



## LOCAL

# Fairchild F-27 plane makes journey from Wyoming to the Hagerstown Aviation Museum

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A 64-year-old Fairchild F-27 airplane has returned Hagerstown. A crowd of aviation history fans and past Fairchild employees gathered to watch the plane being unloaded Thursday at the Hagerstown Aviation Museum.

Built in Hagerstown in 1959, the plane serves as a footnote in Fairchild's history of aircraft production.

Fairchild, an aircraft manufacturing company, came to Hagerstown in the early 1930s. The peak of airplane production was during World War II, museum Executive Director John Seburn said.

Around 10,000 people worked for Fairchild in the early to mid-1950s, museum Vice President Kurtis Meyers said. By the time the F-27 was built, that number was cut down to around 3,000.

Almost every business in Hagerstown supported the Fairchild operation in the early 1950s, museum volunteer Brad Overcash said. He worked in the printing department while the F-27 was in production.

The F-27 was the first commercial airliner in the U.S. that had jet engines, Seburn said, adding that there were 128 F-27s built in Hagerstown.

The model was Fairchild's attempt to move away from government contracts, Seburn said.

"They wanted to get into the commercial airline business, and this was their chance to make that happen," Seburn said.

They partnered with Fokker, an aircraft company in Holland which designed the F-27, to get approval to build the same planes in Hagerstown.

## **Where did this F-27 come from?**

The plane that pulled into the airport hangar, Meyers said, was originally an executive plane for the Pepsi-Cola

Co., then used as an Atomic Energy Commission transport aircraft, and lastly owned by Hawkins and Powers to transport firefighters.

In 2006 an auction was held to sell off the remaining planes from the Hawkins and Powers in Greybull, Wyo. Ryan Philippi purchased the plane then, and in 2016 donated the aircraft to the Hagerstown Aviation Museum.

Since 2016, the museum has had to work out how the plane would get from Wyoming to Hagerstown. The plane had to be dismantled, which cost the airport roughly \$40,000, according to Seburn.

The fuselage of the aircraft was transported on the back of a large tractor-trailer. The three-day journey from Wyoming was paid for and arranged by D.L. George & Sons of Waynesboro, Pa.

The rest of the plane, including the wings, will be transported in a few weeks. After all the pieces are in, museum volunteers and employees will have to piece the plane back together, which could take months.

John Gregory of Digging and Rigging donated crane services for the unloading of the fuselage.

## **Aviation history abounds in Hagerstown**

Ben Ryland worked at Fairchild in the 1950s doing tooling and repairs. He was still working when Fairchild started to build F-27 aircrafts, before he was furloughed in 1958.

Ryland said there's a lot of navigation and aviation history in Hagerstown, which is why the museum should be supported.

"I wish people would be more supportive of bringing all these planes back to this place where they were built," Ryland said. "It's a lot of history and we should continue to keep it going."

The F-27, when fully reassembled, will likely be displayed outside of the Fairchild Aircraft Flight Test Hangar off Showalter Road, Seburn said.

The goal of the museum, Seburn said, is to preserve this history of aviation in the Hagerstown area.

"There's a lot of family heritage here in the Hagerstown area connected with all of the Fairchild planes ..." Seburn said. "This was one of the planes a lot of folks here helped to build."

