

# DIRIGO FLYER

Vol. X, No.12 December 2002

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society  
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## The Day Tex Rankin Came to Town

By Robert W. Lyons

Mention the name John Gilbert Rankin to most people and expect to be met with total puzzlement. Okay, here's a clue: Tex Rankin. Blank expressions still. His Texas birth may be guessed by many, though not his Oregon and California connections. One last hint: Ten consecutive years a world champion. His name would have meant as little to me as it did to most of the readers of the *Portland Press Herald* Saturday, October 12, 1935. Of course my ignorance was understandable. I had turned nine earlier that year.

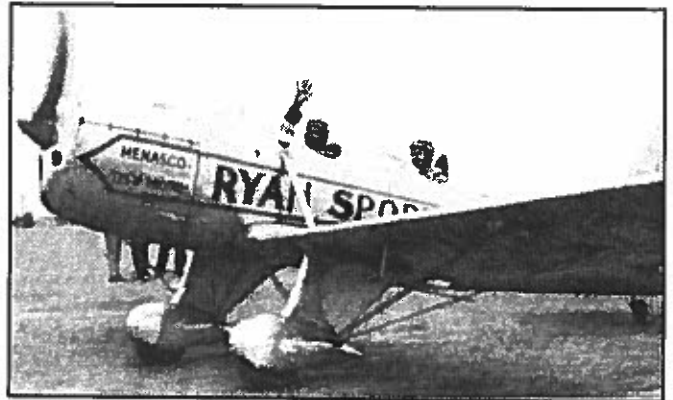
Two words were guaranteed to grab and hold my attention in a seemingly viselike grip. "No school" didn't begin to set my heart racing like "air show." Perhaps I had read the words "stunt flier," "air meet," and "Stroudwater Airport" in the paper that day. More likely, my grandmother, well aware of my fascination with airplanes and the gods who flew them, read them to me.

Air shows were pretty much weekend events, so there was no need to fall victim to a temporary malady serious enough to keep me home from school but not serious enough to keep me away from the airport. My condition may have been incurable, but it was not fatal.

Transportation? No problem. The trolley would deposit me about a mile from the airport for a nickel or a dime. I certainly would willingly have hiked the few miles from Portland. The family car? An unheard of luxury on my side of the tracks. How easy it would have been for Grammy to have killed my plan with that oft-heard two-letter word, the bane of youthful adventures everywhere. My luck held, and I was on my way.

What a glorious sight met my eyes when I finally got there! I wish I could adequately describe the scene, but beauty sometimes defies accurate description. High-wing monoplanes, low-wing monoplanes, biplanes, a few twin-engine planes. Magic carpets just awaiting their next journey to magic places. An estimated 25,000 people — more than I had ever seen. For me, at least, the circus rated a distant second place.

One plane stood out. It was simply more beautiful than the rest. All silver. Low-winged. Fixed landing gear, but the wheels were covered with streamlined enclosures known in



Tex Rankin in his Ryan ST-A NC16039 with a student. (Wm. Wagner Photo)

those days as wheel pants (now referred to as speed fairings). Thoroughbred of thoroughbreds might seem an extravagant notion, but I was too young for such thoughts. Anyway, I was much too busy imagining me flying it to think of anything else.

The announcer brought me back from my dream world as I meandered from plane to plane. Almost all of his words are lost to me, but the words "Tex Rankin" remain. I'd never heard of him, but the crowd reaction told me that it was merely a case of nine-year-old ignorance. I had pulled my attention away from the silver plane in my wanderings and was surprised to see it airborne. It was no surprise that Tex was underway and about to cut loose. Truthfully, I don't remember much of what he did, and I wouldn't be able to describe his complicated routine even if I could remember it, but were told that Tex was now going to make a very low pass down the runway from the Stroudwater River end of the field! Accidentally applying back pressure on the stick, normally producing a climb, would end the low pass and the pilot's life in short order.

I've been to air shows and have met a number of famous and highly skilled pilots, but there remains only one Tex Rankin and only one Ryan ST-A for this nine-year old 67 years later. A stripped down military version was used as a primary flight

"Rankin," continued on page 4

*Dirigo Flyer* is published monthly by the Maine Aviation Historical Society, a non-profit (501c3) corp. P.O. Box 2641, Bangor, ME 04402  
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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

### Special Monthly Meeting • Saturday, December 14, 2002

We issue a special invitation to all of you to attend the December meeting and meet your newly-elected officers and directors. They are a great group of dedicated and hard-working people who believe in the future flight of the Maine Air Museum. Come see for yourself how far we have come and how much we have accomplished. View the material we now have available for exciting displays and get involved in making these displays a reality. Bring your ideas and your talents and join us in making the Maine Air Museum an enjoyable and educational experience for our visitors. Volunteer to be a part of making the Maine Air Museum fly in 2003!

#### Holiday Time

Do you need a unique gift idea for this time of year? Why not give a gift membership to your air-minded friends and acquaintances? Get them to join you in creating a great home away from home where they can give and receive all through the coming year. And remember, they'll also receive 12 issues of the *Dirigo Flyer*, the gift that keeps on giving.

Or maybe they'd enjoy reading a copy of John Garbinski's book, The U.S. Air Force in Maine at our special price until 1/1/03 of \$12.00 plus \$3.00 postage, a savings of \$8.00. And for that special lifetime remembrance, you can give a Memorial Brick. In this way, you can give a permanent gift in memory of those you love and care for. Remember, these bricks are half the price of the quoted price in the ad on page 6. (For members only.)

With these gifts, you will have given a unique gift, and also helped the Maine Air Museum to a successful take-off in 2003.

#### Renewal Time

For many of you, it's renewal time again. Please check your label for the expiration date of your membership. If your label has a red star next to the date, it's that time for you. Please mail your renewal dues to MAHS, 101 Monroe Avenue, Westbrook, ME 04092-4020 (or bring to the next meeting).

At this time, also think about upgrading your membership: life members never have to worry about when their dues are up. This is also the best time to consider making a donation or pledge to the museum. The Maine Aviation Historical Society / Maine Air Museum is a non-profit educational 501(c)3 corporation and all donations are tax-deductible within the limits of the law. For a major donation or gift, please see one of the officers or directors.

Have a safe and happy holiday season.

#### Want to Know More?

Erstwhile crash  
investigator  
Vice President  
Peter Noddin  
out in the rain and  
dark doing his thing.  
Want to know more?  
Check out his  
excellent web site at  
[www.geocities.com/petef86a/](http://www.geocities.com/petef86a/)  
and find out.  
(Mike Cornett Photo)



## Editorial

This coming year marks the 100th anniversary of the Wright brothers' first flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina on December 17, 1903. The year 2003 promises to be a most exciting year in the field of aviation with all the celebrations planned throughout the nation. It can also be a most exciting year in the history of aviation in the state of Maine as the Maine Air Museum opens its doors to the public with a Grand Opening scheduled for mid-year. What a way to celebrate that first flight with the first flight of Maine's newest and most exciting museum!

A lot of work still needs to be done to prepare for this grand event. As an original founding member of the Maine Aviation Historical Society, parent of the Maine Air Museum, I can take pride with the rest of you in how far we have come and how much we have accomplished in the past ten years. I know this goes for all the other founding members who are still with us, and for those who can no longer be with us. Many have joined our efforts along the way, and their enthusiasm and work ethic have been major factors in getting us to where we are today.

We are now at one of those turning points in our history where we have the opportunity to move forward and become a great museum. In the next six months, there is much work to be done by all to ensure that when the Grand Opening is held, we present the state of Maine and those who visit us with a first-class facility.

It must be one that the world will say "Wow!" when they see what we have done, will want to revisit, and will tell all the world about it. Like all volunteer organizations, we have had our downs as well as our highs, people who have come aboard, flamed briefly and gone out. Now is the time when we must have a concerted effort by a number of people who will volunteer in the next six months and after to ***MAKE THE MAINE AIR MUSEUM FLY!***

Whether you are an original member, newly joined or not yet one of us, we ask you to seriously consider what you can do in 2003 to make this museum become a reality. Working with our dedicated newly-elected officers and our Board of Directors, we ask you to volunteer to make 2003 one of your most exciting years. Enjoy the camaraderie of your fellow aviation enthusiasts in putting your best talents to their best use in accomplishing something we can all be proud of in the years to come. As we drive by the Maine Air Museum in the future, we can point with pride as we tell our children, grandchildren and friends, "I helped to build that!"

Among the people we need to take charge and make sure things are run and done right are the following: Museum Manager, Gift Shop Manager, Physical Plant Maintenance, Groundskeeper, Public Relations Manager, Volunteer Coordinator, Membership Manager, Fundraising Manager, Program Chairman, Activities Chairman, and Record Keeper. Look over this list carefully and choose where you would best fit in. Make a statement, make your mark in 2003 and do something you will enjoy and will be proud of. Want to run your own store? Be the Gift Shop Manager. Like to mow grass and plow snow? Be the Groundskeeper.

There is a home away from home for you at the Maine Air Museum, where *you* can be someone *important*. Enjoy your life more in the company of your fellow enthusiasts. Add something more to your life in 2003 — ***VOLUNTEER!***

Leo Boyle, Life Member #2

Editor, *Dirigo Flyer*, 1992-present

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## Special Visitor ... Special Rates

### Bangor International Airport Then and Now



President George W. Bush gets a chance to see the Maine Air Museum as Air Force One leaves Bangor recently.  
(Mike Cornett Photo)

Flying out of Bangor was quite different some 70 years ago, as judged by this ad of the times.  
(via John Miller)



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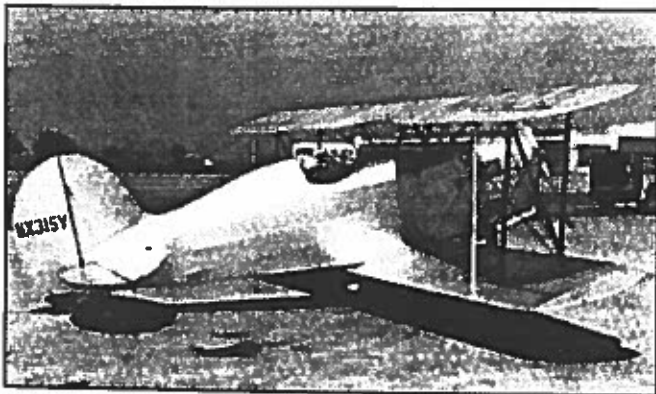
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"Rankin," continued from page 1

trainer during World War II at some training fields, but mention Ryan to me and tack on an ST-A and I see only Rankin's silver plane flashing inverted down the runway and the wonderment and admiration of all who shared the experience with me. I wonder how many adults whose inner child still lives also remember and treasure that day ...

Rankin is remembered fondly by the older members of the flying fraternity not merely as an acrobatic champion and member of the Hollywood Motion Picture Pilots Association and Screen Actors Guild but for his Rankin Aeronautical Academy



Above: Tex Rankin's Great Lakes biplane NC315Y which he used for many of his later aerobatic championships.

Right: Tex Rankin and his Ryan ST-A with many of his aerobatic trophies.

at Tulare, California. In operation for 54 months during World War II, more than 8,000 cadets graduated from its primary ground and flight training. One, Major Richard Bong, became America's top ace with 40 victories and earned the Congressional Medal of Honor. More than 6800 medals and awards were garnered by academy graduates according to Walt Bohrer, author of "Black Cats and Outside Loops," a biography of Tex Rankin.

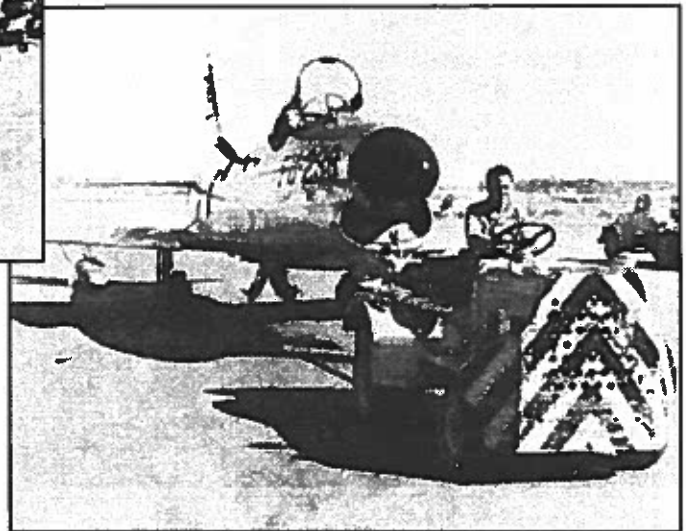
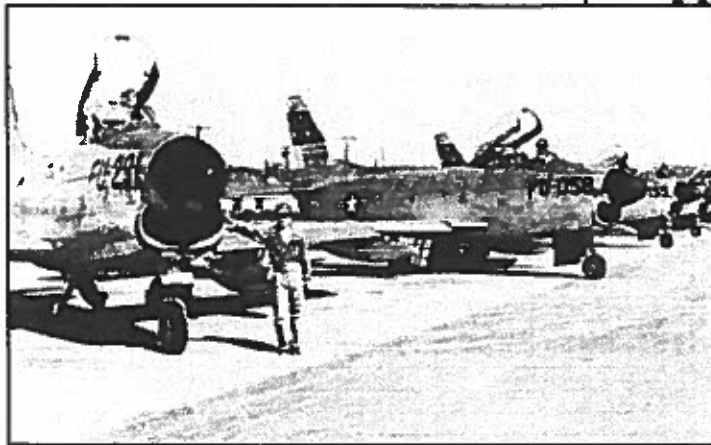
Rankin and two of his three passengers were killed near Klamath Falls, Oregon on February 23, 1947 while he was conducting a demonstration flight in a Republic Seabee (as ungainly and unattractive as his Ryan ST-A was sleek and beautiful). A loss of power shortly after take-off and an unsuccessful emergency landing ended his illustrious 25-year career of acrobatics and instructing at age 54.



## "Unofficial" Photos of the 49th FIS ...

These three photos show the 49th Fighter Interceptor Squadron North American F-86D Sabre-Dogs at Dow Field in Bangor about 1950.

*Photos from the Unofficial 49th FIS Home Page.*



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## ... And One More "Official" Photo from Greenville



A Cessna L-19 at Greenville Airport. (Mike Cornett Photo)

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## Buy a Brick and Support the Maine Air Museum

The Maine Air Museum is proud to announce the new Memorial Pathway Program. Here's how it works:

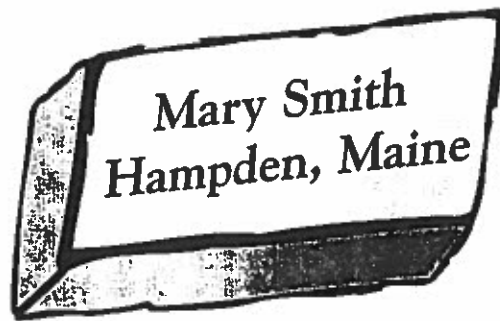
To successfully carry out and reach the museum vision, and to refurbish building 98, the Maine Air Museum needs the financial support of business and public community leaders and individual private citizens. Your interest in preserving the rich Maine aviation history will require funding presently not available to the museum effort. To this end, the museum board has established the following contribution plan for receiving your monetary donation and recognizing your gift permanently in the museum pathway and wall of honor. Remember: your donation is fully deductible.

### ★ Stratocumulus Member — \$100 Donation

Entitles the gift giver to a one-year membership and two-year museum pass and a benefactor's engraved 4"x8"x2.5" red clay brick with up to two lines (14 characters/line, .65" high) of commemorative text in the name of the gift giver or his/her memorial to others. Brick to be installed on the museum grounds, walkway or building facade.

### ★ Altostratus Member — \$150 Donation

Entitles the gift giver to a two-year membership and three-year museum pass, copy of The United States Air Force in Maine, and a benefactor's engraved 4"x8"x2.5" red clay brick with up to two lines (14 characters/line, .65" high) of commemorative text in the name of the gift giver or his/her memorial to others. Brick to be installed on the museum grounds, walkway or building facade.



See Order Form on Page 7

### ★ Altocumulus Member — \$250 Donation

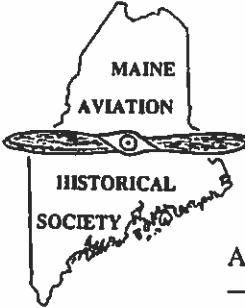
Entitles the gift giver to a five-year membership and five-year museum pass and a benefactor's engraved 4"x8"x2.5" pearl gray marble brick with up to two lines (14 characters/line, .65" high) of commemorative text in the name of the gift giver or his/her memorial to others. Brick to be installed on the museum grounds, walkway or building facade.

### ★ Cirrus Member — \$2500 Donation

Entitles the gift giver to life membership status and a benefactor's engraved three foot white marble setting bench with one line (27 characters/line, 2" high) of commemorative text in the name of the gift giver or his/her memorial to others. Bench to be installed in the museum building or on the museum grounds.

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## Upcoming MAHS Meetings

✈ ✈ ✈ 2002 — 2002 — 2002 — 2003 — 2003 ✈ ✈ ✈

December 14..... 10 a.m. .... MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor, Maine

January 11 ..... 10 a.m. .... MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor, Maine

*MAHS meeting sites are flexible and we're always looking for guest speakers and new program ideas. Call Les Shaw at 1-877-280-MAHS if you have any ideas or if you can be of help.*

## Membership Update

### Welcome New Members

433. **Lt. Col. John R. Dean**  
4507 Autumn Leaves Terrace, SE  
Decatur, AL 35603

434. **Harry M. Hughes**  
P.O. Box 235  
Scarborough, ME 04070-0235  
207-883-2625

☐ Remember: if there's a red star on your address label, it's time to send in your 2003 dues. While you're at it, why not consider an upgrade? Membership levels are on back cover.

### Got Ideas?

MAHS meeting sites are flexible and we're always looking for guest speakers and new program ideas. Call Les Shaw at 1-877-280-MAHS if you have any ideas or if you can be of help.

### Got 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.

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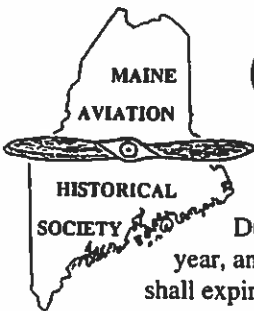


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2003

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Maine Aviation Historical Society  
P.O. Box 2641  
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### December Meeting

December 14, 2002  
10 a.m.

Board Meeting, 9 a.m.  
Maine Air Museum  
Bangor, Maine