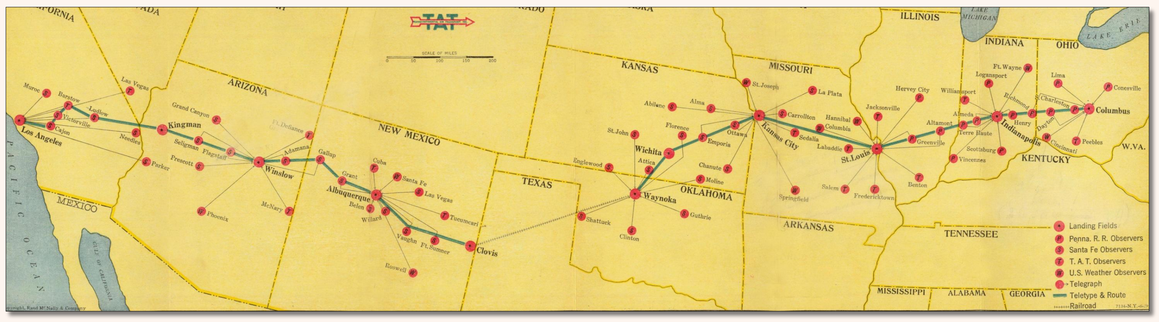
FLYING THROUGH HISTORY: THE WINSLOW-LINDBERGH REGIONAL AIRPORT

AN AIRPORT IS BORN: LINDBERGH & TAT

TRANSCONTINENTAL AIR TRANSPORT

Civil aviation received another boost when an unknown airmail pilot named Charles A. Lindbergh completed the first solo, non-stop trans-Atlantic flight in the *Spirit of St Louis* on May 21, 1927. The public's enthusiasm over his accomplishment combined with the Air Commerce Act encouraged business investment in commercial airline ventures. In May 1928, a group of aircraft, railroad, and banking interests organized Transcontinental Air Transport, Inc. (TAT), with financier Clement M. Keys as president. The pioneering new company promised the nation's first cross-country passenger service. Once Keys convinced Lindbergh to lend his name and services to the enterprise, he promoted the new passenger service as the "Lindbergh Line" in order to instill confidence in the flying public. Lindbergh served as chairman of TAT's Technical Committee, which got the company off to a successful start and also made lasting contributions to aviation standards.

Seen here in Winslow in 1929, Lindbergh (dark jacket) made trial flights in his Ryan Brougham to identify the major cities and rural towns that would become TAT airfields. (Photo courtesy of Ted Miley)



TAT's Technical Committee, which was responsible for establishing the cross-country route (above) and schedule; determining stopover cities and improving or building their airports; developing lighting, communication, and weather bureau networks (above); and selecting the aircraft and pilots. (Photo courtesy of the David Rumsey Collection)

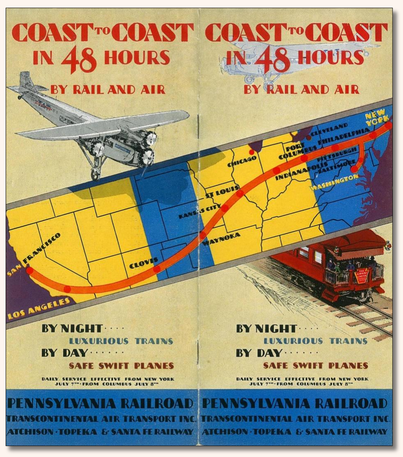
Charles Lindbergh and new bride Anne Morrow Lindbergh in 1929

WINSLOW'S TAT AIRPORT

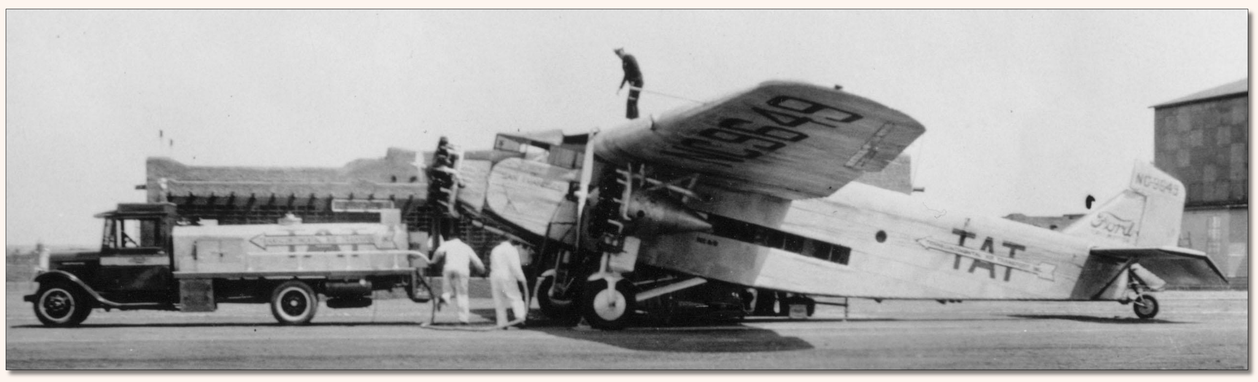
At the time, most passenger aircraft could only safely fly several hundred miles between refueling stops, which necessitated a string of airfields across the country. In October 1928, Lindbergh selected Winslow and Kingman as the stopover airfields between Albuquerque and Los Angeles due to their good weather, open terrain, access to the Santa Fe line, and ideal locations for refueling stops in either direction. His colleagues chose the flat, open landscape south of town for a terminal, hangar, parking apron, and two asphalt runways. Like TAT's other stops, Winslow's new airport met or exceeded safety requirements. TAT set up radio and Teletype communication systems as well as a network of weather stations that covered a 150-mile-wide band from coast to coast (above). Their cross-country service included railroad segments because flying at night was dangerous, but TAT knew the restriction was temporary and also worked to develop airport lighting systems and navigation beacons across the landscape.

The dedication of Winslow's new TAT airport was held on June 26, 1929. Three thousand people attended the celebration, which was held in the almost-finished hangar and included a proclamation by the mayor, a speech about TAT's history and goals by a local company manager, dances by Laguna tribal members, and a community dance with music by the Santa Fe Indian Band. TAT field manager Cedric M. Bradley was even given the distinctive honor of being named a Laguna chief.

On July 5, the Lindberghs landed at Winslow's airport as part of his final inspection of the route. On July 7, he presided over the dedication ceremony for TAT's cross-country service in front of 30,000 people at the Glendale airport near Los Angeles. The next day, he piloted the first eastbound flight and landed the *City of Los Angeles* in Winslow with Anne among his passengers. *Winslow Daily Mail* editor Carmelo Giragi sent Billie Yost to interview the newlyweds, who said that "he was as nice as the boy next door." Though Winslow residents were anxious to catch a glimpse of Lindbergh during the brief welcome ceremony, they treated him like a regular person, which Lindbergh told Bradley he appreciated. The Lindberghs returned to Los Angeles on one of the inaugural westbound flights with Amelia Earhart on board.



Left: The inside of this TAT brochure described the trip in detail. Travelers took a luxury Pullman on the Pennsylvania Railroad overnight from New York City to Columbus, Ohio, then boarded a plane that stopped in Indianapolis, St. Louis, Kansas City, Wichita, and Waynoka, Oklahoma. They dined at the Harvey House before they transferred to a Santa Fe Railway luxury Pullman for an overnight trip to Clovis, New Mexico, where they boarded a flight that stopped in Albuquerque, Winslow, Kingman, and, finally, Los Angeles. (Image courtesy of Björn Larsson)



Right: The ill-fated Ford Tri-Motor named *City of San Francisco* (NC9649) gassed up in front of Winslow's terminal in 1929.

TAT'S FORD TRI-MOTORS & PASSENGER SERVICE

TAT's Technical Committee selected the all-metal Ford Tri-Motor for its fleet. Americans trusted the Ford name and appreciated the fact that the rugged "Tin Goose" could keep flying if it lost one of its engines. It could cruise at 100 miles per hour for a distance of 350 miles with-out refueling and cross the country in half the time of the fastest train. TAT executives believed that the innovative aircraft would revolutionize air travel while turning a profit. But the one-way fare was expensive – today's equivalent of over $5,000.

TAT reconfigured the aircraft to hold only 10 passengers and spared no expense to provide them with a safe and pleasant experience. Amenities included uniformed male attendants called "couriers"; meals by Fred Harvey; earplugs and chewing gum; all-aluminum lavatories; individual reading lamps, ashtrays, and windows that opened; and newspapers, playing cards, and maps of the natural wonders along the route. Aluminum chairs with seatbelts and headrests soon replaced the upholstered wicker seats. Despite these efforts, passengers still endured bumpy flights, wide temperature variations in the unpressurized cabins, and high noise levels. Passengers would often get airsick and sometimes pass out.

THE MOUNT TAYLOR DISASTER

On September 3, 1929, just two months after TAT's inaugural flights, the *City of San Francisco* (above) took off from Albuquerque but never landed in Winslow. Over 70 civilian and military planes joined the search, and Lindbergh himself landed at the Winslow airport in time to join the recovery efforts. On September 7, a Western Air Express crew spied the wreckage on Mount Taylor near Grants, New Mexico, in which all three crew members and five passengers perished. Most investigators believed the pilot encountered sudden, terrible weather conditions and crashed into Mount Taylor while turning back to Albuquerque. TAT soon required its pilots to report their location every 15 minutes, shifted the route there to the south, and canceled flights in foul weather. Despite TAT's extensive investment in weather and communication systems, the crash was widely reported and their innovative venture lost momentum.

THE EVOLUTION OF TAT

Because TAT had no lucrative airmail contracts to offset its expensive passenger operations, the airline continually lost money and cut fares. Combined with the Mount Taylor tragedy and the onset of the Great Depression in October 1929, TAT was close to bankruptcy. The airline merged with California's Maddux Air Lines in November to become TAT-Maddux Air Lines. Despite the Depression, passenger numbers began to increase within two months of the rate reductions. Even though TAT lost nearly $3,000,000 in its short life, it helped make air travel available to everyone, and its commitment to safety, comfort, and service laid the foundations for modern air travel.