



# LINDBERGH'S RETURN TO MINNESOTA, 1927

Bruce L. Larson

FEW INDIVIDUALS in history have been showered with adulation equal to that given Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr., of Little Falls, Minnesota, after he flew the "Spirit of St. Louis" nonstop from New York to Paris, France, on May 20–21, 1927. His flight of 3,610 miles in 33 hours and 30 minutes was the first one-man crossing of the Atlantic Ocean by air.

Thronged of well-wishers gave the twenty-five-year-old Minnesotan a hero's welcome in several European capitals. Then he sailed back to the United States on the cruiser "Memphis," which was especially sent by President Calvin Coolidge, and received tumultuous ovations in Washington, D.C., and New York. People responded enthusiastically to Lindbergh's modesty and youthful charm as well as to his considerable achievement, which more than previous flying feats came to symbolize man's triumph over the air.

Minnesotans had their turn to honor Lindbergh in August when he returned home briefly during a national good-will tour. Large, demonstrative crowds greeted the flier in the Twin Cities on August 23–24 and in Little Falls on August 25. The object of Lindbergh's journey was to promote commercial aviation rather than himself, but he was met everywhere with an unrestrained acclaim that has been assessed as "the greatest national ovation ever given an American."<sup>1</sup> As exemplified by the Minnesota reception, the overwhelming response seems worth describing and evaluating for its own sake as well as for its influence on Lindbergh's life and on the development of aviation.

Lindbergh's cross-country tour was sponsored by

---

*Mr. Larson, assistant professor of history on leave from Mankato State College, delivered a version of this article at the fifth annual Northern Great Plains History Conference at the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks. He is currently completing a doctoral dissertation on Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr.*

---

<sup>1</sup>Dixon Wecter, *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship*, 426 (New York, 1941).

the Daniel Guggenheim Fund for the Promotion of Aeronautics. Anticipating that ambitious promoters might seek to use Lindbergh's name for profit, Dwight W. Morrow, father of Lindbergh's future wife, Anne, and soon to become ambassador to Mexico, suggested that the fund "give [Lindbergh] something to do, to save him from the wolves . . . before he commits himself to some proposition he might regret." (Writing to the author on January 16, 1970, Lindbergh minimized this danger: "I wasn't much worried about the 'wolves' and felt well able to take care of myself in this respect.") Fund officials conceived the idea of a tour to aid the development of commercial aviation, and Lindbergh promptly accepted. Staying at Falaise, the Guggenheim home on Long Island, Lindbergh worked closely with Harry F. Guggenheim, president and acting administrator of the fund, and himself proposed that "a stop be made at least once in every state of the Union." This suggestion formed the basis for the final schedule which outlined eighty-two stops throughout the country and covered about 22,000 miles between July 20 and October 23, 1927.<sup>2</sup>

Assistant Secretary of Aeronautics William P. MacCracken, Jr., arranged for a Department of Commerce plane to accompany the "Spirit of St. Louis" from place to place. Subsequently a tour party was formed which included Donald E. Keyhoe, aide to Colonel Lindbergh (by this time the flier held that rank in the Officer's Reserve Corps) and tour manager, and Philip R. Love, pilot of the second plane and a personal friend of Lindbergh since the days they trained in the army and flew mail routes together.<sup>3</sup>

In Minnesota, meanwhile, Governor Theodore Christianson named an official welcoming committee of Little Falls residents to deliver a personal greeting and to invite Lindbergh to his home state upon his arrival from Europe aboard the "Memphis." The committee consisted of state Senator Chris Rosenmeier, Mayor Austin L. Grimes, Dr. Chester H. Longley, John S. Levis, Kenneth T. Martin, and Richard D. Musser.<sup>4</sup>

In early June the six, preceded by letters of introduction to Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg, a fellow Minnesotan, and to Mayor James J. Walker of New York, traveled to Washington and to New York City. Grimes, Levis, and Martin rode with Longley in his Nash automobile, labeled the "Spirit of Little Falls," while Rosenmeier and Musser took a train to Washington. The committee could not reach Lindbergh in the nation's capital but finally was able to interview him in New York. Mayor Grimes relayed the official greeting and invitation.<sup>5</sup>

Lindbergh also received other Minnesota invitations: from a Minneapolis delegation headed by businessman Charles E. Ovenshire, from the American

Legion, the 109th Air Squadron of the national guard, and the Minnesota State Fair. The secretary and general manager of the State Fair, Thomas Canfield, was particularly persistent in his efforts to secure Lindbergh for a flying exhibition. And Little Falls even requested President Coolidge to stop on his way to his summer home in the Black Hills of South Dakota to confer the Congressional Medal of Honor on Lindbergh at the homecoming celebration.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, Guggenheim Fund officials could accommodate only a fraction of those who sent Lindbergh tour invitations. Among elements that entered into the final selections, Lindbergh explained long after, were "importance of the city, interest and cooperation of officials, personal-background relationships (Little Falls, Detroit, St. Louis, San Diego), [and] landing facilities."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Milton Lomask, *Seed Money: The Guggenheim Story*, 92 (Morrow quote) (New York, 1964); Charles A. Lindbergh to Bruce L. Larson, June 24, 1967, in possession of author, hereafter cited as Lindbergh Letter. The tour itinerary is listed in Charles A. Lindbergh, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, 506-511 (New York, 1953).

<sup>3</sup> Useful published accounts of the tour include Donald E. Keyhoe, *Flying With Lindbergh* (New York, 1928) and the same author's "Seeing America With Lindbergh," in *National Geographic Magazine*, January, 1928, p. 1-46; Walter S. Ross, *The Last Hero: Charles A. Lindbergh*, 150-160 (New York, 1968); Kenneth S. Davis, *The Hero: Charles A. Lindbergh and the American Dream*, 235-237, 242 (Garden City, N.Y., 1959); Lomask, *Seed Money*, 91-96.

<sup>4</sup> Theodore Christianson to Chris Rosenmeier, June 3, 1927, Theodore Christianson Papers, Minnesota State Archives, St. Paul.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Rosenmeier to Frank B. Kellogg, Congressman Harold Knutson to Kellogg, and Christianson to Kellogg, June 1, 2, and 3, 1927, respectively, and Kellogg's reply of June 7, 1927, are all in the Frank B. Kellogg Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society, along with a letter from the committee to Lindbergh, June 10, 1927. There are relevant communications from Kellogg and Everett Sanders, secretary to President Coolidge, in the Calvin Coolidge Papers, in the Library of Congress. The author interviewed Chester H. Longley on June 20, 1967, Kenneth T. Martin by telephone in August 4, 1967, and Gordon Rosenmeier, son of Chris Rosenmeier, on June 20, 1967. See also the *Little Falls Daily Transcript*, June 1, 11, 15, 1927, p. 1 in each case.

<sup>6</sup> William Beck, assistant to Kellogg, to Mayor George E. Leach, June 6, 1927, A. R. Rogers to Kellogg, June 9, 1927, Thomas Canfield to Kellogg, June 27, July 21, and August 15, 1927, and Kellogg to Canfield, July 25, 1927, all in the Kellogg Papers; Canfield to Rosenmeier, June 3 and June 28, 1927, and Rosenmeier to Canfield, June 4 and June 31, 1927, all in the Chris Rosenmeier Papers, in the possession of Gordon Rosenmeier, Little Falls; Mayor Grimes and J. K. Martin, president of the board of commerce, to Kellogg, May 31, 1927, Kellogg to Grimes and Martin, June 1, 1927, and Kellogg to Sanders, June 1, 1927, all in the Coolidge Papers.

<sup>7</sup> Lindbergh Letter, June 24, 1967.

LINDBERGH WAS ABLE to keep his late-August dates in Minnesota although they were announced as tentative at first. He was on schedule and approximately one-third of the way through the tour on August 23 when he flew the "Spirit of St. Louis" westward from Madison, Wisconsin, into Minnesota. At that time Lindbergh made "fly-overs" above four of many communities whose invitations he could not honor because "time and circumstances did not permit a landing" — Portage and La Crosse, Wisconsin, and Winona and Red Wing, Minnesota. Circling the cities, Lindbergh, as he had done elsewhere, dropped the following printed tour message:

Aboard "Spirit of St. Louis"  
On Tour

GREETINGS

Because of the limited time and the extensive itinerary of the tour of the United States now in progress to encourage popular interest in aeronautics, it is impossible for the Spirit of St. Louis to land in your city.

This message from the air, however, is sent you to express our sincere appreciation of your interest in the tour and in the promotion and extension of commercial aeronautics in the United States.

We feel that we will be amply repaid for all our efforts if each and every citizen in the United States cherishes an interest in flying and gives his earnest support to the air mail service and the establishment of airports and similar facilities. The concerted efforts of the citizens of the United States in this direction will result in America taking its rightful place, within a very short time, as the world leader in commercial flying.

(Signed) CHARLES A. LINDBERGH

HARRY F. GUGGENHEIM, president  
The Daniel Guggenheim fund for  
the promotion of aeronautics

WILLIAM P. MacCRACKEN, JR.,  
Assistant Secretary of Aeronautics,  
Department of Commerce.<sup>8</sup>

Winona was the first Minnesota community to receive the Lindbergh message. During the last of several passes over the city, he released a canvas bag with a bright orange streamer. As the bag hit the ground, "35 to 40 pairs of scrambled hands and feet [sought] the message in a dog-pile on the walk." This spirited reaction was typical throughout the tour, for it was known that each greeting was autographed by Lindbergh. The *Winona Republican-Herald* termed the fly-over "a signal honor" for the city and said Winona was pleased to give Lindbergh the "first reception . . . in his home state."<sup>9</sup>

At 12:50 P.M. on August 23 the citizens of Red Wing gave Lindbergh his second Minnesota welcome. Spotted by watchers on Sorin's Bluff, the silver monoplane was greeted by a ringing fire bell and shrieking industrial whistles. According to the *Red Wing Daily Republican*, building roofs were crowded with residents eager to get a closer view. On top of the *Republican* building a white "R" had been painted for identification in keeping with prearrangements by the Guggenheim Fund. It advocated that communities mark their names or initials on roofs to assist aviators who might otherwise be forced to fly low enough to read railroad station signboards. After circling Red Wing for ten minutes, Lindbergh resumed flying the air-mail route toward the Twin Cities.<sup>10</sup>

At 1:34 P.M. Lindbergh flew over the St. Paul Municipal Airport. Since he was due to speak at the site after a parade through the cities, a large crowd viewed his maneuvers. He circled and passed over the area, but at no time did he "loop or otherwise stunt the 'Spirit of St. Louis' . . . [since] it was not designed as an acrobatic plane."<sup>11</sup> Lindbergh then proceeded to Wold-Chamberlain Field, Minneapolis, where he landed at 2:03 P.M., only three minutes off the prearranged time. Punctuality, Lindbergh felt, would help convince a somewhat skeptical public of the reliability of aircraft.

Certain unplanned developments nevertheless complicated the landing at Wold-Chamberlain. Some people were fooled when Lindbergh, unlike the advance plane accompanying him, approached the airport from the north (because of a detour over downtown Minneapolis) rather than from the expected easterly direc-

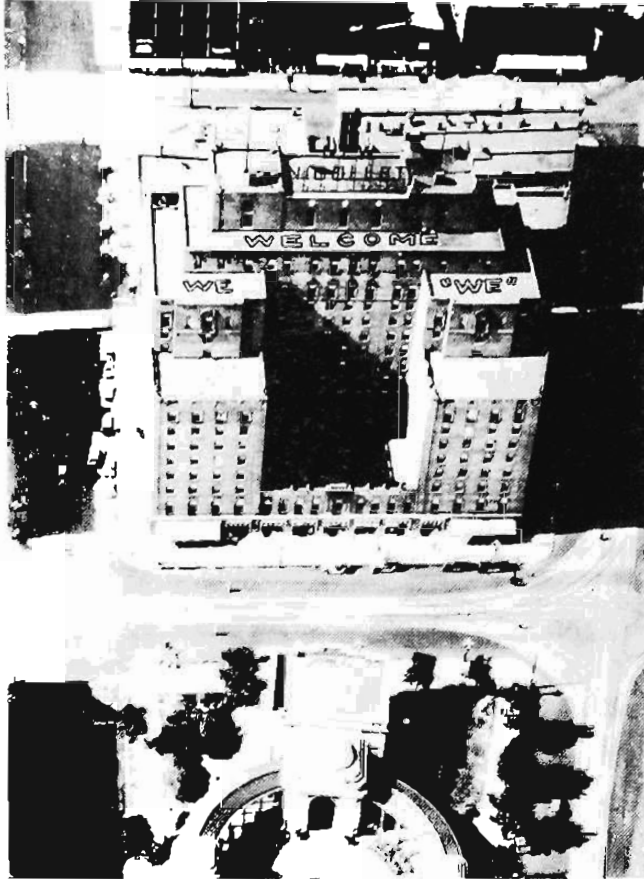
---

<sup>8</sup> Harry F. Guggenheim telegram to Christianson, July 15, 1927, Christianson Papers; Lindbergh, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, 508; Lindbergh Letter (quote). The complete message appears in Keyhoe, *Flying with Lindbergh*, 239-240.

<sup>9</sup> *Winona Republican-Herald*, August 23, 1927, p. 1, 9. This issue also printed the Lindbergh message.

<sup>10</sup> *Red Wing Daily Republican*, August 22, p. 1, and August 23, p. 1, 1927; Lindbergh Letter; Keyhoe, *Flying With Lindbergh*, p. 241-242.

<sup>11</sup> *St. Paul Dispatch*, August 23, 1927, p. 1; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, August 23, 1927, p. 1; Lindbergh Letter (quote). Miscellaneous clippings and programs pertaining to Lindbergh's return to Minnesota and the rest of the tour are in the Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr., and Family Papers and the Lindbergh scrapbook compiled by Dorothy Wray of Campbell, Minnesota, both in the Minnesota Historical Society; a Lindbergh scrapbook collected by Mrs. Linda Lindbergh Seal, the flier's aunt, in the possession of her daughter, Mrs. P. W. Huntemer of Chicago; the Minneapolis Historical Collection of the Minneapolis Public Library; the Little Falls Public Library; and the holdings of the Morrison County Historical Society, Little Falls.



FLYING over Minneapolis, Lindbergh and the "Spirit of St. Louis," nicknamed "We" by the press, were welcomed by this sign painted on the Nicollet Hotel.

tion. More important, though, was the behavior of the crowd which broke police lines and surged toward the "Spirit of St. Louis." Some 20,000 people reportedly "ran wild . . . to sweep over the field and surround the plane" in spite of Lindbergh's diversionary move to turn eastward and taxi directly to the airmail hangar instead of the 109th Air Squadron hangar, as planned. Contrary to news releases at the time, however, smoke from artillery guns, fired in greeting, did not interfere with the plane's descent. In any event, Lindbergh says that the Minneapolis landing, despite the crowd, did not present as serious a danger as that encountered in a number of other landings of the "Spirit of St. Louis."<sup>12</sup>

The general confusion at Wold-Chamberlain delayed the start of the scheduled parade, but at last Lindbergh took his place in a parade car with Mayor George E. Leach of Minneapolis and Mayor Lawrence C. Hodgson of St. Paul. Riding in the next car were Mrs. Leach, Mrs. Hodgson, and Evangeline Lindbergh, the flier's mother, who made the trip from her home in Detroit, Michigan, to take part in festivities honoring her son.

From the airport the parade cars drove on 34th Avenue South to Minnehaha Parkway and then westward on the parkway to Park Avenue. At this point the

cars reached the main parade route which in Minneapolis was "Park avenue, Tenth street to Nicollet avenue, Nicollet to Second street, to Third avenue, and over the Third avenue bridge, to University avenue." In St. Paul the parade followed "University avenue to Robert street, to Fillmore avenue, to State street, to St. Lawrence street, and the airport." At approximately 3:30 P.M., less than one and one-half hours after Lindbergh's landing, the parade wound up at the St. Paul airport. There, after Mayor Hodgson introduced him as "the best known man in the world," Lindbergh talked on a subject he often repeated on the tour — the general needs and future of commercial aviation in the United States.<sup>13</sup>

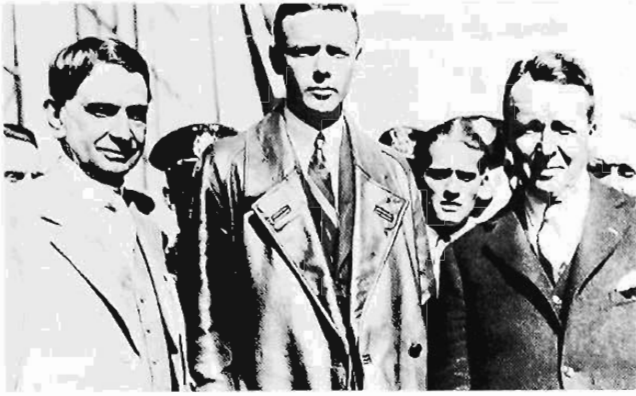
For all the excitement, Lindbergh Day in the Twin Cities was not an unqualified success, in spite of the large crowds (estimated by the *Minneapolis Tribune* the next day at 250,000, by the *Minneapolis Journal* at 500,000, and by the St. Paul dailies at 300,000). An editorial in the *Minneapolis Tribune*, for example, complained that the quick passage of the parade through Minneapolis made it "a distinct disappointment. . . . No parade at all would be preferable to one in which the hero is not to be satisfactorily seen." The editorial further suggested that "the Guggenheim Foundation, if it is desirous of having this tour attain the objectives professed, plan the parades in relation to the susceptibilities of the countless thousands standing in line."<sup>14</sup> Several letters to the editors of Twin Cities papers expressed similar views.

In an editorial, entitled "Why the Parade Sped," the *Minneapolis Journal* explained that the Minneapolis committee had a contractual commitment to deliver Lindbergh at the St. Paul boundary by 3:00 P.M. and also that Lindbergh himself had turned down the committee's plan "to take him at high speed from Wold-Chamberlain Field to the starting point of the parade." Furthermore, the *Journal* stressed, it was "by no fault of the Committee or its guest" that Lindbergh's departure from the field was delayed and that the tour manager had to hurry the parade along, "with the result that it reached . . . St. Paul . . . exactly on time." Tour manager Donald E. Keyhoe later explained that he and Lindbergh felt that the party should be on time in the second city, and "for this reason our visit to Minneapolis was rather short and our passage through

<sup>12</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 24, 1927, p. 1, 4; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, August 24, 1927, p. 1, 2; Wray Scrapbook; Lindbergh Letter.

<sup>13</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 24, 1927, p. 1, 8; *St. Paul Dispatch*, August 23, 1927, p. 1; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, August 24, 1927, p. 1; Wray Scrapbook. The speech was broadcast. See Charles F. Sarjeant, ed., *The First Forty: The Story of WCCO Radio*, 50 (Minneapolis, 1964).

<sup>14</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 26, 1927, p. 12.



MAYORS Lawrence C. Hodgson of St. Paul (left) and George E. Leach of Minneapolis (right) posed with Lindbergh.

the city was rapid. We all regretted this, but it could not be helped."<sup>15</sup>

In his January 16, 1970, letter to the author, Lindbergh said of the 1927 parade: "I had become seriously concerned by the tendency of reception officials to overcome schedule delays by driving the cars I rode in at excessive speeds. I considered the hazards involved much greater than anything I encountered in flying during the tour."

Lindbergh's official appearance in the Twin Cities ended the evening of August 23 with a banquet at the Saint Paul Hotel. On that occasion Governor Christianson presented him with a commemorative medal from the state.<sup>16</sup>

It was customary procedure during the tour to set aside two days out of each seven for rest. August 24 was one of those days. Such days did provide "the greatest opportunity for personal relationships" on the tour, but they were often hectic. In fact, because of the constant demands on Lindbergh for public exposure, he found the hours of flying between stops most restful and "often mapped out long detours in order to extend these hours."<sup>17</sup>

Lindbergh's stay in Minnesota permitted him but lit-

<sup>15</sup> *Minneapolis Journal*, August 25, 1927, p. 16; Keyhoe, "Seeing America," p. 16-17 (quote); Keyhoe, *Flying With Lindbergh*, 255-258.

<sup>16</sup> *Minneapolis Journal*, August 24, 1927, p. 1, 17. The medal is now part of the Lindbergh Collection in the Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.

<sup>17</sup> Lindbergh Letter, June 24, 1967.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Mrs. Eva Lindbergh Christie (now Mrs. C. Howard Spaeth) in Red Lake Falls, Minnesota, April 1, 1967; Lindbergh Letter; *St. Paul Dispatch*, August 23, 1927, p. 1; *Minneapolis Journal*, August 24, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Lindbergh, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, 507, 508; *Minneapolis Journal*, August 25, 1927, p. 1.

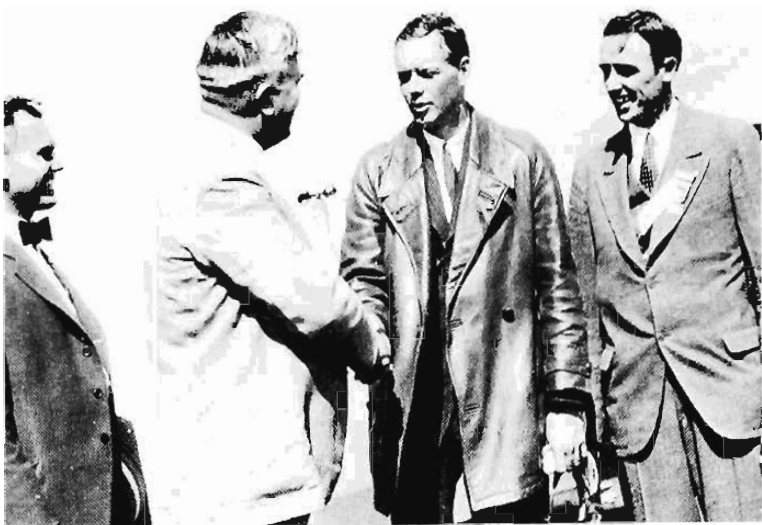
tle time to spend with his mother, his half sister, Mrs. Eva Lindbergh Christie, or with other relatives who gathered to see him. Mrs. Christie, recently recalling the 1927 celebrations in the Twin Cities and Little Falls, remarked: "I hardly had a chance to talk to Charles." Evangeline Land Lindbergh, who sought to avoid undue attention by staying at the Radisson Hotel in Minneapolis, drove on August 24 to the Lowry Hotel in St. Paul where her son was staying and joined him at noon for a few hours.<sup>18</sup>

THURSDAY, August 25, was a special one for the tour as it took Lindbergh home to Little Falls. Joining the party for that leg of the tour, Mrs. Lindbergh took off for Little Falls in the escort plane. She was a veteran of flights in her son's barnstorming "Jenny" and of one flight in the "Spirit of St. Louis." Lindbergh followed in the familiar Ryan monoplane but detoured somewhat for fly-overs at Savage, Shakopee, St. Cloud, Melrose, and Sauk Centre.<sup>19</sup>

The request for a fly-over at Savage was probably honored because the village had befriended Lindbergh in 1923 after he made a forced landing in a nearby swamp. Except for a cracked propeller there had been little damage to his airplane, but the accident did delay his plans to fly his father, Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr., between towns in the latter's primary campaign for the U.S. Senate. On the 1927 fly-over Lindbergh, according to Savage's Mayor Charles F. McCarthy, "swooped down on our town at 12:15. . . circling the village three or four times, coming down to scarcely more than one hundred feet." Lindbergh often flew at this low

EVANGELINE LAND LINDBERGH and her son, a week before the epic flight





AT LITTLE FALLS Lindbergh shook hands with Governor Theodore Christianson while Mayor Grimes (right) looked on.

altitude, even in open country, as he dipped his wings or waved to those below.<sup>20</sup>

Passing quickly over Shakopee, Lindbergh turned the "Spirit of St. Louis" north toward the familiar areas of Stearns and Morrison counties. Shortly after 1:00 P.M. Lindbergh circled St. Cloud. The *St. Cloud Daily Times* noted that the plane's license number, NX-211, was visible from the ground and that "it was very possible to see the 'Lone Eagle' leaning far out of his cabin waving to those in sight."<sup>21</sup>

After dropping the usual printed promotion for commercial aviation over St. Cloud's St. Germain Street, Lindbergh flew west to Melrose where his grandfather, August Lindbergh, had settled in 1859 upon his arrival from Sweden. The *Melrose Beacon* reported that Lindbergh circled the area about 1:20 P.M., "hovering over the land homesteaded by his grandfather . . . at the west limits of the city." Later, however, the *Beacon* revealed that the canvas bag containing the tour message had snagged on the tail of the plane and did not drop to earth. Consequently, Melrose had to wait to get the message from Fargo, North Dakota — by registered mail. Lindbergh was on schedule at 1:30 P.M. when he flew over Sauk Centre and dropped greetings and then headed for Little Falls in the "Spirit of St. Louis."<sup>22</sup>

What probably was the most memorable day in Little Falls history required considerable preparation. For weeks the homecoming committee and, for that matter, virtually all of Little Falls had anticipated — and planned for — the visit which the city's newspaper was to evaluate as "more important than one from the president of the United States." The old family car, a

Saxon once driven by Lindbergh, was rescued from rusting-junk status and displayed as a prize possession. The press and radio made arrangements for "all out" coverage of the homecoming. Air officials, including flier Charles ("Speed") Holman, selected a sixty-acre field on the Jacob Bratcher farm north of town as a suitable landing field for the event. Lindbergh cards were printed and the way cleared to reroute Highway 371 traffic to allow for the parade.<sup>23</sup>

Everyone joked about "relatives" arriving for a visit on August 25. Although police and national guard units were scheduled for special duty, the *Little Falls Transcript* published warnings that pickpockets and house prowlers were known to be following Lindbergh celebrations from city to city. Two Little Falls youths, John Wetzel and Frank Larson, were chosen in an "All-American Boy" contest to serve as honor guards for Colonel Lindbergh in the Twin Cities and Little Falls. On August 24 the *Transcript* published the complete program of events under the heading, "Facts About Lindy Day," disclosing that there would be business closings and restricted postal service during the day.<sup>24</sup>

August 25 was sunny and hot. Nevertheless, most of Little Falls and thousands of visitors were at the pasture that served as a landing field when Lindbergh brought the "Spirit of St. Louis" down at 2:00 P.M. The three-point landing prompted a lieutenant in the 109th National Guard Air Squadron to remark that the flier "knew his stuff." The silver plane taxied to a stop, and out stepped the pride of Little Falls, smiling and sunburned in his familiar leather jacket. After exchanging greetings with officials at the landing field, Lindbergh was ushered to a car for the festive parade through the city.<sup>25</sup>

The parade was elaborate. It included bands and

<sup>20</sup> *Shakopee Argus-Tribune*, September 1, 1927, p. 1 (McCarthy quote); Lindbergh Letter. For the Savage incident, see Charles A. Lindbergh, "We," 71-76 (New York, 1927). The cracked propeller is now at the Lindbergh House in Lindbergh State Park, Little Falls.

<sup>21</sup> *St. Cloud Daily Times*, August 25, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Melrose Beacon*, August 25, 1927, p. 1, and September 1, 1927, p. 1; *Sauk Centre Herald*, August 25, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> *Little Falls Daily Transcript*, August 25, 1927, p. 2. In an interview with the author at Little Falls on June 23, 1967, Arthur La Fond said that he and Pat Lauraman used a pipe wrench to steer the old car to town shortly after the Paris flight. The car is now at the Lindbergh House. See *St. Paul Sunday Pioneer Press*, August 13, 1967, second section, p. 4. Stanley Hubbard, Sr., who covered the Lindbergh celebration as owner and broadcaster of WAMD, Minneapolis, termed radio activities as "all out coverage" in a telephone interview on August 4, 1967.

<sup>24</sup> *Little Falls Daily Transcript*, July 28, August 19, 23, 24, 1927.

<sup>25</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 26, 1927, p. 1.

drum corps from several Minnesota communities, floats (one of which featured the Saxon car), an old tractor Lindbergh used on the home farm, replicas of the "Spirit of St. Louis," the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and the Statue of Liberty, and a marching delegation of five hundred children. For once there were many familiar faces and voices in the crowd, estimated to be 50,000 strong despite the heat. Guilbert Jarvis, city editor of the *Transcript* in 1927, recalled that the "town was packed with people" and that for a newspaperman the event was definitely a "stemwinder." The colorful parade ended at the fair grounds south of the city where several speakers paid tribute to Lindbergh. Among them were Mayor Grimes, Congressman Harold Knutson, Senator Rosenmeier, Governor Christianson, Swedish Consul Nils Leon Jaenson of Minneapolis, and Dr. Longley of Little Falls. Lindbergh also received decorations from Sweden and his home town.<sup>26</sup>

Lindbergh then took the platform, acknowledged the warm welcome, and stated simply that "I have looked forward for a long time to coming back to Little Falls and I regret that I can stay but one day now that I am here." The main import of the speech was typical of those Lindbergh gave elsewhere. Noting first that the purpose of the tour was "to hasten the time . . . [in which] this country will fly," Lindbergh outlined a brief history of aviation in the United States.

<sup>26</sup> Telephone interview with Jarvis, August 4, 1967; *Little Falls Daily Transcript*, August 25, 26, 1927; *Little Falls Herald*, August 26, 1927, p. 1, 8; *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 26, 1927, p. 1, 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Little Falls Herald*, August 26, 1927, p. 1, 5; *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 26, 1927, p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 27, 1927, p. 1; Minnesota interview by author and Russell W. Fridley with Lindbergh and Mrs. Eva Lindbergh Christie in April, 1966. Among Lindbergh's statements of his views on wildlife preservation are "The Wisdom of Wildness," in *Life* (December 22, 1967), p. 8-10, and "Is Civilization Progress?" in *Reader's Digest* (July, 1964) p. 1-8.

He emphasized that in twenty-five years development of aeronautics had been more rapid than advances in any other form of transportation and cited construction materials, design, and weight as problem areas that had been successfully overcome.

Urging that people "differentiate between commercial, experimental, and military aviation," Lindbergh pointed out that the safety record of regularly operated airlines equalled that of other types of transportation. He personalized the aviation issue for Little Falls residents by reminding them that they could fly to Minneapolis in one hour. Land travel took three hours. Lindbergh admitted there still were problems, such as landing planes in fog and financing the high cost of flying, but he was optimistic about solutions. He noted, for example, that the fuel cost of the "Spirit of St. Louis" was less than four cents per mile.

At this point Lindbergh gave the crowd something to think about by predicting that "the day is coming when airlines will be more extensive than our present day railroad lines" and that "we may expect to see regular passenger service to Europe—when flying boats will render a regular service." To accomplish these feats America would have to be "awake to aviation," moving ahead of Europe, Lindbergh said. The tour had been conceived to stimulate this "awakening," and Lindbergh concluded his comments by calling for construction of airports near the centers of cities and for standardization of air laws.<sup>27</sup>

During Lindbergh's remaining hours in Little Falls, he attended evening festivities at the Elks Hotel, where the program included more tributes, another Lindbergh speech, and a number of musical presentations. The next morning he viewed the family home and the pleasantly wooded acres along the Mississippi River where he had spent many boyhood hours. It is possible that this early experience with nature stimulated Lindbergh's lifelong interest in the worldwide preservation of wildlife.<sup>28</sup>

*THE LINDBERGH family car, a 1916 Saxon (visible behind the car in the foreground), was part of the Lindy Day celebration at Little Falls.*



Always aware of the tour schedule, Lindbergh reluctantly took off in the "Spirit of St. Louis" from Little Falls at 11:30 A.M. on August 26, his third day in Minnesota, and headed over the west-central portion of the state to Fargo, North Dakota. Although confronted by gusty winds, he landed on time at Fargo, where many Minnesotans had gathered for a last goodbye to the state's most popular hero.<sup>29</sup>

WHAT CAN BE SAID of Minnesota's response to the return of Charles A. Lindbergh after his epic flight of 1927? Years after the event, Minnesota historian Theodore C. Blegen wrote that Lindbergh received "a glad and unprecedented ovation from his home community" which "took deep pride in what he had done." Impressions recorded in 1927 reflect the emotional impact of Lindbergh's return. In the words of the August 23, 1927, *Minneapolis Journal*, for example, "the homecoming of Colonel Lindbergh to the soil of Minnesota is an affair of the heart." To possessive Minnesotans Lindbergh was the "Gopher Ace," the "blond Viking of the air," the "Minnesota birdman," "Minnesota's own," or simply "Charlie" or "Slim." Governor Christianson received suggestions that the state be renamed "Lindberghia" and that Lindbergh be made head of a "Boys' Aviator" movement.<sup>30</sup>

To the Minnesota press Lindbergh was a "world air hero," "an intrepid flier," and "a gallant and sensible young man." His reception, complete with novelty items such as "Lindy planes" for automobile radiator caps, was broadly evaluated by the *St. Cloud Daily Times* as greater than any plaudit accorded a victorious Roman general. A *St. Paul Pioneer Press* editorial writer concluded that "for once the world stopped its quarrelling and united for a moment to applaud a young man who had accomplished a feat of outstanding and extraordinary heroism."<sup>31</sup>

Prior to Lindbergh's visit the *Minneapolis Tribune* had expressed the hope that "the welcome [Lindbergh] gets from his own home folks will have a little individual quality which he has not noted in the welcome he got elsewhere," and to many observers the Little Falls response seemed uniquely warm. The *Little Falls Daily Transcript* described the attitude toward Lindbergh as a particularly jubilant "chesty feeling." The *Little Falls Herald* more explicitly editorialized: "There were places that more people welcomed him, but none could have equalled the warmth with which the Colonel and his mother, Mrs. Evangeline L. Lindbergh, were welcomed at Little Falls." A more impartial commentator, the *New York Times*, observed that the Little Falls reception "was exemplified by a remarkable display of plain, old-fashioned appreciation for the feat of a native son."<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, the enthusiasm of some admirers for

souvenirs of their hero led them to vandalize the Lindbergh home near Little Falls. Martin Engstrom, a friend of Lindbergh who was keeping an eye on the unoccupied homestead at the time, had padlocked the house and boarded up the garage. Nevertheless, according to Engstrom, people "kicked in windows, picked up anything loose," and generally "defaced the home." It is difficult to determine the exact loss in terms of historic artifacts, but many items were taken from the house, including a number of books from the library of Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to vandalism Lindbergh was subjected to insatiable demands for stories by newspapermen. In Minnesota press coverage was so complete that virtually all front-page headlines and subheadings were devoted to Lindbergh during the three-day visit. The only exceptions were articles on the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, and the progress of Bobby Jones in the national amateur golf championship. Lindbergh soon came to feel that many details in newspaper stories — like what he ate for breakfast — were "tedious and silly." He stated recently that they were "elements that caused me eventually to avoid contact with the press."<sup>34</sup>

Disenchanted, too, were the frequent misquotations and false information which he said regularly appeared in print. In addition Lindbergh hated wordy, sentimental prose such as the *Minneapolis Tribune's* report from Little Falls that "the Lone Eagle had returned to his home nest. . . in a blaze of glory." He also found many nicknames annoying and misleading. Lindbergh particularly despised the news media's favorites, "Flying Fool" and "Lucky Lindy," because to him there was nothing "lucky" about his flight, nor was he a "fool." He had meticulously prepared for the flight. Furthermore, he had used a sound, new airplane with instruments, and he was a trained, experienced pilot. No less emphatic forty years after the event, Lindbergh maintains that "the name 'Lucky Lindy' was a news-

<sup>29</sup> *Moorhead Daily News*, August 26, 1927, p. 1; Lindbergh Letter.

<sup>30</sup> Theodore C. Blegen, *Minnesota: A History of the State*, 485 (Minneapolis, 1963); William J. Lovejoy to Christianson, June 23, 1927, and Edwin P. Thayer to Christianson, June 16, 1927, in the Christianson Papers.

<sup>31</sup> *Duluth Herald*, August 26, 1927, p. 1; *Little Falls Daily Transcript*, June 2, 1927, p. 2; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, August 23, 1927, p. 8, 9; *St. Cloud Daily Times*, August 24, 1927, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 23, 1927, p. 6; *Little Falls Daily Transcript*, August 23, 1927, p. 2; *Little Falls Herald*, August 26, 1927, p. 4; *New York Times*, August 26, 1927, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Martin Engstrom, Little Falls, June 22, 1967; *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 27, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Lindbergh Letter (quotes); Lindbergh, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, p. 161-162.



paper concoction" which he "never liked," and that the "second-rate" song given that title "was often played at dinners I attended, much to my embarrassment and annoyance."<sup>35</sup>

The exuberant receptions given Lindbergh came to be a source of worry and irritation as well. Having once seen a man cut in half by a propeller and another seriously mutilated, Lindbergh was concerned that, in huge crowds, someone would come too close to his airplane during landings. The busy tour staff arranged in advance for police and military officers, together with fences or ropes, to keep the crowds a safe distance from the landing strip area. Despite these measures, there were times during the tour when crowd breakthroughs forced Lindbergh to "ground-loop and cut the switches," breaking off his landing approach. Later Lindbergh charged that "press photographers and reporters running out onto the field often started off the crowd break-through, although resulting newspaper stories usually, if not always, attributed the break-through to the crowd."<sup>36</sup>

There is evidence, however, that the behavior of the Little Falls crowd, for all its jubilation, was remarkably restrained. Although some participants, in later interviews, described the crowd as "pressing and almost a mob," a "mob," and "almost insane," others reported "orderly and interested people," "no trouble or violence," and "not a bit of hysteria." In apparent support of the latter interpretation, the *Minneapolis Tribune* labeled the reception "enthusiastic" but "orderly," and the *New York Times* noted that a more dignified parade speed had been possible because of the absence of the "boisterously enthusiastic crowds" of metropolitan centers. The *Times* further reported that Lindbergh consequently "passed through the streets of the old home town minus that tired, bored stare of the big city receptions." In a revealing and conclusive statement about his reception in Minnesota, Lindbergh wrote long after: "I remember noth-



LINDBERGH addressed this crowd at Little Falls, urging the rapid development of commercial aviation.

ing about the stops in Minnesota that would justify the term 'hysterical.' I recall the days in Minnesota as having been surrounded by above-average dignity and interest in the future of aircraft. I remember clearly the lack-of-pressure feeling I had at Little Falls, the feeling of getting back to some degree of normalcy and the kind of human relationships I had known before my Paris flight. It was a great relief."<sup>37</sup>

IN THE DECADES since the event, historians have tried to understand what it was about Lindbergh, the achievement, or both which so convulsively captured the public imagination. Although there was great enthusiasm for the flight in Europe, Latin America, and other parts of the world, most writers have concentrated their attention on the American reaction about which generalizations can perhaps more accurately be made. At least one writer has conjectured that the reason for the adulation given Lindbergh in the United States can best be explained by the fact that he was "a quiet rebuke to the Lost Generation." According to this viewpoint his heroic deed offered a wholesome contrast to a decade characterized by corruption in politics, crime on city streets, disillusionment with World War I, corrosion of religion by scientific theories, and sensational, low-level journalism.<sup>38</sup>

In a different vein John W. Ward has contended that the American reaction expressed an admiration for both the self-sufficient individual and the machine — one stressing America's past and the pioneer spirit and the other America's future and the new technology. Ward also suggests that "the public . . . imputes meaning to Lindbergh's flight and then Lindbergh's function is to affirm the truth of these meanings by his success."<sup>39</sup>

Not only was the solo nature of the flight noted in

<sup>35</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 26, 1927, p. 1; Lindbergh Letter.

<sup>36</sup> Lindbergh Letter; Keyhoe, *Flying With Lindbergh*, 31-33; Lindbergh, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, 495-498.

<sup>37</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 26, 1927, p. 1; *New York Times*, August 26, 1927; Lindbergh Letter.

<sup>38</sup> Wecter, *The Hero in America*, 427 (quote), 430; Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties*, 219-222 (New York, 1931); Ross, *The Last Hero*, 146-149.

<sup>39</sup> John W. Ward, *Red, White, and Blue: Men, Books, and Ideas in American Culture*, 34-37, 57 (quote) (New York, 1969). This is a collection of the author's essays, including "The Meaning of Lindbergh's Flight," first published in *American Quarterly* (Spring, 1958), and "Lindbergh, Dos Passos, and History," first published in *Carleton Miscellany* (Summer, 1965).

## GLORY ENOUGH FOR ALL



AMERICANS everywhere claimed Lindbergh and his achievement as their own.

several instances by the ebullient Minnesota press in 1927, but several later writers have singled out this aspect of the Lindbergh phenomenon for inquiry. Among these is Walter S. Ross, who concludes that Lindbergh was a hero in part because the "epic deed was so much a solo performance from first to last." Perplexed by "the furore" caused by the Lindbergh flight, Henry Ladd Smith points out in his study of commercial aviation that Lindbergh did not make the first crossing of the Atlantic (the first was by a navy seaplane in 1919). Instead, Smith suggests, the public responded as it did because Lindbergh flew alone and because "the public was ready for an air hero in 1927." In contrast, Lindbergh's own analysis accents the technological advance which the flight represented: "Flying alone was of secondary significance to the fact that it was the first non-stop airplane flight between the continents of North America and Europe."<sup>40</sup>

Lindbergh's own qualities — his youthfulness, sense of humor, and modesty, for example — enhanced the enthusiastic response he elicited in Minnesota, as elsewhere. The *Minneapolis Tribune* described Lindbergh's achievement as "conceived in the magnificent audacity of youth."<sup>41</sup>

Without question Lindbergh was a figure with

whom youth identified. Reports by tour members, which revealed that Lindbergh had clowned at a swimming party and executed tricky maneuvers while outwitting a camera plane in the air, revealed that the flier had a sense of humor and made him engagingly human. Lindbergh himself recalled that after a false story had been started that he loved to eat jelly beans, a box of them was often awaiting him in a hotel suite during the tour. He and other tour members then divided up the jelly beans as ammunition and threw them at each other. According to Lindbergh, however, newspaper stories often exaggerated incidents, and "more practical joking took place in the normal life of the air fields" than on the tour.<sup>42</sup>

The modest manner in which Lindbergh received the plaudits of the world was noted by Minnesota newspapers. While the *Minneapolis Tribune* described Lindbergh as "a modest, earnest young man, not puffed up with vainglory," the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* asserted that few popular heroes had "worn so well" as Colonel Lindbergh. An editorial entitled "An Epic of the Air" in the *Little Falls Daily Transcript* related his longevity as a hero "to the unostentatious manner in which he has conducted himself . . . to his refusal to commercialize on his exploit; in short, to the modesty, sportsmanship, courage and high purpose which make up the personality of this youth." For fourteen-year-old Robert Mead, *Minneapolis Tribune* essay contest winner, Lindbergh meant simply, "Depend on yourself and do your best and then don't blow about it."<sup>43</sup>

FINALLY, personal familiarity with his family undoubtedly intensified Minnesota's response to Lindbergh. Many residents of the Little Falls area remembered Evangeline Land, the young woman from Michigan who went to Little Falls to teach in the public schools and soon married lawyer Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr. Mrs. Lindbergh's father, Dr. Charles H. Land, was a Detroit dentist well-known for his experimental and scientific work with porcelain and dental innovations. People mentioned that the flier may have inherited from Dr. Land an interest in science and

<sup>40</sup> Ross, *The Last Hero*, xiv; Henry Ladd Smith, *Airways: The History of Commercial Aviation in the United States*, 122-123 (quote) (New York, 1942); Lindbergh to Russell W. Fridley, director of the Minnesota Historical Society, April 7, 1967.

<sup>41</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 24, 1927, p. 14.

<sup>42</sup> *St. Paul Dispatch*, August 24, 1927, p. 1; Keyhoe, *Flying With Lindbergh*, 67-68; Lindbergh Letter of June 24, 1967 (quote).

<sup>43</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 24, 1927, p. 14; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, August 23, 1927, p. 8; *Little Falls Daily Transcript*, August 25, 1927, p. 2; *Melrose Beacon*, September 1, 1927, p. 4.

technology. Certainly some older central Minnesotans recalled Lindbergh's paternal grandparents, August and Louisa Lindbergh. August, a liberal member of the Swedish Riksdag from 1847 to 1858, had displayed an independent spirit when he emigrated to the United States at the age of 50, and editorials in the *Minneapolis Tribune* and the *Svenska Amerikanska Posten* commented significantly on the family's pioneering spirit and Swedish background.<sup>44</sup>

For most Minnesotans, however, the Lindbergh name was directly connected with the public career of Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr. A fiercely independent thinker whose convictions and economic views remained constant throughout his active career as Republican congressman from 1907 to 1917, the elder Lindbergh was widely known for his attack on the "Money Trust," his opposition to American entry into World War I, and his deep commitment to the Midwestern farmer. To many people he was a radical, for he advocated such policies as government ownership of utilities and transportation facilities and government control of banks. No doubt many voters recalled the disloyalty charges and general vilification against Lindbergh, Sr., in the 1918 gubernatorial campaign. Others were familiar with his participation in Farmer-Labor

politics and his three most widely circulated books explaining his maverick views.<sup>45</sup>

In view of the senior Lindbergh's career and character, Minnesotans naturally compared the flier to his father. For example, Knud Wefald, a sympathetic state legislator and United States congressman from Hawley, wrote the *Minneapolis Daily Star* editor that Lindbergh, Sr., was "the most sanely radical man I have ever met" and went on to assess the son's 1927 flight as a radical gesture comparable to the elder Lindbergh's courageous political stand. Wefald further predicted the possibility that young Lindbergh would realize his father's dream of high service to the people of Minnesota in the "offices of governor, U.S. Senator, and even President of the Republic." Former Governor John Lind was also reminded of the elder Lindbergh. In 1930 he pointed out that "the boy resembles his father in not bragging about his achievement." In a strong statement Lind accused the "Big Men" of Minneapolis of rushing the younger Lindbergh in the parade to St. Paul, explaining that "perhaps they were afraid he would arouse the spirit of his father."<sup>46</sup>

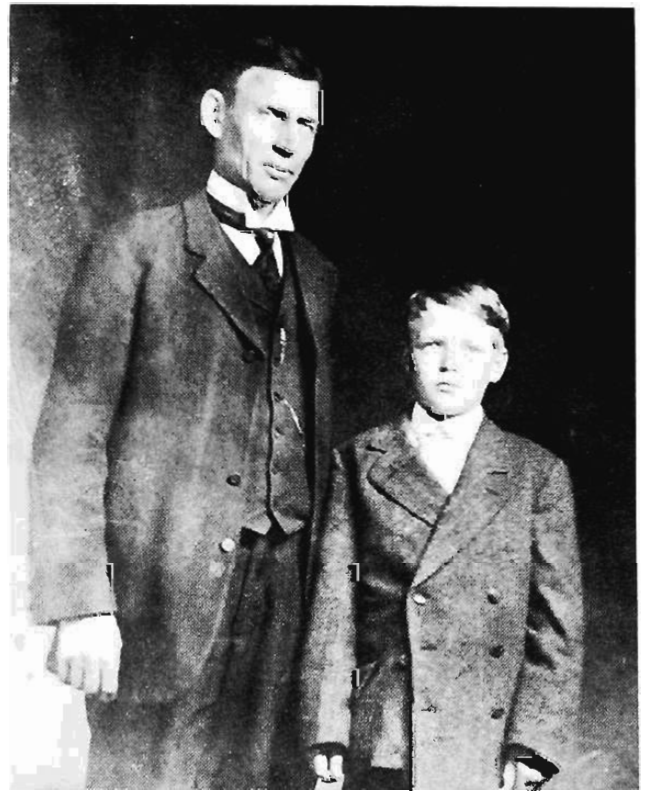
Another Minnesotan, a former Methodist minister at Sauk Centre named T. Brabner Smith, compared Lindbergh with a second prominent native of central Minnesota, novelist Sinclair Lewis. He found that the two men offered a sharp contrast in character and, as might be expected in view of the location of the observer, Lewis came out second best. Smith said Lindbergh was "clean in mind and soul" and displayed

<sup>44</sup> For material on the Lindbergh family background, consult the Lindbergh Papers in the Minnesota Historical Society; Lindbergh's own books, *The Spirit of St. Louis* and *We*; Lynn and Dora Haines, *The Lindberghs* (New York, 1931); Grace Lee Nute, ed. "The Lindbergh Colony," in *Minnesota History*, 20:243-258 (September, 1939); and James Creese, "Charles Augustus Lindbergh," in the *American-Scandinavian Review*, 15:488-492 (August, 1927). Worth consulting also, in spite of errors, are appropriate chapters in Ross, *The Last Hero*, and Davis, *The Hero*. For data on Land, see L. Laszlo Schwartz, "The Life of Charles Henry Land (1847-1922)," in *Journal of American College of Dentists* (1957), p. 33-51. The editorials are in *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 24, 1927, p. 14, and *Svenska Amerikanska Posten*, August 31, 1927, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> The Lindbergh Papers and other manuscript collections in the Minnesota Historical Society contain important material on Charles A. Lindbergh, Sr. The most valuable printed work is Haines, *The Lindberghs*, which is sympathetic to Lindbergh's views. For the 1918 campaign, consult Robert L. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire: A History of the Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922* (Minneapolis, 1955), and the same author's "The Nonpartisan League and the Campaign of 1918," in *Minnesota History*, 34:221-232 (Summer, 1955). The three books are: *Banking and Currency and the Money Trust* (1913), *Why Is Your Country at War and What Happens to You After the War and Related Subjects* (1917); and *The Economic Pinch* (1923).

<sup>46</sup> Knud Wefald to Editor, *Minneapolis Daily Star*, May 24, 1927, Knud Wefald Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society; Lind's comments are found in A. J. McGuire to Dora B. Haines, May 13, 1930, Lynn Haines and Family Papers, in the Minnesota Historical Society.

*IN HIS misbuttoned coat a youthful Lindbergh posed with his father, Congressman Lindbergh.*





LINDBERGH, the hero

some of the best qualities of human nature. Lewis, on the other hand, used his talent to "make money by despoiling his home town." Smith went on to charge that such Lewis novels as *Main Street* and *Elmer Gantry* unfairly exaggerated life in the small agricultural communities of Minnesota.<sup>47</sup>

While Lindbergh's visit offered an omnibus opportunity for many Minnesotans to reaffirm loyalty to state, small town, Swedish ancestry, American boyhood, virtue, and country, Lindbergh himself firmly maintained throughout the tour that its purpose was solely to promote commercial aviation. Insisting that the Guggenheim tour was "in no sense a personal journey," Lindbergh confined his speeches and press state-

ments to pleas for more airports, uniform air laws, perfection of aeronautical equipment, and expansion of commercial airlines.<sup>48</sup>

Lindbergh's persistence paid off. Aviation historians credit his flight and tour with precipitating a major boom in American aviation development which involved an unbroken and rapid acceleration of aviation and aeronautical technology. Substantial increases in air freight volume, engineering and research activity, and the number of airports, pilot licenses, airplane companies, and air routes have been documented for the years 1928 and 1929.<sup>49</sup>

From the barnstormers of the 1920s to the jumbo jets of today, Lindbergh has continued to play a prominent role in aeronautical developments. He has served as a part-time consultant with such organizations as Pan American Airways, Transcontinental Air Transport, the Pennsylvania Railroad, the Guggenheim Fund, the Bureau of Aeronautics, and (with a brigadier general rank) the United States Department of Defense. The rate of progress in aviation has, nevertheless, amazed even Lindbergh who some forty years after the flight stated: "In 1927, I felt sure aviation had a great future; but advances in speed, safety, range, cost, and usefulness have been far beyond my expectations."<sup>50</sup>

<sup>47</sup> *Sauk Centre Herald*, August 18, 1927, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> *Little Falls Daily Transcript*, August 25, 1927, p. 1, 2 (quote), 4; *Little Falls Herald*, August 26, 1927, p. 1, 5; *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 26, 1927, p. 9.

<sup>49</sup> See, for example, John H. Frederick, *Commercial Air Transportation*, 9, 76 (Chicago, 1947); Lloyd Morris and Kendall Smith, *Ceiling Unlimited: The Story of American Aviation from Kittyhawk to Supersonics*, 266 (New York, 1953); Jerome C. Hunsaker, *Aeronautics at Mid-Century*, 36-37 (New Haven, Conn., 1952); Smith, *Airways*, 123.

<sup>50</sup> Lindbergh Letter (quote) of June 24, 1967; Lindbergh to Larson, January 16, 1970.

OSCAR TUNEM of Clarkfield, Minnesota, has furnished the photographs on pages 147 and 149. The cartoon on page 150 is from *The American Review of Reviews*, 76:30 (July, 1927). The other photographs are from the society's collection.



Copyright of **Minnesota History** is the property of the Minnesota Historical Society and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. Users may print, download, or email articles, however, for individual use.

To request permission for educational or commercial use, [contact us](#).