December 17, 1903 Wright Brothers (…Not Juneau)

Presented by Juneau Airport:
Patty Wahto
Marc Cheatham
Mal Menzies
Joe Heueisen
Pre-1920
Juneau sees the first glimpse of an airplane. Army biplanes passes over Juneau with the 1<sup>st</sup> airmail from Seattle - Whitehorse - Nome in 1920.
By July 1922, in a round-about way, Clarence “Ollie” Prest, in his second attempt to fly to Alaska (originally for Siberia), shipped his Curtiss Jenny biplane “Polar Bear II” to Juneau where he reassembled on a beach in Thane and flew Skagway and eventually to Fairbanks after crashing in the interior; missing for a short period.
1925-1930

1922 – Roy Jones and his plane “Northbird”, a Curtiss MF flying boat (Navy surplus), had a mechanical and towed to Juneau. Jones departed downtown JNU and did a ‘fly-by’ of Juneau October 1922. 1st commercial operator in Alaska (KTN). In May 1923, Jones departed Juneau and made it to Petersburg in a record 82 minutes! His operation closed in August 1923 after his aircraft crashed.

In 1926, four Navy bi-planes conducted aerial mapping of Southeast Alaska.
Surveyed territory map showing Mendenhall Valley Elimination from Tongass National Forest. Homesteads established along south end would be future airport area.

Articles reference some pilots were landing on these grass ‘flats’.
Alaska Tideland Survey showing the homestead boundaries, what land CAA passed on to the city; and the need for the ATS. Shows how the airport land developed.
Late 1920s to early 1930s

Early landing strip demarcated with flags show a north-south alignment. This was perpendicular to what would be the main runway and eventually became the tarmac area.

1929 saw Juneau’s 1st flight school on the flats north of the current airport location. Aircraft operated on a dirt strip and grass flats.
1929-1932

April 1929 – Ansel Eckmann with Bob Ellis make 1st non-stop from Seattle to Juneau (downtown dock - Juneau Motor Co.) in an Alaska Washington Airways’ Lockheed Vega named “Juneau”.

Juneau’s 1st airline became Alaska Southern Airways in 1932 and continued operations downtown.
1930-1935

1934 - Pacific Alaska Airways (PAA) purchases Alaska Southern Airways. PAA also purchases 75 acres from Joe Kendler (part of Alaska Juneau Dairy Homestead) for construction of an airfield. This property was the southern fraction of the US Survey and use of accreted land and land rights.

Note: During this time, if accreted land was not claimed (by survey), Dept of Interior would own. As far as we know, this accreted property was not claimed. The runway appears to have been built on this accreted land.
1934 - Preliminary work to begin on PAA’s airfield in the flats. PAA to excavate; while Feds provide $1500. Crews pulled off road work to build Juneau airport.

Bids called by PAA for work on new airport ‘out Glacier Hwy’. Runway to be 300’ x 1800’
Juneau’s First Official Airfield

- April 1935 - The Pacific Alaska Airways Airport Opens.
- US Navy published a complete directory of Alaska airports by 1934. Navy had previously completed aerial mapping of southeast Alaska by late 1920s.
Legendary pilot Shell Simmons started Alaska Air Transport in downtown Juneau with his Stinson “Patco” in 1935.

In 1939 Alaska Air Transport merged with Marine Airways to form Alaska Coastal Airways (Airlines) ……more mergers to come.

Downtown operations as busy as ever in late 1930s. PAA had airport; all others downtown.

Bob Ellis started Ellis Air (Lines) in 1936. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, Ellis sold some planes to the Navy for the ‘cause’. Ellis merged with Alaska Coastal in 1962 to form Alaska Coastal-Ellis… …and in 1968 taken over by an established Alaska Airlines.
First private plane lands at Juneau ‘Airport’.

Pacific Alaska Airways Lyman Peck holds register, Aircraft Owner Mr. Blackman signs register, while pilot Lemantine looks on.

1935 – 1940
1936 - PAA field is not available for general traffic. L.F. (Frank) Barr, who runs an air service between Atlin to Juneau is forced to land on Danner’s farm land.

Barr Air Transport
1938 – PAA carries 1st airmail pouch carried by between Juneau, Whitehorse & Fairbanks.

By 1936 over 300,000 lbs. of mail and 2M lbs. of freight moved by air in Alaska. By 1938 there were 155 commercial planes in Alaska flying 6M miles; carrying 3.5M lbs. freight.
1935-1940

Northern route already established with wheel plane, but not a southern route.

August 1938 - 1st landing at the Juneau Airport for PAA Sikorsky S-43 “Baby Clipper”. Experimental flight linked air mail express & passengers on the Southeast route by wheel plane.

• Marked the start of extensive research/monitor of weather & charted weather patterns/contours (by month) for air travel
• Flight time/connections meant passengers/mail could travel from AK to NY in two days (similar to today)

Note: After researching various ‘clippers’, this plane appears to be the Baby Clipper as discussed, but the name Alaska Clipper refers to the larger S-42 (see next slide)

Credit: Herbert Hilscher Sept 1938 Alaska Life
While most float planes were downtown Juneau, for a very brief period, specifically 1940, Pan Am brought up a Sikorsky Clipper (S-42); ‘flying boat’ Alaska Clipper. There are only a few photos and scant information on the operations out of Auke Bay. Originally the Bermuda Clipper, renamed the Alaska Clipper in 1940, and again to the Hong Kong Clipper II in 1941, where it was lost (bombed/sank) on Dec. 8, 1941.
In 1942, the Army Air Corps seized the PAA Airport (war time), and extended using fill from the A-J Mine as well as adjacent excavation, then paved the runway. Total cost of $442,000. Juneau Airport runway is now 4,968’ x 300’.
1940’s

Juneau Airport remains a mix of military and civilian….after federal takeover.
Shortly after the runway was extended, gravel revetments were added to protect Army Air Corps aircraft. These remained for several years after WWII.
Juneau Airport
mid to late 1940s

By 1947 the Navy owned/operated the Juneau Airport.

The City of Juneau (Council) obtained a permit from the Navy to build a terminal (small strip of land) and the Juneau Municipal Airport terminal was constructed using Federal $$ and City bonds (reimbursed by airlines). The Federal permit (Navy) and Federal funding (CAA) appeared to be contingent upon the City working toward ownership of the whole airport as well as providing an adjoining seaplane base.
In 1948, the first portion of the new Juneau Municipal Airport terminal is constructed at a cost of $140,000.

Note: In 1946 Federal Airport Act passed, prior to this act, airports were financed and operated by state, county, or municipality. This led to airport expansion over the next few years.
Juneau Municipal Airport Terminal
Late 1940’s/ early 1950’s

1952 photos by j.m. creany
1950’s

1950 – Pan Am DC-4 slides off the end of the Juneau runway. Pan Am cancels flights at Juneau Airport when temperatures are between 28-32°F.

1950-1953 there was a push from the City, airlines and military to lengthen the Juneau runway by an additional 2500’. Aircraft were getting larger and accidents were occurring. Approval of a 1,500’ additional was given as well as funding at 75% by the Federal Aid airport program.

….and just in time…..
1953 - The Juneau Airport is quitclaimed to the City of Juneau by the CAA.

The conveyance apparently included all buildings and facilities (other than those used by the CAA and Weather Bureau), as well as equipment.
1953 City begins dredging to extend runway to accommodate larger aircraft.

1954, the extension to the runway was completed and now at 6,468’.
In 1957 the expansion of the terminal was completed which added 2nd-story. The Air Traffic Tower cab was an add-on by the Federal government by 1960.
In 1961 the Juneau airport runway expanded again by 2,200' to accommodate large jet traffic. Runway listed as 8,456’. In 1964 the runway also sustained cracking during “THE” earthquake. City applies for federal funding for repairs.  

NOTE: in recorded history dialogue there are discrepancies between 2,000’ – 2,200’. If extended 2,000 (1988’ with 212’ off ends) this would match the runway historic data and equate to the 8456’ as published.
By 1962, jet service had come to Juneau. The runway extension made jet service possible, but in 1963 Pan Am terminates service to JNU.
By 1973 the terminal has a new face and the front (public entry) now faces Shell Simmons Dr.; as it does today. Public paid parking (by meter) is formally established to the public side.

January 22, 1976, the City Assembly passed Resolution 353 formally changing the name of the Juneau Municipal Airport to “JUNEAU INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT”.
Juneau Airport
1972

Alaska Airlines and Western Air Lines
ticket counters

Curios & Gift shop

Baggage Claim

Passenger
Boarding Lobby
In 1979 Juneau Airport taxiway constructed for part of the runway...as much as funding allowed.
In 1984, the Juneau Airport terminal was expanded to the east. The expansion added a two-story large air carrier concourse. The new Air Traffic Tower cab was added in 1986.
In 1989/90 – Taxiway (Alpha) is extended full length of the runway at 8456’.
In 1997 the airport runway was rehabilitated. In 2004 part of the taxiway was repaved.
In 2009, the Juneau Airport terminal began expansion (13,000 sq ft) to the east. At the same time, the adjacent 1984 portion of the terminal was remodeled. A geothermal heat pump system was installed for these areas, as well as accommodate future terminal remodel.
Following an extensive 8-year Environmental Impact Study (EIS), the airport completed an $85M mandated Runway Safety Area (RSA) in 2013. The safety area added 600’ to each end for protection of aircraft overruns; as well as added 400’ to runway length (now 8857’).

In 2015, the Runway rehabilitation was completed. In addition to resurfacing 5” of asphalt, the Jordan Creek culvert that runs under the runway was replaced and all new LED airfield lighting systems.

Note old section of runway pavement on south side was the original 1940s-1950s pavement width of 300’, now used as runway safety area.
Juneau Airport has $27.5M in airport improvements currently underway…

…more history in the making.
Thanks & Credit:

JNU Airport Staff: Patty Wahto, Marc Cheatham & Kris Ritter
Mal Menzies, Airport Board
Joe Heueisen, Airport Board
Doug Wahto
Alaska State Library – Historical Collection
Juneau Douglas City Museum Collection & Staff
City and Borough of Juneau Archives
Juneau Airport Master Plan(s)
Alaska State Library-Historical Collections
Captain Lloyd H. “Kinky” Bayers Collection, 1898-1967
R & M Engineering
Gastineau Heritage News/Gastineau Channel Historical Society
Alaska Airlines.com Historical
Pan America/Pacific Alaska Airways.com historical
Pacific Northern Airways.com
Jim Ruotsala Collection
Large Air Carrier History As Operated in Juneau

Alaska Airlines

Delta Air Lines

Pan America World Airways (Pan Am)

Ceased operations in JNU 1963

Western Air Lines

Pacific Alaska Airways

Alaska Coastal Airways

Ellis Airways

Pacific Northern Airlines (PNA)

Ellis Air

Alaska Coastal Airways

Marine Airways

Alaska Air Trans.

Wien Air Airlines

MarkAir

Alaska Washngton Airways