

Museum Notes

by Kristen Parrott, curator
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Twenty-two years ago, in the winter of 1995, a regional organization called “Citizens United Against Low Level Flights” was formed, with its headquarters in Viroqua. The organization produced a pamphlet explaining that, “The Air National Guard has proposed increased military training in Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. The proposal includes expansion of the Hardwood Bombing Range southwest of Wisconsin Rapids. Two new flight corridors are planned in northeast Iowa and southwest Wisconsin. In the Wisconsin corridors, the proposal calls for 2151 round-trip training flights per year....Jets in the corridor would fly up to 615 mph at altitudes as low as 300 ft and possibly 100 ft.”

Those proposed corridors would have passed over parts of Vernon and Crawford counties. The mission of the Citizens United group was to oppose “low-level military flights in inappropriate areas, areas with large populations of humans and animals,” including Hillsboro, La Farge, Readstown, and Viroqua.

Citizens United mounted a successful campaign to halt the expansion of flight corridors into this region. The campaign was waged before the days of social media, and when few people had email addresses or websites. Instead, those who opposed the flight corridors wrote letters to distant legislators, talked one-on-one with local officials, and attended regional public meetings.

The organization contacted a wide variety of people to ask to join the campaign: the Amish, other local farmers, tourists enjoying rivers in the area, private pilots. Citizens United literature stated that, “We are concerned that B-2 Stealth bombers, F-16 fighters, and B-52 bombers appearing suddenly over the ridge top may frighten our children and elderly, endanger our Amish friends and private pilots, startle our livestock, drive off our tourists, and reduce our wildlife populations and water quality.”

Citizens United Against Low Level Flights disbanded when the flight corridor expansion plan was abandoned. Over the years since then, people once involved with the group have given some of their documents, maps, newspaper articles, videotapes, and other related items to the museum’s archives.

Learn more about the history of this protest movement at the museum’s next free public program on Tuesday, September 5, at 7PM. Guest speaker Marilyn Leys, who was deeply involved in the Citizens United organization, will talk about what made the campaign successful. Copies of her 2015 book, *Denting Goliaths: Citizens Unite Against Regional Low Level Flights*, will be available for purchase. Programs are held in the museum’s wheelchair-accessible conference room. Refreshments will be served after the program.