

DIRIGO FLYER

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Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
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Flight of Fancy

By James E. McCarthy

Somewhere, I had picked up exciting news. A Italian Armada, of many aircraft, was to fly over Bangor that very day on the return leg of an around-the-world flight. Its commander was Bruno Mussolini, son of Benito, the Italian dictator. Even at 12 or 13 years old, that seemed important to me. I had just started taking pictures with a small brown Bakelite camera. In that year, 1933, something that significant was something that should be photographed.

Frawley's Drug Store on Main Street in Bangor, across from Freese's Department Store, at the corner of Cross Street, was the source of photographic film, developer, printing paper, chemicals and all the other supplies that aspiring photographers cherished. That morning, in the summer of that year, I had visited Frawley's to buy a roll of 120 or 620 Agfa film, in anticipation of the big event.

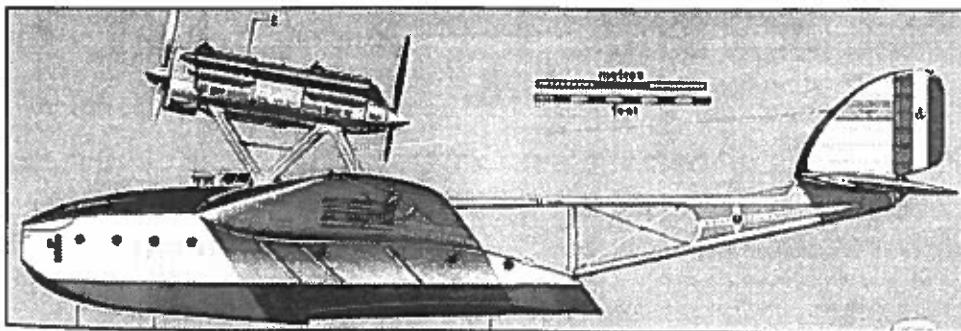
Very little of the entire episode comes to mind, but two things remain vivid. First, returning from Frawley's, I walked from Main Street on a route that brought me to that formidable set of stairs that then stood between, and behind, the Bangor Library and the old Bangor High School on Harlow Street. I climbed, likely ran up, the long run of steps to the "stub" street that culminated at the juncture of Park, Center and Somerset Streets. There, I paused — it was a somewhat open area — to scan the skies. No airplanes were in sight. What I had in mind, and what I did, from that point, I don't remember. My second outstanding recollection was that the day passed without sight, or sound, of an aircraft overhead. I was disappointed.

In succeeding days I learned nothing more about the anticipated event. Years later, in the '90s, remembering that earlier disappointment I searched aviation records that might uncover the story of that flight. I found nothing. It was only recently that I unexpectedly came across something that might relate to my dilemma. On the "web," a reference in Newfoundland Aviation History stated that General Italo Balbo, with an Armada of 24 flying boats had landed in the bay at Cartwright,

Labrador, on July 12th, 1933, en route to the Chicago World Fair. On August 1st, the same group landed near Shoal Harbour, Newfoundland, on its return to Italy. No mention was made of the number of aircraft in the Armada on the eastbound crossing, nor was there any indication of trouble before or after Shoal Harbour, but it was noted they remained in Newfoundland eight days before departing. The delay might well have been waiting for acceptable weather, or due to a maintenance problem, or maybe, they just liked the Newfoundland girls. During that time, they were attended by two Italian submarines, and an Italian Navy "yacht."

It seems likely, even probable, that the Armada overflew Maine points, particularly on their eastbound journey, when the "great circle" path is considered. On any day now, when atmospheric conditions are right, contrails lace the skies over Bangor on that course between Europe and America. It is probable, too, that I was mistaken about the around-the-world flight, and about Bruno Mussolini. That son of Benito became an aviator, no doubt, but as best I can determine he was born in 1918, only three years earlier than my birth date, much too young to have commanded that flight. On the other hand, it is clear from the record I just mentioned, and other information I uncovered later, that Italo Balbo led two round trips across the Atlantic. The first was in 1930, with 12 Savoia-Marchetti SM.55X flying boats, from Orbetello in Italy to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and the second from Rome to Chicago for the 1933 World Fair, presumably with the same aircraft type.

Italo Balbo was an ardent, and prominent fascist, and an intimate of Benito Mussolini. It was thought by many that he might well become the future leader of Italy. (*cont'd on pg. 4*)



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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 Maine Air Museum Bangor, Maine

December Meeting - December 11, 2004

The December meeting of the Maine Aviation Historical Society will be held at our Maine Air Museum at 10 a.m. on Saturday, December 11, 2004. We expect to have an interesting speaker from the Maine Air Guard telling of some of their experiences during their recent deployment in Iraq.

Following the program, there will be a Board of Directors meeting. We especially request that those Board members who have recently resigned be present at this meeting as your input on the future direction of the museum and the Society is most important to us. Please make every effort to attend this important meeting.

★★★★★ Dues are Due! ★★★★★

For many members, dues are due this month. As membership records are now going to be kept on the museum's computer, please send your dues to the Bangor address. To make it easier for new people to get used to processing the dues, we thank you for sending them in as soon as possible. *RED STAR ON LABEL MEANS DUES ARE DUE!*

Flying Santa Claus



2004 is the 75th anniversary of Captain William Wincapaw's first Flying Santa Claus flight to the lighthouses. MAHS member #13, Bill Wincapaw III of Florida (his grandson), has been invited to fly along on this flight on Saturday, December 4th. He will be flying from Pease Airport in NH about 8 a.m. and getting off at Owls Head Light about 1 p.m. We have sent a notice out via e-mail in hopes that some members can meet him along the way. Bill has promised us a full report when he gets home.

Yankee Flyer 2005 Calendar Now Available



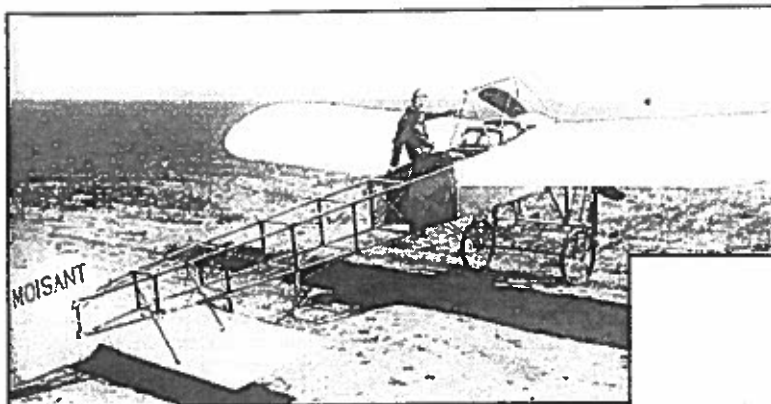
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A sample picture from the cover of the 2005 Yankee Flyer calendar now available from the Massachusetts Aviation Historical Society.

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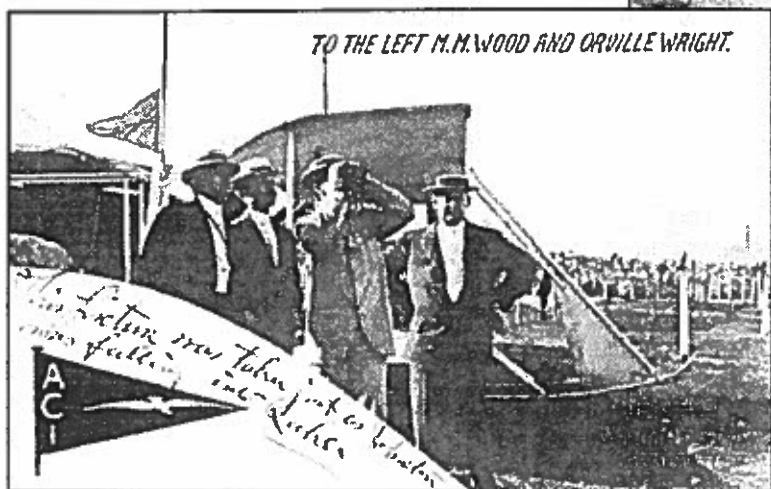
St. Croix Johnstone



St. Croix Johnstone in his Moisant-Bleriot XI at the Hempstead Plains field, Mineola, on June 22, 1911. One month later he set an American speed record in it. (Photo via D. Horn and *World War I Aero*, #186)



St. Croix Johnstone of Illinois made the first known flight in the State of Maine on August 9, 1911 at the fair there. He was killed less than two weeks later in Chicago at the Grant Park Air Show when his plane came apart over Lake Michigan and he drowned. (Photo via Roy Nagel and Ralph Cooper)

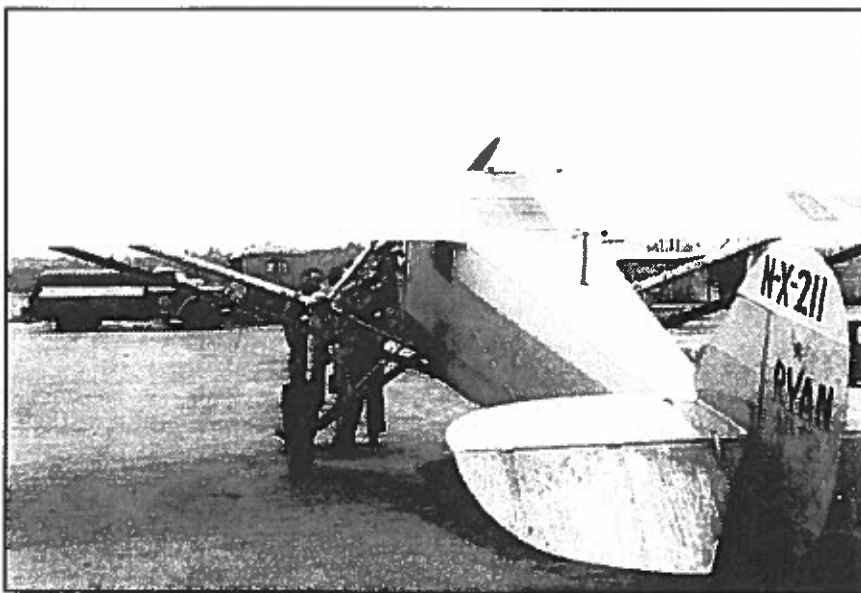


His plane was a Moisant, an American-built Bleriot XI. (M.K. Wood Photo, Wright State University Libraries)

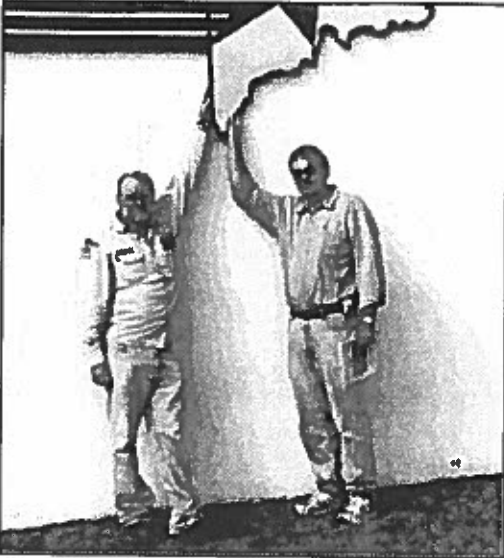
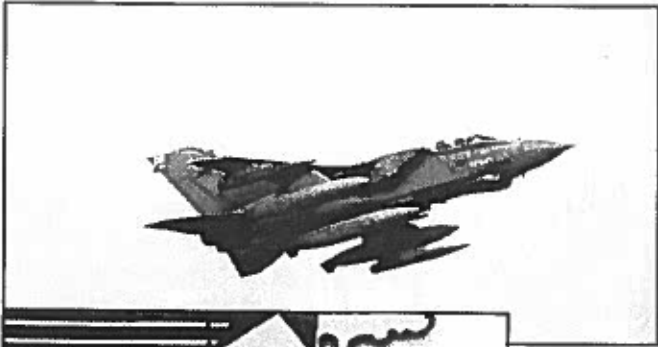
Is It ... or Isn't It?

No, this is not the "Spirit of St. Louis"; it is one of two replicas Hollywood had built for the movie "We" starring Jimmie Stewart in 1952 or 1953. The second replica was kept in reserve in case of damage to the first one so as not to delay making of the film. This picture was taken at the then-Old Town, Maine Airport (now DeWitt Airport) in 1954. The mud on the tail is not due to sloppy housekeeping, it was put there to replicate the mud Charles Lindbergh acquired on takeoff from Long Island, New York in 1927 on his solo trans-Atlantic flight. A Stinson L-1 used for in-flight filming and carrying some spare parts accompanied the "Spirit." From Old Town the planes flew on to Halifax, Nova Scotia, filming as they went along. At Halifax, the "Spirit" was put aboard a ship bound for Europe where it was used to make the rest of the movie.

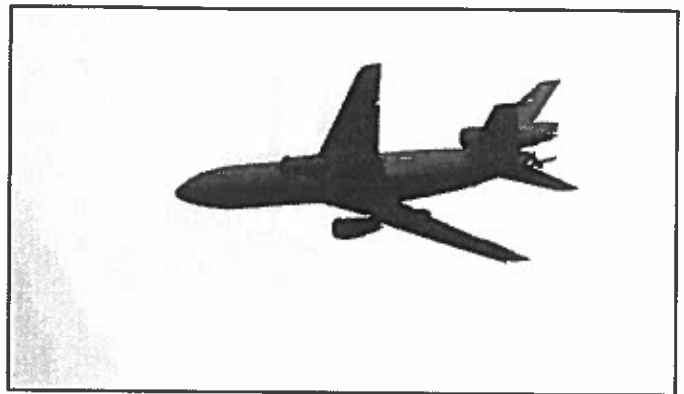
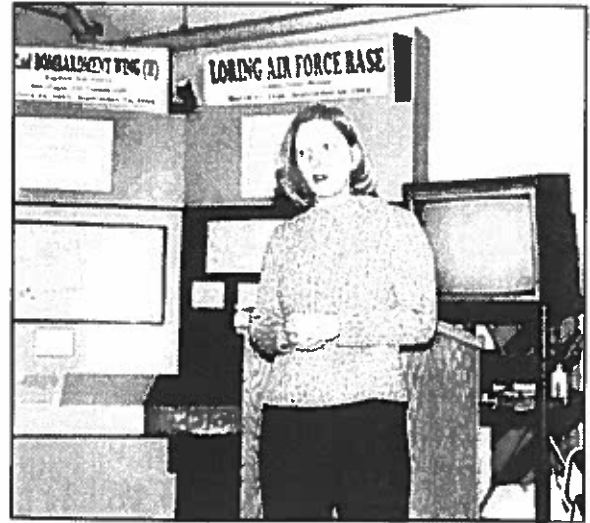
(Norm Houle Photo)



Do You See What We See? Photos from the MAM Scrapbook



(above)
The British are coming to Bangor — low and fast!
(right)
Rebecca Huff speaking at the October meeting on Bangor International Airport and its future. She is the manager of the airport. (Mike Cornett Photos)



A McDonnell-Douglas KC-10 tanker visiting its KC-135 residents at Bangor.

Life members Mike Cornett and Les Shaw doing what they have done so well the last few years — keeping the Maine Air Museum flying. (Mike Cornett Photo)

Flight, cont'd from page 1

In 1939, from his post as the governor of Italian-held Lybia, he visited Rome, where he expressed disagreement with Mussolini's support for Hitler's invasion of Poland. He, apparently, favored alignment with England, but continued to lead air patrols over North Africa. On June 28, 1940 he was shot down and killed by anti-aircraft gunfire from an Italian Navy ship. The government claimed inadvertent "friendly" fire. There were others who believed Mussolini had ordered it. In any event, it ended Balbo's prominence in the aviation world, and his vocal displeasure with a Mussolini policy.

There had probably been a flight that gave rise to my attention, possibly on the day I watched for it, almost surely that summer of 1933, but not the around-the-world flight I imagined. Instead, it was the flight to, or from, Chicago. Where, and in what form, my original information about it evolved, I'll never know, but it did help foster a boy's early interest in history and aviation, even though, historically, it proved to be just a flight of fancy.

Editor's Note: The flight that Jim is referring to is that of 24 Italian flying boats, Savoia-Marchetti SM.55Xs from Italy to the Chicago World Fair in 1933. Under the command of General Italo Balbo, they flew to Chicago from July 5-12, 1933.

Leaving Chicago on July 19, they flew to New York City and left there on July 25 to fly to Shediac, Nova Scotia. Flying a great circle route, they were just off the coast of Maine for most of the flight. A few outlying areas did get a glimpse of some of the planes flying overhead.



General Italo Balbo

The exception was Rockland where Capt. Gallo landed his plane in the harbor with a broken oil line. The crew ate lunch on the wing while repairs were made and 10 gallons of oil delivered. Within hours, they took off and joined the other planes in Shediac. The 24 planes flew from Labrador to the Azores, where one plane capsized on take-off. On to Lisbon, Portugal and on August 12th, 1933, 23 planes arrived back in Italy. It was a tremendous achievement for 1933.

Remember When: Portland Airport in Scarborough, Maine on August 17, 1930

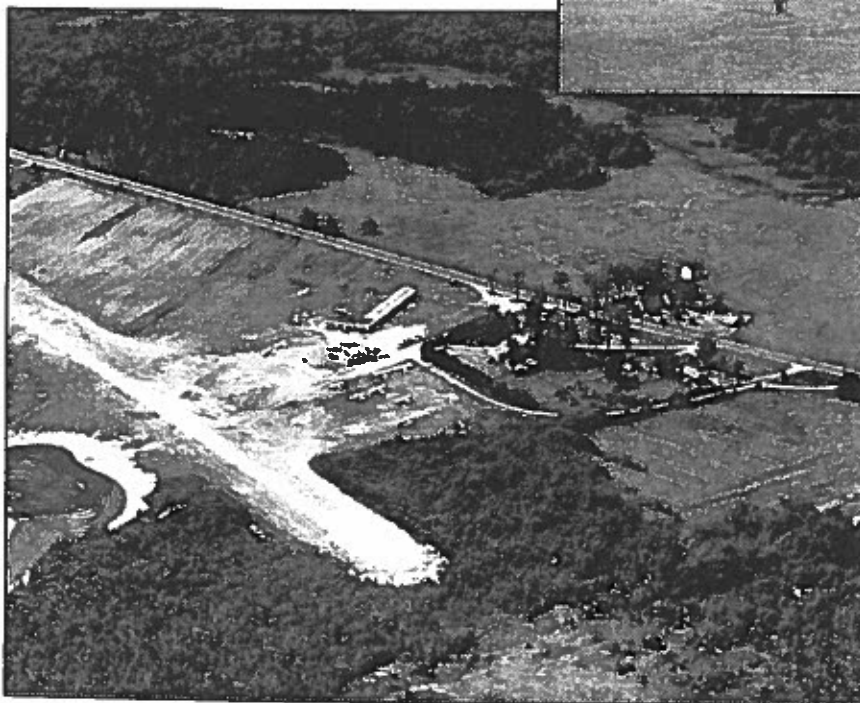
Three photos taken on August 17, 1931 at the Portland Airport in Scarborough.

1. Travel Air A-6000-A 6-passenger monoplane based there. An OX-5 powered Curtiss Robin in the background.

2. Can you identify these five planes?

3. The hangar and office with an American Moth biplane (a British DH60 Gypsy Moth built in Lowell, MA under license).

(Photos via Rodney Laughton)



Harold Troxel's Port O Maine Airport around 1950. This airport started after World War II and was located on Pleasant Hill Road, just off Route 1 at the Scarborough-South Portland line. More information and pictures wanted.

(Photo via Rodney Laughton)

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.

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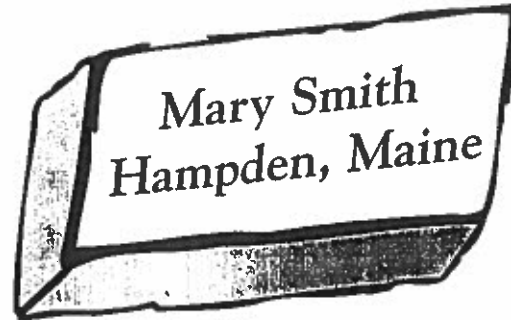
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- December 11 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor, Maine.
- January 8 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor, Maine.
- February 12 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor, Maine.
- March 12 10 a.m. MAHS Meeting, Maine Air Museum, Bangor, Maine.

Programs for and any changes to these meetings will be announced.

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To volunteer, call 1-877-280-MAHS. To check the dates on which we need help, link to:

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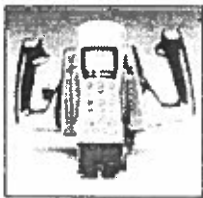
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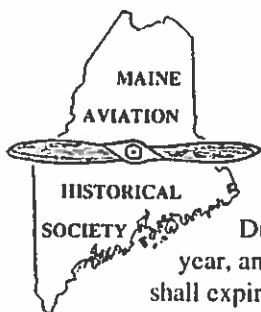
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Maine Aviation Historical Society

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December Meeting

December 11, 2004

10 a.m.

Maine Air Museum

Bangor, Maine