

# DIRIGO FLYER

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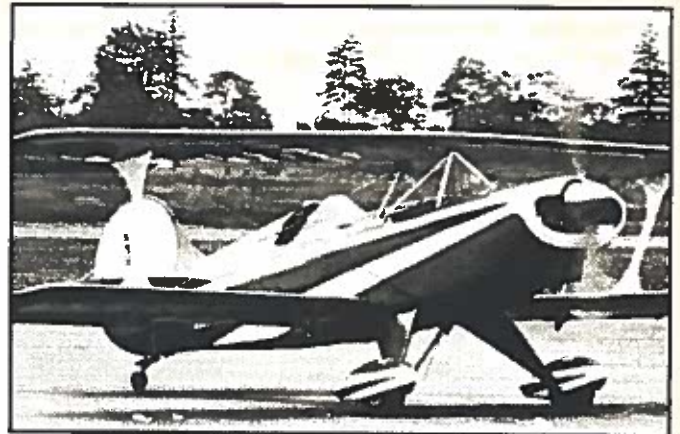
Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society • P.O. Box 2641, Bangor, Maine 04402 • 207-854-9972  
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## Dick Theriault's Risky Ride into the Record Books

By Leo Boyle

Reading a book can be exciting and inspirational, and sometimes both as it was for Richard Theriault, a Rumford, Maine native. Ever since he read a book about the U.S. Army Air Service's "Dawn to Dusk" flight across the continent in 1924, he had wondered about what this flight must have been like in an open cockpit biplane. Long fascinated by the early fliers of the air mail in the same types of planes. Dick decided eventually to look into the possibility of such a flight.

With the help of the National Aeronautic Association and the U.S. government, he learned that the international record for speed over a recognized course in Class C-1.b Group I would be within his reach, as well as the U.S. record for the longest flight in a single place open air cockpit aircraft. With the greater reliability and performance of aircraft and especially of engines in the 1970s as against those of the 1920s when the old records were set, there was a reasonable chance of success. Not wanting to fly east to west as the U.S. Army fliers had done, he decided



The beautiful orange, brown and white modified Steen Skybolt that Dick Theriault of Rumford flew to FAI and national records in 1978.

(Photo via Dick Theriault)

to finish "at home" so to speak, and fly from California to Maine.

Upon deciding on a plane, the Steen Skybolt Homebuilt, he had the best builder of these aircraft build him one. Designed for aerobatics, he took the plane to Mr. Steen, the designer, and had it modified for the record attempt. It was converted to a single-seater, and the covered front cockpit had a fuel tank installed. On one of his final test flights, Dick made a dive and the cowling cracked and came loose. Needless to say, he made a fast emergency landing at Capistrano, California. The cowling was patched together and final preparations were made for the flight. All he had were basic flight instruments; i.e., altimeter, speedometer, rate of climb and turn and bank, plus engine instruments. He had no electronic equipment, and only a sealed radio for emergency use. Van Nuys, California had been selected as the take-off point and the night before, the plane was placed in an air-conditioned hangar to keep it cool for the next morning's take-off.

The orange, brown and white bi-plane was powered by a 200 hp Lycoming engine. The Lycoming factory people had told him to run the engine "flat out" for the entire trip. Weighing in at just under 1300 pounds, the maximum weight for the record attempt, the plane was capable of about 170 knots per hour.

"Theriault," continued on page 3

### 1999 ELECTION ALERT!

Your ballot is enclosed for the election of officers to lead the MAHS in the upcoming exciting year. The candidates selected have all been chosen for their dedication, enthusiasm and willingness to serve. 1999 looks like a banner year in the state of Maine aviation-wise. Already on the agenda for activities are the Great L/A Air Show and the Great State o' Maine Air Show (BNAS), the Northeast Aero Historians Meeting, the usual fine programs at Owls Head, the Gaddabout Gaddis Fly-in (Bingham), the Seaplane Fly-In (Greenville) and several other activities which we will announce as dates are finalized. Important decisions will be made on our museum site, fund-raising, publicity and a membership campaign. A full schedule of hikes and searches is being planned now.

Your vote is important. Write-in votes are encouraged for those who are willing to serve. Bring your ballot to the November or December meeting, or mail it to the address on the ballot. Votes must be in on or before December 12, 1998, the date of the December meeting in Portland, when the results will be announced.

Vote now and show your support for those who are elected.

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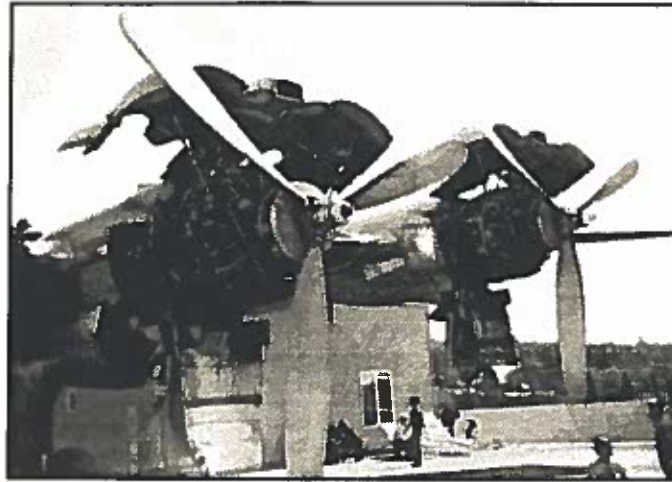
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Monthly meetings  
are held at 9 a.m.  
on the second Saturday  
of each month  
at various locations.  
See schedule for details.



## Starliners in September

Two of member Maurice Roundy's Lockheed Starliners' Powerplants opened up for inspection at his Auburn home during the Lewiston-Auburn Open House in September. (Jim Chichetto Photo)

## Oops! October Meeting Brief

The October meetings was held in Bangor on October 17th. There was a small attendance due to the change in date, and most of the discussion was on the museum site. A tour of Building 98 was also included. (Please see photos elsewhere in this newsletter.)

We learn by our mistakes, and in the future we will not change meeting dates or places at the last moment unless a real emergency arises so that everyone may plan to attend.

## November Meeting: Note Date and Place

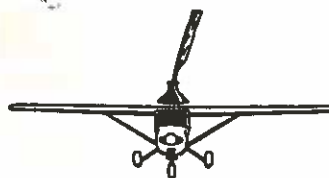
The MAHS meeting will be held on Saturday, November 14th. It will be held at the Maine Air National Guard Facility at Bangor International Airport at 9:00 a.m.

An interesting program is planned, plus important updates on the "White Bird" search, and the progress of the museum will be discussed as well as where we are going and how do we achieve our goals in 1999.

Passes will be available for pick-up at the gate; just ask for directions to the meeting place. Please try to be there — we need your input and ideas.

## "White Bird"

Jules Arel and Don Saunders have gone to the new site in Washington County with the person who found aircraft parts there a few years ago. We have an area of roughly 300 x 500 yards of rocky terrain that needs to be thoroughly searched. A hike to that area will be announced after the November meeting for shortly thereafter, before winter closes in. If you are interested, please be at the November meeting or let Leo Boyle (207-854-9972 eve.) or Jules Arel (207-848-2275) know before then if you can't be at the meeting. We need 15 to 20 volunteers to thoroughly comb the area.



## Join the Maine Aviation Historical Society

For more information, please call  
Leo Boyle at 207-854-9972 or write to  
101 Monroe Avenue, Westbrook, ME 04092

**Help Preserve Maine's Aviation History**

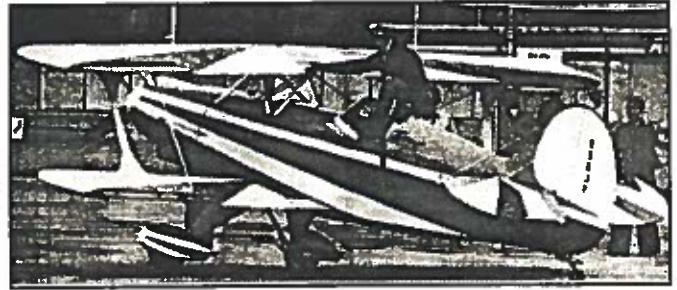


"Theriault," *continued from page 1*

On September 10, 1978, after using almost 6000 feet of runway, Dick lifted the Skybolt into the air and headed east to clear the San Gabriel Mountains. He had to sacrifice rate of climb for airspeed in order to maintain the engine oil temperature. He was thankful now that they had marked his route on the sectional maps, cut out the route, taped them together and rolled them in a toilet paper-like scroll. As he would soon be crossing the mountains, he now pulled out his scrolled map and his best look at it was of it sailing over his tail. Deserting his planned 3-4000 feet cruising altitude, he descended to the desert floor and watched the dust devils below him. His arrival at Sante Fe found him more tired than he expected and with a very raw face, the racing-type windscreen doing little to protect him from the wind.

For the flight, he was dressed in a helmet and goggles, leather flight jacket, silk scarf, pants and boots and gloves. His final good-bye at Van Nuys had been to his parachute which he decided not to take along. He learned the niceties of the white silk scarf on the second day of the flight from Sante Fe to Quincy, Illinois. It has to be tied and knotted just right. If a long end suddenly flies back out of the cockpit, it can give your neck quite a twist. It is also vital for wiping goggles clean of oil splatters and especially covering your wind-blown and wind-burnt face. The rawness of his face and the resultant cold sores were aggravated by a pounding headache. The wind would flap the front edge of his helmet on his forehead, resulting in the headache. The solution was to fly the plane with one hand while the other hand reached under the bottom of the seat to pull bits of styrofoam from the seat padding. What he didn't lose overboard he stuffed under the leading edge of the helmet to ease the flapping. Thus the intrepid 4000 hour pilot reached Quincy, Illinois in uneventful fashion.

The next day's flight to Toledo, Ohio was not to be as easy. Pilot, aircraft and engine were holding up well on this flat-out flight across the country and the records seemed to be within easy reach. However, as he reached the area around Toledo, he flew into a vicious Midwest series of thunderstorms. When he felt he should be close to Toledo, he came down low and tried to follow a major highway in what he thought was the right direction. Unable to read any signs and unsure whether he was approaching or departing Toledo, he finally ripped the taped seal off the radio and called the Toledo tower. Because of his extremely low altitude, they could not pick him up on radar. Shortly thereafter, Theriault was able to read part of a sign, but all he got out of it was "Holiday." This was enough for the Toledo tower people and they told him that after he passed the next major intersection to turn sharp right and the runway lights would be directly ahead of him. And they were! By then Dick was soaked to the skin as was the Skybolt, and he made a hard landing and then stalled the engine. Wet as it was, he could not get it started, and when the "follow me" truck arrived, they had to tow him in to the hangar. As he was allowed one 36 hour layover, he decided to take it in Toledo and gain a bit of needed rest. Also, the Skybolt was checked over for any damage from the hard landing and the engine and radio were dried out, the radio being resealed.



Richard Theriault and his modified Steen Skybolt biplane, in which he set records for time and distance for biplanes in 1978.

After their rest on the long layover, plane and pilot were ready and the take-off was made for the final leg of the flight to Portland, Maine. Mother Nature again found a way and as he approached Vermont, the weather deteriorated and a landing was made at Rutland. Upon landing, he found that the weather forecast from Rutland to Portland showed the same terrible VFR weather and the decision was made to wait for the anticipated clearing the next day. On September 16, 1978, an uneventful flight was made to Portland. The tower gave Theriault permission to make a low pass over the runway and a military approach to land. With this flourish and an inverted approach ended a world's record flight set by a Maine flier. Having established the 1000 km, 2000 km, 3000 km and 4000 km speed records by his flight, it was pointed out that if he could continue on to Presque Isle, he would add the 5000 km record. This he did on September 30, 1978 after getting all the clearances and paperwork straight first.

Richard Theriault of Rumford, Maine set these five international records recognized by the FAI and also the U.S. National Record for the longest flight in single place open air cockpit airplane within the United States on September 10-30, 1978. Today, in 1998, these records still stand and Dick Theriault is justifiably proud of his achievements, as are we in the Maine Aviation Historical Society. Dick is still kicking and flying today. Regrettably, the Steen Skybolt N98JP is not. Dick had sold a part interest to a fellow pilot in New Hampshire. He had slightly modified the tabs and when he got into an inverted spin, he was unable to pull it out. The wings and tail were ripped from the plane as it plowed through the trees inverted. Luckily, the fuselage landed in a gully and, although badly injured, the pilot survived. If you want to see a Steen Skybolt today, you can see member John Miller's at his Antique Airfield in Newburgh, Maine.

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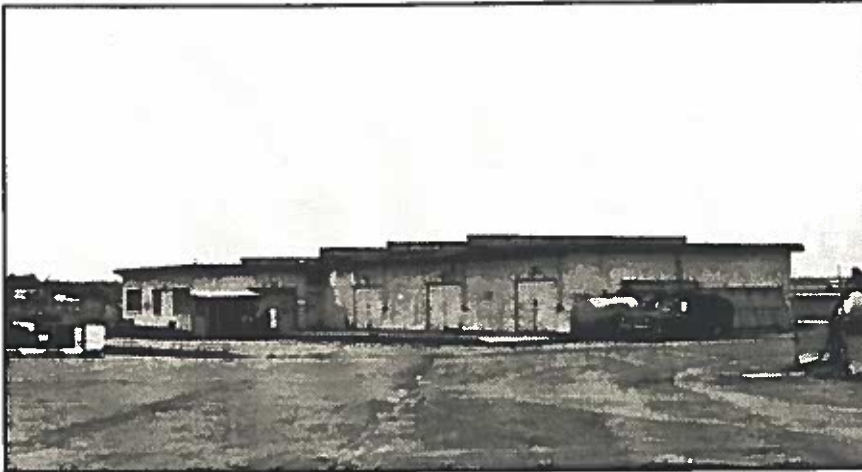
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## Will Bangor's Building 98 Be Our New Home?

Here are some pictures of Building 98 at Bangor International Airport, which has become a new possibility along with the original site. We will have more information at the November meeting, along with a tour of both sites. Lewiston-Auburn remains a viable alternative at the present time.



Building 98 at Bangor International Airport. The three doors are where missiles were armed during the Cold War. (Don Saunders Photo)



Building 98 from the road, with the large wall available for a sign. (Don Saunders Photo)



Museum Committee members Ed Armstrong, John Garbiniski and Chairman Jules Arel inspecting the inside of Building 98. (Don Saunders Photo)

## Upcoming MAHS Meetings and Calendar of Events

November 14 ..... 9 a.m. .... MAHS Meeting, Maine Air National Guard Facility, Bangor International Airport.

December 12 ..... 9 a.m. .... MAHS Meeting, Portland International Jetport Terminal, Portland, Maine.

January 9, 1999 ..... 9 a.m. .... MAHS Meeting, Lewiston-Auburn Airport (tentative).

February 13, 1999 ..... 9 a.m. .... MAHS Meeting, TBA.

March 13, 1999 ..... 9 a.m. .... MAHS Meeting, TBA.

July 3-4, 1999 ..... All Day ..... Great Lewiston-Auburn Air Show, Lewiston-Auburn Airport.

July 24-25, 1999 ..... All Day ..... Great State o' Maine Air Show, BNAS, Brunswick, Maine.

Meeting sites are flexible. We are always looking for suggestions on locations, guest speakers, slide shows, etc. Call Scott Grant at 207-775-3404 if you have any ideas or can be of help.

### Welcome New Members!

271. **Clyde Dixon, Jr.**  
P.O. Box 342  
York, ME 03909 207-363-5881
272. **Benjamin Butera**  
54 Stoney Brook Road  
Hampden, ME 04444 207-942-1465

### The Great Lewiston-Auburn Liberty Air Show

On October 27, Leo Boyle, Scott Grant and Rob Rohr attended a committee meeting for this new air show planned for July 3-4, 1999 at the Lewiston-Auburn Airport, Carol Niewola, Manager. They have an impressive record of success with the Liberty Festival, and have a great experienced organization in hand to add this air show to their agenda.

We will act as an advisory group to promote the current and historical aviation aspects for this show. They plan to make this an annual event and we can help to make this a grand success.

Plan now to attend and participate in this exciting event. We will keep you posted on what's going on as it becomes finalized.

### MAHS T-Shirts Now Available

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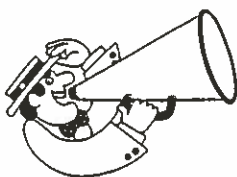
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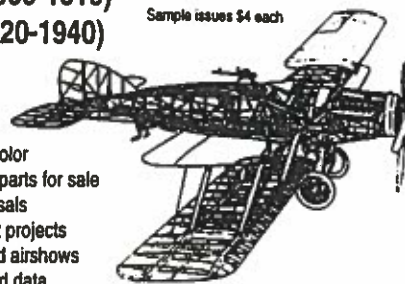
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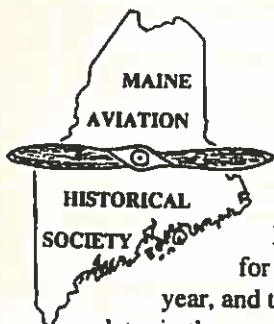
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Dues will be for the calendar year, and those joining later in the year will receive all newsletters retroactive to January of that year. All renewal of dues shall be due on January 1st.

Annual membership includes *12 monthly newsletters!* Mail payment to: MAHS  
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Membership	Dues	Benefits
Regular	\$20 annual	Newsletter, Patch, Museum Admission
Family	\$30 annual	Newsletter, Patch, Museum Admission
Corporate	\$50 annual	Newsletter, Patch, Museum Admission
Supporting	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Patch, Museum Admission, 4 Free Passes
Lifetime	\$500*	Newsletter, Patch, Lifetime Membership Number, Museum Admission, 10 Free Passes

\* (2 annual \$250 payments)

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

**November Meeting**  
Saturday, November 14, 1998  
9 a.m.  
Maine Air National Guard Facility  
Bangor International Airport