

# Jim Hamilton – L.B. Owens Airport: A Chronological History

---

## 1929–1930: Founding and Dedication

- The airport, located in Columbia, South Carolina’s Rosewood neighborhood, was initiated under the leadership of Columbia’s “Flying Mayor,” Dr. L.B. Owens.
- In 1929, the Curtiss-Wright Flying Service—then a major aviation force—built the first structure on-site: the Curtiss-Wright Hangar.
- The airport was officially christened on April 25, 1930. Georgia baseball legend Ty Cobb led the ceremony, drawing a crowd of 15,000–20,000 aviation enthusiasts.
- Originally named Municipal Airport Owens Field, it became the first commercial airport in the Midlands, serving as Columbia’s primary terminal until the 1960s.

## 1930s–1940s: Early Years and Notable Visitors

- The Curtiss-Wright Hangar became the central hub for airport activity.
- Eastern Airlines began passenger service in 1932, followed by Delta Airlines in 1934.
- The airport was a stop for the participants of the Woman’s Dixie Derby air race.
- The airport register from this period includes numerous pilot signatures, now digitized and available through the Richland County Library.
- Amelia Earhart visited the airport in November 1931 as part of the Autogiro Promotional Tour and signed the airport’s register.

## 1940s–1960s: Growth and Transition

- The airport served Columbia’s general aviation needs with aircraft sales, service, and flight instruction.
- In 1946, Hawthorne Flying Service and Dixie Aviation were awarded a five-year operating contract.
- In 1962, ownership of Owens Field was transferred from the City of Columbia to Richland County.
- Midlands Aviation began operations in 1964.

## 1970s–1980s: Upgrades and Renaming

- Facing potential closure in the 1970s due to community concerns, Richland County invested in the airport to retain it as a key resource.
- In 1982–83, major renovations were undertaken, including a new 4,600-foot runway, updated hangars, navigational aids, and lighting.
- A new terminal opened in 1984, and the airport was renamed Columbia Owens Downtown Airport to emphasize its location and accessibility.

## 2000s–2010s: Honoring Legacy and Revitalization

- In December 2008, the airport was renamed Jim Hamilton–L.B. Owens Airport to honor longtime manager and aviator Jim Hamilton and the airport’s founder, L.B. Owens.
- Jim Hamilton served as airport manager for over 40 years, implementing major safety and infrastructure improvements. He was a two-time recipient of the Order of the Palmetto and was inducted into the South Carolina Aviation Hall of Fame.
- In 2010, a terminal lobby display featuring biographies and videos of Hamilton and Owens was installed.
- The Curtiss-Wright Hangar, which had been in disrepair since the early 1980s, was sold in 2016 to Hangar Owner, LLC and restored. It is now home to the Hunter-Gatherer Brewery and hosts public events.

## Today

- The airport continues to serve private, business, and military flights.
- It remains a vital piece of Columbia’s aviation infrastructure and historical heritage, located just three miles from downtown Columbia in the historic Rosewood neighborhood.

