

DIRIGO FLYER

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Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
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Old Orchard Beach: "The Dawn"

With this issue, we begin another chapter in the aviation history of Old Orchard Beach with the story of "The Dawn" by the late Frederick R. Hamlen. We wish to thank Leo Opdycke, publisher of *World War I Aero* and *Skyways* journals, for permission to reprint this fascinating historical account. *Leo Boyle, Editor*

By Frederick R. Hamlen

Labor Day had come and gone. So had most of the summer vacationers all around the beach area. The only ones left were those who had hardly been able to wait for the holiday to pass, swearing that the beach was at its very best in September and October. Although I had been taken home to Massachusetts to begin my very first year of school, Joe and his younger brother Bill (never especially air minded) stayed on since their own school opening had been delayed due to an outbreak of infantile paralysis. Harry Jones, while winding up his flying season, was still taking up the occasional group of passengers in his Stinson SB-1. Then in mid-month the beautiful all blue Stinson SM-1 "Royal Windsor" dropped in momentarily on return from Harbour Grace, Newfoundland where she and her crew, Schiller and Wood, had been poised for yet another trans-Atlantic attempt which, because of the "Old Glory" disaster, was never started. By this time the beautiful, warm September weather was beginning to be rather "tricky" in that it was highly susceptible to the raging equinoctial storms which invariably swept the northeast coast.



"The Dawn" nosed into Captain Jones' hangar for maintenance. (Photo: HJC, OOBHS)

Suddenly and unannounced, at 5:10 PM on October 10, 1927, there appeared an enormous aircraft, majestic in its slow flight yet totally unlike anything else that anybody had ever seen in a plane. The beach strollers stared agape as this "thing" from out of the southwest circled the pier before heading off in the direction of Prouts Neck. They watched her make a wide shallow turn to the left when about opposite the Scarborough River mouth and turn again to cruise back toward Old Orchard. Here was a perfect chance to preview the lowering craft with its long, narrow upper wing, twin engine nacelles looking like torpedoes slung below, a fuselage or "body" looking more like the hull of a boat than anything else, with two wheels barely discernible below it, another wing much shorter than the upper and with bulky objects resembling pontoons near its tips, and a spindly beam projecting aft from the center section of the upper wing which at its end carried a ridiculously small horizontal tail and two tiny rudders. Overall the ship looked to be of a buff color, and on her lower left wing she carried the registration number NX-1282.

Joe happened to be present on the beach at the moment of arrival and was as dumbfounded as anyone else. As the ship cruised toward the town, he knew that she was on her "downwind" leg in preparation for a landing. So, getting the jump on



Frances Grayson arrives at Old Orchard Beach in "The Dawn."
(Photo: HJC, OOBHS)

OOB, continued on page 4

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web site: acadia.net/mahs/
telephone: 207-941-6757
1-877-280-MAHS (in state only)

ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

President

James P. Chichetto (#5L)
RR 1, Box 1730, Etna, ME 04434
207-269-3281
e-mail: jimF84F@aol.com

Vice President

James McCurdy (#206)
152 DeWitt Ave., Bangor, ME 04401
207-990-4480
e-mail: ccssna386@aol.com

Secretary

Leo Boyle (#2L)
101 Monroe Avenue
Westbrook, ME 04092-4020
207-854-9972
e-mail: pshaw@maine.rr.com

Treasurer

Charles Brantner (#287)
1051 North Main Street
Winterport, ME 04496-3417
207-223-5335
e-mail: cbbvjb@javanet.com

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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.

Editorial

As the year 2000 draws to a close and 2001 dawns upon us, we can look back on a year in which much has been accomplished, and the future looks bright. Regrettably, 2000 ended with your President and your Secretary being beset by major physical problems, but hopefully both of us should be up and recovered in 2001.

A new youthful slate of officers will be taking over the running of the Society and the Maine Air Museum in the coming year, and we look forward to supporting their eagerness and enthusiasm. We are on target for opening the museum to the public in the early summer of 2001, but a lot of work remains to be done before then. We will need volunteers to work on the variety of tasks that still face us. Step up now and let us know what you can do, and what you would like to do to allow us to share our knowledge and collections with the public and move forward with our educational goals. The results will be a great reward to those of us who have worked so hard to bring us to where we are today.

All one has to do is look at the outside of the building, the interior of it, the fence around our property, the new paint and one can see how much has been accomplished by our volunteers so far. We have increased our public exposure with the publication of our first book by John Garbinski, participation in many air shows and fly-ins, and cooperative events with the local EAA Chapter. We have gained many donations and artifacts and have a great start on a library. We have had expert advice and training in running a fundraising campaign and we shall begin this campaign in earnest in 2001.

We have gained many new members this year and we need to retain them and gain more in the coming year. For most of you, your membership expires December 31st of this year. Take pen in hand today, upgrade your membership and renew today. Life members can show their continued support by making a donation if they wish. If all members will bring in one new member, we could double our membership.

Remember, 2001 is the year we open to the public. We have come as far as we have to date with volunteers, and look at what we have accomplished, not the problems we have had. If we cooperate and remember that we are the Maine Aviation Historical Society and the Maine Air Museum, we can do great deeds, but we must all work together in 2001. There is a place for everyone in the Maine Air Museum. *Leo Boyle, Editor*

IF YOU HAVEN'T VOTED YET, GET YOUR BALLOTS IN BY DECEMBER 9TH!

Nominations for Officers and Board of Directors Maine Aviation Historical Society/Maine Air Museum

The following nominations for officers of the MAHS/MAM are presented for election or re-election for two year terms:

President: John Garbinski (#245)
Vice President: Peter Noddin (#295)
Membership Secretary: Alfred Cormier (#196)
Recording Secretary: William Townsend (#101L)
Treasurer: Charles Brantner (#287)

The following nine Board of Directors positions are open for election or re-election:

John Garbinski (3 years)	Leo Boyle (#2L) (2 years)
Peter Noddin (3 years)	James Chichetto (#5L) (2 years)
William Townsend (3 years)	Charles Brantner (2 years)

Vacant (2 years)

Vacant (1 year)

Please give serious consideration to your choices for officers and board members for the MAHS/MAM. Write-in candidates are welcome! We need positive, dynamic leadership to carry the society ahead in the next few years. Ballots are included in this issue of the *Dirigo Flyer* and must be received by December 9, 2000. The new officers and directors will be sworn in at the January 2001 meeting.

My Conclusion of the Why? and Who? of the Searsport Flying Contraption

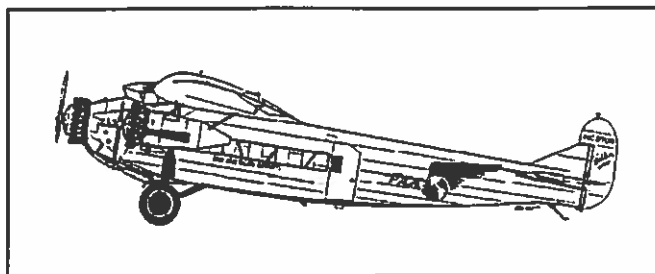
By Oscar Blue

The Wright Brothers are credited with the first heavier than air powered flight on 17 December 1903. They photographed their activities, documented their results and patented their invention and had a right to profit from their efforts.

Glenn Curtiss made his first successful heavier than air powered flight in Hammondsport, New York in 1908. In 1909 he was demonstrating a V-8 powered airplane in France and in 1912 was developing float planes.

The Wright Brothers were unhappy with Curtiss for making and selling airplanes that used features of control that they had patents on and were suing him for patent infringement.

My conclusion is that it was Glenn Curtiss who had the 1912 Searsport Flying Contraption built, incorporating none of the features that the Wright Brothers had patents on. This contraption had wings and could have lifted off but the person chickened out and did not allow it to fly for fear he could not make a controlled landing. With corporate fortunes at stake, the Curtiss organization would have utilized the resources and had the incentive to at least try a heavier than air powered flying machine that incorporated none of the features the Wright Brothers had patents on.



Wilbur Wright died in 1912, and in 1914 the Curtiss organization made the Langley Aerodrome fly, proving something made before December 17, 1903 would fly.

Wooden Boat Builders with a Searsport connection had built planes for the Curtiss organization in 1910.

Searsport was a quiet, out of the way place for this experiment to take place. The earliest known heavier than air successful flights occurred in Maine in 1911.

When World War II came, the government sort of forced the American airplane manufacturers to cooperate and build planes for the war effort.

You Never Know Who's in the Other Cockpit . . .

A student became lost during a solo cross-country flight. While attempting to locate the aircraft on radar, ATC asked, "What was your last known position?" The student replied, "When I was number one for takeoff."



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OOB, continued from page 1

everybody, he raced headlong for the hangar, knowing that this would be her final destination. As predicted, the huge ship made a left hand turn over Goosefare Brook, turned again and then, looming ever larger, slid over the pier to her landing. Others then began to converge upon Harry Jones' place, as anxious as Joe to get a close up look at this great beast. Where was she bound? Who was in her? And did she have a name?

The story behind the aircraft and its owner had begun long before that October 10th day. There was a lady, born in the state of Arkansas, who at around the age of thirty wound up in New York adventuring in real estate matters. She turned herself into a very very wealthy woman in but four years. Besides showing excellent business sense she was extremely energetic, lively and determined, and she also became increasingly air minded. Eventually she met one Igor I. Sikorsky who, born in Kiev, Russia, had designed and constructed bomber type aircraft for his country during World War I and later migrated to the United States where he set up an aircraft manufacturing concern which finally came to be located at College Point, Long Island. Following their meeting, Mrs. Frances Wilson Grayson received flying lessons from Sikorsky, and it came to pass that she gained considerable flying skill and know-how, although she never did solo.

When Lindbergh made his epic flight on May 20/21, 1927, there grew quickly in Mrs. Grayson's mind a yen to become the first woman to cross the Atlantic by plane. Thus at the end of May 1927 she went to Sikorsky with a plan. He had been continuing with the design and construction of bomber types as well as a few minor biplane types, but during the late May meetings he had sold her on the acquisition of a large twin engined amphibian, the design of which had resulted in his diminishing interest in military aircraft and a desire to produce a type which he deemed to be sorely needed by commercial aviation interests.

(I have found it rather difficult to pin down the Grayson plane within the chronology of Sikorsky aircraft production — simply because the archival records have disappeared except for a few paltry remnants. The evidence remaining appears to show that Mrs. Grayson was indeed about to procure the very

first of Sikorsky's long distance amphibians. There is fine information on the new Sikorsky ships in the September 1927 issues of *Aero Digest* and *Aviation*. In poring over these and scanty literature elsewhere, and finding no photos of long distance ships other than the one for Mrs. Grayson, I am led to believe that while the service version, designated S-36, was in its final stages, the order from Mrs. Grayson had Sikorsky so well into a long distance prototype that for the September 1927 articles as well as the *1928 Aircraft Yearbook* he found himself perfectly able to give descriptions, specifications and three-views for an alternate design which came to be known as the S-36A. Meanwhile, the service version became the S-36B.)

As a result of the late May meetings, Mrs. Grayson made a down payment toward the delivery of a ship specially for her, and with this up-front money to hand, construction was started forthwith. Next, Mr. Sikorsky arranged a meeting between Frances Grayson and Mrs. Ange Ancker, another very wealthy American woman whose residence at the moment was in Denmark. The two formed the Ancker-Grayson Aircraft Corporation with each putting up \$20,000 in capital — enough funds for the plane's cost plus all other expenses such as crew salaries, maintenance, fuel and oil, and sophisticated instrumentation.

In no time at all the several airframe components were completed. Wings, tail surfaces, outrigger and nacelle streamlining were built up from duralumin sections and covered with fabric and finished with Titanine aircraft dope. The hull, however, was framed out in hardwood which, after being varnished, was sheathed with formed duralumin sheets riveted and/or screwed into place. The lower wing floats were also fabricated from formed dural sheets, as was the deck forward of the pilots' compartment.

The "turtleback" over the main cabin, which housed the navigator's stations as well as Mrs. Grayson's sumptuously appointed quarters and "office," surprisingly was not. As in normal fuselage construction it was completed with a system of formers and stringers and covered with fabric. The wheels were retractable, the split axles being hinged to the fuselage while the main landing gear struts, positioned vertically, were devised so that they could be partially telescoped into the engine nacelles. For operation of the system, shock cording was used.

The tankage was accommodated not only in the center section of the upper wing but within the engine nacelles. Additionally, there was tankage provided in the forward section of the hull. Altogether the plane could carry about 910 gallons of aviation fuel, much of which could be valved off in the event of an emergency.

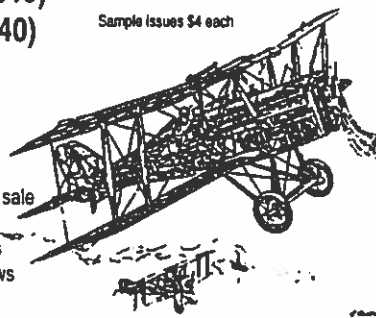
Upon completion, all of the components received a buff colored finish of pigmented dope. On September 12th, the completed components were shipped to the Sikorsky hangar at Roosevelt Field where assembly started immediately. Boris Lebensky had been appointed foreman on this very special job, and Sikorsky himself oversaw the construction and assembly along with Frances Grayson.

OOB, continued on next page

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A pair of Wright J-5C engines was delivered to the hangar and installed, as well as two handsome Hartzell propellers, truly pieces of sculpture. Upon the scene came Bryce Goldsborough who had been a founder of The Pioneer Instrument Company. He had agreed to be the navigator-radio operator on the ocean flight, and he busied himself with the installation of flight instruments and navigational aids, including the newly developed earth inductor compass and a powerful radio with a 1000 mile transmission range. Wilmer Stultz, former naval aviator, was approached and he agreed to the job as pilot, with the firm understanding that Mrs. Grayson would help considerably on the flying duties. During the hectic assembly phase, the announcement was made that the plane's ultimate goal would be Copenhagen, with a stopover either in England or France.

A temporary registration was applied for, and the Department of Commerce assigned number 1282 and granted permission to go ahead with flight tests. Presently the plane stood completed, including her numerals in the government approved places on the flight surfaces. Her name, "The Dawn," was stenciled in rather small letters on either side of her prow, a replica of the Stars and Stripes was painted on the outer surfaces of each upper rudder while the white cross on red background flag of Denmark was painted on the inner surfaces of each upper rudder. Additionally, the upper parts of the hull and floats were painted blue.

One September 19th, a mere seven days after assembly had begun and only eleven weeks from the start of construction, "The Dawn" was taken aloft on her maiden flight by Stultz, Grayson and Goldsborough. Her gross weight was 9,000 pounds whereas her maximum load was reported at 12,000 pounds. On the very first flight the plane looked sluggish on her takeoff and had some trouble in getting airborne from Roosevelt's 5,000 foot runway. As a result, immediately upon landing and at the conclusion of a brief conversation which included Sikorsky, Mrs. Grayson called Harry Jones, well known to her through his growing reputation, to feel him out on the chances of a successful takeoff from the two mile beach at Old Orchard. Harry, even though his season was over, was so cooperative and hopeful that the crew was encouraged to opt for Maine as a departure point. They decided to leave for there just as soon as tests had been concluded and "The Dawn" had received her full NX registration. It was received about the beginning of October, and the prefix letters were placed ahead of the numerals already in place. On October 5th, another load test was made, Mrs. Grayson was not on board but "Doc" Kincaid, the Wright engine expert, was, and the test turned out successfully enough so that Mrs. Grayson was moved to announce that her ship would be flown to Maine the next day. But that didn't happen, nor did it for the next few days because of the storms beginning to scourge the northeast coast.

Finally, on October 10th, "The Dawn" was fueled for the three hour hop. Aboard went Grayson, Stultz, Goldsborough, "Doc" Kincaid, Lebensky and John E. Frogge, a newspaper reporter/photographer, and following the engine warm-up, the Sikorsky was taxied across Roosevelt Field to the foot of the Byrd ramp. Turned around, her engines were momentarily

idled while everybody checked their safety belts. Presumably Stultz asked the traditional question, "Everybody ready?" Then he opened the throttles, and "The Dawn," rolling faster and faster toward the west, lifted off easily at 2:10 PM and veered to the northwest before taking up a northeast course for Old Orchard Beach.

Left behind with a quizzical expression upon her face was the very beautiful and ordinarily smiling Ruth Elder. She, soon to head out across the Atlantic with George Haldeman in the bright yellow Stinson SM-1 "American Girl," and Lilli Dillentz, then holding over in Lisbon with the Junkers D-1230 and its crew attempting a westward crossing, were the only adversaries Frances Grayson had to be the first woman to fly the Atlantic. (As it turned out, "American Girl" departed for Paris while "The Dawn" was in Maine. On October 13th, Elder and Haldeman were forced down by a broken oil line, alighting next to a ship 325 miles northeast of the Azores after 35 hours of flight. Lilli Dillentz and the Junkers D-1230 reached Horta in the Azores on October 14th, but the flight went no further, though it attempted to do so.)

Taxiing along the broad beach of Old Orchard after its landing, "The Dawn" seemed to drag her belly, so low slung was she. When opposite the hangar, there was a pause and then a blast from the starboard engine as she turned her prow and edged up to the beginning of the dry sand. As a group led by Harry Jones, Bob Hazzard and Fred Boston approached, the engines were shut down and cabin windows fore and aft were slid open. Uncoiling himself from the left cockpit came the long and lanky Wilmer Stultz. From the rear came Bryce Goldsborough, a wiry medium sized man with suspended trousers and a belt, "Doc" Kincaid, a clean and good looking fellow, Boris Lebensky, a not-so-trim individual in rather soiled clothes, and John Frogge with his reporter's gear. Finally, from the right cockpit sprang the vivacious and witty Frances Grayson, wearing a spiffy flying suit and helmet.

OOB, continued on page 6



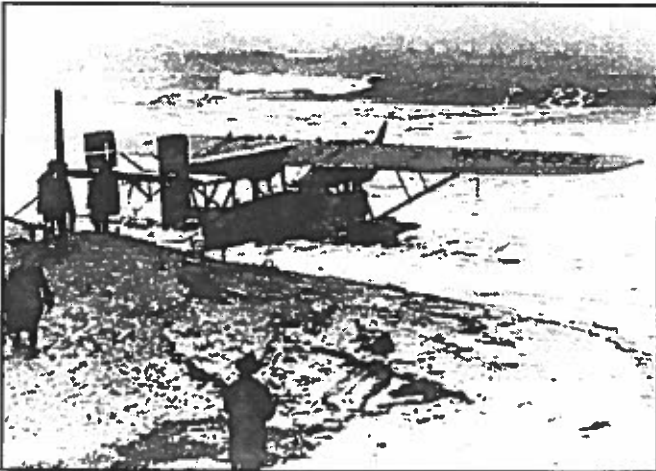
Mrs. Owen Brewster, wife of Senator Brewster, christens "The Dawn." Mrs. Grayson is in the right foreground. (Photo: HJC/OOBHS)

OOB, continued from page 5

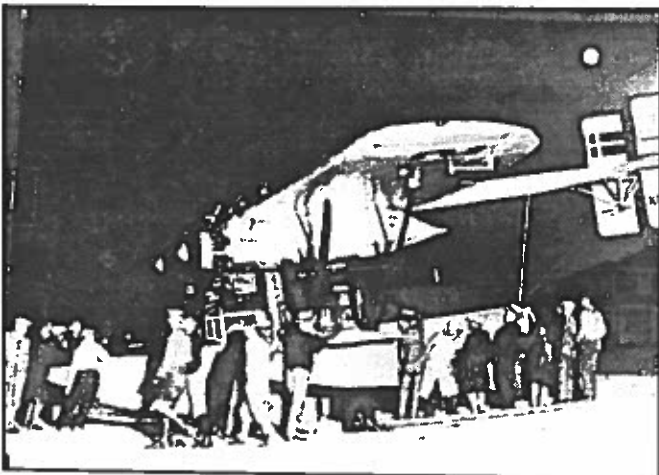
Everybody retired to the hangar exchanging introductions and greetings, and later the crew members were shown to the enormous Brunswick Hotel which had been reopened for them.

The next day, October 11th, "The Dawn" was loaded with sand and water ballast and taken aloft by Stultz and Kincaid for a further load test from a much longer runway than Roosevelt could offer. The test worked out well enough, except for some minor trouble with the port engine, and that problem was easily fixed by "Doc" Kincaid. In the evening, Governor and Mrs. Brewster of Maine were on hand for the formal christening which was accomplished with a decorated bottle of the famed Poland Springs water (since Prohibition was in effect).

There was a sinister look to the skies on October 12th as clouds thickened and a rising wind began to spit drops of rain. The ocean seemed to be "standing right on its edge." The crew was about to receive a fearful baptism in what State of Mainers had known about for a long time — an equinoctial storm. What was coming up with a full moon present was a "moon tide" — a super high tide combined with a vicious nor-easter. The crew stayed with the plane through the afternoon and early evening then retired to its hotel quarters as the wind really began to blow.



Mrs. Frances Grayson's Sikorsky S-36 "Dawn" amphibian is pounded by a nor'easter at OOB in October 1927. (Photo: HJC/OOBHS via MAHS)



Volunteers save "The Dawn" from an October storm. (Photo: HJC/OOBHS)

The next morning, the storm was still in progress and the tide was still rising and beginning to engulf the plane. The wheels and belly were buried in the sand already. Quickly, the crew, including Mrs. Grayson, dug out the wheels, laid down planks, shoved "The Dawn" up to the very edge of the sand and tied it down again. The plane was saved, and by afternoon the high tide was going out. Immediately clean up work began and the tarpaulined engines were uncovered and dried. "The Dawn" had been lucky, for outside of some cosmetic damage she was in pretty good shape. (I have recently talked with my cousin Jimmy Hamlen who says what was happening on the morning of the 13th, and he said that had it not been for the planks and hard manual labor the ship would most certainly have been carried out and wrecked. The natives declared that the storm was the worst they had experienced in years.)

By late afternoon, all was peace and harmony once again, and "Lady" Grayson, as Joe always called her, was as lively as ever, giving no sign whatsoever that she had learned *a thing* from their experience as to the hazards of wintertime, overwater flight.

Igor Sikorsky arrived on the scene late in the day, when the next morning, which turned out to be a sunny and lovely one, Mrs. Grayson announced she and her crew would attempt their non-stop flight across the ocean the following day. That evening a hastily prepared farewell banquet was given at the Brunswick, and she chose the occasion to "take a shot" at her many critics.

Bad weather reports canceled any take off on the 15th, and Sikorsky returned to his plant at College Point. The next day was not much better, but things looked good for the 17th and the take off was set for that morning, the crew to be awakened at 5:30 AM.

Up early October 17th, the crew made final checks, "Doc" Kincaid declaring that the Wright Whirlwinds were in mint shape, and put provisions aboard. It was not necessary to do any fueling as the tanks had contained 859 gallons since the 15th. Shortly after 9:30 AM, at low tide, the mechanics began to crank the handles operating the inertia starters. As the ear piercing shriek reached its climax and clutches were engaged, propellers turned and the two engines belched into action. The crew climbed aboard, and following a warm-up period, "The Dawn" was taxied all the way down to the underpinnings of the pier where she was turned around to face Pine Point, 2 3/8 miles away. After a momentary idling of the J-5Cs, Stultz pressed open the throttles. "The Dawn" began her run, lifting off finally when about opposite my grandfather's house. She gained about ten feet of altitude and that was all. Thus, Stultz had the problem, running out of beach as he was, of negotiating a low and slow turn to his right in order to avoid a crash over on Prouts Neck. Spectators saw the plane stagger onward until, when she approached Cabbage Island, a long cloud of vapor streamed rearward as Goldsborough quick-released 260 gallons of expensive aviation fuel. Only then did "The Dawn" begin to climb, but too much fuel had been lost for the successful completion of a non-stop ocean flight. They had no choice but to return to the beach.

To be continued in next issue.

Upcoming MAHS Meetings and Calendar of Events

2000 — 2000 — 2000 — 2000 — 2001 — 2001 — 2001 — 2001

December 9 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor, Maine.

January 13 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor, Maine.

Meeting sites are flexible. Call Scott Grant at 207-775-3404 if you have any ideas or can be of help.

New Member Address Correction

The gremlins really got to us on one of our new members last month, and our sincere apologies to her. The correct address information is as follows:

393. Judith E. Meader
19332 Hempstone Avenue
Poolesville, MD 2083-2133
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e-mail: meaderj1@westat.com

Do You Have E-Mail?

Don't forget to send us your e-mail address if you want it listed in the *Dirigo Flyer*. It's a great way to keep in touch with other members, share information quickly and stay current on aviation issues and happenings.

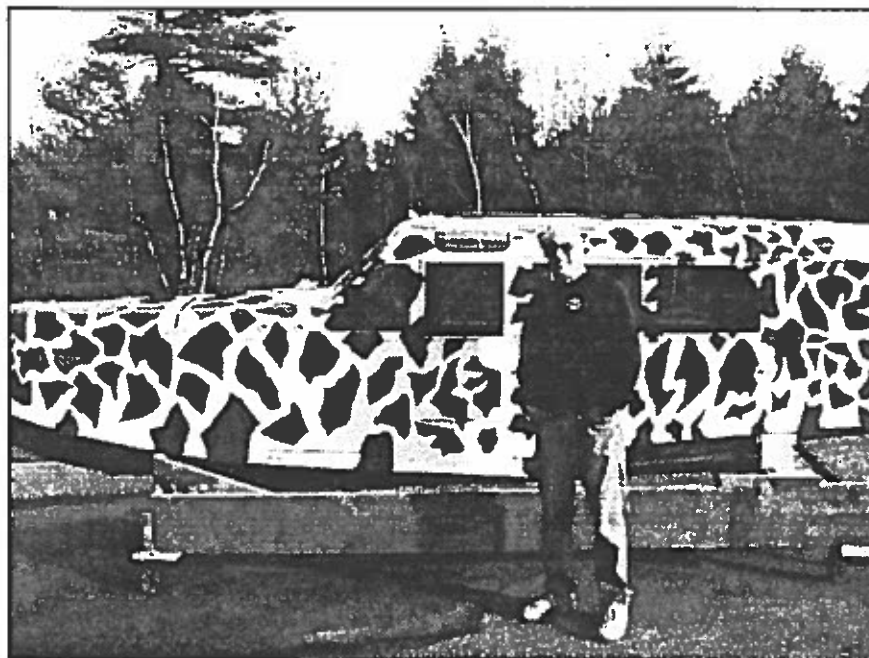
Our Deepest Sympathy

It is with deep regret that we note the passing of member **J. Russell Wiggins** of Ellsworth. Although a recent member, Mr. Wiggins has been most supportive of the aims and goals of the Maine Air Museum and the Society, both personally and in his newspaper. We shall miss him, and we express our sympathy to his family and his many friends.

We also extend our sympathy to Ken DeWitt of Clearwater, Florida and Old Town on the recent passing of his wife **Dot DeWitt**. Ken as been a long time member and for many long years ran the Old Town Airport.

We are also sad to report the passing of **John "Jack" Hardy**, proprietor of Littlebrook Airport in Eliot. Jack and his wife Jean, who survives, built and ran the airport for more than 25 years. Our deepest sympathy goes to his family and friends.

It's a Giraffe . . . It's a Plane . . .

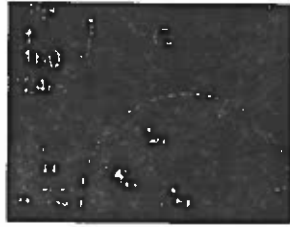


Member Dick Jackson of Rochester, NH and his Sikorsky S-39 restoration, resplendent in its new paint job as Martin and Osa Johnson's Sikorsky used in their African safaris in the 1930s. We hope to see it flying in 2001.

(Norm Houle Photo)

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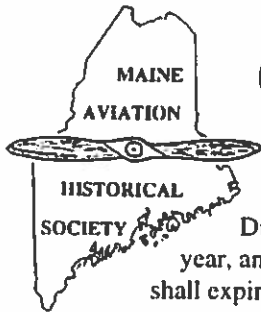
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Regular	\$25 annual
Family	\$35 annual
Corporate	\$100 annual
Supporting	\$100 annual
Lifetime	\$500*
* (2 annual \$250 payments)	

Benefits
Newsletter, Decal, Museum Admission
Newsletter, Decal, Museum Admission
Newsletter, Decal, Museum Admission
Newsletter, Decal, Museum Admission, 4 Free Passes
Newsletter, Decal, Lifetime Membership Number, Museum Admission, 10 Free Passes

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

December Meeting

Saturday, December 9, 2000
10 a.m.
Maine Air Museum Building
Bangor, Maine