



DIRIGO FLYER

Vol. X, No. 2 February 2002

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
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Adventures With Luscombe

The following story by member Lin Lawrence is quite appropriate because our first airplane at the museum is a Luscombe Model #8A and members can see firsthand what he is talking about from his training at the Luscombe factory.

Leo Boyle, Editor

By Member Lin Lawrence

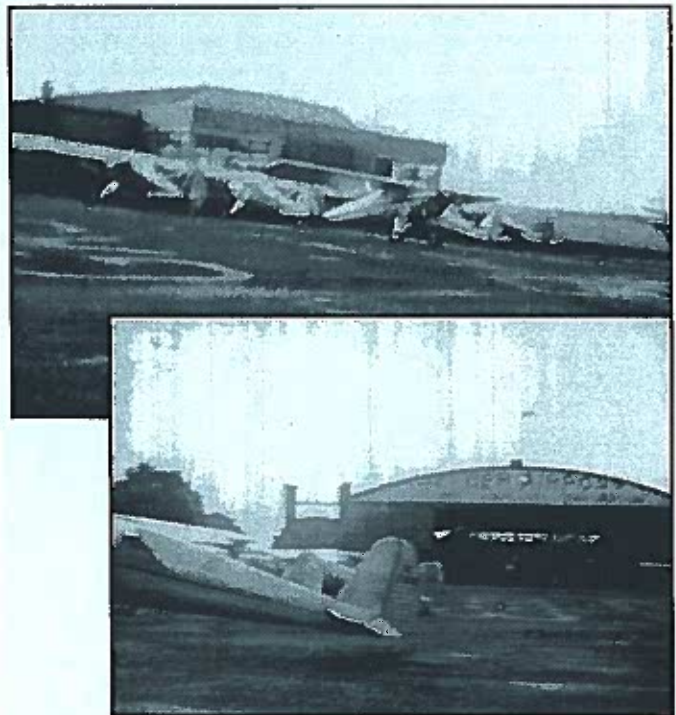
The date was 1938, and the question is: How did a kid pumping gasoline in northern Maine learn about the first all-metal light airplane? An evening visitor to the filling station, as they were known sixty years ago, gave me his copy of *Flying* magazine with a picture and story announcing the new Luscombe Model #8. His comment was, "This is the way of the future" and that was enough to encourage me to respond to the advertisement.

Don Luscombe's brochure mentioned that he was also offering a mechanics school, training mechanics to repair all-metal airplanes leading to an CAA Airplane & Engine Mechanic Certificate (now called Power Plant) at the Luscombe School of Aeronautics in West Trenton, NJ. Enrolling there, I was met by Homer and Steven Richards of Rumford, Maine. (If anyone has information on these two men, Lin would appreciate it.)

Don Luscombe had begun with the Luscombe Phantom, which was a miserable failure. As the mechanic began looking at these fuselages hanging from the ceiling, they spent evenings drawing up a smaller lighter design known as Model #8 to be



Aircraft and engine mechanics class at Luscombe in 1939. Behind Glenn Kauffman on the right is Lin Lawrence, author of this article.



Top: Luscombe Model #8s at the Luscombe factory in West Trenton, NJ in 1939. Bottom: Mercer County Airport in West Trenton with Luscombe Model 8s in the foreground. (Lin Lawrence Photos)

powered with a 50 hp Continental engine. Continental soon came out with a 65 hp model with a starter that would give a cruise speed of 100 mph. Much of the Mechanics School was spent working on the production line at 25 cents per hour. Tuition was \$90.00 a month (big money in those depression years!) for a job that paid 25 cents per hour. "Such a deal!" Don Luscombe was one great promoter.

Working on the production line was a great learning experience, especially watching the loading of the wings with sandbags until the structure deformed. This was just part of the CAA requirements for the Approved Type Certificate which was necessary to produce a certificated airplane for sale.

The Luscombe Model #8 was one of the strongest little airplanes ever produced. All this convinced me that airplanes are much safer than we pilots who fly them.

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 Monthly Membership Meeting President's Report for January 2002

I would like to welcome the new Board members, William Cook, Joe Quinn and Jim Chichetto. I look forward to working with the entire Board in the coming year. I also wish to welcome Joe Quinn as our new Treasurer. I must thank the outgoing people as well. They have all worked hard to make this museum a reality and I am sure they will stay involved as members.

At the last planning meeting, we decided that we will open the museum on Memorial Day. That means there is lots of work to be done before that time. We discussed tasks and assigned volunteers for many of them. If you have a special interest or talent, let us know. I bet we have a job for you. It will take the work of the entire Society to make the museum a success. No contribution is too small or unneeded. We will open with the main bay and the smaller bay behind that in May. We discussed displays, layouts and some projects that need to be done. I hope to have a sample display made for the next meeting. We continue to work on the heat for the building. Things are coming together slowly but surely, as we move ahead.

I thank you for your confidence in me and I look forward to the grand opening in May.

— *Les Shaw*
 President, MAHS

Meet the New President and Treasurer of the Maine Aviation Historical Society and Maine Air Museum



Les Shaw, President of the MAHS/MAM for the year 2002.



Joe Quinn, Treasurer of the MAHS/MAM for the year 2002.
(Mike Cornett Photos)

January 2002 Meeting Notes

The January 2002 meeting of the MAHS/MAM was held on January 12, 2002 at the University of Maine in Orono, courtesy of Les Shaw. Outgoing President John Garbinski gave the opening remarks and got the meeting going on a very positive note. Outgoing Treasurer Charles Brantner gave his last report showing the bills all paid and money in the bank. We want to take this opportunity to graciously thank both of these officers for their fine service during their terms of office. Leo Boyle gave the membership report, showing renewals coming in at a good pace. Les Shaw gave the museum report and Mike Cornett and Al Cormier gave the report on the physical plant and the heating system progress. There was no news on the crash site/hike front, and John Garbinski hoped to hear after the 15th about the Army's inspection for us to get the Huey helicopter.

The first item of new business was the counting of the ballots and the swearing in of the new officers. Les Shaw was the only one running for the office of president, and he was elected in a landslide. Four members were running for three seats on the Board of Directors. Ed Armstrong, running for re-election, was re-elected strongly and will continue as chairman of the Executive Committee. Jim Chichetto ran very strongly and will return again to the Board. Bill Cook was elected by a close vote over Joe Quinn for the final seat on the Board. Congratulations to our new President and the three Board members. In a related development, Joe Quinn volunteered to serve out the year remaining on Charles Brantner's term as Treasurer, was confirmed by the Board, and thus also becomes a member of the Board.

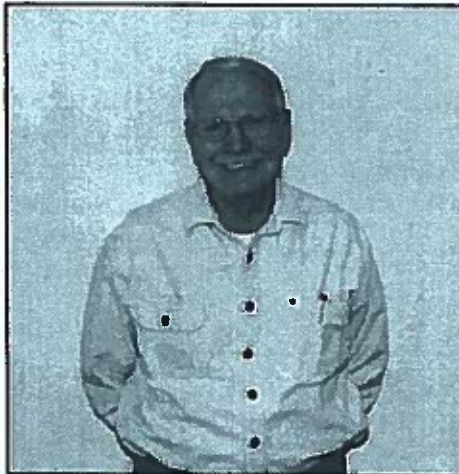
We then discussed the new roof and the paperwork that has to be completed for the city of Bangor. Then Leo Boyle discussed the jet engines that the U.S. Navy has offered us that are now in Norfolk, VA. Jim Chichetto volunteered to follow up on the engines, what types

they were, and the best means to get them up here. Joel Gopan is trying to sell the Gamma Goat for us and we'll know more next month. John Garbinski is following through on the visit by TANCOM to get us approval for the Huey. Al Cormier reported on the progress with getting heat in the museum. Jules Arel explained there was no specific reason for not getting the grants we applied for, and that we were encouraged to continue to apply.

After a lunch of Pat's Pizza and soda supplied by our new president and delivered by Mike Cornett, we went into the planning session of the meeting. We reviewed each of the main rooms and determined the areas that we would need to make available for an opening. The main display area and the room behind it were determined to be the rooms that we would open, and that we would strive to have these rooms ready for a Memorial Day 2002 opening. There are all kinds of opportunities for volunteers in the fields of building renovations, grounds maintenance, building maintenance, database, office work and tour guides. We also need people to work on the Ranger engine, the Scorpion helicopter, the electrical board, building displays, building models for display, doing public relations and working on programs and fundraising. Work will continue in these areas throughout the month, so come to the February meeting ready to pitch in.

For more great photos from this exciting meeting, see page 6.

The February meeting will be held at the museum on February 9, 2002 at 10:00 a.m. Dress warmly and I'll see you all there.



Above: Ed Armstrong, Chairman of the Executive Committee, re-elected to the Board. *Right:* Past President Jim Chichetto returns to the Board. *Left:* Bill Cook, new member of the Board of Directors.
(Mike Cornett Photos)



Wings of the Past

The following stories about American aircraft of the '20s and '30s are the beginning of an occasional series by member Neal Strange of Raymond. Neal goes back a long ways in Maine aviation, for it was his father who started what is now the Portland International Jetport. In these short pieces, Neal will bring us details of some of these aircraft and relate them particularly to Maine's aviation history. Please let us know if you enjoy these pieces and let us know of particular aircraft that had a role in this state's history that you would like to know more about.

Fokker "Universal" A.T.C. #9

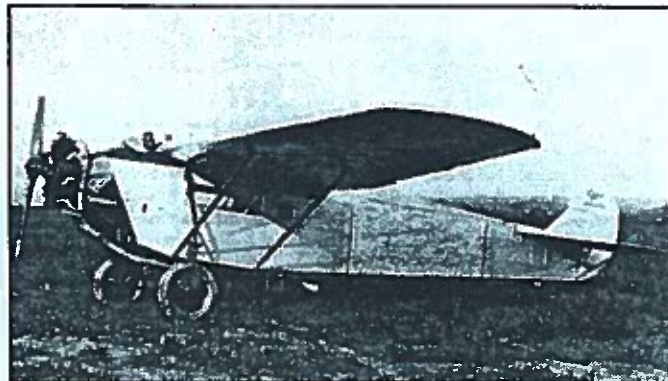
By Neal Strange

Designed and produced by internationally renowned pilot and engineer Tony Fokker, the "Universal" received its official "Approved Type Certificate" from the Department of Commerce on June 27, 1927, although several of its predecessors were already in service prior to certification.

Void of frills and fancy appointments, the plane was designed to perform with little concern for overloads or limited operating conditions and was equally at ease on floats, skis or wheels. Because of its outstanding versatility under adverse conditions, the "Universal" became a popular choice among early bush pilots in north country U.S. and Canada and Alaska as it could carry a 900 lb. payload within a range of 300 miles.

Four to six passengers and cargo rode in an enclosed cabin directly beneath the wing, but the lone pilot was forced to brave the elements in an open cockpit just forward of the wing's leading edge.

Powered by a 200 hp Wright "Whirlwind" radial engine, the "Universal" cruised at 100-105 mph with a payload of 900-1200 lbs.; landing between 45-50 mph. Price at the factory in 1927 was \$14,200 as a land plane; \$16,650 when equipped with floats.



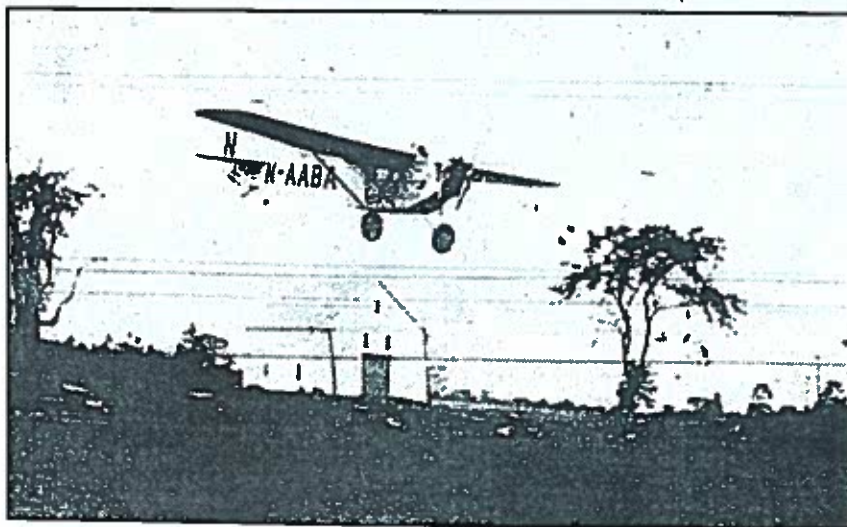
Fokker "Universal"

Only 23 "Universals" were manufactured under A.T.C. # 9 before subsequent Fokker designs were produced and sold in greater numbers, but at least one of the original 23 found its way through the skies over Maine nearly a year before receiving A.T.C. approval.

On July 30, 1926 pilot E.F. Billings of Colonial Air Transport landed his "Universal" on a short airstrip at the Stroudwater Flying Field, near the outskirts of Portland, with a cargo of 500 dresses from Boston, Mass.

J.R. Libby Co, a leading department store in Portland, had made special arrangements with the U.S. Postal Service to have the shipment flown to Portland by Colonial Air Transport, one of the official carriers of U.S. Air Mail in 1926.

His mission successfully completed, Billings then suited up and climbed into his airy perch directly behind the Whirlwind Engine. After a brief warm-up and an amazingly short take-off run, he lifted the "Universal" clear of the grass, turned southwest, and slowly vanished from sight of the 100 or more spectators who had arrived at the flying field to witness the first official U.S. Air Mail delivery to Portland, Maine.



Portland's first Air Mail Delivery to Stroudwater Field.

Approved Type Certificate Buhl-Verville "Airster" A.T.C. # 1

By Neal Strange

With the ending of WW1, flying enthusiasts, many of whom were returning Air Corps pilots anxious to exhibit their newly acquired expertise, were limited in selection and availability of aircraft other than government surplus trainers such as the Curtiss "Jenny" series and a few French and British designs manufactured solely to train pilots for aerial combat in Europe.



While public interest in flying increased dramatically during the mid-1920s due to crowd thrilling antics of barnstorming pilots and Lindberg's heroic achievement, it soon became obvious that civil aviation, with its nation-wide fascination and monetary potential, was here to stay.

As the irresistible lure of flight gained momentum, a phenomenal tide of aeronautical engineers and entrepreneurs hastened to manufacture an extensive variety of personal and commercial aircraft for sale to the air-minded public.

Within three years, 1926-1929, the civil aircraft manufacturing industry emerged from small factories and back yards of home builders to one of the most progressive industries of the day in spite of a looming national recession.

However, in 1926 a recently instituted "Aeronautics Branch" of the U.S. Dept. of Commerce, in view of this increasing trend in aircraft production, saw cause to enact a federal mandate in the interest of public safety and manufacturing stability.

The act stipulated that all civil and commercial aircraft designed and manufactured in the U.S. must conform to specific criteria as designated by a regulatory authority who,

contingent on "APPROVAL" will issue the manufacturer a "CERTIFICATE" authorizing production of a specific "TYPE" aircraft; hence the "Approved Type Certificate" or A.T.C. as it's commonly referred to, became a compulsory standard throughout the industry.

This legislation, titled "The Air Commerce Act of 1926" required designers and production facilities to emphasize safety, performance, and meticulous engineering during the manufacturing process and to substantiate compliance of these requirements through a series of tests and inspections prior to certification. As a result, all U.S. certificated aircraft marketed from 1926 on were products of the highest caliber technology then available.

Beginning in March 1927 and through October 1957, a total of 817 "Approved Type Certificates" were issued in chronological order to a multitude of independent aircraft manufacturers, many of whom were of relatively short duration due to insufficient capital, faulty management or, like the automobile industry of the same period, merged with larger corporations.

The first aircraft to pass all the stringent federal requirements successfully and be awarded the distinction of being the "Approved Type Certificate #1" was a little known biplane called the Buhl-Verville "J4 Airster".

Refined from an earlier prototype by pioneer designer Alfred V. Verville, the Airster received its official airworthiness approval and blessings from the Dept. of Commerce on March 29, 1927.

Powered by a 200 hp Wright Whirlwind engine, the "Airster" carried two in tandem open cockpits at a cruising speed of 108 mph. Price at factory with Whirlwind engine was \$9300; a somewhat prohibitive figure for the economy in the late 1920s, but equipped with an optional government surplus Curtiss OX-5 engine of 90 hp, could be owned for about \$4500.

Only 13 were built and delivered under A.T.C. #1 before production ceased, but although forerunner in a long line of federally certificated aircraft to follow, spanning nearly three decades, the "Airster" proved itself by its record of performance, reliability and public acceptance to be a product of diligent design and manufacture, well deserving its A.T.C. notoriety in the annals of aviation history.



Above: The Buhl-Verville "J4 Airster" CA-3 with Wright Whirlwind. *Right:* The Buhl-Verville Airster with Curtiss OX-5.

**More Great Photos
from the January Meeting
of the MAHS**



Jules Arel, board member, discusses grant writing and fundraising at the January meeting.



Les Shaw presents outgoing president John Garbinski a Certificate of Appreciation for his service in 2001.



Pizza and soda at the January workshop.
(Mike Cornett Photos)



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

March 9 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 Scott Grant at 207-824-8617 if you have any ideas or if you can be of help.

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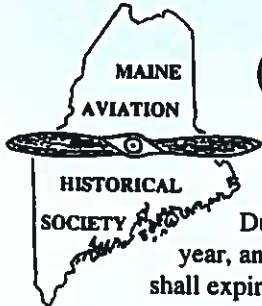
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Bangor, ME 04402

February Meeting

Saturday, February 9, 2002
10 a.m.
Maine Air Museum
Bangor, Maine