Howell Airport (1
st
location), Blue Island, IL

41.65 North / 87.74 West (Southwest of Chicago, IL)

Howell Airport, as depicted on the October 1944 Chicago Sectional Chart (courtesy of Richard Doehring).

This is yet another former Chicago-area general aviation field which has been lost forever.

The Howell Airport in Blue Island was apparently built at some point between 1938-44,
as it was not yet depicted on a 1938 aerial photo,

nor listed among active airfields in The Airport Directory Company's 1938 Airports Directory (according to Chris Kennedy).

The earliest depiction of the airfield which has been located

was on the October 1944 Chicago Sectional Chart (courtesy of Richard Doehring).

It depicted Howell as a commercial/municipal airport.

The April 1944 US Army/Navy Directory of Airfields (courtesy of Ken Mercer)
described Howell as having a 2,600' unpaved runway.

The 1946 Chicago Sectional Chart (courtesy of Chris Kennedy) depicted Howell as a commercial airport.

The earliest photo which has been located of Howell Airport was a 1951 aerial view. It depicted the field as having 2 grass runways. Two hangars were located on the southeast side, around which were parked 6 single-engine aircraft.
The 1958 IL Airport Directory (courtesy of Chris Kennedy)

depicted Howell as having 3 "turf & crushed rock" runways,

with the longest being the 2,600' east/west strip.

The operator & manager was listed as W. T. Howell.

The aerial photo in the directory depicted 2 hangars north of the northwest/southeast runway,

and another hangar at the southeast corner of the field.

Curtis Kovacs recalled, "I learned to fly at Howell 1958-60 with Willie Howell."
There was corn planted in the triangle of the runways & west of the north/south runway.

Willie's school used J-3s & TriPacers. Joliet Range was still active."


He was described as an expert on Navions.

A 1961 aerial view showed that a 3rd hangar had been built on the northeast side at some point between 1958-61.

A 1962 aerial view showed the airport in an unchanged manner.

Howell Airport was described by the 1963 AOPA Airport Directory (according to Chris Kennedy) as having 3 gravel runways (3,400' 13/31, 2,400' 18/36, and 2,600' 9/27).

The operators were listed as Howell Flying Service & Suburban Flying Service.

Howell Airport, as depicted on the November 1971 Chicago Sectional Chart.
At some point between 1963-71, two of the runways at Howell had been paved, including a new 3,710' Runway 18R/36L, as depicted on a 1971 airport directory (courtesy of Chris Kennedy).

This brought Howell Airport to a total of 4 runways.
An aerial view of Howell Airport from the 1972 IL Airport Directory (courtesy of Bill Pagett).

The directory depicted the field as having 2 macadam runways (with the longest being the 3,500' northwest/southeast strip),

as well as 2 turf runways.

Dozens of light aircraft were visible parked on the northwest & southeast sides of the field.

The operators were listed as Howell Flying Service & Suburban Flying Service,

and the airport manager was listed as W.T. Howell.

Brian Wohlgemuth recalled, “I spent the better part of my early childhood tooling around Howell Airport.

My dad was part owner of Suburban Flying Service back in the mid 1970s.

Runway 9/27 was a taxiway back in the 1970s...

I don't know if it was ever rated for runway use from as far back as I can remember.”

A 1974 aerial view depicted over 40 aircraft parked on the northeast & southeast sides of the field.

Brian Wohlgemuth recalled, “Willie Howell was an interesting fellow.

When Willie died in the mid-1980s, his son sold the property to concentrate on his newer field in New Lenox, IL.”

[Unfortunately, the Howell Airport in New Lenox didn't last very long, as it closed in 2006.]
By 1986 Howell Airport was apparently on a downslide, as a 1986 airport directory (courtesy of Chris Kennedy) showed that the runway configuration had started to shrink.

Two former runways (18L/36R & 9/27) had since been downgraded to taxiways, and what used to be the longest runway (18R/36R) had been shortened to 2,598'. The longest runway at that point was Runway 13/31, which had also been shortened to 3,059'.

An NTSB accident report gave details of a Mooney landing accident at Howell in 1987.
The last photo which has been located of Howell Airport was a 1988 aerial view.
A closeup from the 1988 aerial view showing the hangars & planes on the southeast side of Howell Airport.

In 1988, it was reported that Howell Airport was for sale.

A developer appeared promising to build a power center on the site

if the Village of Crestwood would purchase & deliver the land.

Brian Wohlgemuth recalled, "The airport 'went out with a bang' back in the late 1980s (1989 I think)

with a final going-away party before the airport was converted into a shopping center.

I remember taking off from the 'newer' Runway 18/36 during the final party (in my last flight in a 172

with my stepdad).

Howell was a great field and I was saddened to watch the field

that formed a big part of my childhood turned into a Best Buy & Office Depot."
The movie theaters & the Portillo’s Hot Dogs have pictures in their entryway of the early airport and the various buildings & planes that flew in over the years.”

The exact date of closure of the original Howell Airport has not been determined. The 1993 USGS topo map did not depict the former airport at all.

A 1998 aerial photo showed that commercial buildings had covered the site of the original Howell Airport, with not a trace remaining of the former airport.

A circa 2001 aerial photo of the site of the former Howell Airport.
New Lenox Airport / Howell Airport (2<sup>nd</sup> location) (1C2), New Lenox, IL

41.48 North / 87.92 West (Southwest of Chicago, IL)

New Lenox Airport, as depicted on the 1969 Chicago Sectional Chart.

No airfield was yet depicted at this location on a 1961 aerial view nor on the June 1962 Chicago Sectional Chart (courtesy of William Pagett).

The New Lenox Airport was licensed in 1968 (according to the painted legend along the front of its hangar).

The earliest depiction of the airfield which has been located was on the 1969 Chicago Sectional Chart.
It depicted New Lenox as a public-use airport having a 3,600' unpaved runway.

The earliest photo which has been located of New Lenox / Howell Airport was a 1974 aerial view.

The field had evidently gained 2 paved runways at some point between 1969-74.

Three hangars were located on the north & west sides of the field,

and 3 single-engine aircraft were visible on the north side of the field.

The airport was evidently renamed Howell New Lenox Airport at some point between 1969-83,
as that is how it was labeled on the 1983 USGS topo map.

It had evidently been taken over by the son of Willie Howell, founder of the original Howell Airport in nearby Blue Island.

A 1988 aerial view depicted Howell Airport in the same configuration as seen in 1974. However there was not a single airplane visible on the entire field.

The 1998 USGS aerial photo depicted Howell Airport as having a total of 5 hangars on the northwest corner of the field, with 2 long T-hangars having been added at some point between 1988-98. The field did not appear very well-used, though, as only 2 aircraft were visible parked outside at the field.
In the 2002 USGS aerial photo, a total of 6 light single-engine aircraft were visible parked outside on the field.

The airport was otherwise identical in configuration to how it was depicted in the 1998 photo.
Jacob Rueth recalled, “I took about 20 hours of training there towards my private pilot’s license in 2004-05, and I left because of rumors that they were closing.”

In 2006, Howell New Lenox Airport's FAA Airport/Facility Directory data described the field as having 2 asphalt runways: 2,877' Runway 13/31 & 2,362' Runway 5/23, both of which were described as being “in fair condition, cracked with grass growing through.” There were a total of 63 aircraft listed as being based on the field, including 4 multi-engine aircraft.

The field was said to conduct an average of 82 takeoffs or landings per day.

The 2006 Chicago Terminal Area Chart depicted Howell-New Lenox Airport as having 2 paved runways, with the longest being 2,900'.

Jacob Rueth reported in 2006, “I flew in there in mid-July this year and stopped to say hi to the people there & they were still open.”
A July 2006 aerial photo by Brian Cramer, looking north at the Howell New Lenox Airport, taken only a few days before the field's closure.

A July 2006 photo by Renée Kwiat of her Beechcraft Debonair at Howell New Lenox Airport.

According to Renée, “My husband & I flew from Page Field, Fort Myers, FL to Howell New Lenox. I thought documenting the hangar, which was painted with the field elevation, field name and licensure date with a nice static shot would be a memorable keepsake of a soon-to-be-destroyed general aviation field.”

According to Brian Cramer, “Howell Airport in New Lenox closed forever on August 1, 2006. It will become mixed commercial & residential development.”

Jacob Rueth reported in 2006, “On August 5th I was on short final when I saw the yellow X above the numbers. That & the place was abandoned.”

A sad 2007 aerial view showed that 3 of the hangars had been removed, with only the 2 hangars on the north side of the field still standing. The northern half of the 2 runways still remained,
but the southern half of the property had been covered by streets for a new housing development.

Howell New Lenox Airport is located on the southeast corner of West Laraway Road & Schmul Road.

Governor's Airpark / Wings Field / Haedtler Field, Chicago Heights, IL

41.47 North / 87.72 West (Southwest of Chicago, IL)
Governor's Airpark was apparently built at some point between 1946-51, as it was not yet depicted on a 1939 aerial view, nor listed among active airfields in the 1946 Chicago Sectional Chart (courtesy of Chris Kennedy).

The earliest photo which has been located of Governor's Airpark was a 1951 aerial view.
It depicted the field as having 2 grass runways, with a few small hangars southeast of the runway intersection. Four light planes were parked amongst the hangars, and a 5th plane was visible on the east end of the runway.

The 1958 IL Airport Directory (courtesy of George Miner) depicted Governor’s Airpark as having 2 turf runways. It listed the operator as Midwest Aircraft Sales Corporation, and listed the manager as Walter Thomas.

The 1960 Jeppesen Airway Manual (courtesy of George Miner) depicted Governor's Airpark as having a 2,650' Runway 18/36 & a 2,150' Runway 9/27.
Governor's Airpark, as depicted in the 1958 IL Airport Directory (courtesy of George Miner).

A 1961 aerial view depicted Governor’s Airpark in basically the same manner as the 1951 photo, but the number of planes visible on the field had increased to 7.

The 1962 AOPA Airport Directory described Governor’s Airpark as having 2 turf runways: 2,650' 18/36 & 2,150' 9/27.

The operator was listed as Midwest Aircraft Sales Corporation.

At some point between 1962-63, the airfield was apparently renamed as "Wings Field", as that is how it was depicted on the 1963 Chicago Local Aeronautical Chart (courtesy of Chris Kennedy).
Wings Field apparently gained a paved runway at some point between 1963-69, as the Aerodromes table on the 1969 Chicago Sectional Chart (courtesy of John Voss) described it as having 2 runways, with the longest being a 2,000’ asphalt strip.

Karen Johnson-Crowther recalled, "My father, Joseph Bacik, owned a little private air field which I remember as Wings Field. We lived in Chicago Heights & my dad sold the airport before he retired to Florida in 1972. I remember one year many of the small hangars were destroyed by a storm as well as a fire which burned down the main building. My dad had a pilot's license which he lost after his heart attack which led to retirement. He had a few partners in the airport, one of which if I recall correctly, committed suicide by flying his plane over Lake Michigan until he ran out of fuel."

Apparently the airfield was closed at some point between 1969-71, after being sold by Joseph Bacik, as it was not depicted at all on the May 1971 Chicago Sectional Chart (courtesy of Chris Kennedy) or the November 1971 Chicago Sectional Chart.
The airfield was evidently reopened as 'Haedtler Field' at some point between 1971-74.

A 1974 aerial view depicted Haedtler Field as having an east/west paved runway and a crosswind grass runway. Six light aircraft were visible parked on the field.

Cherie Sieger reported, "Wings Field has special meaning to me. My father, Jim Davis, was in the Civil Air Patrol when they were redoing the airfield and then renamed it 'Haedtler Field' in the early 1970s. He was very involved with this airfield & he was very proud of the work they were doing there. We flew out of that airfield many times while my dad was associated with it. There were 2 hangars there plus a building that had the office. My sister & I used to play in the hangar."

According to Sam Lee, his brother flew out of Govenor's Airpark with the Civil Air Patrol in early 1970s.

Haedtler Field was described in the 1976 AOPA Airport Directory (courtesy of Chris Kennedy) as having a single 2,000' asphalt Runway 9/27. It was said to be a private field, for "Civil Air Patrol use only."

Michael Rafferty recalled, "I was a cadet in Civil Air Patrol in the 1980s. Circa 1984-86 we used to hold our weekly Squadron meetings at Headtler Field in the hangar depicted in the 2006 aerial view. The airport was still active, only used by Civil Air Patrol members for the most part. I learned how to fly gliders (big old red & white 2-seat Schleicher that was about 25 years old,
towed up to 3,500' by a Vietnam vintage OV-1 Birddog) there,
and others in our squadron flew their 1st solos there in an orange & white Cessna 152.

Runway 18/36 was a grass runway.

If you look at the 2000 photo, there is a square clump of trees in the middle about 1/3 of the way down from the top.

Just to the right of that clump of trees was the northernmost edge of Runway 18/36,
while if you go down near the bottom of the picture, where the dark green spot in the tree line ends, is
the end of the runway.

It was about 3,000' long, not exactly smooth & chock full of gopher holes.

There were those who 'maintained' the airport that undertook gopher removal missions at night with a 22 long & a bright flashlight."
The last photo which has been located showing Headtler Field in operation was a 1988 aerial view.

A closeup from the 1988 aerial view showed that Haedtler Field did not appear very healthy, as only 3 single-engine aircraft were visible on the field.

The 1990 USGS topo map labeled the field as "Haedtler Landing Strip", and only depicted Runway 9/27.

However, the 1991 USGS topo map appears to have been using older data, as it labeled the field once again as "Wings Field", and depicted both runways 18/36 & 9/27.

Headtler Field was closed (for reasons unknown) at some point between 1988-98, as a 1998 aerial view showed the airfield had been abandoned, with all of the buildings except one having been removed,
and the runway considerably deteriorated.

In the circa 2000 aerial photo, the remains of the paved east/west runway was still quite recognizable. There was no sign of the former grass Runway 18/36.

A single former hangar sat to the south of the Runway 27 approach end.
A 2002 photo by Sam Lee looking west along the extremely overgrown remains of Runway 27 at Governor's Airpark.

The painted runway number "27" could just barely be discerned among the weeds.

Sam reported that the property was for sale.

According to Cherie Sieger, as of 2002 the old hangar was being reused to store farm equipment for the corn field.

Cherie Sieger reported in 2003, "My father [former Haedtler Field pilot Jim Davis] passed away last September 22nd.

My sister & I took his ashes to the airfield (which was being utilized as a corn field) on October 12th - very nice people that own the corn field let us go to the old runway and we drove to the middle of it.

She headed one way as if to 'take off' and scattered half of his ashes on the runway,'

I then proceeded to 'land' taking his remaining ashes in the other direction
(can you imagine two 40+ year olds running up & down the airstrip?).

We knew the moment we had to decide what to do with his ashes that this was the most fitting sendoff for him.

My step-mother (who was also involved with the field at the same time as my dad) was very moved that we chose 'Haedtler Field' as the place to leave my dad for eternity."

A circa 2006 aerial view looking west at the former hangar which remains south of the runway.

A 2007 aerial view showed the sole hangar still remained on the site, which was otherwise still clear & not yet redeveloped.

The airport is located southeast of the intersection of South Cicero Avenue & Route C12.