

HISTORIC AIRMAIL BEACON TAKES CENTER STAGE AS FLY KANSAS AIR TOUR RETURNS TO ANTHONY

Anthony, KS – In the heart of south-central Kansas, the past and future of American aviation will converge as the Fly Kansas Air Tour makes a memorable stop at Anthony Municipal Airport on Wednesday, September 24, 2025, from 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. But this is more than just a fly-in. It's a celebration of American ingenuity, a tribute to early airmail pilots, and a chance for the public to see a piece of aviation history that most have never heard of—a concrete arrow that once lit the skies.

Before radar, GPS, and air traffic control towers, pilots navigated by giant arrows on the ground—yes, literal arrows, some as long as 70 feet, made of concrete and painted bright yellow or red. These arrows pointed the way to the next beacon in the Transcontinental Airway System, a groundbreaking 1920s navigation project that helped U.S. airmail pilots deliver letters across the country—day or night, rain or shine.

The Anthony arrow, built in 1931, is one of the last remaining of its kind in Kansas—and the only one still topped with a functioning beacon tower. Today, it stands as a rare monument to a transformative time in American aviation, when innovation met necessity at a national scale.

The 2025 tour begins Tuesday evening, September 23, in Wellington and winds across the state through Friday, September 26, stopping in Anthony, Strother Field, Augusta, Eureka, Parsons, Emporia, Herington, and Salina. Each stop includes: STEM learning sessions for local students, Aircraft on display for public viewing, Community gatherings with pilots and aviation professionals.

At Anthony, the spotlight will be on the Transcontinental Airway Beacon & Navigation Marker, now listed on both the National and State Registers of Historic Places as of 2024. Following a historical presentation about the beacon, a community lunch will be available for purchase, with opportunities to talk to pilots and tour aircraft on-site.

Known officially as Beacon #24 on Contract Airmail Route #34, the Anthony site once formed part of the critical Amarillo to Kansas City segment of the cross-country route. Each beacon had its own Morse code signal—Anthony's was "B" (· – ·)—so pilots could verify their location even in the dark.

To assist pilots, the U.S. government in the 1920s and '30s erected over 5,000 acetylene-powered beacons, spaced roughly every 3–10 miles, depending on terrain. Emergency landing fields and airstrips were added, equipped with rotating incandescent lights and red warning lights for surrounding obstacles.

The Anthony beacon tower itself is believed to have been repurposed from a windmill tower. Although the arrow was partially shortened during highway work, its concrete base remains clearly visible, pointing toward the next now-lost beacon, as it once did for pilots flying by starlight.

This forgotten system represents one of the most daring infrastructure projects of its time. A collaboration between the U.S. Postal Service and the Department of Commerce, the system laid the foundation for today's air traffic navigation.

In the age of satellites and smartphones, it's hard to believe that pilots once navigated the entire country by looking out the window for arrows on the ground, but that's exactly what they did—and that innovation helped lead to the modern aviation industry. Pilots relied on a clever mnemonic: "When Undertaking Very Hard Routes Keep Direction By Good Methods"—each beacon broadcasting the Morse letter of a word in that phrase.

Of the four surviving arrows in Kansas—located in Danville, Argonia, Clearwater, and Anthony—only Anthony's still boasts its original beacon. Its survival and recent restoration reflect growing efforts to preserve the lesser-known infrastructure that supported American progress.

The site's original description, found in a 1931 Airway Bulletin, notes its "L-shaped" field layout, 1,343 feet in elevation, and two landing strips spread across 130 acres. The airport remains in public use today and is one of the few places where aviation buffs can see an original navigation marker still in place and still doing its job.

As the Fly Kansas Air Tour lands in Anthony, it brings with it more than aircraft—it brings a story. A story of early aviators braving the skies with nothing but gas lamps, concrete arrows, and raw determination. And now, that story will be shared with a new generation, not in dusty textbooks but with live aircraft, hands-on learning, and a look back at the beacons that once guided America's future through the night.