



DIRIGO FLYER

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Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
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The "Roma," Part II

In this issue, we conclude the story of the "Roma" at Old Orchard Beach by Frederick R. Hamlen. We thank Leonard E. Opdycke, editor of Skyways Magazine, for granting us permission to reprint this exciting story.

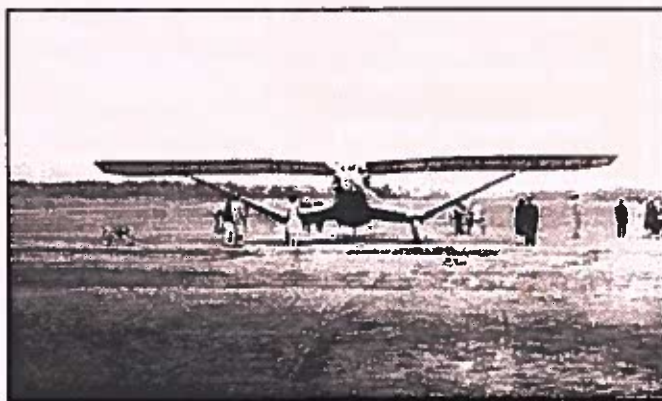
By Frederick R. Hamlen

Naturally, word immediately began spreading around the entire area that bad blood had developed between the two pilots. To make matters worse, a presentation was taking place at this time with Roger Williams receiving a medal from young Calvin Boston (son of Mrs. Fred Boston, a next door Hamlen neighbor) along with very best wishes for the coming flight.

Almost immediately following the presentation, the "Roma" was hitched to a truck and with the help of many willing hands, was taken, fully loaded and provisioned, to the shadow of the pier, the wind being more or less favorable for a takeoff toward Pine Point. Turned around to face Pine Point, 2 3/8 miles away, she awaited her crew. Roger Williams, now helmeted and goggled but wearing his business suit with the ever present bow tie, was the first to climb high up to the left hand window opening of the cockpit, followed by the helmeted and jacketed Cesare Sabelli. Into the rear cabin climbed the neatly dressed and putteed Bonelli, followed by the shirted and jodhpured Dr. Pisculli.

The Hornet coughed after a couple of revolutions of the big propeller and burst into action. After a few moments she was given some throttle, and the gang of onlookers began to hear the pounding roar so typical (and beloved) of a Pratt & Whitney engine. Everything sounded just fine before the engine was idled and the crew checked their belts.

Then the throttle was opened until the pilots saw 1900 rpms and gave the signal to pull the chocks. Weighing 12,500 pounds or so, "Roma" gathered speed going up the beach. Some newspaper accounts spoke of a beautiful takeoff. However, to the spectators the ship seemed logy. There was a shout from the crowd, "She won't make it!" But the "Roma" was airborne roughly opposite the Jones hangar. Her nose was held down for awhile in order to gain speed, and then as she turned off to the right, it could be seen that indeed she did seem to be



Bellanca K "Roma" at Portland Airport in Scarborough in September 1928 showing its unusual configuration. (Photo via Rodney Laughton)

floundering. Something was wrong or appeared to be for a moment. "Roma" continued away and, crossing Prouts Neck, had some 500 feet of altitude. Flying toward the east, she was watched until she passed out of sight. The takeoff had come at 12:08 p.m.

Many in the crowd began immediately to move away. At home they would keep in touch with "Roma's" progress via their radio sets. But there were little groups still hanging around and talking about the flight twenty minutes later when a shout went up, "She's coming back!"

At treetop level "Roma" skimmed over Prouts Neck, severely threatening the safety of all the expensive real estate there. Then the little group began to hear the engine—not sounding like a good Pratt & Whitney at all. It was coughing, sputtering, banging and threatening to quit at any moment. Williams, who evidently was at the controls from the moment of takeoff, managed a pair of turns that would align him with the beach, and "Roma" staggered to a landing. At 12:30 p.m. she was safely on the beach again.

Four disconsolate men climbed down from the ship as spectators and reporters crowded close to learn what had happened. One man pushed his way through the little crowd and handed Sabelli a piece of paper. It warned of terrible storms which had suddenly developed not far at sea. This same man

"Roma," continued on page 3

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Monthly meetings
 are held at 10 a.m.
 on the second Saturday
 of each month
 at various locations.

See calendar for details.

Maine Aviation Historical Society President's Report Read at the March 2001 Membership Meeting

Well, here we are in the great city of Portland, Maine. We come to Portland this month because, as our largest city, the people of Portland have much to offer in terms of support to this organization and its goals for this year and the years to come. This organization also needs to become more aware of the concerns and desires of our members who live and work here in the greater Portland area. The city is the home of one of Maine's greatest aviation heroes in Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Major Charles J. Loring Jr. The Portland area is steeped in aviation history and the Portland Jetport is the focal point for aviation activities in this area. There is no better place than the Jetport for us to hold our monthly meeting when we come here. We have been here before, and we will be here again because the people of Portland and our members in this area are very important to us, and to the success of this organization.

Let me take a moment to update you on some of the progress we have made in the area of membership support. We are currently in the process of consolidating our association records and streamlining the membership and the newsletter process. We now have a computer and database set up in our office at the Maine Air Museum in Bangor. When finished, we will be able to provide an up-to-the-minute and accurate accounting of all memberships in any status, and we will have a central point for all correspondence including the distribution of the monthly newsletter, the *Dirigo Flyer*. This will allow us to better communicate with our members, and will also ensure timely execution of association membership-related correspondence.

Since our last meeting in Bangor, progress has been made on the museum primarily through the efforts of Les Shaw and Mike Cornett. If you have not been to the museum building lately I encourage you to come by and see the improvements for yourself. We are getting ready to begin work on the main display area, and we solicit your ideas and suggestions for the types of displays you would like to see at your museum. I have some ideas of my own including a Maine Aviation Hall of Fame, but we need everyone's ideas not just a few. We want to make sure that everyone has a say on what is displayed at your museum when it is finally ready to open. That brings me to my last point in this month's President's Report. As I stated in last month's report to the membership, we must stand fast and stay the course. Patience is key but we also need to help ourselves along the way by coming up with realistic fundraising goals. This month I will introduce two new and practical ideas toward that goal. Spring is just around the corner and with it will come the excitement of more crash hikes, great guest speakers for our meetings, air show preparations, and getting more needed work done on our museum. We welcome your participation in any or all of these events and activities.

— John C. Garbinski, President, MAHS

Who's That Behind Those Foster Grants?



Harold Katz, late well-known Portland Pilot and his Piper Aztec. Maine native movie actor Gary Merrill, on the right, is looking forward to another flight with his favorite pilot.
 (Photo via Bill Robertson)

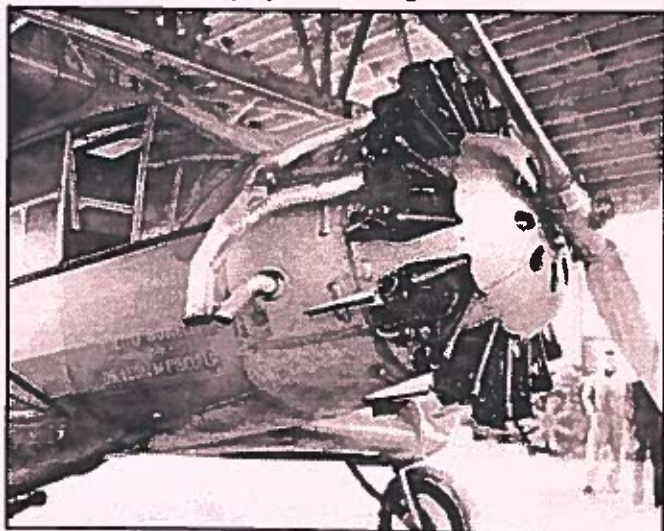
"Roma," continued from page 1

had rushed to the pier just as the ship was leaving. He'd been attempting to stop them, but had been barely too late. Sabelli, Williams and Bonelli quickly realized that their bad luck had actually been a blessing in disguise. For, in that kind of weather, their heavily loaded craft would surely have succumbed.

After takeoff, "Roma" had proceeded with difficulty as far as Peak's Island, about 10 miles east of Prouts Neck, when the crew's ears were almost shattered by a great backfire. At that point the Hornet all but quit, forcing the pilots to look for an immediate landing spot while at the same time sending a message aft to valve all of the fuel in the main tank. The tins of gasoline were jettisoned as well by Bonelli and Pisculli along with most of the provisions. A landing on Peak's was impossible, so Williams found himself heading for nearby Richmond's Island, a much larger spot. Approaching it, Williams tried the throttle and the Hornet burst more-or-less into life again, saving "Roma" from landing in the water. Over Richmond's he found some lift and, in the manner of a circling sailplane, gained a little altitude. The Hornet was running intermittently, but putting out enough power to make it back to the beach.

As the furor following the flight's abortion calmed, Frank Stashak went over the engine and discovered that the backfiring had been caused by faulty carburation. The first and most serious backfire had broken the horn in the carburetor's air intake. Giuseppe Bellanca's face was no longer all smiles as he learned that Stashak had warned of the misaligned propeller and had insisted in taking the time to remove it and give it a thorough overhauling. Stashak now recommended directly to Bellanca that it was vital to have the propeller removed and shipped back to the factory for thorough testing and alignment. Bellanca concurred and added that "good sense demanded that the motor be gone over before trying to make a trans-ocean flight."

Sabelli, still shaken over his narrow escape, agreed, admitting that his life had been saved by the intercession of fate. He announced to the press that it would take two or three days to put things right with the propeller and engine.



Still hoping to fly the Atlantic, the "Roma" sits in the hangar of the Curtiss-Wright Flying Service at the old Portland Airport. Continued trouble with the carburetion of the Pratt & Whitney engine caused the eventual cancellation of their attempt. (Photo via Leo Boyle)



The Bellanca K "Roma" at Portland Airport, September 17, 1938. (Photo via Earl Soper)

Subsequently, Stashak struggled with the propeller and engine but to no avail. On September 24th, the engine was removed from "Roma", which was then at Portland Airport, and returned to Hartford. Six days later, a new Hornet engine arrived by truck and was installed in the plane. It was then planned to make the flight from Old Orchard Beach on October 3rd, after only the most necessary flight tests. When these were completed, "Roma" was flown to the beach, but after weather (fog and cross winds) delayed the start for several days the flight was canceled.

About the end of the year, NX4864 was repossessed at a public sale by the Bellanca Aircraft Corporation. In February 1929, the plane was recovered and reengined, with a 525 hp Wright Cyclone, and a group of Argentineans planned to fly it to their country. However, the deal was not consummated, and Bellanca retained possession of the aircraft. On March 5, 1930, the Bellanca K was reengined with a Pratt & Whitney Hornet of 525 hp. Then on August 4, 1932, the plane was sold to Dresser-Solberg Co. Inc. of 6714 5th Ave., New York City. The same day, an NR registration was approved for Thor Solberg to make a flight to Norway with Carl Peterson as radio operator.

NR4864 was given the new name "Enna Jettick" (a well-known brand of shoes) and with the two men aboard departed New York for Oslo, Norway on August 23, 1932. It went down at Placentia Bay, Newfoundland some thirteen hours after takeoff, ending the flight and its ill-starred career. Reportedly, some parts of the aircraft were salvaged.

The flight to Rome, from Old Orchard Beach, was made successfully by Roger Q. Williams and Lewis A. Yancey in the Bellanca J "Pathfinder", July 8-10, 1929—landing due to fuel shortage at night on the 9th at Santander, Spain after 31 hours and 42 minutes in the air and continuing to Rome the next day, their total elapsed time being 55 hours and 41 minutes, their flying time 41 hours and 52 minutes.

Editor's Note: Fred Hamlen passed away suddenly on 12/7/87 while working on the latter part of this manuscript. The almost completed text and his notes were sent to me by his widow, Mrs. Pat Hamlen, and the resulting manuscript is presented on these pages. It stands in memory of all that Frederick R. Hamlen has done in completing the saga of trans-Atlantic flights from Old Orchard Beach. We thank you Fred, and we'll remember.

MAHS March Meeting Notes

The March meeting of the MAHS was held at the Portland Jetport on March 17 having been postponed from March 10 because of the snowstorm. Member Jim Sheppard of South Portland gave a fascinating talk on his life and experiences as a Tuskegee Airman. Jim was a crew chief on P-40s, P-47s, and P-51s in Alabama, Michigan, Sicily and Italy in World War II. He went on to a career with the airlines and the FAA.

President John Garbinski gave his report, and the secretary's, treasurer's and membership reports were given and accepted. Mike Cornett gave the report on work that has been done on the museum building, and Bill Cook will begin this week on work for the displays. Carl Sederquist reported on the fundraising and Jim Chichetto reported on the 2001 hike schedule. John Garbinski told us the Bell UH-1 Huey from the Army National Guard is in the final stages of the paperwork and this should be completed soon.

Book sales were discussed and new proposals put forth and accepted. President Garbinski made a proposal for a Maine Aviation Hall of Fame and we will be suggesting ideas for this display and potential candidates from the members shortly. The meeting was adjourned at 2 p.m. Next month's meeting will be held in Augusta and the May meeting at the museum in Bangor.

April Meeting

The April meeting will be held in the Conference Room of the Maine Instrument Flight School at the Augusta Airport on April 14 at 10 a.m.

Our speaker will be Millard Harmon, well-known pilot who will fly in to talk to us and tell us of his life of world-wide flying adventures. It should be an exciting and fun-filled meeting, so make plans now to attend.

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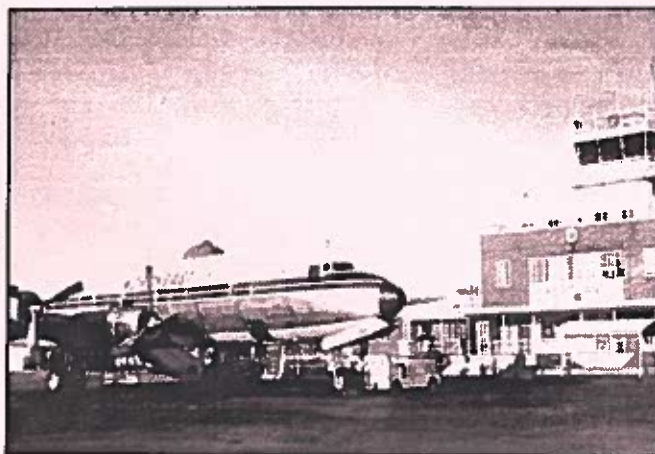
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Contact Through the Web

I came across your web site the other day. I thought I would pass along this photo of a Northeast Airlines DC-6 in Portland. The picture was taken during a stopover there by my late father, Richard Grahn, who was a pilot for Northeast and Delta Airlines. I don't have the date but suspect it was the mid-1960s.

Good luck with your work! *Doug Grahn, Vermont*

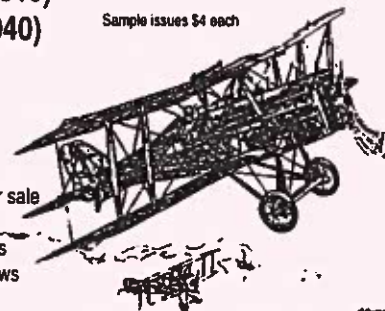


Northeast Airlines Douglas DC-6B in front of the old terminal in Portland in mid-1960s. Photo taken by the late Richard Grahn who was a pilot for Northeast and Delta Airlines. (Photo courtesy Doug Grahn)

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A Personal Involvement in the Search for the "White Bird"

By Oscar Blue

Being very interested in aviation history, especially Lindbergh-era aviation, when the story of the unfinished flight of the "White Bird" by Gunnar Hansen in the June 1980 *Yankee Magazine* was discussed at a Civil Air Patrol meeting, it really caught my attention.

Another CAP member and myself took a ride and looked at Round Lake and the Round Lake Hills from the air. When the TIGHAR group was formed and conducted their 20 searches in the Round Lake Hills, every report of their adventures interested me.

One time in the spring of 1987, a letter to the editor appeared in a newspaper, most likely the *Bangor Daily News*:

Those people looking for the crash site of the "White Bird" in the Round Lake Hills should consider investigating the weathered airplane wreckage seen on the eastern slope of Big Spruce Mountain by a Ferry Flight into or out of Presque Isle in 1942. This wreck site was reported but because it was an old wreck and no life involved there was no effort made to investigate it; then, with WWII in progress, it has been forgotten.

Big Spruce Mountain is near White Cap Mountain, Greenwood Pond, Silver Lake, KIW and the Appalachian Trail.

When Nungesser and Coli left France they told their relatives that if they got to North America and found the weather so bad that going to NYC would be difficult, they would head west to Montreal for a distance record.

That evening the location was checked on an aeronautical chart and circled, the newspaper was used to start a fire in the woodstove. After all, how could the "White Bird" wreckage be on a mountainside in central Maine when Anson Berry heard it crash in the Round Lake Hills? After 20 searches in the Round Lake Hills, TIGHAR sort of gave up looking there. Some people believe that the wreckage had been found some time before TIGHAR started looking in the Round Lake Hills and had been hauled off.

There is another account of the Anson Berry story that has him going to the store in Northfield and asking the storekeeper, "Did you hear that airplane go over the other day? You should see the swath it cut through the treetops."



"L'Oiseau Blanc" during early test (no nav lights yet). Coil stands in the cockpit. The hatch in the nose provides access to the manual primer for starting. (Photo courtesy Musée de l'Air)

Here is my personal theory of what happened to the "White Bird":

The "White Bird" made it to the Magoon Farm in Crawford where it was seen and flew off toward Round Lake and the Round Lake Hills. Anson Berry heard it and the tearing crash in the Hills. But the "White Bird" did not crash there, it did do a touch and go in the treetops where the aluminum propeller bushhogged the upper branches of some trees, the swath Anson Berry found.

To my knowledge every account of the "White Bird" presence in Crawford and the Round Lake Hills is of a moving, noise-making airplane. No structural parts of the plane were ever found on the ground. Things that were found or brought to TIGHAR's attention could have been dropped from the open cockpit or torn from the underside of the lower wing.

After circling the farm in Crawford and doing the touch and go in the Round Lake Hills and experiencing the foggy and rainy coastal weather, Nungesser and Coli gave up on going to NYC and took the most prudent course to Montreal by heading to Quebec City to intercept the St. Lawrence River. This line of flight would bring them through the Appalachian Mountains in Maine where they are the narrowest and lowest. But because of real bad weather they impacted the eastern slope of Big Spruce Mountain and did not survive. The weathered wreckage of the "White Bird" was seen and reported but not investigated and identified in 1942 by the U.S. Army Air Corps.

Leo Boyle, founder of the MAHS, and myself were flown around Big Spruce Mountain in May and October 1994 where we took pictures. In the pictures is a mailbox-shaped object which could be the same size as the forward part of the "White Bird's" hull containing fuel tanks covered with a metal hood 15 feet long, four feet wide, and six feet tall.

To my knowledge, nothing south of the Round Lake Hills or west of Big Spruce Mountain seen or heard has been substantiated as being the "White Bird." We were the only ones who went to investigate a known crash site that could date from 1927 and the only ones I know to bring back any photographic evidence of anything that looks like a structural part of the "White Bird." This object in the wild woods of Maine was where as far as we can determine the unidentified weathered wreckage was seen in 1942.

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Be It Resolved . . . We Are Official!

On Tuesday, March 27th, between 9 a.m. and noon, the resolution to recognize the creation of the Maine Air Museum will be presented to the Maine Legislature by Rep. Tina Baker (D-Bangor). In addition, House Clerk Millie Macfarland will make arrangements for MAHS to have a table in the Hall of Flags on the second floor so that we can make information available to the House members and the public. Carl Sederquist and others will be in attendance, and Carl plans to show his slide show on the museum during that presentation time.

The wording of the resolution appears below. Be watching your newspapers for more details of our official recognition.

**STATE OF MAINE
THE YEAR OF OUR LORD TWO THOUSAND AND ONE
JOINT RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF CREATING
THE MAINE AIR MUSEUM**

WHEREAS, from the early flights of civilians and barnstormers at a farmland site known as Maplewood Park, to Godfrey Field, Dow Air Force Base and the Bangor International Airport, the Bangor area has a long and exciting history of military and civilian aviation; and

WHEREAS, it is appropriate that the Maine Aviation Historical Society has chosen the former Dow Air Force Base, a former strategic air command base, as the home of the Maine Air Museum; and

WHEREAS, when completed, the museum will tell the story of Maine's military aviation heritage including the Presque Isle Army Air Corps Base, the Houlton Army Air Corps Base, the Brunswick Naval Air Station, the Loring Air Force Base, and the Dow Air Force Base, and of the scores of military planes that crashed in the State; and

WHEREAS, the museum will highlight Maine's civilian aviation history, depicting the dozens of public and private airports, grass strips, float planes and bush pilots, and

WHEREAS, game warden, state police and other governmental air operations will be displayed; and

WHEREAS, it is the goal of the Maine Aviation Historical Society to display the various aircraft and artifacts depicting the history of aviation in Maine for the education and enjoyment of Maine's students and residents, and as a focal point where pilots, historians, and aviation enthusiasts of all ages can share their common interests; now therefore be it

RESOLVED: that we, the Members of the One Hundred and Twentieth Legislature now assembled in the First Regular Session, offer our support in making Maine residents and students aware of the Maine Aviation Historical Society's efforts in establishing the Maine Air Museum; and be it further

RESOLVED: that suitable copies of this resolution, duly authenticated by the Secretary of State, be transmitted to the Maine Aviation Historical Society as a token of our esteem.

A-Hiking We Will Go . . . A-Hiking We Will Go . . . A-Hiking We Will Go . . .

At this time we have a list of possible MAHS hikes which will be open to the general membership and public. These sites include hikes we have done in the past and some new sites we have been researching this past winter. As with all hikes, some basic rules need to be understood and followed.

It is the goal of the MAHS to promote the advancement of aviation history in Maine by allowing our members and others a chance to see some of the artifacts in the settings in which they have been found. With a very limited exception, the MAHS does **not** allow people to pick up bits from these sites as keepsakes, nor do we allow the wholesale removal of artifacts for commercial sale. The exceptions to this rule are 1) if a part is needed by a museum to help complete a display, or 2) if the artifacts are in danger of being destroyed due to land use or outside forces. Instead, we encourage people to take pictures and to leave the site as they found it. In some cases, the MAHS will place a marker at the site with the history of the site on it. If you hike with us, you will follow the rules.

Here are the sites we hope to make it to this year:

Mid- to late May: The KC-97 near Bethel, Maine. This is a Cold War site and we may place a marker at it when we hike there.

Late May: We will try to do a four-stop Cold War ride and hike day. Meeting in Millinocket, we will visit two F-86A crash sites, an F-101B site, and a 1950 Sea Fury site. We will replace the flags at the three markers we have already placed at these sites.

June: The DC-3 on Mt. Success in New Hampshire, near the Maine border.

Mid-June: The C-54 on Fort Mountain in Baxter State Park.

July: We have a number of known sites we may go to, including the F-101B at Bald Mountain in Dedham, a hike to a pre-war RCAF Anson, and a possible C-47 in Troy, Maine. Other sites are being researched but nothing is decided at this time.

Dates, times, contact names and meeting points will be listed on the web site and in the newsletter as more detailed information is worked up. —Jim Chichetto, Hike Meister


JOIN THE MAINE AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY TODAY

Upcoming MAHS Meetings

✈ ✈ ✈ 2001 — 2001 — 2001 — 2001 — 2001 ✈ ✈ ✈


- April 14 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting, Maine Instrument Flight School, Augusta, Maine.
- April 14 1 p.m. Memories of Golden Age Flying, Jonathan Miller, OHTM, Owls Head, Maine.*
- May 12 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor, Maine.
- May 12 1 p.m. Amelia Lives, Alison Machaiek, OHTM, Owls Head, Maine.
- June 9 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting.
- July 14 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting.
- August 4-5 All Day Transportation Spectacular and Aerobatic Airshow, OHTM, Owls Head, Maine.
- August 11 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting.
- Sept. 8 All Day Greenville International Seaplane Fly-In, Greenville, Maine.
- Sept. 15 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting. Note change of weekend.
- Sept. 22-23 All Day Great State o' Maine Air Show with the Blue Angels, BNAS, Brunswick, Maine.
- Sept. 29-30 All Day Gadabout Gaddis Fly-In, Bingham, Maine
- October 13 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting.
- November 10 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting.
- December 8 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting.

* The Owls Head Transportation Museum will also have their Antique Aeroplane Show on the following dates: May 2 — June 10 and 24 — July 8 and 21-22 — September 2, 16 and 30 — October 14



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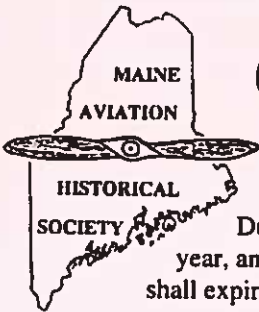
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2001

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* (2 annual \$250 payments)		

Maine Aviation Historical Society
P.O. Box 2641
Bangor, ME 04402

April Meeting

Saturday, April 14, 2001
10 a.m.

Maine Instrument Flight School
Augusta Airport, Maine