

# History of the Black Hawk R/C Pilots (1969 – 2021)

## Pre-History (1964 – 1968)

In 1964 the Northeast Iowa Radio Control Society or “NEIR/CS” was founded by Bill Baldwin, Joe Pfiffner and “Scotty” Kleinendorst. In those days, it was illegal to fly inside the Waterloo city limits. The story goes that one Sunday evening some young men were flying a control line airplane near one of the greens on Byrnes Park golf course. As fate would have it, a foursome with Waterloo City Councilmen approached the group to chase them off the course. The startled young pilot crashed his model into the green, augering a rather large hole in the process. Three quick readings of a new ordinance at the following Monday night council meeting and model airplane flying inside the city limits was banned! (This ordinance is no longer in effect. However, there is a noise ordinance limiting the noise level of model aircraft and cars.)

The three founding members of NEIR/CS rented a flying field two miles west of Cedar Falls on the Whitey Harken farm. The cost was \$50 per year and the flying field was a 200-foot circle. Within a year there were twelve club members and dues were \$10 per year. In 1966 the flying site was moved to Telfer Hammer’s hay field near the corner of Orange and Hoff Roads in Waterloo.

## NEIR/CS Club Membership Roster

Bill Baldwin	Larry Hatton	Joe Myers
Roy Benefiel	Gary Jensen	Laverne Petrie
Dick Blake	Melvin “Scotty” Kleinendorst	Joe Pfiffner
Roger Farwall	Don Methfessel	Jim Porter Jr.

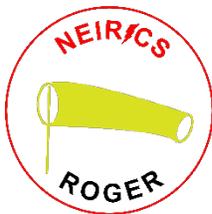
In the early days, club members flew single channel (rudder only) and three-channel (rudder, elevator and throttle) reed radio sets, sometimes called “bang-bang” radios because the rudder and elevator servo movements were full travel from center to one side or the other. Throttle settings were idle,  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$  and full throttle. Radio equipment operated on 27 MHz and was mostly do-it-yourself using plans from “*Model Airplane News*” and “*R/C Modeler*” magazines. Scotty Kleinendorst said, “if you got one flight out of them you were lucky”. Club members also flew with Galloping Ghost, Digitrio and F&M Digital 5 radios. In 1965, Larry Potts joined the club, bringing the membership up to a “baker’s dozen”. Larry found a deal for the then top of the line Micro-Avionics 6 Channel radios for only \$333. This price was so good that eight members ordered radios. This at a time when you could buy a new Chevy for \$2600! In 1968, digital proportional radio control systems operating on 72 MHz became widely available, which expanded the number of frequencies from 7 to 30, and greatly reduced interference problems.



The aircraft flown at this time were different from those flown today. Many trainers used 15 to 25 size two-stroke glow engines. Jim Mitchell and his son, John, learned to fly RC with a SIG Stinson L-5 with a Min-X radio "on the new 72 MHz" and a Fox 15 engine. John says, "It flew like crap!" Popular airplanes of the time were the Goldberg Skylane, SIG Astro Hog, Taurus, Orion and Smog Hog. Of course, these model airplanes were just plans in a magazine or balsa kits that required many hours of building time. When Larry Hatton saw an airplane of any size, he would say, "Put a 60 on it!" Larry liked power and speed, and a 60-size engine was the ultimate in power. Gliders were also popular and at one time almost half of the club members flew a glider of some kind.



SIG Astro Hog



The first NEIR/CS patch was a circle with a red border on a white background and NEIR/CS at the top in red, a gold windsock in the middle and the pilot's name at the bottom in black. Only a few of the original NEIR/CS members had one of these patches. Later, a second NEIR/CS patch in a more patriotic red, white and blue was developed. These were a round white

background with a border in red like the original patch, but with NEI & S in blue and R/C in red with a red prop in the center.



In December 1968, the club's name was changed to the "Black Hawk R/C Fliers" and a new patch was designed with a colorful round patch featuring a bird with a broken wing walking on crutches. Some members didn't care for the term fliers because they felt fliers played with toy airplanes or were people who flew in airplanes. It was agreed that club members were pilots, not fliers, so in 1969 the name was changed to the Black Hawk Radio Control Pilots, Inc.

That same year Club members decided to become an Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA) chartered club. Articles of Incorporation were filed with the Iowa Secretary of State and the club joined the AMA as club #792. Being an AMA club required all club members to also be AMA members and one or two people dropped out because of this. Bob Nelson, Wayne Boots and Mike Carroll had joined the club by then and became charter members of the new club.

The new name required a new patch as many members did not like the "broken wing bird" motif. Mike Carroll designed the new patch. It was a return to the patriotic red, white, and blue colors of the second NEIR/CS patch, and shows a P-51 like aircraft in blue with the name Black Hawk erroneously combined into one word, "Blackhawk Pilots" in blue letters with "R" and "C" with a red outline instead of the requested solid red. After the first 25 incorrectly made patches were sold, an attempt was made to fix the design.



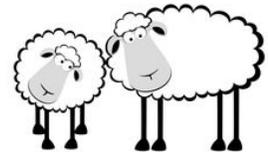
The “Blackhawk” spelling was not corrected, but the “R” and “C” was filled in with solid red as originally intended. This version of the patch was used for the next 30 years.



If you had a club patch, you needed a club uniform to wear it on. The official club uniform was a dark grey one-piece jumpsuit that looked “pretty sharp” according to John Mitchell. Club members wore the uniform when flying and at the annual spring model airplane shows at the Waterloo Arts and Recreation Center and later at the Crossroads and College Square Malls.

### **Pullin’s Farm - 5065 Hoff Road (1968-1973)**

In 1968, the club moved ½ mile north to Pullin’s Farm and paid \$125 a year rent. This was a great place to fly and the club dues were raised to \$20 for the club’s 20 members. The flying field was in the middle of a pasture that was shared with a herd of sheep. The club mowed three runways in the nice grass. The sheep always left their “mark” on the runways, and the sheepdog might beat you to your aircraft if you landed too far away. The glider flyers setup a winch along one side of the runway. Interference was a common problem with 27 MHz radios, and the southeast corner of the flying field was notorious for aircraft “getting hit”. Club members blamed the interference on CB radios, HAM operators and even a metal gate. CB radio channel 23 is shared with 27 MHz radio-controlled devices, so CB radios were most likely the cause of interference.



RCM Magazine – Feb 1969

The farm was within the Waterloo city limits and fell under the city’s regulations regarding the flying of model aircraft. About fifty people lived in a new housing development nearby, and one homeowner called the police regularly to have the flyers kicked off our field. The police would often stop by just to watch the flying, and then later would be out in response to a noise complaint. Members of the club polled the residents in the new subdivision regarding the flying and discovered only one resident was opposed. With this information club members talked the Waterloo Mayor, Lloyd Turner, who was wheel chair bound, to come out to watch the flying and maybe get some “stick time”. While the Mayor was flying, a police cruiser with two officers came roaring up the road, apparently responding to yet another noise complaint. When they saw the Mayor, they came to a sudden stop, said “hello” to the Mayor and then left. The Mayor said he didn’t think the club would be bothered any longer. He was true to his word.

John Mitchell remembers seeing his first R/C flight at the Pullin Farm. Wayne Boots agreed to show young John and his dad what R/C flying was all about. It was winter and they met Wayne and Larry Hatton at Pullin’s field but could not use the field due to snow. Wayne flew his P-47 with retracts from the gravel road on that blustery winter day to show some newbies what

flying was all about. John said, "If there was ever a way to become a hero to an 8-year-old boy, that was it!"

In 1973 Rick Edwards was flying his SIG Kadet on 27 MHz when it got "hit" and he lost control of the airplane. The Kadet crashed into a power line, shorting the power to the landowner's milking equipment right in the middle of milking 40 head of cows. Thus, the Pullin Farm flying field was lost, and the club began searching for a new flying site.

### **Birdsall Park (1974- 1996)**

The Cedar Falls Parks Department opened Birdsall Park in 1968. The area east of the entrance to the golf course was an ideal flying site for gliders, and club members soon started flying there. It was a nice location and the city mowed the grass! One unfortunate affect was that the gliders seldom flew at the other club flying fields and new club members were never exposed to the joy of powerless flight. Around 1996, the golf course added another 9-holes in the area where the gliders were flying and glider flying stopped altogether.

### **Hawkeye Tech (1974 -1976)**

Jim Mitchell knew Harold Bienfang, who was head of the welding program at Hawkeye Tech, now Hawkeye Community College on East Orange Road. Harold suggested the alfalfa field on the hilltop in the back of the aviation building for a flying site and helped convince the college administrator to allow the club to use that site. The "grass" was heavy alfalfa stubble that easily punctured Monokote wing covering. Club members turned out with push mowers to mow a wide rectangle as the main North-South runway and pit area. Toward the North end of this runway was mowed a diagonal, that laid out NW to SE which was much narrower. Once the field was established, Jim and John Mitchell kept it mowed. The field was short and on top of a hill, so you could run off either end of the runway during takeoffs and landings. The flying field's location was next to the South Hills golf course and there were occasional overflights over the course. Expansion of the campus forced the club to move to the bottom of the hill, even closer to the golf course before the site was finally abandoned.

### **Deerwood Park (1975-1978)**

A new flying field near Waterloo or Cedar Falls could not be found, but the city of Evansdale gave the club permission to fly in Deerwood Park. The flying field was Kentucky bluegrass, surrounded on three sides with 100-year-old oak trees. It was also just 50 yards downwind of the sewage treatment plant, which was a frequent aircraft magnet. Club member Bud Hall did the mowing and the city charged no rent. However, they did get revenue from club members, since the park could only be reached by passing through two city speed traps. When the I-380 bridge was built over the Cedar River, it took most of the land used by the club. There's now a small lake on the site of the runway.

### **Cedar River Natural Resource Area on Miller Creek Road – John Livingston Field (1976 – 1995)**

In 1973, the Black Hawk County Conservation Board acquired the 593-acre Cedar River Natural Resource Area on Miller Creek Road. Jim Mitchell knew Wayne Faulk, chairman of the Black Hawk County Conservation Board, and asked him about a flying site on the new property.

Concurrently, club members were pouring over aerial photos of county owned property before concluding that the Natural Resource Area contained the only feasible flying sites. Jim Mitchell, Bob Nelson and Bob Camarata inspected the area, and in the spring of 1976, the club requested the use of the cropland just inside the bike trail across the road from the ranger's trailer. Jim Porter Jr. and Bob Camarata made a formal presentation to the Conservation Board



with about a dozen club members present. No doubt, the professional presentation made by Jim Porter Jr. along with the strong support of Wayne Faulk secured the flying field which became known unofficially as the "Washburn Field". The only opposing vote was from Dave Nagle, later Congressman Nagle, who said he was afraid the model airplanes would scare off wildlife. Mr. Nagle convinced the Board that they should not give up the income from the crop land and proposed that the club be allowed to use another site closer to the river. This was agreed to by all parties and Bob Camarata was selected to act as field liaison with the Conservation Board. The early development work at the field was overseen by Leo Hanson, head of staff at the county office. Leo was always helpful, very cooperative and supportive of the club's efforts to improve what was to become John Livingston Field. Several improvements had to be made before the field could be used. The access road to the flying site was nothing more than a dirt path that was unpassable if it rained. The county put in a gravel road, leveled the flying field and added drainage. They also built a picnic shelter complete with tables, put up signage, graveled a parking area and took care of garbage. Leo Hanson and later Steve Finnegan at the Black Hawk County headquarters were instrumental in getting this work done quickly. A few times each year the county would mow the outfield area around the flying field. Initially, Jim Mitchell mowed the runway and later Warren Worley did the mowing.

The field was named in honor of John H. Livingston. John was born in Cedar Falls and was an early aviation pioneer and air racer. The book, "*Jonathan Livingston Seagull*" published in 1970, was loosely based on John Livingston's life, and influenced club members to name the field after this local aviation legend.

### **The Great Flood of 1993**

The flying field had been in continuous use from 1976 until 1993, when the Great Flood inundated the area, flooding the flying field and everything around it. This was the greatest recorded rainfall in the previous 121 years of recorded history in Iowa! Once the flood waters receded, a heavy weed buildup followed! Warren Worley was mowing the flying field at that time, but he could not keep the outfield weeds mowed down. The county mowed the outfield 30' away from the runway in September 1993, but the flying season was largely over by then.

In the summer of 1993, the club members flew at the Oelwein airport. The airport management welcomed the club and there were many good flying days and weekends there. However, it was a long drive and club meeting discussions focused on finding a new flying site. A major concern was repeated flooding of the flying field and not being able to fly at the Washburn Field for the entire summer. This concern was not misplaced as the Cedar River has crested almost as high or higher than in 1993 at several times since then.



In the fall of 1993 and spring of 1994, the county replaced the signs, bulletin board, picnic tables and garbage barrels at the flying field. The “spring” work day was held in the fall of 1993. A large group of club members showed up to clean up the field. John Livingston Field remained the only club flying field through the 1996 flying season. The club dues were \$13 per year, mainly for postage for the monthly newsletter. John Livingston Field was used by many club members, as well as non-members for a couple of years after 1996 as Warren Worley continued mowing the field.

### **New Hartford (1996 to present)**

In 1988, Jim Gerholdt lived in New Hartford and wanted a flying site closer than Washburn, some 30 miles away. Jim asked Paul Schoeman, a local farmer and businessman, if he could fly from Paul’s conservation farmland just south of town. Paul agreed and Jim recruited some club members to help level out an East-West flying field near the current field entrance on County Road T-55. Jim kept the flying field mowed and it was a popular flying site. In September when the days were getting shorter, but the weather was still nice, the sun would set right on the end of the runway.

About this time, Bob Nelson, owner of Bob’s R/C, started a Wednesday morning retiree breakfast group at Ingalls Little House Cafe in New Hartford. Six to eight club members would have breakfast and then fly afterward. Paul Schoeman would often stop at the Cafe for breakfast or coffee with the club members. By the fall of 1995, the club had been searching for a replacement flying site for the Washburn field for more than a year without success. One Wednesday morning someone in the group asked Paul if he would consider selling 10 acres of farmland for a new club flying field. Several club members met Paul at his farm and drove out to the prospective flying field. Years earlier, Paul had removed the topsoil from the area to build the levy behind the New Hartford elementary school. The remaining soil was loose sand which was not good for farming. There was a pit that was filled with water and several small trees were growing along the edge of it. Paul owned a scraper and said he would fill in the pit and level out the area. He would grade the area beyond the runway to divert water drainage from the uphill farmland away from the proposed runway. He would also grade an access road from County Road T-55 to the flying field. A purchase price of \$10,000 was agreed to for approximately 10 acres including the access road easement. Paul even offered to finance the purchase with 5% annual interest on the unpaid balance, so the club did not need to seek

financing from a bank or other sources. The club would pay two installments of \$1000 plus interest each year, which would pay off the loan in 5 years. The club had the property surveyed and rezoned from agricultural to recreational parkland. Membership was about 50 flyers and the annual dues were raised to \$60 a year with a special one-time assessment of \$50 to cover the cost of the new flying field and improvements.

Dedication of Club Field (1996)  
New Hartford International Airport  
To it's Members and to President Neal Leaper  
By Mayor of New Hartford Mike Luck



The grading was done that fall and work was started on the flying field in the spring of 1996. A North-South runway was laid out to take advantage of the prevailing southerly winds in the summer months. Mel Downing lived nearby and used his antique John Deere tractor to do the final grading of the field and the access road. The access road was named in his honor and a road sign erected at the turn in the road. The access road ran right through the middle of the flying field Jim Gerholdt had maintained. The club rented a sod stripper and cut sod from Jim's flying site and laid it in the pit area of the new flying site. This gave the club a nice grass pit area and a very sandy runway. At this point, it should be noted that the sand was not river sand, but wind-blown sand known as Loess Hill sand. This is a very fine, loose sand that is firm when wet, but drains very quickly and becomes very loose sand again. Initially, the club planted grass seed with little success. The ground water level in the area is only 15' below the surface, so first one and later a second shallow well were drilled to irrigate the runway. The pipe from the second well is still in the ground near the gate at the north end of the pits. The club had a soil sample analyzed by the Agricultural Extension Service. The report said that the soil was sterile and needed organic material or humus to be able to grow anything. The recommendation was to let weeds grow and when they died in the fall, they would add humus to the soil.

The club was the first AMA club in the state of Iowa to own it's flying field. Ownership would allow the club to make permanent improvements. The first order of business was to select an appropriate name for the field. "New Hartford International" was selected with a location code of "NHI". This gives New Hartford the distinct honor of being the smallest town in the world to have an "international" airport. No other airport in the world uses the NHI location code.

There was no shade at the field and the sand was very hot that first summer. Mike Hall and Dave Junkins proposed building a simple lean-to shelter from a couple of sheets of plywood and some support posts. By the time the plans were finalized, the club had built the picnic shelter with a concrete floor. Most of the materials were donated and club members provided all the labor.



The next need was for storage space. In 1999, club members built a 24' x 28' garage. Russ Gemoll loaned the club the money to purchase the materials for the garage. The club owned an old Cub mower and Warren Worley mowed the grass with his John Deere tractor with a belly mower. Both were stored in the new garage along with a multitude of items that just showed up, including chairs, tables, tools and cooking supplies.

It became apparent that growing grass was a long-term project and the wells could not produce enough water to keep grass growing in the hot days of summer in Iowa. In May 2002 the club laid down a petromat runway. At that time, no model airplane club in Iowa had a petromat runway, so the club was a pioneer in using this material. Petromat comes in various widths. The first runway used 3 rolls of petromat that were 15' wide and 300' long. Two petromat strips were laid making a runway that was 30' wide and 450' long.

The fence had been installed 20 feet, from the edge of the runway in accordance with AMA guidelines, but the club members felt they were too close to the runway when taking-off and landing. A decision was made to lay down two more strips of petromat, but before that could be done, some work was needed on the runway foundation. The first petromat runway and the diagonal runway had been put down on sand. This proved to be unstable and the runway developed "waves" and wrinkles. The pocket gophers also burrowed under the runway making large bumps in the petromat. The petromat on the main runway was pulled up and about 200 tons of gravel brought in to provide a firm surface for the petromat. Brian Jebe used his John Deere tractor to level out the gravel to a uniform depth of 2" to 3". Then four strips of petromat were laid down for a 60' x 440' main runway. The gravel foundation was almost too firm, as the staples used to hold down the petromat wouldn't penetrate the gravel. Finally, long spikes were used to hold down the petromat.



The Wednesday morning breakfast group found that the North-South runway faced the sun in the morning and requested that the club install a petromat "diagonal runway" to allow for morning flying. Initially, the diagonal runway only extended from the main runway to the West, but it was soon extended to the East as well. Warren Worley donated chain link fencing and club members installed it to separate both runways from the pits. Without a gravel foundation, the diagonal runway petromat was difficult to maintain. Eventually, the petromat was pulled up and grass planted.

In the spring of 2013, large sections of the petromat blew loose in a windstorm. Club members re-stretched the petromat and patched the torn sections. The petromat blew loose again in the spring of 2019. The old petromat was re-stretched as much as possible and three rolls of new petromat were overlaid on the center two sections of the runway.

## Blackhawk Show Team

In the late 1970s, Dave Ramsey organized the “Blackhawk R/C Show Team”. (The team used the spelling of “Blackhawk” from the club patch.) The AMA sanctions official air show teams who put on static and flying demonstrations. Dave Ramsey was the Team Leader, secured the AMA Sanction, chose the name, recruited team members and picked the official team uniform. The uniforms were reminiscent of an American Airlines pilot’s uniform with a light blue shirt and dark blue Sears work pant, which held up well to fuel and grass stains. Dave assigned ranks to all the team members. Dave wore silver Captains bars on his shirt epaulettes. Shelby Hagberg was “second in command” with silver Commander’s bars. Warren Worley, who ran the announcer’s table and set up the speakers, wore a silver Ensign bar. Those who flew the different routines wore a silver Colonels Eagle.



The team traveled to many of the Cedar Valley’s small towns and flew at events like “Pickle Days”, “Harvest Days”, at airports, flight breakfasts and even on baseball diamonds. The regular routine was to have Bob Nelson fly his “Heavy Lifter” model aloft with Dave’s replica Space Shuttle attached on top. Bob would release the Shuttle at an extremely high altitude, because it flew like a brick! The model would then flip flop off the Lifter and spiral down several hundred feet, gaining enough speed so that Dave could make a somewhat controlled landing. He did this repeatedly and successfully to the team’s and the crowd’s amazement. Shelby Hagberg would fly his helicopter and had an amazing aerobatic routine set to music with his Extra 300. Shelby would finish after the music ended by killing the Extra’s engine while at a high altitude. Then he’d perform dead stick maneuvers before flying inverted about a foot above the runway, pull up, roll out and land at his feet. It was always the hit of the air show. Jim Porter would hand toss a very fast sailplane, do some aerobatics and return over the runway to stall and catch the model in his hand. Bob Nelson would demonstrate his flying skills by doing the full AMA Pattern. Bob and Bob Camarata would demonstrate pylon racing with two Quickie 500s. Spectators were invited to fly trainer aircraft, and finally there would be a flight of Warbirds. At the end of the air show, Bob Nelson would take his “Heavy Lifter” aloft filled with candy while the last air show act was in progress. When the other models had landed, Bob would fly over and release the treats, and Warren would invite the kids to grab some candy!



In its heyday, the show team was very popular and performed annually at events around the state. Putting on an air show required regular practice and coordination to minimize the dreaded “down time”, when nothing happens. Times changed, team members moved away or moved on, and the Blackhawks AMA Sanctioned Show Team dissolved into history in the early 1990s.

### **EXPO in the UNI Dome (1999 – 2014)**

Bob Nelson, a charter member of the club and local hobby shop owner, proposed the club host an indoor fly-in in the UNI Dome. The cost was \$1000 for one day and Bob agreed to underwrite any losses the first year. At the time, the McLeod Center had not been built and the basketball floor and bleachers were in the Dome; so only half of the Dome interior was available for flying. Electric flight was in its infancy. The airplanes were home built as were the brushless motors. NiCad batteries were used, because Li-Po batteries weren't available yet. A five-minute flight was exceptionally long. The event was a success and the club made a small profit. In 2006, the event was expanded to two days with the full Dome available. The cost to put on the event was \$5,000. This was a large financial undertaking for the club, but we never lost money. One year we only made \$8 profit! The event grew in popularity each year and by 2014 there were 160 pilots and 500 spectators. In the few short years the EXPO was held, there was tremendous growth in indoor R/C flying technology with commercially available brushless motors, Li-Po batteries, foamy models of all types, 2.4 GHz radios and miniaturized receivers and servos. Unfortunately, the UNI Dome schedule did not have an open date for the event in 2015 and it has not been held since.



### **Club Logo**

When the club website was established at [www.bhrpc.org](http://www.bhrpc.org), a digital logo was required. It was adapted from the 1968 patch design and has been used on club hats and shirts since then. This logo finally corrected the spelling of the club name.



### **Black Hawk R/C Pilots (50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year)**

The flying field at New Harford is frequently used during the summer months when the temperatures are warm and the winds light. Club members can be found there almost any good flying day in the summer. The club hosts multiple events each year: R/C Combat, Float Fly at Prairie Lakes Park, National Model Aviation Day, Warbird Fly-In and a fall Swap Meet & Fly-In. In addition, the club participates in community events including Model Aviation Discovery Day at HobbyTown in Waterloo, and Beaver Creek Days and the Pumpkin Festival in New Hartford. In 2019 the club raised the adult dues to \$100 per year, the first increase in 25 years. The proceeds from National Model Aviation Day go to a local veteran's charity.

The club maintains a social media presence with a webpage and Facebook. A monthly newsletter is emailed to all members.

The Wednesday morning breakfast group eventually moved from Ingalls Little House Cafe to the Cedar-Loo Hy-Vee on University Avenue and now meet at the Ansborough Avenue Hy-Vee.

Over the years, many club members have contributed labor and financially to the club. There are too many to name here, but they know who they are, and the club appreciates all that they have done.

Contributing to this and previous versions of the club history were: Bob Camarata, Larry Hatton, Scotty Kleinendorst, Bob Nelson, Jim Gerholdt, John Mitchell, Dick Groth and Neal Leeper (Editor).

*[Editor's Note: If there anything that I missed in compiling this history, please let me know.]*