

# **CAMP GRANT & BELL BOWL TIMELINE**

## **Airport, Camp Grant & Bell Bowl Prairie**

- June 14, 1917 – Selection by secretary of war of land in New Milford Township selected as one of 16 Army training posts referred to as a National Army Cantonment, later named Camp Grant.
- Aug 1917 – 8,000 civilian workers constructed the camp with several militia companies on duty.
- December 1, 1917 – camp ready to receive 41,160 soldiers.
- July 4, 1918 – Farewell parade of 28,000 soldiers (86<sup>th</sup> Army Division) marched through downtown Rockford in front of 100,000 spectators.
- Sept 23, 1918 – Spanish influenza outbreak infected 4,000 soldiers with a death rate of 100/day in October. A total of 1,400 servicemen and 323 civilians died. One of four soldiers sick.
- July 27, 1921 – War department issues order closing Camp Grant and sale of buildings.
- Aug 15, 1922 – settled final lawsuits over land acquisition with local farmer & Rosecrance Memorial Home.
- Sept 22, 1922 – Rockford Register reports government spent \$14,680,620 on construction of Camp Grant (4,000 acres).
- May 1923 – Offer to sell by the US War Department accepted by Illinois National Guard (revocable purchase).
- Aug 9, 1924 – Illinois National Guard (33<sup>rd</sup> Division) assumes control of the base.
- July 27, 1932 – Now 4,000 acres at a total cost to state and federal government of \$15,000,000.
- Jun 3, 1933 – President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) establishes six (6) forestry camps as part of Civilian Conservation Corps (federal relief effort to put hundreds of thousands of Americans back to work; Great Depression began with stock market crash in Oct 1929).
- Sept 1935 – Illinois National Guard ends use of facilities.
- Fall 1940 – Griffith & Sons Construction Co. (Chicago) rehabilitated the base, erecting 365 new buildings with 6,000 civilian workers (Jan 1941) at a cost of \$9,000,000.
- Aug 31, 1943 – German prisoner of war camp opened; there were no escapes.
- Fall 1943 – After processing 300,000 recruit trainees, reception center closed and transferred to Ft. Sheridan; 100,000 medical unit trainees were trained at the old reception center.
- Dec 1943 – Greater Rockford Airport Authority names five (5) Commissioners: Swan Hillman, Kimball Finkenstaedt, Harry Shaw, Glen Alberstett, and W. Herbert Conklin.
- 1946 – State of Illinois adopted the Airport Authorities Act under which Greater Rockford Airport Authority was created.
- Fall 1945 – Seth B. Atwood buys 340 acres and donates to Rockford Park District.
- Aug 1947 – completion of master plan by Chicago engineering consulting firm: Foth, Porath & Horner.
- Aug 1948 – Transfer of title for Camp Grant land to Greater Rockford Airport Authority.
- 1954 – Construction of Greater Rockford Airport.
- 1954 to 1970 – Host to annual fly-in convention of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) when the event moved to Oshkosh, Wisconsin.
- 1974 – Majority of remaining Camp Grant buildings demolished.

# FACT SHEET

## Airport, Camp Grant & Bell Bowl

*"Camp Grant is quite the biggest thing that ever happened in Rockford",  
possibly creating "another Rockford as big as this city was ten years ago"*

*John Camlin, Chamber of Commerce president (1917)*

- **Name:** Initially referred to not as Camp Grant but as federal "cantonment". Named in honor of Civil War General and US President, Ulysses S. Grant (21<sup>st</sup> Illinois Infantry in the Civil War).
- **Location:** Five (5) miles south of Rockford on the east bank of the Rock River, just north of the confluence (intersection) with the Kishwaukee River.
- **Size:**
  - Airport – In 2005 the airport includes 3,000 acres. In 1946, the GRAA was granted 1,500 acres of federal land.
  - Foreign Trade Zone – In 2005 we have 1,700 acres on Airport + 1,000 acres in Rochelle.
  - Camp Grant –
    - In 1924 it contained 3,200 acres on site plus 6,000 acres for rifle range.
    - Peak: 5,460 acres.
    - During World War II, camp was the largest reception center in the country for the US Army.
- **Camp Grant (1917 – 1946):**
  - Statistics ("Rockford, An Illustrated City", Jon Lundin, 1996) –

Population (July 1918) – 50,000	Buildings – 1,100
Roads – 22 miles (macadam & concrete)	Water reservoir – 550,000 gallons
  - Military encampment (1917-1921 & 1940-1945) – quartering troops, airfield, rifle range, railroad, water & sewer system, electric power, paved roads. Provided trained infantry and medical troops.
  - Induction/training center - World War I/train over 56,000 calvary with 200,000 passing through (1917-1921)  
World War II/300,000 infantry (1941 - 1943); 100,000 medical (1943-1945)
  - Prison – World War II (1943-1946)
  - Illinois National Guard training (1922-1939)
  - Civilian Conservation Corp (1933-1935)
- **Bell Bowl Prairie**
  - One of the best-preserved prairies in northern Illinois – a glimpse of the Rockford area prior to colonization.
  - Named for camp commandant, General George Bell.
  - Preservation area – one-half mile long and 150 feet wide.
  - Natural amphitheater – at northwest end, christened "Bell Bowl" during World War I.
  - Management – GRAA (Airport Authority) owns the property and managed by the Authority and the Natural Land Institute of Rockford (private, non-profit organization founded in 1958 and dedicated to preservation of natural areas and open space in northern Illinois).
- **Most famous speakers**
  - President Theodore Roosevelt
  - General John J. Pershing (Aug 1921)
- **Most famous commanders**
  - Major General Thomas H. Barry (1917-1918, first commandant)
  - General George Bell (1919-1921)
  - Acting commander, Colonel Charles B. Hagadorn (committed suicide on Oct 7, 1918 at the height of the Spanish influenza epidemic)
  - Colonel J. H. Davidson (Nov 1940)
- **Most famous trainees**
  - Jack Ruby – assassin of Lee Harvey Oswald, accused assassin of President Jack F. Kennedy