



DIRIGO FLYER

Vol. II, No. 1 January 1994

Attending the January 15th meeting were Clay Carkin, Norm Houle, Jack Denison, Rob Rohr, Neal Strange, Ed Goldman, Leo Boyle and Jim and James Chichetto. Despite the small attendance, it turned out to be one of our most interesting meetings. Everybody brought material to share and exciting ideas were generated. Free copies of newsletters, Barnstormer Restaurant menus, windsocks, *Central Square Times*, Maxwell Field material and other things were available.

NEW and OLD BUSINESS ITEMS:

- The picture of the ice boat-plane (?) on *Strut and Axle* from Owls Head was passed around and some of the Brunswick area people thought they knew whose it was. Please let Leo and Owls Head know if you have that information.
- Charlie Chiarchiarro's letter to Leo on the items needed for the new exhibit was read and several members are checking to see what they have.
- A letter from and article about Ed Maliar, a new member, were passed around.
- Rob and Ed Rohr will update us on what is needed from their display.
- The October MAHS meeting is changed from October 8 to October 15 because the 30th Northeast Aero Historians meeting will be held at the New England Air Museum in Connecticut on October 7-9. This should be a great meeting and everyone who can should plan to attend. All members will receive information directly from the New England Air Museum.
- If you have any information on accidents or crashes, please forward this to Leo or Jim Chichetto. We will coordinate this information and forward it to Larry Webster who coordinates this for New England.
- We still need exciting photos for the 1995 *Flying Down East* calendar which is in the works now to be put out this summer.
- Keep working on getting more people to join and we will be able to do more in the future. Most charter members have paid their 1994 dues — if you haven't, please do so now. If not, this may be the last newsletter you will receive.
- Clay is making application to get our 50th anniversary of World War II banner. More at the next meeting.
- Ruth Jones suggested we compile a list of aircraft on display and memorials in Maine. A partial list follows — let Leo know of any additions.

1. Old Orchard Beach, Library Park: Memorial plaque honoring Harry Jones and the trans-Atlantic attempts from there.
2. Old Orchard Beach, Library Park: Memorial commemorating the 50th anniversary flight of *Spirit of St. Louis* replica.
3. Old Orchard Beach Historical Society: Harry Jones scrapbooks and photo display. Limited access, call Leo first.
4. Portland International Jetport: MAHS and Chamber of Commerce photo exhibit of Maine aviation history.
5. Mere Point: State of Maine memorial plaque honoring arrival there of 'round-the-world flyers in 1924.
6. Brunswick Naval Air Station: Lockheed P2V-7 Neptune and P-3A Orion.
7. Waterville Airport: Northrop F-89.
8. Bangor International Airport: McDonnell F-101.
9. Bald Mountain: F-101 crash and crosses.

• NEW MEMBERS to be welcomed to MAHS include:

59. F.E. Ed Maliar	P.O. Box 288	Bohemia, New York 11716	216-589-6376
60. Andy Stinson	Box 53	Enfield, Maine 04433	207-732-3858
61. Camille M. Cyr	7 Algonquin Lane	Brunswick, Maine 04011	207-729-8169
62. Peter T.C. Bramhall	1 Meadow Creek Lane	Falmouth, Maine 04105	207-781-2506

• Finalized hikes so far are as follows:

April 2 Mt. Success, New Hampshire
 May 19, 20, 21 Fort Mt., Maine

Please contact Brian Wood evenings at 985-6479 for more information and/or to sign up.

• While you're marking your calendars, please remember these **UPCOMING MEETINGS . . .**

February 12	9 a.m.	Conference Room, Portland Jetport
March 12	9 a.m.	Freeport Middle School
April 9	2 p.m.	Barnstormer Restaurant, Pease AFB, NH. This will be a joint meeting with the Massachusetts AHS. We will all have dinner there after the meeting.
May 14	TBA	Wiscasset Airport, Wiscasset
June 11	TBA	Sanford Airport, Sanford. Visit Lou Furnas' Field in Berwick after tour of tower.
July 2, 3	9 a.m.	Military Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum. We hope to have a table and display there.
August 13	TBA	Bangor Airport, Bangor
Sept. 10, 11	9 a.m.	Greenville Fly-In, Greenville. (Jim, host) We hope to have a table and display there.
October 15	9 a.m.	Oxford Aviation, Oxford. (Rob & Lloyd, hosts) Tour of Oxford Aviation.
November 12	9 a.m.	Lewiston/Auburn Airport. Possible tour of 1649s.
December 10	9 a.m.	Conference Room, Portland Jetport

. . . CALENDAR of UPCOMING EVENTS . . .

April 8-10	TICO, Titusville, Florida
April 10-16	Sun 'n Fun, Lakeland, Florida
May 29	Ford Meet and Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum
June 19	Transportation and Technology Auction, Owls Head Transportation Museum
June 2, 3	Military Aviation and Aerobatic Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum
June 11, 12	NAS, So. Weymouth, MA - Thunderbirds
July 10	50s and 60s Meet and Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum
July 23, 24	Truck and Tractor Meet and Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum
July 28-Aug. 3	Oshkosh, Wisconsin
Aug. 6, 7	Annual Rally and Aerobatic Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum
August 21	Antique, Classic Auto Auction, Owls Head Transportation Museum
Sept. 4	Motorcycle Meet and Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum
Sept. 10, 11	Seaplane Fly-In, Greenville, Maine
Sept. 11	Convertible Meet and Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum
Sept. 24, 25	New England Escadrille Air Show, Pease AFB, New Hampshire
October 2	Foreign Festival and Fall Flying Finale, Owls Head Transportation Museum
October 7, 8, 9	30th Northeast Aero Historians meeting, New England Air Museum, Bradley Field, CT
October 23	Great Fall Auction, Owls Head Transportation Museum

- Speaking of air shows, the idea of having a fly-in show at Sanford this summer or fall has been brought up. Please let Leo know your thoughts about this. It could be good press and a way to gain new members, but we'll have to get started soon.
- Stuart Downing, President of the Mass. AHS, called and they are very interested in the Saturday, April 9 meeting at the Barnstormer Restaurant at Pease AFB. This will be an afternoon meeting followed by dinner. We are looking for speakers, slide shows or whatever. Please let Leo know your ideas, and let's have a good representation at this important and fun meeting.
- Try to attend the February 12th meeting at the Jetport when we can discuss these ideas further. Bring your questions and anything you want to share. Also, bring your aviation videos for a loan exchange between members. See ones you haven't seen and loan yours to other members who haven't seen them. See you there!

**MAINE AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Special Interests _____ Phone _____

1994 Membership Dues are \$20.00, includes balance of 1993.
Please mail payment to: **Maine Aviation Historical Society**
101 Monroe Avenue
Westbrook, ME 04092-4020

- New
 Renewal

For more information, call 207-854-9570

THE STROUDWATER FLYING FIELD

by Neal Strange

It was a clear, crisp May morning in 1925. A young woman waited alone at the edge of a field beside Westbrook Street in Stroudwater near the South Portland boundary line. The field was a section of land when and her husband purchased the previous year as a site for their new home. While waiting, she watched the southern sky and listened for a sound that would be far removed from the customary noises of the surrounding farmyards.

Stroudwater, a small village steeped in history on the outskirts of Portland, was a peaceful farming community in 1925 with only an occasional ring from the blacksmith's anvil or the hourly trolley bell to ripple the tranquil countryside.

Soon, from the sky over Fore River, a soft hum slowly increased to a mild roar and the early sun reflected on the silver wings of a World War I biplane. The young woman watched as it circled above the field then, with engine throttled back, glide to a soft landing and roll to a stop in the tall grass, much to her relief. This event, witnessed only by the lady in waiting and the plane's pilot, marked the origin of an airstrip called The Stroudwater Flying Field.

The pilot was Clifford Strange, a Portland dentist whose interest in aviation began with the Wright's achievement at Kitty Hawk. The solitary observer, his wife Alice. The plane, a wartime trainer, was a Curtiss JN4D but nicknamed "Jenny" by the many pilots who trained in them.

Thousand's of "Jennys" were built to train pilots for overseas duty and following the Armistice declared surplus and released to the civilian market where they could be purchased for \$500 to \$1000.

Although the field was of sufficient length for the Jenny to land and take off, there existed numerous alder bushes, woodchuck holes and wagon ruts requiring removal to provide reasonably safe operations. Dr. Strange and his brother-in-law, Albert Johnson, also a Portland dentist and aviation enthusiast, began the task of clearing and leveling using a Fordson tractor and various wooden drags of their own design. As the work slowly progressed, curious villagers began to arrive to view the activity and the marvelous khaki and silver "flying machine." Some of the young and adventurous volunteered labor in exchange for a brief ride in the "open cockpit."

The following year several more Jennys were purchased by local flying enthusiasts and "tied down" at the Stroudwater Flying Field. Those early sportsman pilots were a diverse group: doctors, auto mechanics, railroad workers, and store proprietors, all sharing the desire to fly.

By the summer of 1927 a grass runway between Westbrook Street and Fore River had been cleared and leveled. The runway, now asphalt covered, remains today in the same location was constructed that housed four planes. In addition, a small "operations office" was provided by Dr. Strange for pilots and friends who would congregate inside after dark and on rainy weekends to swap tales of aerial escapades.

At this time Strange's home, located on the site of the present control tower, was completed and occupied by his family of four.

The airport then became recognized by the U.S. Department of Commerce and listed in the 1927 National Airport Directory. Fueling facilities were installed and soon transient aircraft frequently stopped for service.

As the majority of pilots and aircraft owners were occupied earning a livelihood during regular working hours, there was little daytime activity at the airport. However, shortly after 5:00 p.m.), on long summer evenings, shouts of "Contact!" rang out as one by one the Curtiss OX5 engines were hand cranked to life. Spectators lined Westbrook Street often perched on top of their Model T Fords or Essexes for a better view of the helmet and goggle clad airmen and their graceful Jennys.

It was a time before federal regulations applied to either pilot or plane. As soon as a fledgling airman became proficient enough to take off and land, without serious mishap, he was free to follow the wind wherever and whenever he chose. Many innocent onlookers summoned their courage, handed over \$5.00 and strapped themselves in the front seat of a Jenny for their first plane ride with a pilot who perhaps only a few months earlier had experienced *his* first plane ride. Fortunately, due to the docile handling qualities of the WWI trainer, accidents were rare and seldom more than a broken propeller or bent wing bow.

While evening flying during the week attracted sightseers to the airport, Sunday was the day for action. The five day work week was unheard of during the '20s, so Sunday was the time for leisure activity. Long before the Stroudwater church bell rang summoning parishioners, the OX5 engines shattered the morning silence. Spectators, individual and in family groups, began arriving with blankets and picnic baskets prepared for a day's outing at the Flying Field.

For city dwellers, Sunday at the airport likened to a day in the park; a chance to enjoy the great outdoors, stroll around and be entertained. \$5.00 bought a ten minute, windblown ride and many young men from Portland and surrounding towns, whose interest in flying was sparked from their first plane ride at the Stroudwater Flying Field, became bomber and fighter pilots a decade later.

Concerns for security were non-existent. Children and adults were permitted to roam freely over the runway and around the parked aircraft. Often a frantic parent would be observed retrieving a toddler wandering toward a spinning propeller.

When winter snows arrived most of the Jennys were tied down and covered or dismantled and stored in local barns or garages to wait for spring. However, a few hardy souls equipped their planes with skis and, bundled in fur, would brave the elements for a brief hop providing the reluctant OX5 engine could be coaxed to turn over.

With the coming of spring so came the mud. More than one fledgling airman, impatient to wait out the thaw, found himself and his plane nosed up in the soft runway while attempting a take-off. The embarrassed pilot would then seek the services of a neighboring farmer and his horse to retrieve and return the craft to its tie down.

The stockmarket crash of 1929 and the following years of depression brought nearly all flying activities at Stroudwater to a standstill. Aircraft owners, burdened with economic pressures, sold or scrapped their planes. Public interest waned as grass grew tall on the runway.

In 1933, during the Roosevelt administration, federal money became available for municipal projects nationwide. Highways, bridges and airports were included. The city of Portland leased the airport from Dr. Strange in order to be eligible for improvement funding. Within the next two years the original runway was upgraded and lengthened and a new diagonal strip was added. The slow decline of the recession renewed public interest in aviation and new model planes began appearing at the field, now renamed the Portland City Airport. An additional hangar was constructed and in 1934 two fixed base operators were established, namely, the Portland Flying Service and Northeast Airways, Inc. Both firms offering repairs, charter service and flight instruction. The same year scheduled airline service from Boston to Portland and beyond began with the inaugural flights of the Boston and Maine Airways Stinson trimotor passenger planes on December 17.

As second federal grant was appropriated in 1937 for further airport expansion. However, to be eligible for the appropriation, the municipalities were required to possess full title to the properties involved. After extensive litigation, the city of Portland acquired the airport from Dr. Strange by exercising the Law of Eminent Domain.

Under city ownership a new terminal building was erected to accommodate airline operations, runways lengthened and macadam ramps and taxi ways covered with remaining grass air strip. By 1947 the first control tower was in operation, also runway lights and instrument approach facilities were then installed.

The years that followed produced rapid progress at the airport, now the Portland International Jetport: expanded runways, enlarged terminal building plus a myriad of business and service organizations for the convenience of air travelers.

Those golden years of aviation are now history. Gone are the leather jackets, helmets and goggles and most of the young men who wore them, but the sky over the village continues to reverberate from the arrival and departure of modern aircraft as they follow the flight path of the old Jenny when it landed in tall grass on the Stroudwater Flying Field.

Maine Aviation Historical Society

101 Monroe Avenue

Westbrook, ME 04092-4020

NEXT MEETING:
Saturday, February 12, 1994
Portland Jetport