moved to Atlanta, remarried years some later and has since died.

The Kentucky Cardinal a factory went out of business. When the property was bought years later by another company, much factory's contents were hauled away and dumped into the Ohio.

Wilson was told by the late Charles Robey, who had been chief mechanic at the factory, that perhaps as many as 10 Curtiss-Wright OX5 aircraft engines and pieces of several planes in various stages of production were in the river at the end of Daniels Lane.

"I don't know how deep the water is here," Wilson said. "But I believe the engines may still be here, and no telling what else that may be salvageable. Once you get an engine out and get it to run ... you've got the potential of rebuilding Frank Sheehan's Kentucky Cardinal."

[Article has four photographs.]



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Saturday, 11 June 2005, pp.1A & 2A:

Griffith has vivid memories of plane crash on Frederica
'I still think about it,' former resident says

By Keith Lawrence, Messenger-Inquirer

Nearly 80 years have passed.

But Ole Griffith remembers Valentine's Day 1927 like it was yesterday.

How can you forget your first plane crash? Griffith was almost 6, sitting on the front porch of the old First Presbyterian Church manse at 108 W. Seventh St. with his father, the Rev. O. Curtis Griffith, eagerly awaiting the flight of Kentucky Cardinal No. 5.

Frank Sheehan, a 26-year-old former barnstormer from Louisville, was building the bright-red biplanes at his Kentucky Aircraft Corp. on Daniels Lane.

The planes, made of spruce and balsa wood and high-quality steel, were 24 feet long with a wing spread of 29 feet. Empty, they weighed 1,000 pounds.

The 90-horsepower engine powered the planes at speeds up to 105 mph with a cruising range of 400 miles. The asking price for the plane that advertisements called "almost crash proof" was \$1,980.

"That was the first plane I saw up close," Griffith said Thursday.

It had been on display at the Chalmers-Maxwell auto dealership at Fifth and Frederica streets, he said. "I pestered Dad every day to take me down to see it," Griffith said. "They had steps beside so you could climb up and look into the cockpit."

Sheehan had planned to take the plane, the fifth off his assembly line, up for a test flight Feb. 12, a Saturday.

But that was the day he married his secretary, Ruby Beal, an 18-year-old former star of the Owensboro High School Red Angels basketball team.

They honeymooned in Evansville on Saturday night and returned to the Hotel Owensboro on Sunday afternoon. Monday morning, the couple checked out at 7:30 a.m. to move into their new apartment.

But the Kentucky Cardinal No. 5 – there were 10 on Sheehan's assembly line – already had been sold to a Florida man who was on his way to Owensboro to pick it up.

Test flight

Someone else could have tested it. But Sheehan wanted to do it himself.

So, he and his bride drove out to what was called Sheehan's Field, a new airport with a sod runway at Daniels Lane and the L&N tracks.

It was chilly and windy.

Kenneth Mattingly, Sheehan's partner, took a parachute out of a bag and handed it to him. But Sheehan waved it away.

Smiling, he climbed into the cockpit and promised his bride a ride as soon as he finished the test run.

"Dad had learned that he was going to fly over Owensboro," Griffith said. "And he knew how much I wanted to see it."

So, they sat on their front porch, which faced north, anxiously waiting.

As Sheehan began to circle over the Ohio River to head back to the 30-acre airstrip, people watching from the streets below saw a strip of canvas rip from one of the wings.

"I saw something drop off the plane," Griffith said. "In those days, planes would fly over town and drop Baby Ruth candy bars on little parachutes. I thought that's what it was."

The plane came over downtown heading toward the southwest. Hundreds of people stopped to watch.

Fire Chief E.E. Cureton estimated that the plane was at an altitude of 600 to 700 feet.

But when Sheehan came over Seventh Street, the upper right wing snapped off.

Seconds later, the lower right wing followed, part of it landing in a yard.

"A piece of the wood fell in our back yard," Griffith said. "I kept a splinter with red paint until I went into service in World War II. I don't know what happened to it then."

Out at the airfield, Ruby Beal Sheehan ran for her car, crying, "Oh, I hope he's not hurt."

Newspaper accounts say that those on Frederica Street heard Sheehan yelling for them to clear the street.

"I don't remember that," Griffith said. "I'd be surprised if they could hear him over the engine."

Hillard Gary, a trucker for Koll Grocery, was heading south on Frederica at 9:42 a.m. Suddenly, 10 feet ahead of him, just south of Ninth Street, the Cardinal smashed into Frederica.

Gary braked and missed the wreckage by a couple of feet.

People came running from Owensboro Junior High across the street and the Carnegie Library.

As the ambulance from the Daviess and Glenn funeral home pulled up, hundreds of people began arriving from all over the city - including the Griffiths.

`I still think about it'

"I can't remember if we drove or walked," Griffith said. "But Dad took me down there. I was so scared I wouldn't even go to the bathroom without Mother or Dad for two or three days. I still think about it."

But he wasn't too traumatized.

Griffith entered the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II and logged 4,000 hours as a pilot of B-25s, B-17s, B-24s and jet fighters during a 30-year career.

He retired as a colonel and is a past president of the American Aviation Historical Society.

"I think it was Charles Lindberg's flight to Paris three months later (May 1927) that inspired me," Griffith said. "But I was always adventurous. They tell me when I was about 2 1/2 they caught me riding my tricycle down the trolley tracks on Frederica."

Griffith lives in Phoenix now. His family lived in Owensboro from 1923 to 1928, while his father was pastor of First Presbyterian.

They moved from here to Erie, Pa. And Griffith didn't return until this week.

His brother, the Rev. John D. Griffith, who was born after the family left Owensboro, lives here now.

"I came back for my nephew's wedding," Ole Griffith said. "And I wanted to check my memories of the crash with what the newspapers reported back then."

After spending time in the Kentucky Room at the Daviess County Public Library, Griffith said he was amazed at how close his memory of the crash was to what was reported.

There was one difference, however.

He remembers an explosion when the plane crashed.

But the newspapers reported that the fire came later.

After Sheehan's broken body was removed from the wreckage, the stories said, the crowd moved in closer for a look.

That's when someone dropped a lighted cigarette into the gas and oil on the street and the wreckage was engulfed in flames.



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 9 February 2011, p.1D:



Plane crash on Frederica Street at Ninth Street. The Carnegie Public Library (now Owensboro Museum of Fine Art) is on right of photo. Below: Plane crash on Frederica Street, looking northwest.



This biplane crashed at Ninth and Frederica streets on Valentine's Day 1927, killing the pilot Frank Sheehan, a former barnstormer. Sheehan, formerly of Louisville, was president of Kentucky Aircraft Corp. and planned to make Owensboro a center for aviation manufacturing. He built his airplanes on Daniels Lane by Sheehan Field, a new airport with a sod runway situated between Daniels Lane and Pleasant Valley Road. This was the fifth plane off his assembly line and it was advertised to be "almost crash proof." Sheehan originally had planned to do a test flight Feb. 12, but married his secretary that day instead.



Daviess County, Kentucky, 1815-2015: Celebrating Our Heritage,
Daviess County Bicentennial Committee (Evansville, IN: M. T.
Publishing Company, Inc., 2015) p.155:

A Century of Flight

By Lee A. Dew & David A. Smith

Daviess Countians, along with the rest of the nation, were surprised and amazed when the news arrived of the Wright Brothers successful flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on December 17, 1903.

Some were skeptical that a man-made machine could actually safely leave the ground; others were appalled, calling it a violation of the laws of nature; while still others saw it as the beginning not only of the realization of man's age-old dream of flight, but the coming of yet another mechanical marvel which would impact their future lives.

But Kitty Hawk was far away, and for the most part Daviess Countians saw nothing of the new "flying machines" except what appeared in newspaper or magazine illustrations, or on the motion picture screens at the Owensboro Vaudeville theaters. Cartoonists characterized the new invention, and sometimes ridiculed it, but within a few years it gained a certain legitimacy when Santa Claus was portrayed in pre-Christmas advertising arriving by airplane to deliver presents.

For most Daviess Countians the first glimpse of an airplane came in 1913 when a "barnstormer" pilot named Lincoln Beachy brought his aircraft to the Daviess County Fair. The large crowd witnessed Beachy perform all kinds of "stunts" and were awed by seeing the miracle of flight for the first time "in person."

Other "barnstormers" soon followed, and their appearances were the only fliers to visit the county for several years. Even during World War I, when airplanes proved their worth in warfare and successful pilots were glamorized in the press, Daviess County was not affected. Larger towns built airports, and the Post Office began an airmail service, but it all happened "somewhere else."

But the lack of an airport did not deter the visit of the first airplane to successfully cross the Atlantic. The U.S. Navy's flying boat, the NC-4, was on a tour of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers on the interest of the recruiting service and was accompanied by the band from the Battleship *U.S.S. Pennsylvania*, which traveled by train.

The NC-4's crew were described as "somewhat numb" from the cold weather encountered in the one hour and forty minute flight from Louisville on November 13, 1919. The plane landed in the Ohio River at the Glenmore Distillery and continued downstream to St. Ann Street, where it moored. It contained the first sack of air mail ever delivered to Owensboro. After a two-day visit the three-engine aircraft departed for Evansville, a flight estimated to take "less than half an hour."

The NC-4, being a seaplane, had landed on the river, and the "barnstormers" had used grassy fields as landing strips. But in 1926 Daviess County got its first official airport, thanks to Frank Sheehan, who moved from Louisville with plans for building a revolutionary new type of airplane.

The "Kentucky Cardinal", as it would be called, would be built with frames made of light-weight metal tubes or pipes rather than the sprucewood frames which were in use at the time. Like earlier aircraft, the "Cardinal" would be enclosed by using linen cloth treated with "dope" to make it firm and waterproof. The Cardinal would also boast sleek lines and a powerful single engine. It was to be, in short, a most advanced type of aircraft for the day.

Sheehan selected a site at Second and Triplett Streets in Owensboro for an office and temporary workshop, and began building a factory on Pleasant Valley Road, east of Owensboro, on a field which occasionally had been used by "barnstormers." He also created a runway for his aircraft. Soon the first prototype "Kentucky Cardinal" was ready to be flight-tested, and many predicted that the new craft would make Daviess County a national leader in aircraft manufacturing.

This was not to be, however, because on its first test flight the "Cardinal" crashed at the corner of Ninth and Federica Streets, killing Sheehan.

His airstrip on Pleasant Valley Road remained, however, and soon other airplanes began to visit Daviess County, carrying oil company geologists and prospectors. The "oil boom" which began in the county in the beginning of the 1920's, was expanding rapidly as the nation's need for gasoline and other petroleum products grew during the decade of the "roaring twenties." By the end of the decade a pipeline was laid to help transport crude oil from Daviess County to a refinery in Lawrenceville, Illinois.

Not only did the oil business keep the airstrip on Pleasant Valley Road viable during those years, it also greatly helped the county to survive the Great Depression, which began in 1929. Businesses were making greater use of the private or charter airplanes to get executives and other vital staff members from place to place, and newspapers also used charter planes to get reporters and photographers to the sites of important stories quickly so that they could "scoop" their competitors....



Messenger-Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, Wednesday, 24 February 2016, pp.1A & 2A:

Remnant of city's first airport razed

By Steve Vied, Messenger-Inquirer

A piece of mostly forgotten Owensboro aviation history, dating to the first half of the last century, was reduced to rubble Tuesday when David Adkins, behind the controls of a Caterpillar 329D excavator, used the big machine's boom and bucket to demolish an old, large, wooden, barnlike structure near the CSX railroad tracks just south of Daniels Lane.

Beginning in the late 1920s, what would turn into Owensboro's first airport -- Frank Sheehan Field -- occupied that ground. The airport eventually had a big airplane hangar just a stone's throw from the railroad tracks. Kenneth Payne, 81, who lives within sight of the former airport property on Daniels Lane, is sure that the building that was brought down Tuesday was that old hangar.



Frank Sheehan Field is shown in the 1930s.

"There's no doubt about it," Payne said. "I seen it when I was a kid. Daniels Lane used to be Airport Road."

Payne said he has lived on Daniels Lane near the CSX tracks for 43 years. For many of those years, the old hangar had the word "aviation" painted on one side, but the letters were covered by white siding at some point, he said.

The long, wide structure certainly had the look of a hangar, with a roof close to 30 feet high at its peak and a wide opening on its north end.

The building's walls and rafters were made of 10-inch thick wooden timbers, which were being salvaged, according to Adkins, who works for Phillips Bros. Construction of Vine Grove.

The hangar wasn't the only structure to fall in the vicinity. Several old grain silos were also torn down, along with some smaller buildings. Long after the airport closed, the property was owned by Daviess County businessman James C. Ellis, and some documents bearing the Ellis company name were scattered about the demolition piles Tuesday.

The Owensboro-Daviess County Industrial Foundation, Owensboro City Commission and Daviess Fiscal Court paid the James C. Ellis Estate \$1.8 million in 1997 for property with the intention that it be developed as the Pleasant Valley Industrial Center on 145.3 acres between Daniels Lane and Pleasant Valley Road.

But the industrial park failed to materialize and the land was sold to what is now Owensboro Health for the new hospital. The hospital later acquired the property containing the old hangar and other structures. The hospital has no plans for the area where the old hangar and other structures are being demolished this week. The land just needed to be cleared, a hospital spokeswoman said. A metal building near the hangar building is being retained to hold mulch and road salt.

The former hangar was in a poor condition, with gaping holes on both sides of its roof. When Adkins began clawing at it with the Cat's heavy bucket, it didn't put up much of a fight.

"This was the hangar building," Adkins said. "It's so high in the middle that it's kinda dangerous."

Historical accounts trace the history of Frank Sheehan Field. In 1923 Sheehan, a Louisville native who was completing an aviation course at the Wright school in Dayton, Ohio, leased 31 acres south of the railroad tracks between Daniels Lane and Pleasant Valley Road for an "airplane landing field." Within three years, Sheehan, a former barnstormer, was building bright red Kentucky Cardinal biplanes at his Kentucky Aircraft Corp. plant at the landing field.

But tragedy struck on Valentine's Day 1927, when a Kentucky Cardinal the just-married Sheehan had taken up for a test flight crashed into Frederica Street, just south of Ninth Street. Sheehan was killed in the crash and his aviation enterprise died with him.

The airplane landing field sat empty for a few years. Then, on Jan. 24, 1934, the Civil Works Administration awarded Owensboro \$5,000 to build an airport on 54 acres that included Sheehan Field. Six months later the Owensboro Airport opened with the "only hangar in western Kentucky" the newspapers reported.

C. Waitman Taylor, a former Owensboro mayor, agreed that the building demolished Tuesday was the airport's hangar. "I'm almost certain it was," Taylor said. "It was also used to train World War II pilots."

Katie Lowing, daughter of L.S. Cox Jr., the manager of the airport in its early days, provided a photo of the old hangar building in the 1930s when it was flanked by a brick administration building. She said German prisoners of World War II were held at the airport.

By the end of World War II, the airport on Daniels Lane was no longer large enough for Owensboro. A new airport costing \$900,000 on 880 acres at the end of Bittel Road opened for daytime operation on Dec. 19, 1949. It became Owensboro-Daviess County Regional Airport.

But until this week, about 90 years after it originated, at least one part of Owensboro's first airport remained.



David Adkins of Phillips Bros. Construction of Vine Grove, uses an excavator to demolish the old airport hangar at what was Owensboro's first airport at Frank Sheehan Field off of Daniels Lane.

Form V. B. 3-3000-4-11-52

1 PLACE OF DEATH
 County Daviess

COMMONWEALTH OF KENTUCKY
 State Board of Health
BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

File No. 3203
 Registered No. 58

Vot. Pct. _____ Registration District No. 410

Ins. Town _____ Primary Registration District No. 2145

City Cave Hill (No. 710 East 3rd St. _____ Ward) (If death occurred in a hospital or institution, give its NAME instead of street and number.)

2 FULL NAME Frank Peter Sheehan

PERSONAL AND STATISTICAL PARTICULARS

3 SEX male **4 COLOR OR RACE** white **5 MARRIAGE** married
Married, Widowed, or Divorced (Write the word)

6 DATE OF BIRTH _____ (Month) _____ (Day) _____ (Year)

7 AGE 26 yrs. _____ mos. _____ ds. IF LESS than 1 day _____ hrs. _____ min.

8 OCCUPATION
 (a) Trade, profession or particular kind of work President airplane
 (b) General nature of industry, business or establishment in which employed (or employer) co.

9 BIRTHPLACE (State or country) Ky.

PARENTS

10 NAME OF FATHER Frank P. Sheehan

11 BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER (State or country) _____

12 MOTHER'S NAME OF MOTHER Salahell Gerson

13 BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER (State or country) Ky.

14 THE ABOVE IS TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE
 (Informant) Joy B. Homington
 (Address) Charter (Apt) Louisville, Ky.

15 Filed 2-16, 1927 L. L. Carpenter Registrar

MEDICAL CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

16 DATE OF DEATH Feb. 16, 1927
(Month) (Day) (Year)

17 I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased
 from _____ 1927, to _____ 1927
 that I last saw h. _____ alive on _____ 1927
 and that death occurred on the date stated above at _____ m.

The CAUSE OF DEATH* was as follows:
Skull crushed in fall
of airplane
resident
 (Duration) _____ yrs. _____ mos. _____ ds.

Contributory _____ (Secondary)
 (Duration) _____ yrs. _____ mos. _____ ds.

(Signed) _____, M. D.
 _____ 1927 (Address) _____

*State the disease causing death, or, in deaths from violent causes state (1) Means of injury; and (2) whether Accidental, Suicidal or Homicidal.

18 LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (For Hospitals, Institutions, Transients or Recent Residents)
 at place _____ in the State _____ of death _____ yrs. _____ mos. _____ ds.
 Where was disease contracted, if not at place of death? _____
 Former or usual residence _____

19 PLACE OF BURIAL OR REMOVAL; DATE OF BURIAL
Cave Hill Louisville Feb. 16, 1927

20 UNDERTAKER Davis & Johnson **ADDRESS** Cave Hill Ky.



Gravestone of Frank P. Sheehan, Jr., Cave Hill Cemetery, Louisville, KY



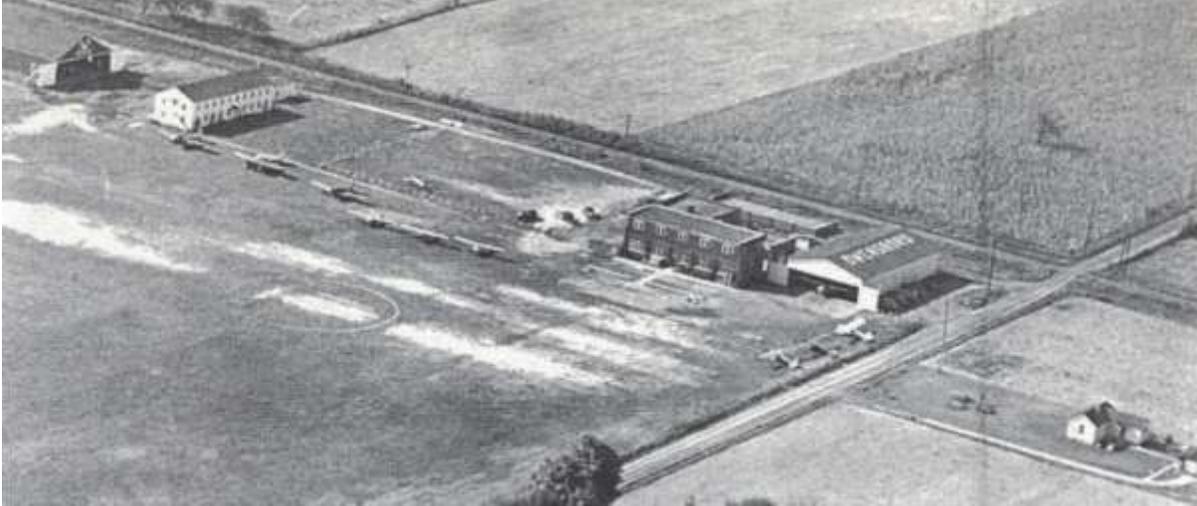
**A Pictorial History of Owensboro – Daviess County,
Messenger-Inquirer (Owensboro, KY: Owensboro
Publishing Company, 1994) pp.78-79:**



Frank Peter Sheehan was testing plane #5 when he crashed at 9th & Frederica Streets (in front of the library) on Feb. 14, 1927.



As he neared the earth he was heard shouting for people to get out of the way. The fire was not from the crash but a careless onlooker with a cigarette dropped in a spill of gasoline.



Aerial Airport, located just off Daniel's Lane, 2 miles east of Owensboro on the Louisville, Henderson & St. Louis Railroad. Originally called the Frank Peter Sheehan Airport from the late 1920s until 1950 when the new airport was built and called the Owensboro-Daviess County Airport. Sheehan had two manufacturing buildings and a hanger as part of his Kentucky Aircraft Corporation, a \$30,000 plant.



The following are some of the pictures related to Frank Sheehan on the “History of Owensboro, KY” Facebook website

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/HistoryofOwensboro>



Frank Sheehan in his military uniform



Frank Sheehan & wife, Ruby Beal Sheehan



The Kentucky Cardinal



Sheehan's crashed plane



Ambulance at scene of crash



Sheehan's mechanics at his hangar. Ott Roby is standing on wheel of plane.



Plane flying over Frank Sheehan Airport in 1928