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Through THE Looking Glass

You may be young at heart, but certainly not in years, if you can remember when an airplane flying over New Bern was sufficiently exciting to bring joyful whoops from kids, and concentrated stares at the heavens from grown folks.

Two such adults, standing on the Elks Temple corner, inevitably indulged in comment the day a plane came over at a greater elevation than usual. "How would you like to be up there with that thing?" one of the old codgers queried.

His companion switched his cud of Brown Mule to the other jaw, reflected with the solemnity of a Solomon, and replied, "Well, I sure would hate to be up there without it." Which, it seems to us, was a statement more profound than a lot of others made on this selfsame Elks Temple corner during the last fifty years.

Commercial airliners were unheard of back in the Twenties, and private planes were mostly restricted to barnstorming pilots who came to town and transported daring citizens over the community for a few minutes in exchange for a couple of dollars or more.

Timid souls, who knew for sure that they weren't about to leave the ground in one of these flimsy contraptions, flocked to the landing field in James City to see others risk their necks. A few of them, initially attracted by morbid curiosity, developed a sudden burst of courage and became jittery passengers.

Much to the disappointment of many of the bystanders, none of the barnstorming planes ever crashed, but otherwise a Sunday afternoon visit to the scene of unusual activity was a rewarding experience and local small fry could hardly wait for the five and ten to open next morning so they could purchase a pair of goggles and play like they were aviators.

If memory serves us correctly, Frank Duffy was the first New Bernian to own and pilot a private plane here. Today, of course, the city has quite a number of private planes and home grown pilots. All told there are 112,000 of these aircraft in the United States now.

At the helm of the 112,000 non - commercial flying machines, at one time or another, are the nation's 700,000 private pilots, and it is estimated that during a single year no less than 130,000,000 passengers take to the air in this manner. Commercial lines don't better this figure by much.

Although airports give prime consideration to the big airliners, causing ever mounting bitterness among private pilots, there still isn't enough room for scheduled arrivals and departures. Schedules are being reduced, alternate fields resorted to, and the popular shuttle flights dropped.

This complete saturation of available facilities shouldn't be surprising to anyone. It has long been predicted, especially in areas of concentrated population. Nothing will ease the situation but more and bigger airports, requiring a staggering outlay of money.

Rapid flight, and if you've

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WINTER SCENE ON SIMMONS STREET
—Photo by Chick Natella