

AIR

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PICTORIAL



Provincetown—Boston Airline

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AIRLINE HISTORY No. 64

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PROVINCETOWN–BOSTON Airline Inc., more commonly known as PBA, is one of the oldest and most respected of the United States' regional airlines. Over the years the company has established an enviable reputation for good reliable service and has grown to become one of the top ten regional carriers. PBA's operation is most unusual in that two separate networks are operated from bases in Massachusetts and Florida. The company operates a diverse fleet with an interesting mix of aircraft types offering great flexibility to cater for changing demand.

Early days

After World War II John C. Van Arsdale Senior returned home to the U.S.A. after serving as a meteorologist in the 8th Air Force in England. He had gained his Private Pilot's Licence before the war and decided that his future would be in commercial aviation, despite his problem with airsickness (rare for a pilot).

In 1946 he formed Cape Cod Flying Service near Hyannis and after repairing the airfield, he purchased two Piper Cubs and a surplus Stearman PT-17, hired instructors and started a flying school. During 1947 a twin-engined Cessna Bobcat was added to the fleet and air taxi services were also started in the Cape Cod area. Van Arsdale later obtained his Commercial Pilot's Licence at the school.

During 1947–48 the first airport in Massachusetts to be constructed under the Federal Airport Act was built at Provincetown, a resort at the tip of the Cape Cod Peninsula. On 1st October 1948 Van Arsdale opened a branch of his operation at Provincetown. The potential of an air service linking Provincetown with Boston, only 30 minutes flying time away, 45 miles across Cape Cod Bay, was soon realised. At that time the alternative land journey of 120 miles took five hours.

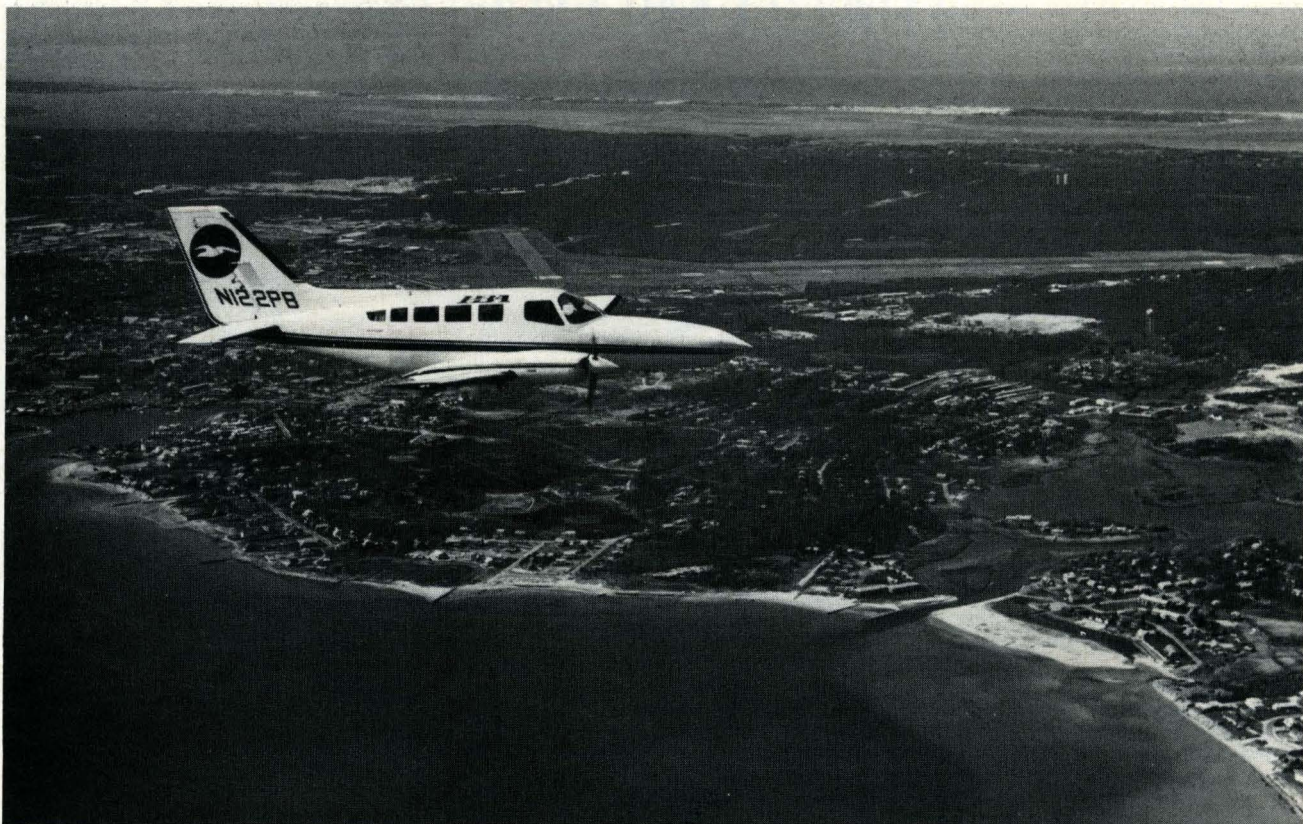
After operating a number of air taxi flights between Provincetown and Bos-

ton, Van Arsdale decided to set up his own airline on the route. He formed a new company appropriately named Provincetown–Boston Airline and intended to use the Cessna Bobcat to operate the services. PBA carried out its inaugural service on 30th November 1949.

The Van Arsdale family was moved to Provincetown in March 1949 with the belief that the only way to run a small local airline was to live in the community and get to know everybody. PBA's operation was very primitive in those days with a new single paved runway, shack-type terminal, while a windsock and radio were the only navigational aids. When passenger demand was not sufficient to fill the Cessna Bobcat, a Stinson Voyager (3 passengers), Piper Clipper (2 pax.) or Cessna 140 (1 pax.) would be used from the expanding Cape Cod Flying Service Fleet. Van Arsdale soon learned the important lesson of making the service fit the demand and of using the most suitable type of aircraft available.

PBA had been started as an Intra-State carrier licensed by the Massachusetts Aeronautics Commission and State Inspectors checked both aircraft

One of Provincetown–Boston Airline's current Cessna 402Cs, N122PB, flies over the village of Hyannis, the centre of aviation activity on Cape Cod. Below is Hyannis Harbour, while the background shows the northern cape shoreline, Sandy Neck and Cape Cod Bay. Just discernible in the distance are the hills of Manomet, south of Plymouth. The Cessna 402 was the pioneer of PBA routes and the current fleet includes more than forty of these aircraft (Photo: Richard C. Kelsey via PBA)





Above: Lockheed 10A Electra N38PB, last of this famous breed to serve with PBA, at Logan Airport, Boston, on 1st September 1968. Note the baggage door open on the nose of the aircraft. Building in the background is Eastern Air Lines' terminal which was then under construction (Photo: Ed Galvin)

Right: Two other PBA Electras at Logan in August 1965, N233PB (nearer) in an earlier livery while N228M has still to be repainted and re-registered N239PB (Photo: H. H. Harwood Jr. via Ed Galvin)



and crews before operations started. During the summer of 1950 scheduled services were operated on the single Provincetown to Boston route.

A development occurred in the autumn of 1950 when an Inspector of the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) visited PBA and charged the company with operating Inter-State flying without a certificate. The position was a legal loop-hole as PBA technically left Boston, crossed the State of Massachusetts State Line three marine leagues from shore, then re-entered Massachusetts on the opposite shore and therefore legally the company was an Inter-State carrier. A Cease and Desist Order was issued on PBA by the CAB and Van Arsdale applied for an exemption that was duly granted. After the 1951 summer season a further exemption was sought as the original was due to expire. The CAB had new legislation under consideration in the form of Economic Regulation Part 298 which covered PBA's predicament and that became law in February 1952; from then on no further inter-state exemptions were necessary.

The Cape Cod Flying Service operation ended in 1952 and Van Arsdale concentrated on PBA operations. Passenger loadings were good during the summer season but during winter there was insufficient traffic for PBA. In 1952 the company entered into a year-round

contract with the Lincoln Laboratory (later the Mitre Corp.) as a government sub-contractor for transportation providing one round trip per day between Provincetown and Boston. A small number of Lockheed Electra Models A and E were purchased to cater for the increase in traffic in the early 1950s. On 1st January 1954 Provincetown-Boston Airline became a corporation with John C. Van Arsdale Snr. as President.

Throughout the 1950s the seasonal operations continued and the problem of the slowdown became more acute and had to be overcome. During the winter period services were cut back to one round trip per day to honour contracts.

Naples Airlines

In the U.S.A. and Canada there is a seasonal movement of people from the northern "snowbelt" to Florida during the period November to April each year.

During the winter of 1957 John C. Van Arsdale Snr. toured Southern Florida to see if it was possible to establish a winter operation to supplement the summer Cape Cod service and keep his aircraft and crews fully utilised all year round.

At Naples in south-west Florida on the Gulf of Mexico coast he saw the need for a seasonal service to Miami in the winter season only. A small company named Naples Airlines was operating from Naples Airport and Van Arsdale Snr. negotiated a leasing arrangement whereby that company would use PBA aircraft and crews for the proposed scheduled service to Miami. Services started in 1957 and the arrangement worked well until 1959 when Naples Airlines ran into financial difficulties and the City of Naples refused to renew the airport lease.

Van Arsdale Snr. purchased Naples Airlines and this enabled him to



Three venerable PBA aircraft on the ramp at Provincetown, Massachusetts, 1st October 1973: Lockheed Electra N38PB, Douglas DC-3 N33PB (which is still in service), and Stinson SM-8A Detroitter N205W (Photo: Ed Galvin)

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continue his two complementary seasonal operations; as a bonus he acquired the lease on Naples Airport in an area soon to become one of the fastest growth regions in the U.S.A. During the 1960 season the "new" Naples Airlines, a division of PBA, operated twice daily Naples-Miami from 1st February to 18th April with only four employees including Van Arsdale and Captain John Zate as pilot.

Naples Airlines expanded rapidly and by 1964 Florida overtook Massachusetts in traffic volume to everybody's surprise. Year-round operations began in Florida in 1964 and by 1968 demand was so great in the peak season that more capacity was required. The company that John C. Van Arsdale Snr. had purchased to complement his PBA

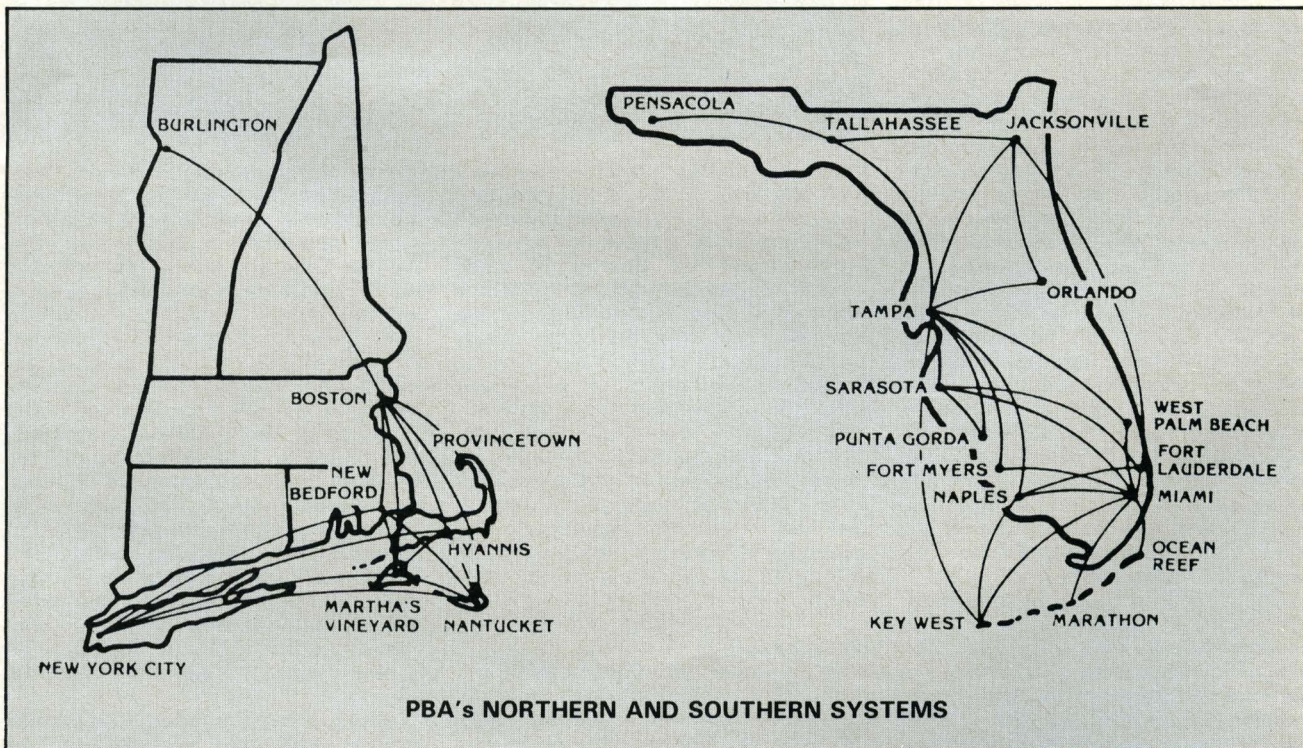
operation had blossomed into a flourishing local airline in its own right.

Van Arsdale's policy was to buy good-quality, low-cost used aircraft and have all maintenance undertaken by outside contract. The Douglas DC-3 became the obvious choice for the Naples Airlines expansion and on 29th February 1968 two aircraft were purchased from Modern Air Transport. A long association with the DC-3 has continued ever since and the type is still in service with PBA. The early livery comprised a red cheat line with titling Naples Airlines and Provincetown-Boston Airline.

During 1968 Naples Airlines introduced a Naples-Tampa route and in the late 1970s a Tampa-Punta Gorda route was added. In 1968 a small fleet of Piper Aztecs was purchased for use in off-season periods and a single

Britten-Norman Islander was purchased in July 1974 for the PBA operation. By 1974 the DC-3 fleet had been increased to four aircraft.

During 1975 Van Arsdale Snr. decided to buy larger capacity aircraft to cater for peak traffic demand, especially in Florida. Turboprop types were soon rejected, mainly due to high costs incurred by the intended low utilisation, and eventually four Martin 404s were purchased from Southeast Airlines; two were delivered in November 1975 and the remaining two in January 1976. Later a further two Martin 404s were purchased from aircraft brokers and placed in service, while a further two were similarly purchased and stored at Naples as a spares source. All the Martin 404s were from the original TWA order and had also seen service with Piedmont Airlines. The Martins



were painted in Naples Airlines livery and titles.

Additional DC-3s were also purchased during the late 1970s and by December 1980 a total of twelve of the type were in the combined fleets. The oldest commercial aircraft in the world, DC-3 c/n. 1997, registered N136PB, joined the PBA fleet on 24th January 1974. To fill the small aircraft gap a single Cessna 402B was purchased in 1972 and by 1978 four of the type were in the fleet.

By the late 1970s Van Arsdale Snr. had decided to introduce a single corporate identity to the PBA and Naples Airlines operations. The Provincetown-Boston Airline title and logo were adopted for both companies' scheduled airline operations and the Naples Airlines aircraft were progressively painted in a revised PBA livery.

Second generation

John C. Van Arsdale Snr. had two sons who remained in the family business, John C. Jnr. and Peter. Both gained their Commercial Pilot's Licences at the age of 18 and after ventures outside the airline returned to their father's companies in the early 1970s. By 1974 both sons were established as their father's successors, each acquiring 29% of the company with an agreement to take over on 1st January 1980. John C. Jnr. became Vice-President Administration and Peter Assistant Vice-President.

During the late 1970s Peter and John Jnr. grew in experience and their outlook for PBA differed from their father's and they were seeking to change the company's operating philosophy and conservative approach to expansion. In 1978 PBA agreed with the City of Naples Airport Authority to lease land and construct a new 120 ft. X 168 ft. maintenance hangar at the airport. PBA could then undertake some "in-house" maintenance, whereas Mr. Van Arsdale Snr. had always contracted out such work. The new maintenance hangar was opened in January 1980 and a second hangar was later completed at Hyannis in February 1981 to service aircraft in the Northern Division.

By the late 1970s the PBA fleet comprised a mixed fleet including Piper Aztecs, Cessna 402s, DC-3s and Martin 404s with seating capacity ranging from 5 to 44. It enabled PBA to have flexibility in coping with fluctuating demand and the airline could offer a Cessna 402 back-up to a Martin 404 or DC-3 service in the peak season, or just run a Cessna in the off-season. John Van Arsdale Snr.'s philosophy of owning his own aircraft proved right as low utilisation of the DC-3s and Martins was not a financial burden.

Deregulation

The 1978 Airline Deregulation Act by the Carter Administration was to have a dramatic effect on the U.S.

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Acquired by the company in 1954, this Stinson SM-8A Detroit, N205W, was built in 1931, rebuilt in 1981-82, and is still in use for sightseeing flights (Photo: Ed Galvin)

airline scene and by 1979 the initial euphoria had passed and airlines were beginning to wage war on each other. Until deregulation PBA had operated its five routes without competition and had a conservative outlook with regard to expansion. One new route Boston-Hyannis was opened in 1979.

On 1st January 1980 when the deadline to sell PBA to his sons arrived, John Van Arsdale Snr. decided to stay on for an additional year as he felt that the deregulation transition was incomplete. However, he stepped down from President to Vice-President, with Peter becoming the new President and John Jnr. Chairman and Chief Executive Officer.

Early in 1980 Ocean Reef Airways cut its services to Marathon in the Florida Keys and the local Chamber of Commerce approached PBA to see if it would take over the services. Marathon is a tourist centre and an air service was most important to the tourist industry of the town. The Van Arsdale sons saw the potential for PBA at Marathon and agreed to serve the route and in exchange the local airport authority offered PBA exclusive rights

at the terminal. PBA would operate Miami-Marathon in competition with Air Florida and would also offer a Naples-Marathon service.

John C. Van Arsdale Snr. was away at a conference while an agreement to serve Key West was concluded and on his return he was very upset with his sons as he felt that they were moving too fast. After discussion the sons accepted an offer to redeem their father's 30% shares in PBA. A deal was arranged and on 30th April 1980 John C. Van Arsdale Snr. retired from PBA management.

Rapid expansion

A week after gaining control of PBA, the brothers ordered two new Embraer Bandeirantes, the airline's first turbo-prop aircraft, but at the same time became involved with large interest repayments. The fight was now on and by the end of 1980 a further two Bandeirantes and five more Cessna 402Cs were ordered.

After services had started to Marathon, a battle took place between PBA and Air Florida with fare cutting and scheduling wars. In the off-season PBA

PBA Flight 413 about to leave Boston at 1.10 p.m. on 1st October 1973. DC-3 N33PB was originally a U.S.A.A.F. C-53, serial 42-6492 (Photo: Ed Galvin)





One of PBA's original batch of Embraer EMB-110P1 Bandeirantes (since upgraded), N94PB, outside the new terminal at Naples on 23rd September 1982 (Author's photo)

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was well placed as it could use smaller aircraft and after making considerable losses, Air Florida withdrew services from Marathon on 1st December 1981.

During 1980 PBA had also introduced services to the lucrative Key West market. New routes added were Miami, Naples and Tampa to Key West and with the Marathon routes included, a total of five new routes was added to the PBA network in Florida during the year.

In the autumn of 1980 Air New England decided to drop its services to New Bedford, Massachusetts, despite the fact that a Federal subsidy was received. John Van Arsdale Jnr. saw the potential of the New Bedford market with services to Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket and, most important of all, New York (La Guardia). PBA reviewed the situation and was keen to expand its northern network with routes from Nantucket, Hyannis, New Bedford and Martha's Vineyard to Boston and New York; Hyannis-Boston was already in operation but improved services were planned. There would be strong competition from Air New England, an established carrier, but PBA applied and was eventually awarded the New Bedford routes, with subsidy. The company decided to use that money to improve terminal buildings, maintenance facilities and on advertising to improve their product in the face of competition; Air New England had used its subsidy to cover operating losses.

PBA decided to go ahead with its expansion plans and from 26th April 1981 twelve new routes were introduced in the north: New Bedford to Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, Boston, New York; Hyannis to Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket, New York; Martha's Vineyard to Nantucket, Boston, New York and Nantucket to Boston, New York. That represented a massive expansion for PBA and \$800,000 was borrowed to start the operations, additional aircraft purchased and the Martin 404s were based in the north. Initially there was a fares battle with Air New England and PBA was doing

well against the established carrier. Bookings were encouraging on the new routes and PBA was looking forward to a profitable summer when the vacation season started.

Traffic controllers' strike

Then the U.S. Air Traffic Controllers' dispute, with a threatened walk-out by the PATCO members, loomed ahead and the possibility of a shut-down of all services of less than 500 miles became a threat to PBA. The 22nd June deadline passed and PBA began to show real success with its new expanded northern operation. On 3rd August 1981 the boom crashed when the PATCO strike started and U.S. air traffic ground to a virtual halt. Slots were required for operations to Boston and New York (La Guardia). PBA lost \$125,000 in the first week of the PATCO strike and for the first ten days no slots were available to the company at La Guardia. Flights in and out of Boston were operated VFR to maintain a service and keep the aircraft flying.

Fortunately the Florida operation was in the off-season and with less traffic, services were not affected except that the cross-financing from the northern operation dried up. Eventually some slots were obtained and the Martin 404s were operated to Boston and La

Guardia as they were the largest aircraft in the fleet.

Air New England was equally affected by the PATCO strike and decided not to operate VFR and grounded some of its aircraft. A labour dispute then resulted in a strike and Air New England cancelled all flights from Boston and New York to Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard and Hyannis on 15th September. The company ceased operations on 1st November 1981 leaving PBA as the surviving carrier. A smaller company, Will's Air, also operating from Hyannis, ceased scheduled operations in August 1982, leaving PBA alone in the market.

In October 1981 PBA expanded services in Florida with the addition of routes from Fort Myers to Miami and Tampa and in November similar routes were started from Sarasota. A total of sixteen new routes was opened in 1981, a year of massive growth and much change for PBA.

The City of Naples Airport Authority had decided to construct a new modern terminal complex in 1980 and that building was completed and dedicated on 16th December 1981. PBA then moved its headquarters into the old Naples terminal.

The dramatic growth of 1981 brought some changes within PBA. For the first time the company had to departmentalise to be more efficient and a computer was introduced to manage the payroll, spares inventory and other internal affairs. Staff increased from 230 to around 500, pilot strength went up from 48 to 103, and three more Bandeirantes were ordered, bringing the fleet to seven. Additional Cessna 402Cs were also purchased. New terminals were built at Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard, while at New Bedford the existing building was renovated. Investment increased and interest charges inevitably increased accordingly. By the end of 1981 PBA was still in profit, but only just.

(to be continued)

Martin 404 N40425 in the PBA maintenance hangar, Naples, 23/9/82 (Author's photo)

