

Dirigo Flyer

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
PO Box 2641, Bangor, Maine 04402 • 207-941-6757 • 1-877-280-MAHS (in state)
www.maineairmuseum.org mam@maineairmuseum.org

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Welcome to the sixth issue of 2006 of the Dirigo Flyer. We are now a bimonthly newsletter. Jan-Feb, Mar-April, May-June, July-Aug, Sep-Oct, and Nov-Dec are the dates of the six issues per year. The newsletter is typed up during the first couple of weeks after the deadline and, hopefully, printed and mailed by the middle of the month.

Maine Air Shows

by Neal Stange

Air shows, or air meets, as they were originally called, became popular in the United State and Europe less than 10 years after the Wright Brothers flew in 1903. The International Aviation Tournament, featuring American, French, and English aircraft, manufactured and flown by their own designers, thrilled thousands with aerial “derring-do” at Belmont Park on Long Island, NY during the week of October 22-30, 1910.

Following World War 1, “Barnstorming” pilots in their war surplus training planes often united to form flying circuses and tour Midwest prairie towns where they would lure the inhabitants with aerial antics, enticing them to buy a 5 minute hair-raising ride in an open cockpit.

As surplus training planes were somewhat limited in performance and reliability, the early “barnstormers”, many with little more than novice experience in the art of piloting, favored the open expanse of mid-west plains and prairies in quest of their aerial fortunes.

Compared to mid-western states, Maine’s erratic landscape left little space to offer airplane accommodations and before adequate airstrips were developed, early Maine airmen cautiously maneuvered their fragile craft from rock strewn cow pastures or gravel roads.

However, the Pine State had one redeeming feature which proved to be a haven for airborne adventurers and entrepreneurs; 5 miles of wide sandy beach, level and hard-packed by nature’s daily tides, presented an airstrip unmatched elsewhere in northern New England. Old Orchard Beach, a nationally popular tourist and recreation Mecca, nearly a century before the airplane’s invention, was destined to become a threshold for the debut of aviation in Maine.

Capt. Harry Jones, World War I flight instructor and prominent figure in Maine aviation history, established an ocean-side flight service in 1921 and, assisted by American Legion Post 57, organized the first officially recorded Maine Air Show on Old Orchard Beach during August of 1924.

The widely advertised three day event met with overwhelming success when hundreds of exuberant spectators shuffled across hot, white sand to welcome a half dozen, silver-wing biplanes and their goggled and leather-clad masters as one by one they gently touched down and rolled to a stop at the water’s edge.

There was apparently no specific program other than the display of aircraft but the frequency of passenger rides at \$5 per ticket gained momentum each day as spectator confidence in airplanes, pilots, and the thrill of flying became contagious.

Old Orchard's natural long runway was to later gain international notoriety by hosting a number of transoceanic flight attempts to Europe and beyond; some successful, some not. Public interest in aviation rapidly increased following Lindbergh's flight to Paris and in spite of the 1930's recession, Maine air shows became popular attractions.

About three miles northeast of Old Orchard in the town of Scarborough, two local business men, Chester Jordan and Phillips Payson developed an airport which was officially opened the weekend of Sept. 27-28, 1928 with a gala air show of aerial aerobatics, parachute jumping, air races, door prizes and passenger flights. A dozen or more transient and local aircraft from various New England airports participated. The highly successful weekend event did much to further public interest in Maine aviation, and air meets continued to be held at Scarborough nearly every summer through the 1930's.

Nearer to Portland during the same period, an airstrip called the Stroudwater Flying Field (now the Portland International Jetport) was developed by two Portland dentists, Drs. Clifford Strange and Albert Johnson and, due to its proximity to the city, became a popular retreat for flying enthusiasts.

The first official air show held at Stroudwater, which had been renamed Portland City Airport, took place on Oct. 12-13, 1935. Titled, "Air Progress Meet", the event, sponsored by a group of local businesses and the newly formed Aero Club of Maine, produced an elaborate program of aerial "Progress" featuring a complex aerobatic routine by nationally famous stunt pilot, "Tex" Rankin, in his Ryan ST monoplane. Included in the extensive program was a bomb dropping contest, spot landing contest, free-for-all air race from Portland to Westbrook, Scarborough, and return, followed by a grand finale sky parade over greater Portland and vicinity.

Unlike any other forms of public entertainment, confined in enclosed arenas or stadiums, air shows can easily be observed, unrestricted, either from the airport grounds or surrounding fields and hilltops. Spectators, reluctant to pay admission at the airport gate, can still observe most of the actions of some vantage point nearby.

In an effort to increase air show revenue, some organizers relied on advance ticket sales which included one chance on a significant prize as further incentive. Depending on size of the show the prizes contributed by program advertisers, varied: tools, appliances, sport equipment or flying lessons were typical awards and on at least one occasion, a new airplane. Local pilots, many with limited flying experience, often attempted spontaneous, mini air shows consisting of a few basic aerobatics and low fly-bys in an effort to attract paying passengers. Parachute jumps were often performed by an amateur jumper, usually a fledgling pilot or mechanic who frequently misjudged wind drift on his decent and landed in near-by woods or someone's back-yard.

Federal grant money greatly accelerated development of municipal airports in Maine during the mid and late 30's; Portland, Lewiston, Augusta, Bangor, and Sanford were among the first to be completed with adequate facilities for aircraft and automobile parking. Improved airport access bolstered public interest in Maine aviation. Air shows, large and small became comparable to county fairs.

Perhaps the most memorable Maine air show prior to World War II was held at the Augusta State Airport on Aug. 28-29, 1937. An aerial Maine and titled, the Maine statewide business and advertising was circulated in weeks before the event was Cup, purchased by the Aero Haven, PA to Portland by airport, the Cub's wings plane to Portland's City hall on exhibition for several reassembled, and flown to GIVEN AWAY to some show's final day.

Extensive advertising, cash value) proved highly



extravaganza produced by the Aero Club of Aero Rendezvous, was liberally sponsored by service organizations. Promotional the form of posters and printed flyers several to take place and during this time, a new Piper Club, was ferried from the factory in Lock Miss Madeline Suttie. On arrival at the were removed in order to transport the entire Plaza. With wings reinstalled, it was placed days before being trucked back to the airport, Augusta by Miss Suttie where it was to be lucky "Rendezvous" ticket holder on the

plus the give-a-way plane (or it's equivalent successful and advance ticket sales soared. A

capacity crowd filled the airport stands and parking lot both days, ignoring 90 degree heat, to watch a program consisting of twelve diversified acts performed by nationally famous professional stunt artists on an aerial state. Some of the names were truly among the “Who’s Who” in aviation of the 30’s.

“Tex” Rankin, American aerobatic champion, Emil Lehecka, German sailplane champion, Gloria, Florence and Edward Allen, famous balloonist’s and parachute jumpers, Ervin Davis, international “Bat Wing” and parachute champion, Vincent “Squeek” Burnett, “sensational” aerobatic specialist and other lesser known but equally crowd-pleasing performers.

While all were unquestionably master of their profession, the most nerve shattering act was performed by Squeek Burnett in his open cockpit Travelair biplane.

The first portion of Squeek Burnett’s aerobatic routine was primarily a series of precision low altitude rolls and loops including, at that time, the difficult and treacherous outside loop, still highly respected by today’s aerobatic professionals. In his finale, he positioned two assistants, one on each side of the runway in front of the grandstand, both holding 15 foot poles to which a red ribbon was attached and stretched across the runway. Squeek took off, circled once to line up with his target, then rolled the biplane and flew between the poles, INVERTED, severing the ribbon 15 feet above the ground. As if that wasn’t enough to impress his already astounded audience, he circled for a SECOND pass with the ribbon lowered to 10 feet followed by yet, a THIRD! – his white helmet barely 5 ft. above the asphalt runway.

Squeek stepped down from his Travelair’s cockpit, after landing amid an overwhelming ovation of applause, cheers and automobile horns; he repeated the entire sequence the following day.

The Air Rendezvous so greatly benefited Augusta’s merchants, hotels and aviation interests throughout Maine, it was reproduced at the capital city airport with most of the same cast again in August 1938 and 1939.

World War II and the restrictions that were applied to general aviation, prohibited air shows nationwide. The airplane assumed a more serious identity in its commercial and military roles and five or more years passed before a new generation of aerobatic pilots, refined aircraft, and renewed public interest revived the popularity of airborne showmen and women.

The semi-annual Air Show and exhibition of precision flying and military capability, presented by the Brunswick naval Air Station, continues to attract the general public and aviation enthusiasts regardless of weather or distance traveled.

However, the increasing camaraderie among pilots and air show fans in Maine is evidenced by the multitudes who descend on the town of Greenville, the first weekend of September, to watch or compete in the annual Greenville fly-in. Float planes, land planes and amphibians from New England and beyond congregate en masse at the airport and seaplane base on Moosehead Lake for 2 days of flying contests, exhibitions and associated aviation festivities in which the entire town participates.

The early fall fly-in at Greenville generally marks the end of Maine air show activity for the summer. However, winter fly-ins, often held on frozen lakes, are gaining popularity with sport pilots, fixed base operators and air show fans and if general aviation remains uninhibited by federal authority, air shows, air meets and fly-ins in Maine and the nation will continue to provide the public with exciting, open air, year round entertainment.

PRESIDENT’S REPORT

By the time you read this, the new Officers and Board will have been announced. I look forward to the coming year and working with these Officers and Board members to make the Maine Aviation Historical Society and Maine Air Museum a stronger and ore self sufficient organization.

We have scheduled meetings at different locations during the next few months. The January meeting was held in Bangor at the General Aviation facility. The February meeting will be held at the Pittsfield Airport and our hosts will be Curtis Air. The March meeting will be held at the Lewiston/Auburn airport and Maurice Roundy will be our host. We will return to the Museum in April as the weather should be warm enough. Please try to attend and show your support.

I have received a draft of the new agreement with the City of Bangor. The Board is reviewing the draft and we expect to be placed in the agenda for the 1/17 meeting. The agreement postpones for another five years the repayment of the roof loan. I have also received a verbal agreement to extend for another 10 years (until 2019) the agreement to lease the building for \$1.00 per year. While we are still responsible for the roof loan, it does give us a few more years to get our stuff together. It was reassuring that at both my meetings with the City of Bangor officials, I received nothing but positive comments on what we were doing and the cit is willing to support us as much as they can.

This past year was a good solid year. While we are challenged with the staffing of the Museum, we had a good summer and we did receive more funds than were expected and we have reduced our expenditures to where we are almost at a break-even for the year.

Let's keep this momentum going during the coming year and do even better.

Happy New Year....Les Shaw

Elections

The results of the annual elections for 2007.

President Les Shaw

Vice President Norm Houle

Secretary William Townsend

Treasurer Joe Quinn.

Board of Directors

Terms ending in 2007: Joe Quinn, Dan See, Stan Smith.

2008: Jim Nelligan, Mike Cornett, Al Cormier, Scott Grant

2009: Hank Marois, Bob Umberger, Jr., John Craig.

The Board voted to make Leo Boyle an Honorary Life Member of the Board of Directors. Leo is no longer able to be active but we still seek his advice and wish to honor his dedication to the Maine Aviation Historical Society and the Maine Air Museum.

Books available through the Maine Air Museum.

Memoirs: With an Angel By My Side by member Alfred Cormier.

His flying life as told by Al and available exclusively from the Maine Air Museum. \$16 at the museum, \$20 via mail order. To order, visit, call, or email the museum

The United State Air Force in Maine, Progeny of the Cold War by John Garbinski

Another exclusive book from the Maine Aviation Historical Society. Softbound, 134 pages, 151 illustrations. \$20.00 (plus \$3.00 postage and handling). To order, visit, call, or email the museum.

U.S. Navy Auxiliary Air Station Sanford, Maine

The control tower of the former Sanford Naval Air Station is slated for demolition, possibly by the time you read this article. The last remaining tower of this design in the country and on the national register of historic buildings, the tower is scheduled to be demolished to make way for a parking lot adjacent to an aircraft repair facility being built at the Sanford Airport.

Although it was hoped to save the structure, it is in poor condition and is of a design that makes it difficult if not impossible to disassemble and relocate the tower. All that will remain are pictures and memories of this, now unique, structure.



Factoid

The Air Rendezvous poster girl in the illustration of the lead article is Beth Strange Chavez, formally of Portland. She was one of the first five stewardess employed by Northeast Airlines (now Delta) to serve on the new Douglas DC-3s in 1940. Mrs. Chavez now resides in Virginia Beach, Va.

Over the horizon

Phillip Plummer, 84, of Schenectady, NY passed away at Ellis Hospital on Dec. 1, 2006 with his loving family at his side. Born in Portland, Maine on March 24, 1922, he was the son of Philip M. and Mary Flaherty Plummer. Philip graduated in 1941 from John Bapst High School in Bangor, Maine. He served in World War II with the 463rd Bomb Group, 15th Air Force, stationed in Foggia, Italy. He was a member of the Air Force Association and life member of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars. While serving in Italy, he met and had a lifelong connection with St. Padre Pio. Philip was employed at the General Electric Company in Schenectady for over 25 years, retiring April 1, 1978. Always an airplane enthusiast, he took his first commercial flight as a child from Bangor to Portland, Maine. He was a charter member of the Bangor, Maine Junior Birdmen of America. He obtained his private pilot's license in July of 1973 and loved flying just for the joy of it. A member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, he was also a member of the Empire State Aerosciences Museum, the **Maine Aviation Historical Society**, a member of the EAA Experimental Aircraft Association, and a frequent attendee at the Oshkosh Air Show and the Moosehead Lake, Maine Seaplane Fly-in. He loved his summers spent at Piper Pond in Abbot, Maine.

He was predeceased by his first wife Eleanor, a brother Robert, and a sister Betty. He is survived by his devoted wife Betty McKusick Perez, a son Michael, a daughter Claudia, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Buy a Brick and Support the Maine Air Museum

The Maine Air Museum is proud to announce the new Memorial Pathway Program. To successfully carry out and reach the museum vision, and to help refurbish Building 98, the Maine Air Museum needs the financial support of businesses and public community leaders and individual private citizens. To this end, the museum board has established a means for receiving your monetary donation and recognizing your gift permanently in the museum pathway and wall of honor. These donations are fully deductible.

Details available on our web site: www.maineairmuseum.org or from the museum by request.



September 15-16, 2007

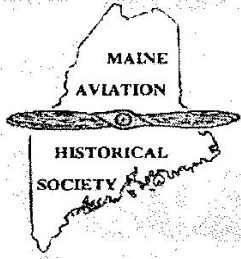
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Web site: www.maineairmuseum.org email: mam@maineairmuseum.org
1-877-280-MAHS toll free in Maine. 207-941-6757

Association Officers

President Les Shaw, Brewer, Maine 04413 les_shaw@umit.maine.edu
Vice President: Norm Houle, Barrington, NH 03825-0563 Livefreeandfly@aol.com
Secretary: William Townsend, Bar Harbor, ME 04609-1330 townsend10@verizon.net
Treasurer: Joe Quinn, Levant, ME 04456, jwquinn@adelphia.net

The Maine Air Museum is located at the 98 Maine Avenue adjacent to the Bangor International Airport.



Maine Aviation Historical Society
Maine Air Museum * Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Special Interests: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Dues are for one year,
and membership will
expire in the month you
joined.

Annual membership
includes six newsletters!

Mail payment to:
Maine Aviation
Historical Society
PO Box 2641
Bangor, ME 04402-
2641

Membership	Dues	Benefits
Regular	\$25 annual	Newsletter, Decal, Museum Admission
Family	\$35 annual	Newsletter, Decal, Museum Admission
Corporate	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Decal, Museum Admission
Supporting	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Decal, Museum Admission, 4 free passes
Lifetime	\$500*	Newsletter, Decal, Lifetime Membership
	* 2 annual \$250 payments	Number, Museum Admission, 10 free passes

We need volunteers-docents, mechanics, maintenance, librarians and exhibit specialists, etc.

- Please call me. I want to be active in the organization.
 I cannot join now, but would like to help. I am enclosing a check for \$_____.
Contributions over \$20 are tax deductible within the limits of the law.
 I wish to support and obtain membership by purchasing a memorial brick.

DIRIGO FLYER
MAINE AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY
PO BOX 2641
BANGOR, MAINE 04402-2641