

## Classic Planes on the Coconino Plateau

by Larry Edsall



**L**ocation! Location! Location! It's the key to real estate, they say, and it can work for your property or against it.

For example, travel US Highway 180 northwest out of Flagstaff and you pass the Museum of Northern Arizona, the Arizona Snow Bowl and the Flagstaff Nordic Center. Soon the San Francisco Peaks are in your rearview mirrors and you're driving between the Squaw Coxcombs and the Dog Knobs as you head across the Coconino

ational vehicle park and campground complete with the Buffalo Lodge and Fred's Diner.

Everybody, it seems, knows the location of Bedrock City and recognizes the huge Fred Flintstone figure on the west side of the road.

But very few people seem to know that just south of Bedrock City—if you turn left on 64 instead of right—you find the Planes of Fame Air Museum, a wonderful gem not only for those interested in avia-

**Those who find the Planes of Fame Air Museum immediately notice the "Connie," a four-engine Lockheed C-121A Constellation parked out front.**

Plateau before T-boning with Arizona Highway 64 at Valle.

Though you may not recognize Valle's name or its know its history—it was settled more than 100 years ago by Spanish and French sheep herders—you know where it is: It's where you turn right as you head from Flagstaff to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, and immediately after making that right turn you recognize the Flintstones Bedrock City, an recre-

tion, but automobiles. While the museum's name indicates its emphasis, it doesn't tell you that the facility also houses as collection of interesting and historic cars and trucks as well as aircraft and displays about aviation history.

Of the perhaps hundreds of thousands of people who turn right each year off 180 onto 64, or who travel all the way up 64 from Williams to the Grand Canyon, only 10,000 to 15,000 find their way into

the Planes of Fame Air Museum.

The museum was founded in 1957 in southern California, by Ed Maloney, who was watching no longer needed World War II aircraft being scrapped for their aluminum and other metal components and thought that instead of being destroyed, at least some should be preserved.

Established with a dozen aircraft and known simply as "The Air Museum," Maloney's was the first such airplane museum west of the Rocky Mountains.

As the collection grew at Chino airport, a second location was needed and was provided in the mid-1990s by John Seibold at his Grand Canyon Valle Airport, which was built in 1936 by TWA, became an Army air base in 1942 and then returned to civilian service in 1946.

Seibold was born in 1934 in New Jersey and was a teenager when his family moved to southern California. He earned his pilot's license at 18 and studied aviation mechanics before enrolling at Cal Poly, where he did a double major in aeronautical engineering and physics.

After college, he worked as an engineer

Foot power may have propelled Fred and Barney around on the ground, but aerial power is the focus of the Planes of Fame Air Museum located just south of the Flintstone village on highway 64 in northern Arizona.

Among the planes inside the museum is this US Navy Grumman J2F-6 Duck (right), built July 6, 1941 by the Columbia Aircraft Corp. of Valley Stream, NY. Propulsion comes from a 900-horsepower, 9-cylinder air-cooled Wright R-1820 radial engine.

Planes are the stars, but there are cars here, too. A 1931 Packard is parked beneath the wing of a V77 Stinson Reliant "Gullwing" (bottom) that wears the colors of Eastern Air Lines. Before its civilian duty, the V77 was developed for air ambulance and spotter duty in World War II.

at the Nevada (nuclear) Test Site and moonlighted flying charter and Grand Canyon sightseeing flights for Las Vegas-based Scenic Airlines. When that company folded in the mid-1960s, Seibold offered to overlook what the company owed him if it would give him its reservations list and brochures.

He eventually upgraded the company from a single-engine Cessna to flying DeHavilland Twin Otters, aircraft with a high wing that didn't block the passen-



KEEP RIGHT >>





The Douglas RB-26C Invader (top) was developed as an attack bomber for World War II, then converted for firefighting duty in Montana and Alaska.

The framework of a two-seated 1917 Standard J7 (row two left) shows the delicate intricacies of such early aircraft.

The AD-4 Skyraider (row two right) was the successor to the carrier-based Helldiver and was used extensively in Korea and Vietnam. This later example has 20-mm cannon and 14 Aero rocket launchers.

The red nose of a Grumman Duck is backdrop to the brightly colored tail section of a Stearman PT-17/N2S Kaydet (row three left). More than 6000 Kaydets were built, used mainly for training of military pilots. This one wears the colors of Jeb Air and was used in the *Rocky & Bullwinkle* movie.

Parked outside at the museum is the Lockheed C-121A Constellation that was airborne headquarters for Gen. Douglas MacArthur and which has been restored inside and out to MacArthur's specifications, including his command seat (row three right).

Germany's Messerschmitt Bf 109 saw its first duty during the Spanish Civil War and was Germany's premier aerial fighter in early WWII. This Bf109G-10 (bottom) was built in 1944, flew over the Eastern Front and surrendered to the US in May, 1945.

gers' view. He entered a partnership with the historic Grand Canyon Airlines and was credited with creating the Twin Otter Vistaliner, a 19-seat craft with enlarged windows designed for sightseeing flights.

At the turn of the 21st Century, Seibold was among 100 people—others included Liberace, Howard Hughes and Kirk Kerkorian—featured by the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* for helping to shape the success of southern Nevada.

He's also helping shape this area south of the Grand Canyon. Because there was so much air traffic into and out of the Grand Canyon National Park Airport at Tusayan—traffic that typically caused his own sightseeing flights to circle for 45 minutes before landing—Seibold sought an alternative landing strip, found the old facility at Valle, and bought and updated it.

That was 20 years ago.

Although Coconino County restricts roadside advertising and thus helps to keep the Planes of Fame Air Museum a secret, those who do find it immediately notice the "Connie," the four-engine Lockheed C-121A Constellation that is parked in front of the museum building.

The plane, known as the "Bataan," was used during the Berlin Airlift and then became the airborne headquarters for Gen. Douglas MacArthur—and later for other high-ranking generals. For a few

days it also served as Air Force One for President Eisenhower during a visit to Korea, and later was used by NASA in support of manned spaceflight operations until 1970.

The Planes of Fame museum returned the plane to flying condition and restored the interior to its condition when it served MacArthur during the Korean conflict, complete with his personal command center and the galley he had installed because he wanted hot meals instead of the traditional cold food served aboard such flights.

Most of the museum's aircraft are in flying condition, and several are the last of their make and model still capable of flight.

Many of the aircraft at the museum have military history, some dating to World War I. In addition to the aircraft owned by the museum or by Seibold, the display—in the museum building and another building just across the parking lot—also includes several automobiles, including a 1906 REO Runabout, 1908 Buick Model 10 convertible, and a 1939 Pontiac Woodie that was used for ground transport of passengers of Grand Canyon Airlines.

Seibold started collecting the cars just five years ago, largely to help those seeing his historic planes with a way to put those planes into historical context. For example, it's one thing to see a 1929 Ford Tri-Motor aircraft but another when that plane has a 1929 Ford car parked beneath its wing.

The museum also has display cases that focus on everything from fighter-pilot helmets to historic passenger airline menus. One large and prominent display case features women in aviation.

The Planes of Fame Air Museum at Valle is open daily except Thanksgiving and Christmas, from 9am until 5pm. Admission is \$5.95 for adults and \$1.95 for children 5-12 years of age. For more information, visit [www.planesoffame.org](http://www.planesoffame.org) or call (928) 635-1000. ■

After working as a sports editor for daily newspapers in Michigan, **LARRY EDSALL** was on staff for 12 years at *AutoWeek*, most of it as managing editor. He has driven more than half a million miles testing cars on four continents. He helped launch [www.izoom.com](http://www.izoom.com) and also helped found PAPA, the Phoenix Automotive Press Association. His books include *Masters of Car Design (Genius)*, *Miata 20 Years* and his eleventh, *Camaro: A Legend Reborn*, all available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).



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