CAMP GRANT & BELL BOWL TIMELINE
Airport, Camp Grant & Bell Bowl Prairie

- June 14, 1917 – Selection by secretary of war of land in New Milford Township selected as one of 16 Army training posts referred to as a National Army Cantonment, later named Camp Grant.

- Aug 1917 – 8,000 civilian workers constructed the camp with several militia companies on duty.

- December 1, 1917 – camp ready to receive 41,160 soldiers.

- July 4, 1918 – Farewell parade of 28,000 soldiers (86th Army Division) marched through downtown Rockford in front of 100,000 spectators.

- Sept 23, 1918 – Spanish influenza outbreak infected 4,000 soldiers with a death rate of 100/day in October. A total of 1,400 servicemen and 323 civilians died. One of four soldiers sick.

- July 27, 1921 – War department issues order closing Camp Grant and sale of buildings.

- Aug 15, 1922 – settled final lawsuits over land acquisition with local farmer & Rosecrance Memorial Home.

- Sept 22, 1922 – Rockford Register reports government spent $14,680,620 on construction of Camp Grant (4,000 acres).

- May 1923 – Offer to sell by the US War Department accepted by Illinois National Guard (revocable purchase).

- Aug 9, 1924 – Illinois National Guard (33rd Division) assumes control of the base.

- July 27, 1932 – Now 4,000 acres at a total cost to state and federal government of $15,000,000.

- Jun 3, 1933 – President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) establishes six (6) forestry camps as part of Civilian Conservation Corps (federal relief effort to put hundreds of thousands of Americans back to work; Great Depression began with stock market crash in Oct 1929).


- Fall 1940 – Griffith & Sons Construction Co. (Chicago) rehabilitated the base, erecting 365 new buildings with 6,000 civilian workers (Jan 1941) at a cost of $9,000,000.

- Aug 31, 1943 – German prisoner of war camp opened; there were no escapes.

- Fall 1943 – After processing 300,000 recruit trainees, reception center closed and transferred to Ft. Sheridan; 100,000 medical unit trainees were trained at the old reception center.

- Dec 1943 – Greater Rockford Airport Authority names five (5) Commissioners: Swan Hillman, Kimball Finkenstaedt, Harry Shaw, Glen Alberstett, and W. Herbert Conklin.

- 1946 – State of Illinois adopted the Airport Authorities Act under which Greater Rockford Airport Authority was created.

- Fall 1945 – Seth B. Atwood buys 340 acres and donates to Rockford Park District.


- Aug 1948 – Transfer of title for Camp Grant land to Greater Rockford Airport Authority.

- 1954 – Construction of Greater Rockford Airport.

- 1954 to 1970 – Host to annual fly-in convention of the Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA) when the event moved to Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

- 1974 – Majority of remaining Camp Grant buildings demolished.
FACT SHEET
Airport, Camp Grant & Bell Bowl

“Camp Grant is quite the biggest thing that ever happened in Rockford”, possibly creating “another Rockford as big as this city was ten years ago”

John Camlin, Chamber of Commerce president (1917)

- **Name:** Initially referred to not as Camp Grant but as federal “cantonment”. Named in honor of Civil War General and US President, Ulysses S. Grant (21st Illinois Infantry in the Civil War).

- **Location:** Five (5) miles south of Rockford on the east bank of the Rock River, just north of the confluence (intersection) with the Kishwaukee River.

- **Size:**
  - Airport – In 2005 the airport includes 3,000 acres. In 1946, the GRAA was granted 1,500 acres of federal land.
  - Foreign Trade Zone – In 2005 we have 1,700 acres on Airport + 1,000 acres in Rochelle.
  - Camp Grant –
    - In 1924 it contained 3,200 acres on site plus 6,000 acres for rifle range.
    - Peak: 5,460 acres.
    - During World War II, camp was the largest reception center in the country for the US Army.

- **Camp Grant (1917 – 1946):**
    - Population (July 1918) – 50,000
    - Buildings – 1,100
    - Roads – 22 miles (macadam & concrete)
    - Water reservoir – 550,000 gallons
  - Military encampment (1917-1921 & 1940-1945) – quartering troops, airfield, rifle range, railroad, water & sewer system, electric power, paved roads. Provided trained infantry and medical troops.
  - Induction/training center - World War I/train over 56,000 calvary with 200,000 passing through (1917-1921)
    - World War II/300,000 infantry (1941 - 1943); 100,000 medical (1943-1945)
  - Prison – World War II (1943-1946)
  - Illinois National Guard training (1922-1939)
  - Civilian Conservation Corp (1933-1935)

- **Bell Bowl Prairie**
  - One of the best-preserved prairies in northern Illinois – a glimpse of the Rockford area prior to colonization.
  - Named for camp commandant, General George Bell.
  - Preservation area – one-half mile long and 150 feet wide.
  - Natural amphitheater – at northwest end, christened “Bell Bowl” during World War I.
  - Management – GRAA (Airport Authority) owns the property and managed by the Authority and the Natural Land Institute of Rockford (private, non-profit organization founded in 1958 and dedicated to preservation of natural areas and open space in northern Illinois).

- **Most famous speakers**
  - President Theodore Roosevelt
  - General John J. Pershing (Aug 1921)

- **Most famous commanders**
  - Major General Thomas H. Barry (1917-1918, first commandant)
  - General George Bell (1919-1921)
  - Acting commander, Colonel Charles B. Hagadorn (committed suicide on Oct 7, 1918 at the height of the Spanish influenza epidemic)
  - Colonel J. H. Davidson (Nov 1940)

- **Most famous trainees**
  - Jack Ruby – assassin of Lee Harvey Oswald, accused assassin of President Jack F. Kennedy