

Dirigo Flyer

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
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May – June 2011

Welcome to our late spring – early summer issue of the *Flyer*. After a rather dreary start that consisted of many days of dark, wet, IFR only weather, we have broken out of the clouds and are enjoying some warm, seasonal summer weather as this is being written. The editor had a nice flight around Mt. Desert Island the other day in a WACO biplane (traded a trip around Frenchman Bay by boat for it) in nice smooth flying conditions. I should have spent the day editing this issue but...flying took precedent.

Port O'Maine Airport

By Brian Wood

Every year for my birthday my father would spend the day taking me any place I wanted to go. For my 14th, it was decided that we would have lunch at Portland's Sportsman's Grill for my favorite meal – spaghetti. After that we could go out to the airport and watch planes.

After an hour watching a few Northeast DC3's and DC6's taxi in, things slowed down and we decided to go down to South Portland and see if we could find another airport we had heard about. It was called Port O'Maine Airport. After some searching we found it off Route One. Little did I know that I was about to receive the best birthday present ever!

Port O'Maine was everything an airport should be with a long unpaved runway, two shorter ones, a windsock pond, a cement maintenance hangar full of planes in various states of disassembly, rows of small planes tied up on the grass and a wonderful terminal building. The terminal had a windsock and floodlight on the roof and the classic yellow Shell oil sign facing the runway. There was a big room with large windows from which you could watch the activity at the gas pumps or perhaps browse through the aviation magazines which seemed to be stacked everywhere. The owner, Harold Troxell, had a dog (Rusty?) which was always looking for attention.

In those days nobody minded if you walked around looking at planes. It was my birthday and my father enjoyed poking around almost as much as I did so as I continued to look he said he was going inside for a minute. The people here seemed laid back and friendly and dad always liked chatting with people so I didn't think much about it. Perhaps 15 minutes had gone by when he came outside with a big smile on his face. He said that I was going to have a flying lesson!

Now everyone has good and bad moments in their lives and the good moments help us get through the bad. Some moments are just so good that they change you forever in a positive way. This was one of them.

I soon had two introductions...John Fleurent, Certified Flight Instructor (CFI) and Aeronca N33P, referred to affectionately as N33 Peter. John was only slightly older than I and lived near the Biddeford Airport. I remember him as being very friendly and patient.

N33P was an unusual Aeronca. She had been in a crash and rebuilt. The conversion changed her from a 7AC into a 7CCM with 90 HP engine. Because of loose FAA regulations at the time some liberties were taken in the rebuild. One bay off of each wing was removed and square balsa tips were added. A square rear window was added in addition to a one piece top hinged left pilot window that allowed dropping of objects like



pumpkins. She had a large dorsal fin and an enhanced electrical system and was painted green. Even today if I close my eyes the sounds, smell and feel of that airplane will come back to me.

I was too excited to remember the details of that lesson. The first line of my log book has the facts: August 18, 1961, from Port O'Maine to Port O'Maine, 30 minutes, familiarization, straight and level.

It was decided that we could afford a one half hour lesson every two weeks. This worked out well as it would be two years before I could solo anyway. During this time I was joined in the bi-weekly pilgrimage to Port O'Maine by my friend Steven who was also interested in flying.

On November 7, I had my sixth lesson with John Fleurent. This day we reviewed gliding turns. When John signed my log in addition to CFI he added the letters ATR – Airline Transport Rating. This was to be my last lesson with him as he had been hired by an airline.

It was a month before the weather was good enough for Steve and me to make the Saturday trip to Port O'Maine and meet our new instructor, Harry Hughes. Log entries on that day indicate training in slow flight and stalls. Harry was our instructor until April 8, 1962 and I believe he also had been hired by an airline. By then we had progressed to traffic pattern flying.

A few weeks later we were to meet a new instructor who was to stay with us for many pages in the log book. Don Morin worked full time for the FAA maintaining airport navigational equipment. He had formerly been the service manager for a car dealer in the Bangor Area. Norm Houle (now a retired Northeast/Delta captain) had taught him how to fly. Norm had not yet been hired by Northeast Airlines and was at the time working at the Brewer Airport. After Don obtained his license, he bought part ownership in a small plane that Norm had which was called an Interstate Cadet. Norm and his wife Kay had previously brought the pieces of this plane up to the Brewer Airport in a trailer after purchasing it out of a barn in Castine. Don and Norm completely replaced the plane's fabric and repainted it with some left over school bus paint which the auto dealership had a surplus of. Yellow!



It was about this time that Harold Troxell sold the airport to two partners. The genealogy is a little uncertain but I believe the purchasers were John Johnson and Nate Lake. Eventually they were joined by Harold Kahn of Kahn Trucking and Kim Whitney. Dick Dyke, with connections to B&M Foods, was also one of the final owners. Kim Whitney had connections to a Portland area Chevy dealership and Nate Lake was a retired Navy pilot. They had plans to pave the runway and purchased a few new and interesting aircraft including a surplus T-28, two Lake Amphibians, a Globe Swift and two Mooney Mites. One of the Lake Amphibians was an LA-4P which was modified from the C-2 Skimmer which were all built in Sanford.

Kim Whitney had a close call on Sebago Lake when he flipped a Lake Amphibian onto its back. Luckily a boater rescued him but the airplane is still on the bottom somewhere. Story is the T-28 made for interesting flying. It was an Air Force version that had a single blade propeller and was less powerful than the Navy versions. Nate Lake was use to the Navy versions and he gave one of his passengers a pretty good scare with a very long and noisy takeoff to the north.

"Trox," as he was called, was probably one of the most interesting people in the history of Maine Aviation. He operated several flying operations and aircraft dealerships throughout the state and was a dealer for the Aeronca Aircraft Company although he never had more than a private pilot license. It is said he came to Maine in the 30's with just a toolbox. He started up Port O'Maine sometime prior to WW II when he left the old Scarborough Airport where he worked as a mechanic for Curtis Wright. The location he chose was a former dairy farm partly in South Portland and partly in Scarborough. He had to close down this operation during the war due to restrictions on airfields within fifty miles of the ocean. Once the war was over he reopened the field. There was a large house adjacent to the terminal building where he lived with his wife, Madeline, who was a pilot also. If I remember correctly there was a grove of trees that separated the house from the airport. For security he installed a system of loudspeakers and flashing lights which on several occasions proved useful for scaring off late night intruders.

One instructor that worked for him in the 50's was named Charlie Carrier and his tradition was for soloing students to donate a bottle of whiskey to him. Student Richard Penn, who soloed one afternoon, dutifully purchased a bottle of Old Crow and as they were having a sip in the hangar Carrier said, "Check your watch, because Trox can smell whiskey a mile away and he'll show up shortly." He did.

After selling the airport Trox and his wife moved to Mexico and then later San Antonio.

There are many other interesting people associated with Port O'Maine. One was Harold Katz who flew a Piper Aztec and is known for inventing the Katz I&II Coarse Director. This is a horizontal gyro with instrument landing indications included. One of the originals is at the Maine Aviation Museum in Bangor. Katz was also known for delivering deceased passengers by air for the Hay & Peabody Funeral Home. One time some of his friends played a pretty good trick on him. He was called out to do a delivery little knowing that the person under the covers was a friend who was still alive. After takeoff this "friend" climbed out of the baggage compartment and placed a hand on Harold's shoulder. Word is that Katz, who was bald, grew hair.

Another person who operated out of the airport was Al Cappola who flew a supercub spray aircraft and occupied the last T Hangar to the southeast. Other operations included Groveton paper with a Lycoming converted Grumman Widgeon which was occasionally brought in for maintenance.

Not only the people but the operations were interesting too. For a few winters the Aeronca was equipped with skis and in the fall seaplanes would be brought in to land on the grass so that the floats could be removed for winter. The following summer the floats would be reinstalled and the planes would take off using a Rube Goldberg three wheel dolly. One time Troxell brought Norm Crosby's Aeronca Seaplane up to have the floats removed but flipped over. Seems the frost which provided easier sliding had melted. Since he was using the short runway which had less grass and more sand the floats stopped sliding and over he went. Leo Gallant and John Fleurent witnessed the accident and ran over to help. "Trox" was busily snapping the electrical switches down which was actually turning them back on because the airplane was upside down. Anyway no one was hurt and the airplane was repaired.

Around this time I ran into Dennis Hattie who was the nephew of the closest friends of my parents. He spent a lot of time hanging out at the field and learned to fly there. The airport mechanic was named Leo Gallant and I believe it was he that loaned me a book on aircraft engines. I remember reading this book diligently and learning a lot from it as I built my Renwal Aircraft Radial Engine model.

Meanwhile I continued my instruction with Don Morin which included going over to the Portland Municipal Airport in a Cessna or Tri-Pacer to practice talking on the radio and a few "cross countrys" to Sanford. It had now been two years since I had started to take lessons and I turned 16 in August. It was a little hard to maintain proficiency only flying half hours every couple of weeks (weather permitting), so at this time I started flying more often. Then one evening after 45 minutes of touch and goes with the Aeronca we did a full stop and taxied back to the end of the runway. Don unbuckled his seat belt, turned on the radio which we never used and probably didn't work, opened the door, got out, and said "take it around." He then closed the door and I just sat there looking at him standing there on the grass. He gave me a wave to the south so off I went. Things were pretty much textbook except that I came in a little high and had to do a side slip. The landing was gentle and I will never forget the sound and feel as the wheels contacted the grass strip at Port O'Maine. I logged 5 minutes solo that evening.



Within a year or two Port O'Maine closed, real estate being worth more than airports. My flying career moved in a different direction. After college I went in the Air Force and flew as a Navigator on B-52's, C-141's, F-4's and KC-135's. I had one orientation flight in an F-16. Dennis Hattie is still flying as a corporate pilot. John Fleurent and Harry Hughes retired as airline pilots and are, I heard, still actively flying. Leo Gallant works as a volunteer at the Owls Head Transportation Museum. Norm Houle

can be seen often at the Rochester New Hampshire airport or Hampton Airport Fly Market. Don Morin worked at the Fryeburg Airport for many years and passed away a few years ago. Aeronca N33P was sold and has crashed a few times but is still flying somewhere down south. I would love to see her again!

This year I drove out to Port O'Maine but couldn't find it. The road is still there and so is Harry Troxell's old house. There are industrial buildings everywhere. A street is named Runway Road and as I drove down it on that foggy evening I could imagine that somewhere along here is where old N33P used to take off and land so many years ago. I think I might have figured out about where the terminal and hangar were but it is just a guess.

By Brian Wood with a lot of help from Dennis Hattie, Norm Houle and Leo Gallant.

Neal Strange

Neal Strange, 87, died on May 21, 2011, at Gosnell Memorial Hospital in Scarborough. He was born in Portland on March 3, 1924, the son of Portland dentist and aviation pioneer, Dr. Clifford Strange and Alice (Johnson) Strange. Neal grew up on the Stroudwater Flying Field, which was established and operated by his father and later became Portland International Jetport.

Neal was born to fly. His father gave him his first airplane, a Heath Parasol, when he was nine years old. He taxied it back and forth on the runway. He took his first solo flight at age 15 in an Aeronca 50 and went on to fly PT-17s in the Army Air Corps in WWII as a Second Lieutenant.

After the service, Neal returned to Maine, where he met Ervette (Eppie) Jordan on a blind date. They married in 1947 and raised a family of one daughter and five sons in the Stroudwater section of Portland near the airport.

Neal was a gifted mechanic and auto-body repairman. He ran several garages and service stations, worked at Maine Motors on Forest Ave. for a number of years, and operated his own shop. In 1977 he became a teacher at the Portland Regional Vocational Technical Center where he taught general trades and auto-body repair until he retired in 1989.

Neal was a founding member of the Maine Aviation Historical Society and contributed many articles sharing his knowledge and experiences in its publication, the *Dirigo Flyer*.

Neal's love of aviation, his interest in history and his remarkable talent as a natural musician are gifts he delighted in sharing with his children and grandchildren.

From 1982 until moving to Windham in 2008, Neal and Eppie enjoyed living on Crescent Lake in Raymond, which was a wonderful gathering spot for their large family. Neal kept his prized 1946 Aeronca Champion seaplane there in the summer and loved to take everyone up "for a spin."

Devoted to this family, Neal made each of his children and grandchildren feel special and loved. He especially enjoyed times when three generations of his family played music together.

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1924 Flight Around the World: Another American First

Leonard Harlow

On April 6, 1924, eight brave U.S. Army Air Service, men paired in four pilot and mechanic crews in four of the five specially designed and constructed Douglas World Cruisers flirted with fate and took off from Sand Point, Washington, for a planned first ever flight around the world. To quote Major General Mason Patrick, the U.S. Army Air Service Chief of that time, what started as four open cockpit converted Douglas torpedo bombers took off and headed northward to Alaska on a great aviation adventure that was "The flight (that) would secure for the United States, the birthplace of aeronautics, the honor of being the first country to encircle the world entirely by air." Thus there was an earlier, "giant step for mankind" in 1924, forty-five years before Neil Armstrong's "one small step for a man" on the moon in 1969. There were American aeronautic pioneers before the better remembered Charles Lindbergh overnight solo flight across the Atlantic from Roosevelt Field outside New York City to Le Bourget Field near Paris, France in 1927.

The west to east flight began with four of the five newly made Douglas World Cruisers on April 6, 1924. It would last more than 371 hours over three continents, the world's highest mountain ranges, long coastal routes, and vast oceanic expanses until 27,553 miles had been completed. Of the four original planned and prepared frail airplanes with inadequate navigational equipment, two completed the entire adventure in Seattle, Washington on September 28, 1924. The third plane for the last lap was the *Texas* renamed *Boston II*. It was the planning an preparation prototype that joined the two surviving planes named the *Chicago* and the *New Orleans* in Nova Scotia to replace the *Boston* that was lost in the North Atlantic enroute to Labrador. Of the original four in the flying group, the first of two planes lost was the Seattle that crashed on a mountain in coastal Alaska and the Boston in the North Atlantic. Not even one member of the original crew was lost in that circumventing world flight that has never been duplicated by anyone flying in a single engine, open-cockpit plane. While Lindbergh flew across the Atlantic alone, his "*Spirit of St. Louis*" was sturdy, had an enclosed interior, and was not taken over the North Atlantic during severe subarctic weather with little in the way of navigational resources.

The Maine connection to the memorable event was, although originally unintended, a brief but pleasant return to American soil after a 6 hour 450 mile flight of the remaining three planes from Nova Scotia after the loss of the Boston. While newspaper reports of the joyous Maine coast “homecoming” are hard to find it is a safe bet that the vent at the end of Mere Point Neck south of Brunswick was reported in print. A world wide sigh of relief is said to have been heard across the United States and elsewhere along the entire route when the two remaining Douglas World Cruises landed in Labrador and the saving of the Boston crew was known. On September 6 after the unintended one day stopover at Mere Point, Maine, the surviving planes and their crews landed in Boston and for the last time pontoons were replaced by wheels for a victory tour across the lower forty eight to Santa Monica where the planes were built and Seattle where the adventure began with a Lake Washington take off of April 6, 1924.

While the entire trip around the world was a huge scientific step forward in the history of aviation, it must not be forgotten that the total adventure was one of massive, methodological, and meticulous pursuit of inventive and original designing, planning, and preparation as well as the providing and coordination of worldwide support supply caches, and expertise without which it is doubtful that the venture would have been successful. Not unlike the massive support of our armed forces in WWII that spread across the world from the home front to the fighting fronts on four continents, the 1924 effort was completely dependent on the similar support operations scattered across the world.

(to be continued...)



This is a photo from the Eastport, Maine *Sentinel* of Aug. 12, 1924. The *Boston II* landed at Shackford Head for repairs on Sunday and headed out on Tuesday. The Army “hydro-aeroplane” spotted the harbor because of the topmasts of a schooner poking up through the fog. In the picture are Mayor Firth and a local carpenter, Guy Sullivan, who made repairs to the aircraft’s floats. This was part of the delivery flight taking the aircraft to Nova Scotia for the crew of the original *Boston* which had crashed in the North Atlantic

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Aug. 13 August meeting Maine Aviation Historical Society, Maine Air Museum, Bangor 10 a.m.

- Portsmouth Airshow with the USAF Thunderbirds 8/13-14
- Great State of Maine Airshow (the last one) with the Blue Angels 8/26-28
- Greenville Seaplane Fly-in 9/8-11

Maine Air Museum staffing

As always, volunteers are needed. Can you spare a few hours to help us out? If so, drop me a note via email mam@maineairmuseum.org or call the museum and leave a message. We do need your help.

Association Officers

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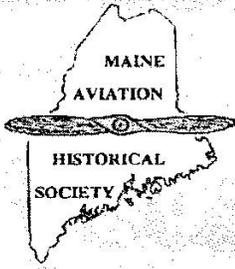
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The Maine Air Museum is located at the 98 Maine Avenue adjacent to the Bangor International Airport.

44° 48' 2.10" North 68° 48' 36.02" West

NEEDED: Newsletter articles and photos. The editor has nearly expended all new material for the newsletter. Email material to wtownsend@roadrunner.com or mail to the museum attention: Dirigo Flyer



Maine Aviation Historical Society Maine Air Museum * Membership Form

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We need volunteers-docents, mechanics, maintenance, librarians and exhibit specialists, etc.

___ Please call me. I want to be active in the organization.

___ I cannot join now, but would like to help. I am enclosing a check for \$_____.

Contributions over \$20 are tax deductible within the limits of the law.

___ I wish to support and obtain membership by purchasing a memorial brick.

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