

Photo of the Month

Louise Thaden



Photo: Louise Thaden, circa 1936. Neg. #N000939.
Courtesy Florence Felker.

Bentonville was once home to pioneer aviatrix Louise McPhetridge Thaden. Born in 1905, Louise had her first airplane ride when she paid a local barnstormer \$5 for five minutes in the air. In 1926 she met Walter Beech of the Travel-Air airplane company. Louise moved to San Francisco to be a Travel-Air salesperson; it was there that she learned to fly. By 1928 she was winning trophies and setting records. She married pilot, engineer, and inventor Herbert Thaden.

In 1929 Louise won the first National Women's Air Derby, beating such famous fliers as Amelia Earhart and Blanche Noyes. In 1936 she and co-pilot Noyes won the Bendix Transcontinental Air Race and set a new east-west speed record.

Bentonville's favorite gal received many aviation honors, including membership in the Smithsonian Institution Aviation Hall of Fame. In 1951 the Bentonville airport was named in her honor. In 1976, three years before her death, Louise returned to her hometown for a re-dedication ceremony at Thaden Field.