



A BRIEF HISTORY OF EAA AIRVENTURE OSHKOSH

The Experimental Aircraft Association's Fly-In Convention, now known as EAA AirVenture Oshkosh, has been in existence nearly as long as the association itself. The first gathering was in September 1953 as a small part of the Milwaukee (Wis.) Air Pageant. That original EAA fly-in at Wright-Curtiss (now Timmerman) Field was attended by a handful of airplanes, mostly homebuilt and modified aircraft. Fewer than 150 people registered as visitors. The larger Milwaukee Air Pageant has faded away but the EAA gathering has become the world's premier aviation event.

EAA's fly-in grew quickly in its first few years and by the late 1950s it had outgrown the area of the Milwaukee airport it was allowed to use. In 1959, the event moved to Rockford (Ill.) Municipal Airport, where it would stay for the next decade. The "Rockford Years" were where the EAA Fly-In Convention established both its prominence as a homebuilders' event and its friendly feeling that is retained to this day. During these years, such diverse aviation interests as Warbirds, antiques and aerobatic performers became part of the EAA event.

By 1969, it was apparent that the EAA Fly-In Convention had simply become too large for the Rockford facility. EAA had grown from a home basement operation to an office and museum in the Milwaukee suburb of Franklin. The annual convention mirrored that growth, attracting hundreds of showplanes and tens of thousands of visitors.

Sites were studied for a new home. Aviation legend Steve Wittman, who had been an EAA member since the association's founding in 1953, suggested the airport in Oshkosh, Wis. That facility had some definite advantages. There was much acreage surrounding the airport to handle the annual influx of airplanes, vehicles and tents. There were two lengthy runways (east/west and north/south) which did not cross, allowing greater traffic movement. Oshkosh city officials were eager to host the event and enjoy the economic boost it provided. In late 1969, the EAA board approved the move to Oshkosh.

There was only one problem — no Convention site or infrastructure existed in Oshkosh. EAA's volunteer network was up to the task, however. Within six months, EAA members had created a home for the fly-in. That volunteer spirit continues today, as more than 4,000 people donate their time and talents to help prepare and coordinate the Convention's grounds and activities.

Through the 1970s and '80s, the Convention exploded into national prominence. Attendance jumped into six figures each year and the event became one of sport aviation's top gatherings.

The EAA and its annual gathering have matured in the 1990s. It now also attracts top government officials from around the world, corporate leaders and hundreds of thousands of aviation enthusiasts. It spans the entire spectrum of aviation and attracts 10,000 airplanes each year.

EAA AirVenture Oshkosh (as of 1998, the new name for the Fly-In Convention) continues to grow in its fifth decade. New exhibit hangars and expanded facilities serve the more than 500,000 aviation enthusiasts who attend the event annually. The local and state economies enjoy a more than \$80-million boost because of the week-long event.

Today, EAA AirVenture Oshkosh is an international gathering place for aviation enthusiasts. An AirVenture participant can study the latest aircraft and innovations; discover new ideas and techniques from the nearly 1,000 forums and workshops; see aviation's top personalities; or just talk airplanes with people from around the world. EAA AIRVENTURE OSHKOSH has become important and influential but retains its friendly and personal feel — part of the reason the world comes to Oshkosh every year.