

DAVID ROLFE/JOURNAL

A panoramic photograph of President Harry Truman's arrival at Smith Reynolds Airport on Oct. 15, 1951, hangs above the old visitor's register in the Airport Commission of Forsyth County office at the airport.

Ledger a window into airport's past

BY DAVID ROLFE
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It seems like a quaint relic from a distant, more refined era — a time of cotillions and engraved invitations.

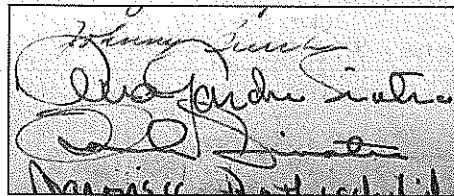
Gentlemen wore skinny ties, white shirts and felt hats.

Ladies wore demure dresses and white cotton gloves.

And traveling by air was considered a novelty, an indulgence for the well-heeled, and most people dressed in their Sunday best before boarding an airplane.

When the Smith Reynolds Airport was dedicated June 11, 1942, a large leather-bound visitor's register was placed in the lobby, sharing space with a bust of the airport's namesake and a summary of his aeronautic exploits.

Visitors arriving by air were expected to sign their name, hometown and date of arrival in the oversize book.



Among the signatures in the register are Ava Gardner Sinatra and her then-husband, Frank Sinatra, on Nov. 1, 1952.

The first signature is that of Richard J. Reynolds Jr., Smith Reynolds' older brother. Next are the names of local luminaries Charles Norfleet, a banker; Bowman Gray Jr., a former chairman of R.J. Reynolds; Ralph Hanes, a textiles executive; and Tom Davis, the founder of Piedmont Airlines.

Today the old ledger rests on a table in the airport manager's office, surrounded by other relics of the airport's past. On the wall above the book is a panoramic photo

of President Harry Truman's arrival at the airport on Monday, Oct. 15, 1951, when he came to help break ground for the new campus for Wake Forest College.

The ledger's thick cover is cracked and fragile now. The yellowed pages are filled with the handwritten names of travelers who filed through the city's airport from 1942 until 1959, with a gap until Nov. 7, 2003, when the signatures resume with President George W. Bush and Allen Joines, the mayor of Winston-Salem.

Some signatures are bold and confident, with letters that glide gracefully across the page. Others are shaky and awkward, slanting this way and that, or stab and slash with careless haste. More than a few are indecipherable. Angry splotches of black ink appear on many pages, the result of disasters with old-fashioned fountain pens.

Most of the names in the old ledger are of