

Charles Lindbergh got Lucky after leavin



JOURNAL STAR FILE PHOTO

A plaque marks the site of the former airfield where Charles A. Lindbergh landed in Peoria on the St. Louis-to-Chicago mail run from 1926 to 1927, prior to his trans-Atlantic flight.

101 THINGS
THAT PLAY
IN **PEORIA**

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TODAY'S 101 THING AT PJSTAR.COM

Before the world knew the daredevil pilot "Lucky Lindy," Peoria knew a mail carrier named "Slim."

On April 15, 1926, Peoria saw its first airmail, via a St. Louis to Chicago stopover. The pilot, a then-anonymous Charles Lindbergh, griped about the weather as soon as he landed: "It was bad all the way from St. Louis."

Lindbergh touched down at Peoria's first airport, Kellar Field (sometimes called Brown's Field, as it was located on the former Brown farm). That area is now the site of the High Point subdivision. There, along High Point road at High Point Lane, a tiny park sports a plaque noting, "Near this marker, Charles A. Lindbergh landed his DeHavilland Biplane on the St.

Louis-Chicago mail run 1926 to 1927, prior to his trans-Atlantic flight."

That's mostly right, says Bob Keenan, historian/gardener at the Peoria airport. The owner of Kellar Field, Alexander Varney, opened a new airport in August 1926, then northwest of Peoria — a site now centered by Dick's Sporting Goods at Grand Prairie. Most people called it Big Hollow Airport, though Varney simply referred to it as "Field No. 2." Regardless, Kellar Field shut down after the opening of the second field, which then became Lindbergh's landing point.

On May 22, 1927, newspapers worldwide carried headlines of a former airmail pilot who arrived in Paris — the first solo, nonstop trans-Atlantic flight.

101 THINGS THAT PLAY IN PEORIA is unique. Try to guess tomorrow's 101 thing on Facebook and win a ticket to the event. **Today's clue:** Though the Tractor was a major part of Peoria history, the outfield was

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The R. G. LeTourneau statue, which you see as you leave the steel house, was moved from its former site in Glen Oak Park. The statue was made possible by donations from the LeTourneau retirees group. The base recognizes many of R. G.'s inventions. The front edge of the base is fashioned as a dozer blade.



Also visible as you leave the house is a Caterpillar R5 tractor made in 1938, as shown this picture.



It is one of only 1,500 made. The owner was Ralph Winship, who used the tractor on his farm north of Peoria.

The dozer blade attachment is cable controlled by a LeTourneau Model AN Power Control Unit. LeTourneau made many attachments for Cat equipment, and he even had representation in Cat Dealerships.

The Carefree HOME



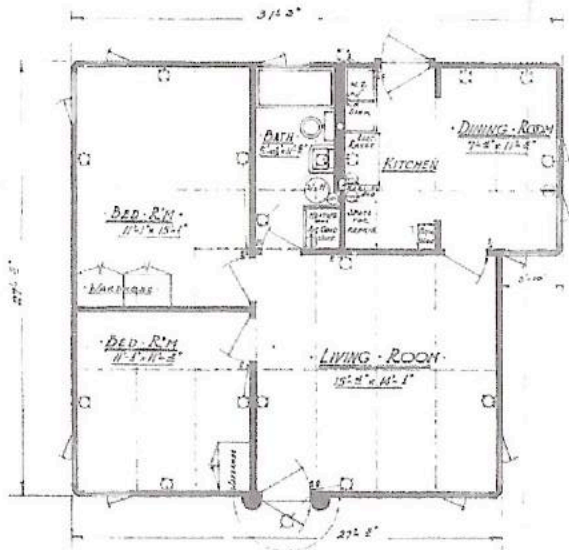
Steel houses were built by R. G. LeTourneau, Inc. from the late 1930's until the United States became involved in World War II, when steel production was diverted to military use. The Great Depression caused many traditional homes to be beyond the financial means of most people. R. G. felt these steel homes would help alleviate this problem. They were small, yes, but much more affordable. The following is a concept of what a home was to most people back then, as written in a 1938 sales brochure for the LeTourneau Steel House –

“Whether it be an Arabian date palm hut, a Bedouin tent, a booth of branches, a Grecian stone cabin, a Mongolian yurt, a marble palace in Rome or an Eskimo igloo, a man’s home is his castle, and a woman’s house is a part of her very life. The home is a man’s retreat from the bustling world, where he takes shelter from the elements and all

unfriendly things; where he eats, sleeps, plays, relaxes, enjoys his family and is visited by his friends. Not only is he king, but everyone in the home is a royal personage."

The display house is heated and cooled by modern methods, unlike the original steel houses. But amazingly, the original steel houses were air conditioned, which was most unusual in the 1930's. This was accomplished by the flow of cold water through radiators at the bottom of the unit. All the furnishings you see in the display house are typical of what was used in those days.

Several different floor plans were available to the consumer and could be modified to suit particular needs. The two-bedroom unit you just toured has outside dimensions of 24' square. A one-bedroom unit was also available. Another plan was a larger two-bedroom unit, measuring 27' 5" by 31' 3". That floor plan is below.



In addition to the house itself, other options were available. An outside stairway could be added to allow access to the roof, where a canvas canopy could be added to provide an outdoor living space. Also available was a one or two-car garage wired for electric lights. And you could add a steel storehouse for tools, lawn mowers, etc.

Robert Gilmour LeTourneau was born in 1888 in Richford, Vermont.



He was described as restless, inquisitive, stubborn, rebellious and energetic by his parents and siblings. He dropped out of school during his 8th grade, leaving home for a job in San Francisco. He later found his calling in the earth moving industry. His first invention was a one-man tractor pulled scraper, eliminating the usual operator on the scraper. In 1921 he built his first factory in Stockton, California. He later opened a factory in Peoria, Illinois (now the Komatsu plant on north Adams St.). This steel house was built in that plant and recently was used there as a factory office before being refurbished and moved to the Wheels O' Time Museum

In 1937 he designed the Tournapull, a self-propelled scraper with a two-wheeled tractor in front. At first it was not at all well-received. In the years to come he built factories in Toccoa, GA; Rydalmere, Australia; Vicksburg, MS; Stockton-On-Tees, England and Longview, TX. In 1946 he founded the LeTourneau Technical Institute in Longview, TX, which is now a fully accredited four-year University. In 1951 he founded Tournata, a colony in Liberia, Africa. Its purpose was to teach natives to use earthmoving equipment to clear land and raise crops. In 1954 he also got into the off-shore oil well drilling business by designing and building the first mobile off-shore jack-up rig. This rig, named the Scorpion, was sold to the Zapata Oil Company whose president was George H. W. Bush. He died in 1969, after complications from a stroke.

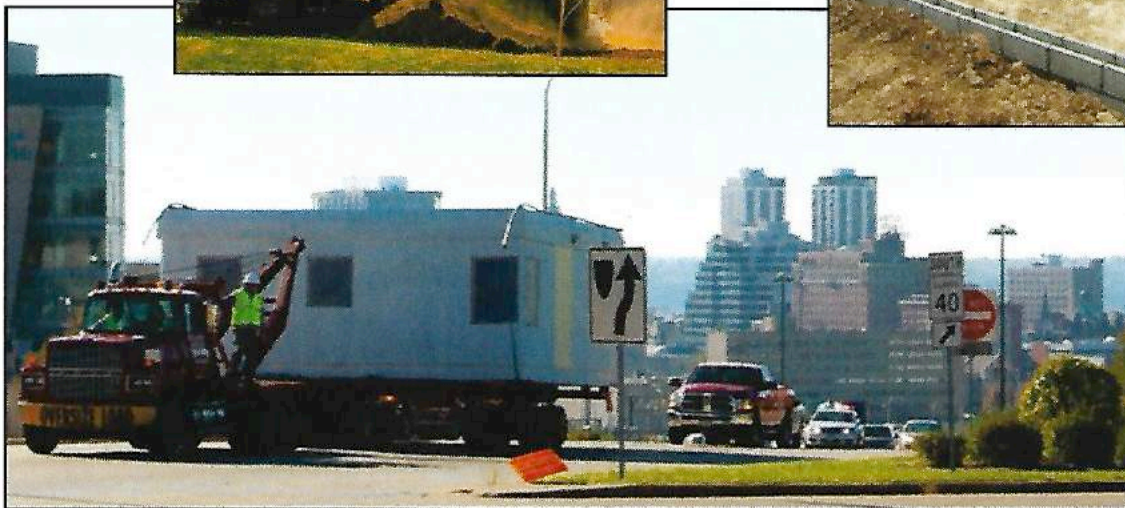
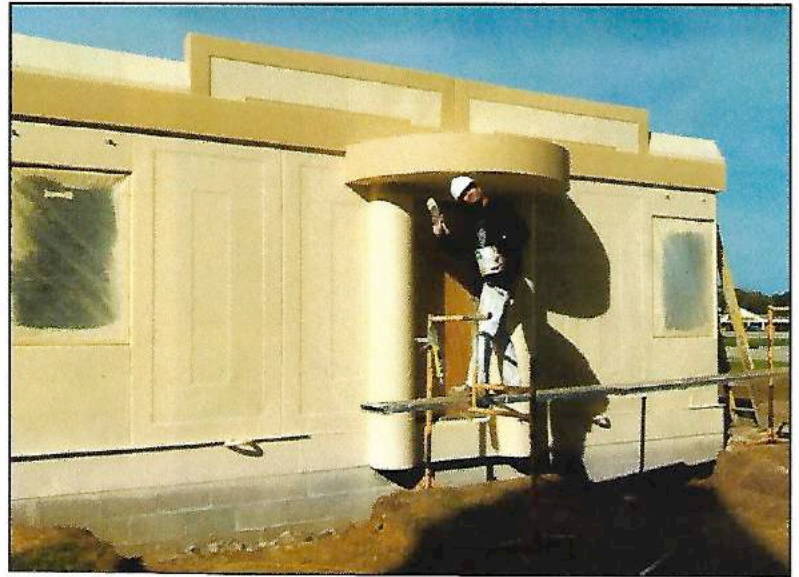
Although R. G. built steel houses only for a few years (he never resumed building them after WWII ended), they were successful. If you look carefully in Peoria Heights, you can still find some. He even built steel barns, one of which remains in East Peoria off a stretch of Route 150 sometimes called Caterpillar Trail. He also built a steel church, which still exists, and is located in East Peoria on Leadley Ave, near the East Peoria High School. Its picture is on the next page. R. G. was known to have attended this church. From all appearances, the church is still in use.

Home at Last!

November 2017

Following weeks of preparation, from repair work done at George Young, to site preparation by Iron Hustler Excavating, to foundation slab and walls by Otto Baum Construction, on October 18th, Balagna House Movers loaded the house onto dollies and towed it through the streets of Peoria to its permanent location at Wheels O' Time Museum.

Gingerly placed on its new foundation, it is now undergoing painting and door and window installation before winter weather sets in. Next, interior furnishing and exhibit design will be undertaken in preparation for the Grand Opening when Wheels O' Time opens in May, 2018.



A special thanks to the Curry brothers James, Paul, Thomas, and TJ, for their fabrication and welding skills in repairing the rusted areas of the house while at George Young.



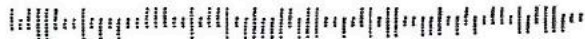
The **STEEL HOUSE** REVIVAL



September 5, 2017

The R. G. LeTourneau statue is removed from its Glen Oak Park location and moved to the Hot Scotsman Fine Art Foundry in Pioneer Park. Following restoration, it will be relocated to Wheels

O' Time Museum to join the LeTourneau Steel House. A sincere thank you to the Peoria Park District Board of Trustees for their co-operation and support for this aspect of the project.



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Welded Steel House Floated from Factory to Permanent Site

32 by 44 ft. House Completely Built in an Industrial Plant—Design Provides for Rigidity, Permanence, Comfort and Attractiveness at Moderate Cost.



Fig. 1—An arc welded steel 5-room residence of the type which "sailed" across the Illinois River at Peoria, Ill.

● LAUNCHED at Peoria, Illinois, recently and towed across the Illinois River on its own bottom was the first residence ever to "sail" to its destination.

A 32 ft. by 44 ft. watertight arc welded steel house, fully equipped with furnace, stoker, cooling system, laundry, plumbing—even partially furnished—was dropped "overboard" by a crane (see Fig. 2), from the yard of the R. G. LeTourneau Inc. factory and

gaskets. The house drew approximately 1 ft. After the maiden voyage, inspection showed an absolutely dry interior.

This house was built complete within the LeTourneau factory. Its construction utilizes arc welded steel panels for both walls and wall frame (Fig. 4). The panels, which are pressed in a die to a form which enhances appearance and adds rigidity, consist of two 12-gauge sheets spaced approximately 5 in. apart for walls and 10 in. for roof, joined together by small braces as shown in Fig. 5. The space between the inner and outer plates is for insulating material which is blown into the panels at various intervals during erection.

Fabrication of a house panel is shown in Fig. 6. The two plates with flanged edges and the small spacer bars which maintain the inner space, are assembled in a fixture. The diagonal braces between the inner and outer plates are then placed in proper position and fused to the plates, forming an extremely rigid section. The shielded arc process of electric

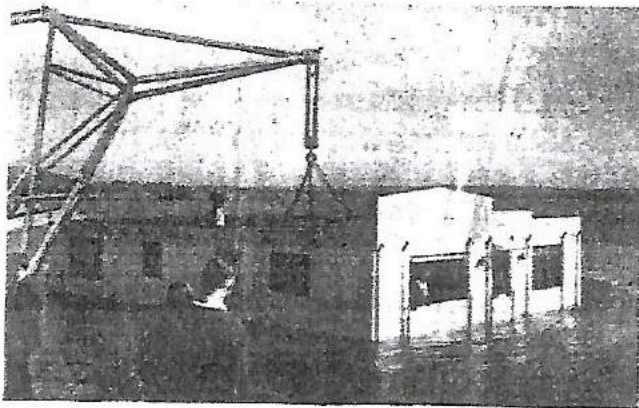


Fig. 2—The arc welded steel house after launching by crane.

towed across the river by a tug (Fig. 3), to be placed on its permanent site on the LeTourneau experimental farm.

The house is constructed of solid steel completely arc welded into a watertight, weather-resisting, fire-, dust-, and termite-proof dwelling. For the voyage across the river, the doors of the house were sealed to a height of 28 in. by means of steel plates and rubber

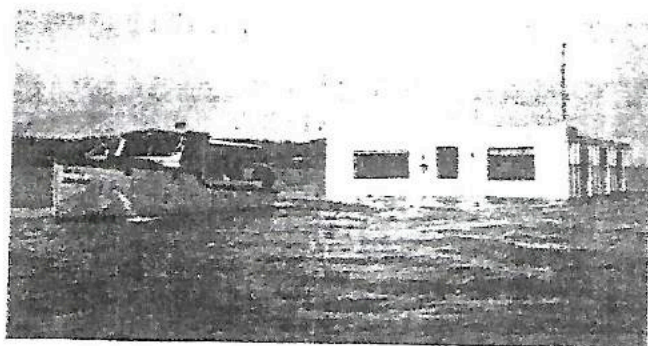
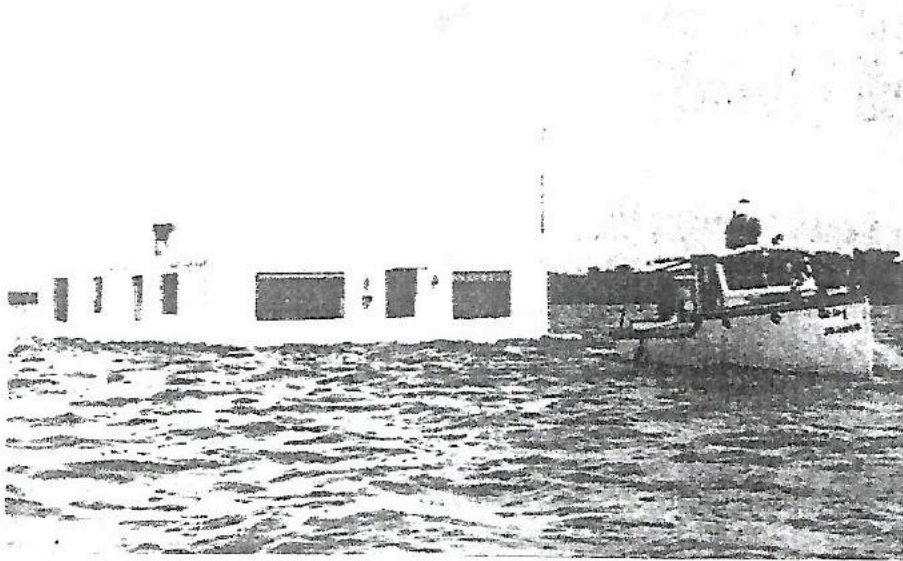


Fig. 3—The house afloat in tow of a motor boat.

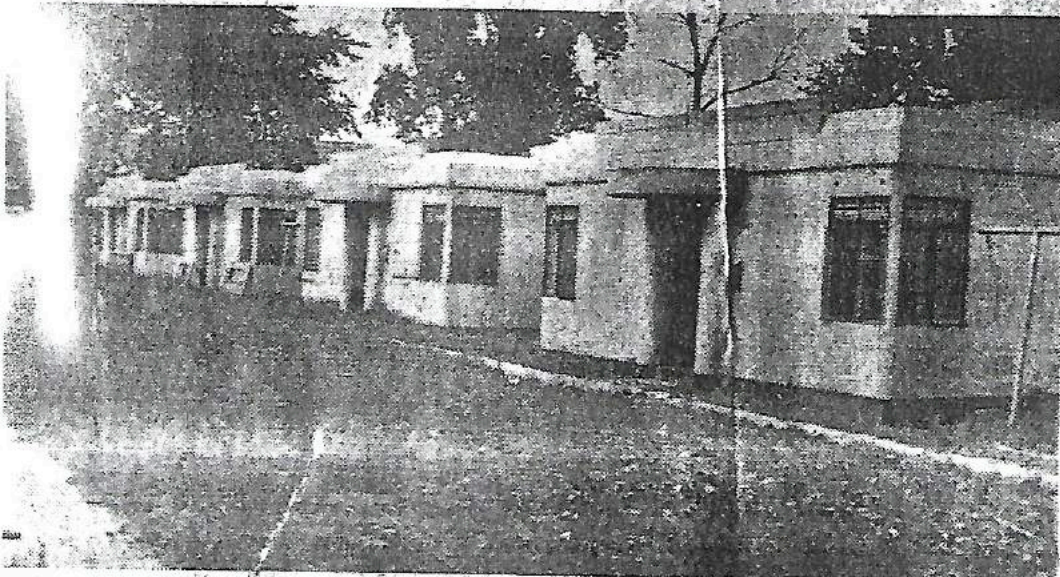
Steel House Floats—"with Greatest of Ease"



■ This eight-room, all-steel structure, weighing 41 tons, was built recently by LeTourneau Co., Peoria, Ill. The house was launched, floating from its own buoyancy, drawing only 8 inches of water, and was towed to a residence site across the river

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THE PEORIA STAR, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 4, 1943



★ **MAKE WAY FOR INDUSTRY.**—These steel houses, part of a group of 26 portable homes in LeTourneau court at the foot of Grant street, are to be moved starting Thursday, to make way for further expansion of the R. G. LeTourneau plant. The 26 houses have been bought by a realty firm and will be displayed for sale, to be placed on lots outside the city.—Star photo.

STEEL HOUSES HERE ARE SOLD LeTourneau Homes To Be Moved

Sale of 26 steel, prefabricated, movable residences, manufactured since 1936 by R. G. LeTourneau, Inc., was revealed by company executives today. The land on which the homes are now located is vitally needed for further, wartime industrial expansion by the heavy earth-moving machinery firm.

Moving of the homes, 21 on LeTourneau court at the foot of Grant street and five more which have been in use as office structures on other company grounds, will begin Thursday. Directing the transfer will be a Peoria buyers' group, Becker and Becker, represented by A. C. Hyde, realty broker.

Going Outside City

Both R. G. LeTourneau, Inc., and the buyers have agreed that, to avoid interference with industrial war work, it will be impossible to allow inspections of the homes at the LeTourneau site. Two "models," one with three rooms and one with four, are expected to be placed adjacent to the Hyde Realty offices in the 1800 block Prospect Road within the next 30 days. Individual