

BRANIFF HISTORY TODAY - Today, we celebrate the 135th anniversary of the birth of Braniff Airways, Inc., cofounder Thomas Elmer Braniff who was born on Thursday, December 6, 1883. Known to his friends as Tom Braniff, he formed the first operating (Braniff Air Lines, Inc., was formed by Tom and Paul in April 1926) Braniff aviation entity, Paul R. Braniff, Inc., with his brother Paul Revere Braniff, in the spring of 1928, and he remained with the carrier and its successors, Braniff Airlines, Inc., and Braniff Airways, Inc., until his untimely death in a private plane crash in January 1954.

Mr. Braniff, a highly successful Oklahoma-based insurance entrepreneur, was persuaded by his technically inclined brother to invest and form a flying club in Oklahoma City. Paul Braniff brought together a group of investors to help finance the new venture that included his brother Tom. The Oklahoma Aero Club was formed, in 1927, using what would become Braniff's first airliner, a Stinson Detroider aircraft registered as NC1929, which was owned by Paul Braniff.

Member's of the new Aero Club included E. E. Westervelt of Southwestern Bell Telephone, Fred Jones owner of Fred Jones Ford dealerships, and Frank Phillips of Phillips 66 fame along with other prominent Oklahoma businessmen. Paul Braniff flew the founding members on hunting and vacation trips in the Stinson Detroider as well as business trips. The club was a short-lived venture, however, as the usual problems such as creating a useful schedule that would accommodate all of the member's needs became impossible to implement successfully. Paul Braniff, Mr. Westervelt and a lawyer, Walter A. Lybrand, bought out the interests of the other original investors.

From the Aero Club, the new Paul R. Braniff, Inc. was formed in May 1928, which became the first incarnation of Braniff, doing business as The Tulsa-Oklahoma City Airline and later as Braniff Airlines, a division of Universal Airlines Corporation. Paul Braniff was named President with his brother Tom Braniff as Vice President, E. E. Westervelt, Treasurer, and Walter Lybrand as Secretary. The first scheduled service was begun from Oklahoma City Municipal to Tulsa Airport on June 20, 1928, with Paul Braniff at the controls of the Stinson Detroider. The small airline was sold and eventually became a division of Universal Aviation Corporation in 1929, which was bought by AVCO, which became American Airlines. At that point two airlines had been named Braniff.

On November 3, 1930, Braniff Airways, Inc., was formed in Oklahoma, with Tom Braniff as President, E. E. Westervelt as Vice President and Paul Braniff as Secretary and Treasurer. The new airline began scheduled service using Lockheed L-5 Vega aircraft on November 13, 1930, between Tulsa, Oklahoma City and Wichita Falls, Texas. The Vegas were very fast and the new company touted that it was the "World's Fastest Airline." The single-engine aircraft featured a 450-horsepower engine and could cruise at 150 miles per hour. Braniff operated a total of twelve of these aircraft until their retirement in 1937.

Braniff Airways, Inc. continued to grow to as far north as Chicago and traffic increased but air mail contracts were badly needed and eventually came with the Air Mail Act of 1934. In 1938, Congress passed the Civil Aeronautics Act that Mr. Braniff called "the Magna Carta" of the aviation industry because it stabilized the system and embarked on the development of an organized national air transportation system. To create this system, the Civil Aeronautics Board was formed to issue certificates of public convenience and necessity as a result of public hearings. This system allowed a more

uniform air transportation plan to be implemented that would better serve the nation's air mail, commerce and defense needs.

Tom Braniff knew that investment in any aviation entity was a risky proposition and felt that trying to raise capital to grow Braniff should be presented to investors who would not be financially ruined if the aviation venture were to fail. Mr. Braniff was very aware of the plight of his fellow man and the need to protect a single person from personal ruin. As a result of this belief he created the B-Line Club (Braniff was known as the B-Line in honor of Mr. Braniff). Braniff was in need of capital to finance new aircraft to use to service the new routes that would be awarded by the CAB and Mr. Braniff felt that because of the 1938 Act that the risk of investment had been modified but was still somewhat evident.

In 1938, Mr. Braniff had initially looked for an investment banker in New York to help him with a public offering of his stock. However, he was not successful in garnering a banker to market his airline's shares but he did meet with one banker that was interested if Braniff could prove that there was interest in his shares. As a result of this, Tom started the B-Line Club in major cities and offered only 100 shares to each prospective investor. He headed to Kansas City where he was well known in the insurance business and sold his first 100-share investment at \$27.50 USD per share to Frank Phillips, the founder of Phillips 66, and an original investor in the 1927 Oklahoma Aero Club.

Tom Braniff set up B-Line Clubs in Oklahoma City, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and Austin. In a very brief period Mr. Braniff had procured 21 members in his moderate risk airline investment group in Kansas City alone. By the mid-1950s, one of the original shares in the B-Line Club were, as a result of stock splits, equal to six shares. A successful public offering of Braniff stock was made, in 1938, as a result of the success of the B-Line Club, which clearly showed that there was public interest in the shares of Braniff Airways. The offering was not made via a Wall Street banking firm but by a Washington DC banker by the name of Ferdinand Eberstadt.

Mr. Eberstadt specialized in the offering to the public shares of family owned corporations. Mr. Braniff and Mr. Eberstadt met and a deal was struck with the first offering quickly becoming oversubscribed. A second larger and equally successful public offering was made several years later. Mr. Eberstadt became a Braniff Airways Board Member and close friend of Mr. Braniff. Mr. Eberstadt served on the Board of Directors for over eleven years.

This unique innovation of Tom Braniff put Braniff on the map not only as a leader in air transportation but also as a company shrewd in raising capital and minimizing investor risk.

For further reading, Braniff Airways Foundation has authored a Wikipedia article about the fascinating life and times of Thomas Elmer Braniff:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Elmer_Braniff

Braniff Airways Foundation has established a Memorial page to honor Mr. Braniff at [Find-A-Grave.com](http://www.findagrave.com):

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi...>

On December 6, 2018, the anniversary of Mr. Braniff's 135th birthday during the 90th year of the company that he cofounded, Braniff Airways Foundation hosted a very special wreath laying ceremony at the Braniff family gravesite. The gravesite, which includes the final resting place for Mr. Braniff, his wife Bess Thurman Braniff, his granddaughter Jeanne Terrell, his daughter Jeanne Braniff Terrell, his son-in-law, Alex Terrell and his son Thurman Clark Braniff, is located in the Calvary Hill Cemetery and Mausoleum located north of Love Field.

Photo: Mr. Thomas Elmer Braniff and his wife Mrs. Bess Thurman Braniff are waving goodbye before they board their luxurious Braniff airliner to begin the first segment of a long trip to Europe. Douglas DC-6 EI Conquistador registered as N6889 is parked on the ramp at Dallas Love Field in the early 1950s.

Braniff Airways Foundation
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Braniff Flying Colors Collection, Curator