

## Skywriting Over Pacolet

Around 1941, when I was about four years old, I saw a truly magic thing in the sky above Pacolet. An airplane, very high in the sky, was writing words with smoke in gigantic letters. This was a wonderful thing for a little boy to watch. The plane did one huge letter after the other until he spelled out an entire word. If I remember correctly my parents told me that he was spelling out the word “Pepsi”. It seems to me that the word filled up the entire sky. The plane itself, was just a small speck as it was letting out smoke. At that time, we lived on Granite Street, then as now, called “Tightwad”. The street is one of the highest on the whole Mill Hill and we had a remarkable view of the whole writing process. After the plane finished writing, he left but the words hung in the air for a while. Eventually, they drifted off and dissolved. This Skywriting event made a strong impression on me and I can still remember it after more than 75 years later.

Does anyone else reading this remember when that happened? I might be wrong but I believe this is the only episode of Skywriting that Pacolet ever had.

Many, many years later I have found out more about skywriting. It peaked out in the 1940s and early 1950s, but at one time it was thought to be the future of advertising. Skywriting, defined as the process of writing a name or message with smoke from an aircraft against a blue sky, began in England after World War I. The smoke making the letters was produced by light motor oil fed through the airplane’s exhaust system.

Several large corporations adopted skywriting for some of their advertising. In 1923, the American Tobacco Company launched the first and very successful skywriting advertising campaign for Lucky Strike cigarettes. The Pepsi-Cola Corporation became one of the biggest and longest-running users of skywriting. In the late 1930s and mid-1940s, it contracted or owned a total of 14 aircraft. In 1940 alone, it contracted for 2,225 writings over 48 states. It is very likely that it was one of these episodes that I saw over Pacolet as a small child.



There are companies that still offer skywriting services. One of these is Skywriting Aerial Advertising. The picture above shows them skywriting “Pepsi” and is on their website at

<https://skywritingaerialadvertising.com/skywriting-aerial-advertising/>.



An airplane once used by Pepsi to do skywriting. This picture is from the website <http://www.antiqueairfield.com>.