



The AMA History Project Presents: History of the RAINBOW AERO MODELERS SOCIETY (RAMS Club)



Founded on November 6, 1980 AMA #1264

Written by RK (2010); Reformatted by JS (03/2013)

The following five-part RAMS club history was written by Russell Knetzger for the club's newsletter, and submitted to the AMA History Project in March 2013. The Rainbow Aero Modelers Society (the RAMS Club) operates a Milwaukee County Parks R/C flying field for the public's benefit in the Milwaukee suburb of Franklin, Wisconsin.

A RAMS Club History - Part 1 **Franklin, Wisconsin, founded November 6, 1980, AMA #1264** by Russell Knetzger, Editor, July 2010

The above sub-caption shows the RAMS will be 30 years old this November. In commemoration, President Tom Ryan asked me to write a brief club history. I was a lead founding member.

Q. Are the Rainbow Aero Modelers Society (RAMS Club) founders of the Oakwood Road field?

A. No. The field was pursued and built by the Milwaukee R/C Association, and operated by them for the first 9 years, 1979-1988. Then the RAMS took over.

Q. Was the Oakwood Road site the Association's first choice?

A. No. The first request was for the park land still available at South 68th & West Rawson Ave. There, County Parks staff worried about noise complaints from Greendale residents. They already owned Rainbow Airport, and wanted all aviation activities together. The Rediske family, previous owners of Rainbow Airport north of us (hence our name), were leasing it back from the County. They agreed and showed us the Oakwood site. We accepted. The County closed Rainbow in October 1996. The asphalt runway is now so overgrown that new RAMS members may not know a full size airport once existed there. One hangar remains.

Q. Why did the Association take on the responsibility to create this public flying site?

A. The Association was created for the purpose of producing this field. Once it turned it over to the RAMS, it continued other activities, such as the January Auction-Swap Meet, by which it had raised all of its funds to build the field. It also did mall shows through the 1980s to advertise the hobby. Now malls are filled with sales kiosks, leaving no room for static display shows.

Q. Why hasn't the Association created other public sites?

A. Because member clubs have learned to do it on their own (Flying Electrons, Inc.-Menomonee Falls, Racine R/C Club-Mt. Pleasant). Also, when clubs lost their fields, they did not come to the Oakwood Road site temporarily. They instead focused on new sites (MARKS Club, 2009, another Wind Lake sod farm).

Q. If Oakwood was run by the Association, why did the RAMS Club form?

A. Because organizing work parties was difficult across so many other clubs. The field took a lot of hand work to build. Flyers using the site became the most willing to work, and gradually they were the only volunteers. Also, layout details and some of the rules were best settled by pilots at the field.

Q. When did the field officially open?

A. September 1979. It was seeded that July (a very dry year, easy to move soil around.) Rough grading and tree removal had been done the fall of 1978. It took most of 1977 to process the request through the County. The actual finish grading and seeding was done by Plant Associates, Inc., a small landscape contractor firm, still located on the southwest corner of Beloit & Calhoun Roads in New Berlin. They returned in 1987 to do the north-south runway.

Q. What is meant by the north-south runway?

A. It is the area now used for helicopter flying. The original field was a square, located entirely north of what is now the east-west chain link fence line. Willow brush and 40 trees midway east from the helicopter chain-link fence and the present east line of the field complicated landings and takeoffs with northwestern or southeastern winds. Directly East of the present North-South fence line was open trash.

Q. What is meant by trash?

A. Before Franklin became a city, about 1958, our site was probably the old town dump. It accepted non-biodegradables, such as bottles, cans, ashes, some tires, and on the surface, metal appliances. East of our drive, the trash was covered with soil, but not where the helicopter shelter now is, nor the woods west of our present equipment sheds. There, trash is still on the surface. Walk between our sheds to view the trash.

A RAMS Club History - Part 2
Franklin, Wisconsin, founded November 6, 1980, AMA #1264
by Russell Knetzger, Editor, August 2010

Introduction: The above sub-caption shows the RAMS will be 30 years old this November. In commemoration, President Tom Ryan asked me to write a brief club history. I was a lead founding member. Part 1, July 2010, covered the founding of the Oakwood Road field by the Milwaukee R/C Association, the field's opening in September 1979, and turning it over to the RAMS in 1988. But by 1980, an on-site club was needed.

Q. What is meant by “hand work” in the original building of the field?

A. Mainly clearing of the brush and trees east of the present North-South chain-link fence. Until that was cleared, no southerly runway was possible. The “brush” was mainly young willow saplings the diameter of a thumb, and spaced a foot or so apart. You could not walk between them.

Q. What method of clearing was used?

A. We found they could only be removed during wintertime when the ground froze, and then a few axe swings cut them off at ground level. With our four-man teams, one person swung the axe, another bent the sapling back to expose its base. Once cut, another man took the sapling out of the way, and still another made large piles of them. The County hauled away 18 truckloads for

us one year, but that stopped because there was no budget assigned to our field. We then resorted to burning the piles, especially after we threw any tree stumps into the piles. If lit in early afternoon, by sunset the piles were gone. This work took several winters.

Q. Why was there no County Parks budget for the field?

A. The original deal with the County was they would charge us no rent, but we would cost them nothing in maintenance. We even built our own imitation County Park sign on Oakwood Road, (County replaced in 1989). The deal was in the form of an Annual Land Use Permit, for which we applied by filing an Annual Report of activities.

Q. Is that still the County's arrangement?

A. Yes, with two changes after 2007. They offered to switch us to a three-year permit, but we have to pay a \$100 filing fee each year with our Annual Report. Their rationale was that other similar operations, such as private restaurants in the lake parks, needed longer permits to justify their capital improvements. They wanted us to have the same privilege.

Q. Just how much land is under our care?

A. It has not changed since 1977, but the 2007 permit clarifies on an aerial photo that it is 18 acres.

Q. What are the boundaries?

A. Our permit extends 1,000 feet from Oakwood Road to Ryan Creek on our north edge, and from the 68th Street marker in Oakwood Road (west edge of woodlands) 800 feet west to the west wooded edge behind our sheds.

Q. Who owns the land around us?

A. We are in the middle of almost 1,000 acres of floodplain, from Ryan Road a mile north to the Racine County line a mile south, and from 76th Street east to 60th Street. Up near the County House of Correction, and south of Oakwood Road east to Oakwood Golf Course near 35th Street, another 600 acres of flood plain guarantees us freedom from encroachment by development. The County owns the lands; much of it purchased by Federal (possibly also State) open space grants. Resale by the County would require reimbursement of those others (very unlikely). We are under County Sheriff protection, with City of Franklin police and fire also involved (911 calls).

Q. What rules come with being on floodplain land?

A. As a condition of subsidizing flood insurance for properties in flood lands, the Federal government requires local communities to enforce floodplain zoning. FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency, regional office in Chicago), must approve the original zoning, and any later changes to it- text or map. Franklin adopted such zoning in 1985. Edges of floodplains can be shifted if fill in one place is offset by an adjacent cut, but FEMA will not look at the map and calculations unless first approved and forwarded by Franklin. Virtually no fill can be brought into a floodplain.

Q. How was the 1987 N-S runway built?

A. Given the 1985 floodplain zoning against bringing in fill, the runway was built entirely by moving soil already on site. Edgerton Contractors, employing a lighter weight paddle wheel earth mover, in two days moved 800 cubic yards from along the creek.

A RAMS Club History - Part 3
Franklin, Wisconsin, founded November 6, 1980, AMA #1264
by Russell Knetzger, Editor, September 2010

Introduction: The above sub-caption shows the RAMS will be 30 years old this November. In commemoration, President Tom Ryan asked me to write a brief club history. I was a lead founding member. Part 1, July 2010, covered the 1979 opening of the Oakwood Road field by the Milwaukee R/C Association and turning it over to the RAMS in 1988. Part 2, August 2010, details the work of building the field (1978-1987.)

Q. What did the 1987 N-S runway cost?

A. About \$2700 was paid to Edgerton Contractors for earth moving. Plant Associates, Inc. of New Berlin helped with the fine grading, as they did in 1979, but this time RAMS members did finish grading and seed dispersal. Chain link fencing was dragged behind our Ford 8N tractor, driven by the late F. Carl Springer, weighted down with several modelers, notably the late Casey Kieliszkowski, to pulverize the surface. Seeding was done at four times the usual rate to prevent initial grass clumps, as in 1979.

Q. What role did the Army Reserve play?

A. Initially the R/C Association, still controlling the field, worked with the US Army Reserves earth moving unit in Racine to build the N-S Runway at no cost. The Reserves need the practice. But over a several-year period, the Reserves could not do it. They only work on drill weekends, when soil conditions might not be right. When they did come, their huge, oversize equipment became bogged down.



Association Secretary Russell Knetzger watches an Army Reservist do field surveying. (Art Schmidt photo, c. 1983)

Q. What did the Association charge the RAMS for the field?

A. Nothing. The Association had accumulated about \$10,000 in expenses to build the field and buy the Ford 8N tractor with its tow-behind PTO mower, but made the transfer at no cost to the RAMS. The tractor and mower had belonged to the Gaese family, where South 60th dead-ends into the Racine County Line, 1.7 miles from the field. Father Arlen (since deceased), wife Mary, and sons Tad and Wade were supportive of the field. Arlen would cut our field, driving the tractor to and from his home because we had no sheds at the time. We were reluctant to ask the County to build sheds because of a “*take it all with you*” clause in our permit, should we ever have to leave. The two metal sheds we erected (\pm 2001 and 2006) can be unscrewed and moved.

Q. Where is the Ford N Tractor now?

A. We sold it around 2001 at our original \pm \$1800 price from the Geases, after we bought our present Allis Chalmers diesel for \$12,000 from member Marv Wolff. The Ford did not have separate power to the PTO (power take-off) compared to tractor speed, so when the tractor bogged down, so did the mower blade speed. The Allis PTO keeps blade speed at full rpm. In

thick conditions, by slowing tractor speed, the blade will retain cutting power. We kept our old tow behind mower because we are able to repair it ourselves.

Q. How was the \$12,000 financed?

A. By a special member assessment. The choices were: \$450 lump sum for Lifetime Pilot Field License; (Knetzger, Strelitzer & Stilley chose this) smaller lump sums but no lifetime license; or \$65 annual license price for several years, which most chose.

A RAMS Club History - Part 4
Franklin, Wisconsin, founded November 6, 1980, AMA #1264
by Russell Knetzger, Editor, October 2010

Introduction: The above sub-caption shows the RAMS will be 30 years old this November. In commemoration, President Tom Ryan asked me to write a brief club history. I was a lead founding member. Part 1, July 2010, covered the 1979 opening of the Oakwood Road field by the Milwaukee R/C Association and turning it over to the RAMS in 1988. Parts 2 & 3, August & September 2010, detail the building of the field (1978-1987.)

Q. How was the Club name chosen?

A. The 25 charter members who gathered that November 6, 1980, wanted to pay some homage to the adjacent Rainbow Airport for assuring County Parks we were compatible with each other. So the “Rainbow Aero Modelers” part of the name came easily. Whether to call it a Club or a Society was the issue. “Club” means fun; while “Society” means serious, technical. Our first President, Dan Fromm, was a mechanical engineer with GM’s AC Spark Plug/Delco Electronics Divisions. He, along with near charter member F. Carl Springer, had helped develop the “Carousel” inertial guidance system for the Apollo space missions and for the Boeing 747. Dan was serious and technical; “Society” it became.

Q. Who designed the RAMS Club logo?

A. His name cannot be found in the club archives, nor by speaking with old time Marks Club members, for he was their member. His occupation was anatomical artist for Deaconess Lutheran Hospital on the southeast corner of North 16th & West Wisconsin Avenue. The Deaconess building was razed not too many years later. Another MARKS club member helped out: He was Tom Schwarzenbacher, who provided the first Oakwood Road sign. He worked for the Milwaukee City sign shop, and using 2x12 inch lumber did a credible job of imitating a true County Parks sign.

In 1988, Milwaukee County Executive-elect David F. Schulz offered a proper County-made sign if we would first clean up our “shanty town” appearance. That came from our use of many different types of sheds, including a rusting steel shipping container as a tractor garage. It took until 2007 to fully fulfill our part of that bargain when our north shed, matching the 2001 south one, was erected, and the container was sold for scrap.

Q. Which 1980 Charter Members still belong?

A. Only two remain: Russell Knetzger, author of this series, and Michael Jankowski, now fire chief of Hales Corners and profiled herein September 2008. In 1980, Mike was the 16-year-old son of charter member John Jankowski. If Casey Kieliszowski had not died last winter, and if

Bill O'Dell had not failed to renew his membership this year, the count would be four. Current members who are on early club rosters - therefore practically charter members - are Milan Zdrubecky (1981, profiled July 2006) and Floyd Katz (1983, profiled January 2006).

Q. Who were the succeeding club Presidents?

A. After Dan Fromm [3] (1980-1982); other Presidents were Jim Meriwether [1] (1983); F. Carl Springer [2] (1984-1985); David Simonson [1] (1986); Meek G. Stalling [5] (1987-1991); Arnold Latus [2] (1992-1993); Wayne Stevenson [1] (1994); Bill Stilley [4] (1995-1998); Doug Imes [3] (1999-2001); Russell Knetzger [6] (2002-2007); and Tom Ryan [3] (2008-2010), incumbent.



Meek G. Stalling, RAMS charter member and club President for 4 terms (1987-1991), the only African-American to join the club. Born and reared in Duluth, MN, he learned to fly in WWII as a Tuskegee Airman. He left secure work as an auto mechanic in Milwaukee to go into lab work, first at Allis-Chalmers, then the space program at AC Spark Plug. He died in 1997. Notice the rough conditions of the field edge. (Art Schmidt photo, c. 1980s)

Q. Where did the club meet?

A. Initially for two years at Security S&L, at South 76th & Layton. Then, in 1983, for 20 years at Great Midwest S&L on South76 at Southridge; for 2003-2004, at Franklin Schools offices on 82nd & Forest Hill; the Franklin Library at South 92nd & Loomis (2005); and our present home, Wauwatosa/WaterStone S/B since February 2006.

A RAMS Club History - Part 5
Franklin, Wisconsin, founded November 6, 1980, AMA #1264
by Russell Knetzger, Editor, November 2010

Introduction: The above sub-caption shows the RAMS will be 30 years old this November. In commemoration, President Tom Ryan asked me to write a brief club history. I was a lead founding member. Part 1, July 2010, covered the 1979 opening of the Oakwood Road field by

the Milwaukee R/C Association and turning it over to the RAMS in 1988. Parts 2 & 3, August & September, detail field construction (1978-1987.) Parts 4 & 5 review the people involved.

Q. Has the club always had a newsletter?

A. Yes. When the issue following this one is published (December 2010) that will be the 361st edition since the first in December 1980. Russell Knetzger maintains a complete set. Is there anyone else also doing so?

Q. Who have been the newsletter editors?

A. Jim Meriwether [1] (1980-1981) was the first editor, and his first edition in December 1980 describes the events at the organizational meeting of November 30, 1980. He carefully lists the 25 charter members who gathered that November 30th. [= years served] (= which years)

The next editor was Scott Wilke [3] (1981-1983), followed by Harold L. Walter [3] (1984-1986); then Val Jaroszewski [7] (1987-1993); Dave Mulhorn and Charles Kalupa shared a year [1] (1994); then stability returned when Jim Hatzenbeller [9] (1995-2003) served Presidents Stilley, Imes and Knetzger, a record not likely to be exceeded. Bill Stilley [4] (2004-2007) introduced color photos; Russell Knetzger [3] (2008-2010) incumbent, continued that feature, as well as email delivery for some 55 members plus 20 fellow editors.

Q. Did the RAMS pioneer club “fly-ins”?

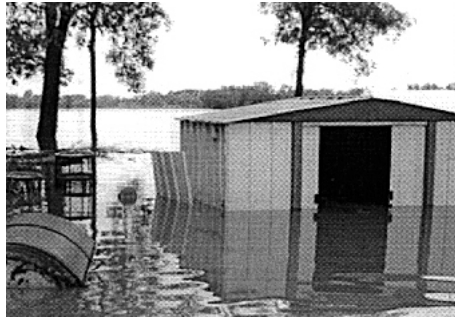
A. Yes and No. As the RAMS were forming in 1980, model aviation was rebelling against “competition.” Giant Scale was coming into vogue, and their national organization (IMAA--International Miniature Aircraft Association) fostered “Fly-Ins,” where you brought your model, maybe you flew it, maybe you didn’t. “See and Be Seen” was adequate. At the same time, the RAMS wanted to maintain good relations with Rainbow Airport, and we did that by putting on static exhibitions at their annual Fly-In, sometimes called a “Pancake Breakfast.” Then as now, similar small airports (East Troy, Palmyra, etc.) put on an annual modest-cost Sunday breakfast to provide a destination for weekend pilots to accrue flight hours. From that experience, the RAMS then started their own Fly-In, but oriented to our own members, except for invited guest demonstration pilots. Now most clubs have Fly-Ins, and most are open to all.



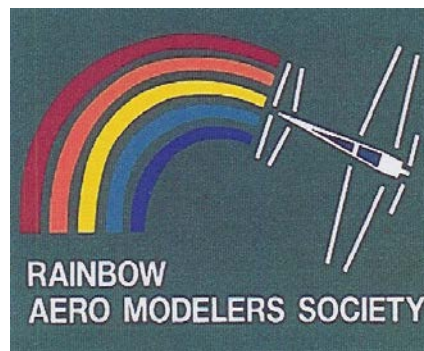
A RAMS Club Fly-In of the same late 1980s early 1990s era as the above Rainbow Airport Fly-in. (Art Schmidt photo)



A static exhibition on the south lawn of the Rainbow airport office (with residence above) by RAMS modelers during that airport’s annual Pancake Breakfast Fly-In. Modelers were always respectfully received. (Art Schmidt photo, mid-1980s to mid-1990s.)



Worst memory in the first 30 years of the Milwaukee County Field: The June 6-8, 2008 “100-year” flood. (Photo by Dale Champagne.)



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