



## #49: Intercontinental Airport

For those “young ones” of us who grew up in the Humble area, it’s hard to imagine there was a time when there was not a massive airport here. It might surprise some of you that the Intercontinental Airport is a rather “recent” addition to Houston. Houston’s “major” airport during the 1940s, 50s and 60s was the Houston Municipal Airport, located on the southside of Houston (it would be renamed as “Hobby Airport” in 1967). There was no major airport on the northside. Instead, there were many private airports all around Houston. These private airports typically had one airstrip (sometimes two) and a few hangar buildings. They were each home to a number of private aircraft, sometimes as many as 40 at each airport.

In the 1950s, there were many people that felt that Houston needed a bigger airport, but they were confident that the Houston citizens would not vote for a bond to pay for it. Fortunately, some major Houston area businessmen and investors had the forethought to purchase a large area of land as a future site for an airport. These investors included R. E. “Bob” Smith (the guy who helped bring the Astros to Houston), Roy Cullen, J. S. Abercrombie (President of Cameron Iron Works) and many others. They purchased 3,000 acres of land just outside of Humble, on old dairy farmland, and named their investment as the Jet Era Ranch Corporation. Some of you may remember the old name of Will Clayton Parkway as being Jetero Boulevard. Well, somewhere along the way a typo in some official paperwork changed “Jet Era” to “Jetero.”

The City of Houston finally got around to funding a new airport. They purchased the Jet Era ranch site in 1960 for \$1.9 million dollars and annexed the land in 1965 so that it fell within the city limits of the City of Houston. Construction got up and running and in June 1969 the new Houston Intercontinental Airport opened with a tower and two Terminals (A & B). Unique to the Houston airport was the Electronic Inter-Terminal Transportation System. This mini train was a subway that ran between Terminal A, one of the parking areas, and Terminal B. It had no rails, no cowcatcher, no conductor, and no caboose. It was the first-of-its kind transportation system and was propelled by magnets. The stylish onsite-Marriott Hotel opened a couple of years later, in 1971. By 1981, the airport had gone through some major changes. The subway train was renovated and reopened in the Summer of 1981. It had been redesigned by WED, a joint venture of the engineering arm of the Walt Disney Productions and the Turner Construction Company. At the time, it was the only transportation system designed by Disney that existed outside their theme parks. In October 1981, the new Terminal C opened. An international Terminal, Terminal D, was added in 1990.

The name was changed to George Bush Intercontinental Airport in May 1997 to honor the 41st President of the United States. Two years later, an above-ground Skyway was opened. At the time, it only traveled between Terminals B & C. Also, the original 3,000 acres of property had been expanded to 8,000 acres by 1999. An additional Terminal, Terminal E, fully opened in 2004.

My childhood home in Aldine was directly in the flight path of one of the runways. The planes would fly overhead on their landing approach and end up rattling every window in the house. This happened every 10 minutes or so. After all a while we got used to it. But it really freaked out visitors when they were enjoying a nice day in our living room and suddenly all of the windows started to rattle!

Today, the airport handles over 33 million passengers each year. It was the addition of the nearby major airport that helped make Humble such a desirable place to live and helped improve the economic growth of our area.

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