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Vol. V, No. 3 March 1997

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society • 101 Monroe Avenue, Westbrook, Maine 04092 • 207-854-9972

Starfire Cartwheel

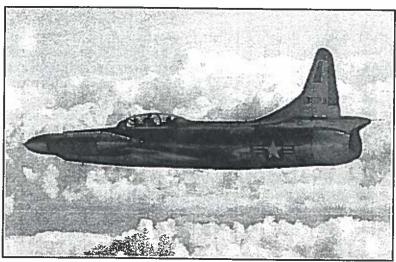
By Jim Chichetto

MAHS had a great display at the ANG Open House in Bangor this year. Many current and former USAF and ANG airman stopped by to view the exhibits and to talk about what it was like back in the "old days". One of those people who stopped by was a young looking retired TWA pilot named Richard Vaux, who had flown with the

132nd at Dow in the 1950s. He told an interesting story about one flight he had in an F-94B Starfire. The flight happened almost 40 years ago, but the details are etched in this memory like it was just last week.

Forty years ago the F-94 Starfire was the all weather 2 seat fighter being flown by ANG units protecting the Northeast. The USAF was flying the F-89 Scorpions at this time, and as they were upgraded the older models were being phased into ANG units. The 132nd Fighter Interceptor Squadron based at Dow AFB in Bangor, Maine was flying F-94s as their all weather interceptors while waiting for their upgrade.

The F-94 Starfire was a stop-gap program designed to field a two seat fighter interceptor quickly. It was started in 1949 using the old F-80 Shooting Star design. At this time the T-33 trainer was being drawn up from the F-80 designs. Since most of the work was already done to lengthen the airframe and add a second seat, it was decided to continue this design to include capabilities needed in an all-weather fighter. This improved version would carry a radar set and an operator for night and bad weather interceptions. The P-1 and later night fighters had shown the value of this theory and the USAF wanted a jet aircraft with these capabilities. The F-94 was 10 feet longer than the F-80, and 7 feet longer than the T-33. Early models carried .50 cal machine guns and later models carried 2.75 rockets. The F-94 was given afterburners to enhance performance, but was



no faster than the old F-80, and a lot less fun to fly. Other design changes gave it a swept back tailplane. This added length and equipment boosted the aircraft's weight to over 20,000 lbs. This was about 3,500 lbs. more than the F-80F and 8,000 lbs. more than the T 33 trainer it was cloned from. Even with an improved J-48-P-5 Pratt and Whitney engine, this aircraft was just too under-

powered for the role it was designed for. The term 'lead sled' was often used when speaking of the F-94's take-off performance. The F-89 Scorpion and supersonic F-101 Voodoo would soon replace the F-94s, but for a few short years from 1954 to 1957, the F-94 was a familiar sight in the air over Maine.

The 132nd had been flying P-51H Mustangs while waiting for conversion to F-80c Shooting Stars. Before the F-80s became available, the decision was made to switch to the F-94A and later F-94B model Starfires. These were two seat all weather interceptor aircraft. The rear seat was used by the radar operator. While the pilots were training to fly this new aircraft, radar operators were being trained for their role. A B-25 bomber was converted into a flying classroom with a number of radar sets built into panels on board the aircraft. The B-25 would be flown in various directions and altitudes to allow the operators actual "hands on" training. By the time the pilots and aircraft were ready to execute their mission, the back seaters were used to their equipment. After flying single seat aircraft, this was a new challenge to the pilots. It took a lot of practice and training to make the two men and their aircraft a team. Training missions were flown days, nights and in all types of weather. By the time the 132nd did upgrade to F-89s they had become proficient in their job. During this time, the 132nd lost 2 F-94s within sight of the base. One crashed and burned on the Odlin Road, the

"Starfire," Continued on Page 2

"Starfire," Continued from Page 1

other crashed on the base. In both cases, the crews survived, but each crash was a scary reminder that flying jet fighters is a risky business sometimes.

September 25th, 1957, will be remembered for a very long time by Richard Vaux. He was a 23-year-old pilot from Milford, Maine who was flying an F-94B for the 132nd ANG out of Dow AFB. At about 8:30 PM Wednesday evening, Lt. Vaux and his radar operator, Lt. Robert Wilshire, 23, of Orono, Maine were coming in for a landing. They had just come on duty earlier and were making their first landing of the evening. The aircraft they were flying had been in use during the day. The last pilot had not written up any "gripes" on it so it was refueled and placed back on line. Lts. Vaux and Wilshire had found no problems during their pre-flight inspection and the take-off and climb-out were fine.

A long sweeping turn set them up for their first landing approach of the night. The weather was good and everything seemed to be working fine. As Lt. Vaux lowered the landing gear each leg shook the aircraft and Lt. Wilshire could feel each leg as it locked into place. He felt the left main gear and the nose gear, but the right main gear didn't lock. He spoke to the pilot. Lt. Vaux checked the switches and lights. All gear down, all lights green. Lt. Wilshire was sure it hadn't locked. Pilot Vaux retracted the landing gear and then cycled it down again. The right main still didn't feel locked to Lt. Wilshire, but again the switches were correct and the lights were all green. After some discussion, it was decided that they would go ahead and land the aircraft, but Vaux would try and hold the weight off the right main as long as possible, just in case.

A picture perfect glide path to the runway and then a light touch-down on the left side and then the nose wheel. As the aircraft lost speed, the wings lost lift and the right wing settled downwards. As the right wheel started to carry the wing's weight, the wheel started to collapse. It hadn't locked and now it was folding under the weight of the aircraft. For an instant Vaux thought about pouring on the power and taking to the air again, but the wing was already too low. As the wingtip touched the runway, it caught and in a split second the aircraft went from speeding along the runway in a flat straight direction, to suddenly cartwheeling off to the right hand side of the runway.

Dow AFB was undergoing a major reconstruction at this time. The three runway system was being replaced by the one long main runway which is in use today. All along the side of the old runway were piles of earth 15 ft. high. Drain pipes, gravel, bulldozers and equipment were all adjacent to the active runway. As the helpless crewmen watched from inside their aircraft, the fighter cartwheeled over this mound of earth and just missed a crane parked there. The aircraft then struck some loose earth and flopped back down on its belly as it continued on its way. At this point the aircraft was sliding and spinning 360 degrees at the same time. As it slowed the pilot blew the canopy fearing that it would jam if they struck anything else and not wanting to be trapped inside the aircraft when it stopped. And stop it did, with a sudden hard impact as it smacked into a

pile of dirt. The sudden stop threw Vaux forward and he hit his head. Wilshire was OK and had gotten out of the jet when he noticed Vaux still sitting inside it. He came back over and helped Vaux out and then both of them hustled over the dirt pile to put some distance between themselves and the jet, in case it exploded. (An earlier F-94C had burned for hours after a crash, the 24 2.75 rockets had blown the nose off the aircraft.)

The crash trucks and crews were soon on site and there was no fire. The jet was a total loss, but both men were OK. They were separated and each gave his version of what happened. One does not write off a jet without having to explain why and how it happened As these reports were made, the wing safety officer came over to the site. He had been home and was called back to help investigate the accident. When he saw the aircraft number, he was overheard remarking that he had been flying that aircraft and had not been able to get the gear to lock down. When questioned when he had flown the aircraft, it turned out that he had been the last pilot to fly this aircraft prior to Lt. Vaux. He had recycled the gear three times and finally landed Each time the right gear had not felt like it locked, but the lights were all green. The more he talked the deeper he dug the hole he was standing in. When it was all said and done, the safety officer ended up being listed as the primary cause of this accident, for not writing up a "gripe sheet" on this bird.

Richard Vaux went on to have a happy and safe career flying for a major airline. Now 39 years later, that night in September of 1957 is just a memory, but for a minute or two on that warm night, a 23-year-old pilot saw his whole life flash by his eyes, and lived to tell about it.

The 132nd was pleased to upgrade to F-89s later that year. The F-94s were soon replaced and scrapped as they had done their job, but technology had passed them by and made them obsolete before they even had left the drawing board. Such was the state of development during the early years of the jet age.

Welcome New Members!

- 184. Raymond James Sacks
 7125 Whaley Place
 St. Louis, MO 63116-2716
- 185. Peter C. Smith 4482 Lorraine Naples, FL 33942-4770



Handsome aerial photographer and member Wayne Briggs of Scarborough at Quonet Naval Air Station in 1943.

Arctic Rescue: Phil Sewall's Diary

Reprinted from the Northeast Airlines Gremlin

The northern lights have seen queer sights, but the queerest they've seen in a long time happened recently when a giant Air Transport Command four-engine plane was forced down in an emergency landing on a small ice covered lake deep in the windswept Arctic. This is the first part of the episode, followed six days later by the landing of another plane sent out to rescue it. Both were marooned on the ice together for 16 days.

The first plane, commanded by Capt. Owen T. O'Connor, was running low on gas and in the blinding snowstorm his only chance was to try and land on a small frozen lake covered with three feet of crusted snow. With confidence typical of a seasoned pilot, Capt. O'Connor skillfully maneuvered and "set her down" without crashing. The landing was one for the books. When the wheels hit, the dazzling but impenetrable snowy mist blinded him. The crew and passengers, however, were unhurt, other than being jolted severely.

With canvas wing covers they made a wind break which held back the strength of the gale, but gave little comfort. Sleeping bags were brought into service and by burrowing in the snow they were able to get an occasional bit of warmth, but in general. sleep at best was broken and fitful. With a hand operated "coffee grinder" transmitter, they started sending SOS signals that were answered with silence.

After the first shock of the landing and the intense cold, the days began to pass with maddening slowness. Hours seemed like days. With limited rations, all became gradually weaker until talk was held down to brief remarks in order to conserve strength.

During the first few days the executives back at the nearest bases were frantically radioing for the lost plane and one searching party was sent out. It reported that it had seen a fire burning at night on a lake but was unable to chart its position because of running into a raging snowstorm.

On the morning of the sixth day, another rescue party of five planes was sent out from the base, under the direction of Northeast Airlines' Capt. Fred Lord, a seasoned pilot who had in his lead plane Lt. Col. Hubbard, an experienced explorer and his crew consisting of three men, First Officer Robert Carey, Navigator Paul Murphy, and Phillip Sewell, radio operator of Northeast Airlines.

Two hours out, Sewell heard faint radio signals which gradually became slightly more audible as they changed direction. With the other planes operating in scattered formation, they maneuvered until the sound became stronger. Finally, they sighted the lost plane on the ice of the uncharted lake. Near it was a dark arrow constructed of tree limbs and another made up by the men themselves.

Capt. Lord's plane was well loaded with gasoline and other supplies so he decided to make a landing, storm or no storm. Between flurries he began the hazardous descent to the ice. Members of his crew rushed to the tail of the plane to add their weight to keep it low on landing. Landing flaps went down.



Captains Fred Lord and Bob Carey with Chief Radio Operator Phil Sewall in front of C-49 on Lake O'Connor. (Photo via Bob Mudge)

With everyone huddled as far back in the fuselage as possible, the wheels hit the snow crust and down into the three feet of snow plowed the wheels and for a perilous moment, a crash seemed inevitable. Luck and skill brought the plane to an abrupt halt which strained it from nose to tail, but caused no breakage.

Upon emerging from the plane, Capt. Lord and his crew, with Lt. Col. Hubbard, were greeted by the stranded victims who by that time were so weak they could hardly more than stumble toward their rescuers and mumble their gratitude. Some of them were so far spent they could make only feeble gestures. Their speech was halting and their answers slow in coming. Intense cold in the six days had numbed even their senses.

The other planes of Lord's rescue party had circled, charted the position of the lake, dropped supplies and then departed to bring back more food and equipment.

The newcomers started in helping the weakened victims build a new shelter which was an improvement on the one already there, but by no means comfortable. Their ample food supply gave new strength to everyone, plus the hope of an early rescue.

Weather, the worst in several days, followed the landing of Lord's plane and the return of both planes had to be postponed. All of the men knew then that the situation had been improved but that danger still lurked.

Sewell, the radio operator of Lord's plane, kept the following diary of the 16-day episode:

February 10—We took off from base. Our ship was assigned as lead aircraft of a group of five. One ship was to record weather; another to listen for homing signals, take bearings, etc. After two and a half hours out, our radio picked up faint signals of lost ship. Gave instructions for the other four planes to start bracketing it. Finally managed to intensify signal, which was being sent on emergency transmitter called coffee grinder, by using kite type antennae or hydrogen balloon. Signal bracketed down and course set. Ship was definitely located within small area. Other four ships instructed to cover this area. Ship sighted on ice of small uncharted lake. We slow down motors and "drag" lake. Other planes converged near spot and start drop-

"Rescue," Continued on Page 4

February Meeting

The February 8th meeting turned out to be exciting, enjoyable, profitable and long. The Secretary reported that dues were coming in at a steady pace and the Treasurer reported the bank balance was growing accordingly. The President reported on our progress and our 1997 priorities. These include the Museum Committee working on possible sites for our new home, continuation of the search for the "White Bird" (spring-related) and work on publishing a journal with some of our longer historical stories. Leo and Clay are going to work on this item.

We were blessed with having two great speakers for this meeting. Member Bill Thaden of Kittery Point comes from an aviation family. His father, Herbert, was a noted balloonist in the '20s and '30s and designed the Thaden Metalplane. Bill was instrumental in rescuing this plane from Alaska and it is now in the Hiller Museum in California. His mother was Louise Thaden, well-known aviatrix and race pilot and winner of the Bendix Race in 1936.

Bill presented two slide shows on his mother and the Bendix Races plus a video. These slides and video presented a wonderful picture of this golden age of aviation and a remarkable pilot. Louise Thaden was a contemporary of Amelia Earhart, but we heard the story of a woman who was a superior pilot and who had held speed, altitude and endurance records to back up her many achievements. All in all, a remarkable life, a great story and a most enjoyable presentation. Our thanks to Bill, and I hope he might be able to give it again in Bangor at one our meetings there.

Last summer a reunion was held in California of Beech Staggerwings. Dave Swanson, our other speaker, flew his Lockheed 12 from Sanford, Maine to California and back with his wife Kay, the Thadens, and Dick and Pat Jackson. His story of his acquisition of this historic airplane (from member Lou

"Rescue," Continued from Page 3

ping supplies, some by parachute. All of our crew back in tail of plane for landing. Wheels hit snow which seemed to explode. Walk from ship after nearly crashing. Men with other plane walked haltingly toward us. Seemed stunned or like walking in sleep; talk almost incoherently. Offer us owl stew. Not so tasty. Tin cans used for cups. Must guard against burns from cold caused by touching wet lips to cold metal and freezing to it.

February 11—First morning. Slept in plane cabin last night but were very cold. Kept waking up every few minutes. Our temperature gauge registers to only 20 below; mercury has driven needle against pin, indicating it is much colder. Sleeping bags covered with fuzzy hoar frost. Preparing ship against weather. Capt. O'Connor doctoring frost bites. Snowing most of the day. Wind sounds like fire siren blowing every minute. We made snow plow from floor boards of planes. Lt. Col. Hubbard most woods wise of entire group. Barometer reading is 28.90, a bad sign. Believe temperature was about 40 below at noon. Froze my fingers trying to decode message after establishing communication with the base. Greased our faces as prevention against cold. To be continued next month . . .

Hilton), its restoration and the preparation for the flight was fascinating. With the help of a large map with the route laid out in red yarn, Dave took us from Maine to California and back on this fascinating flight. We hope Dave and his Lockheed can make it up to Bangor someday soon, for his story is one I can enjoy all over again.

Mike Farrey of the Dakota Aviation Museum then told us of his plans to buy the World War II vintage hangar at the Sanford Airport as the home for his C-47/DC-3 in Northeast Airlines colors. Mike hopes to have an open house there June 21-22 if everything goes well. We'll keep you posted.

It was great to see the large attendance at the February meeting and the number of eager helpers available. As the season moves on, there will be plenty to do. Jim Chichetto and Clay Carkin will be touring the Maine ANG Museum at Dow Field and there will be a meeting in Bangor of people involved in looking at Bangor as a possible museum site. The Board of Directors continues to work with the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, the Maine State Museum, the Quonset Air Museum and others regarding recording and preservation of aircraft wrecks. We should have more information on scheduled hikes at the next meeting along with an update on these and other important matters affecting you and the society, so be sure and plan to attend. We hope to have an interesting guest speaker as well. We hope to also tour possible museum sites at Bangor International Airport after the meeting.

Our Vice President Clay Carkin (207-729-5976) is looking for old/new aviation or military gear/stewardess uniforms, etc. for his award-winning sixth grade science class at the Freeport Middle School. Call him if you can help him or for more info.

The Massachusetts Aviation Historical Society is interested in having a joint meeting with us and the New Hampshire group in the Portsmouth area in the early summer, possibly at the Barnstormer Restaurant. Let Leo know if you're interested.

Arthur Schreiber, native of Portland, Maine, passed away on February 10, 1997 in California on his 90th birthday. Mr. Schreiber gained a measure of world fame as the first trans-Atlantic flight stowaway. On June 13, 1929 he crawled into the tail section of the French Bernard Monoplane "L'Oiseau Canari" ("Yellow Bird") at Old Orchard Beach, Maine and landed at Comillas, Spain. More details in a later issue of *Dirigo Flyer*.

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Scenes from the February Meeting



Mike Farrey of the Dakota Aviation Museum explains his plans for Sanford, Maine at the February meeting. (Photos by Clay Carkin and Norm Houle)



Dave Swanson (*left*) who told us of his flight across the country last summer in his Lockheed 12A, and Bill Thaden (*right*) who presented a great slide show on his mother, famous aviatrix Louise Thaden, at the February meeting. (*Photos by Clay Carkin and Norm Houle*)



Steve Fields, Base Historian, and Jim Chichetto, MAHS President, at the Maine ANG display at their Dow Field headquarters. (Photos by Clay Carkin and Norm Houle)



Spending Quality Time

August 8, 1956, son Richard E. Cumming (*left*) and dad Irving R.A. Cumming (*right*) at the Houlton, Maine Airport. The Cessna 140 - N2451V was owned by the Yankee Flying Club of Beverly, MA, owned and operated by employees of Northeast Airlines. The Beverly to Houlton flight was a dual purpose flight: first so they could visit relatives in Houlton, and second so that young Richard could get some cross-country flying time as he was working on his commercial pilot ticket.

Mr. I.R.A. Cumming at that time was a very senior N.E.A. Captain, and two years later young Richard also went to work for N.E.A. as a DC-6 flight engineer. He retired as a B-767 Captain in 1995.

(Photo from the Cumming Family Collection via Norm Houle)

Growing Up in Maine, Part I



Member Morgan Barbour (B-777) of Bellevue, WA at Boeing Field in the cockpit of a Boeing B-767 prior to a training flight. We're looking forward to his visit this summer.

I had chores to do on my Dad's farm on Middle Road. We moved from Massachusetts to the 100 acres in Maine called "Beneva Farm" in 1939. The name Beneva was derived from my father and mother's first names. His is 88 and she is 95. He operates the "Green Deere" machine: mowing, tedding and baling hay. She operates the "couch" for the most part. So you see, they are still hard-working New Englanders!

During my high school years, I had to clean, feed and milk 20 head of cows after school. Dad did the milking in the morning. We also had chickens, both layers and broilers. My sister, Evangeline, and brother, Ronald, took care of the poultry chores. Our summers were all work.

In addition to the above chores, we had to mow, rake, shake-out, load and store the hay in the barn. Loose hay, not baled hay! With horses and pitchforks, not tractors and balers! When haying was about finished, the blueberries were ripe and had to be raked, winnowed and boxed for market. Dad had two blueberry fields that were alternately burned and harvested each year. By alternating the field burning every other year, meant that we would have the pleasure of raking blueberries every year! This kept us busy until school commenced in the fall. My winter weekends were spent in the "Back 40" cutting wood for the next winter's heat source.

During the war years, most of the farm work was done with the help of a big and gentle horse named "Prince." After the war, Dad was able to scrape up enough money for a down payment on a Farmall "A" tractor. Oh, we were happy! I no longer had to climb the ladder in the barn, hoisting the harness to a height high enough to throw over Prince's back. Ironically and sadly, when Prince died, I used the tractor and a drag to haul him to a lower field gully. I dug a suitable grave and buried a farm animal that gave us his all.

When I was on the farm, I do not remember dreaming or planning on any particular career field, such as aviation. I just wanted to get off the farm. Now I realize that those years taught me many valuable lessons that were an asset in later life. I credit my family and those early years on "Beneva Farm" for the basics and foundation of any accomplishments that I may have attained. To be continued...

++++++++

The West Bound Mail

Anonymous

A drizzling rain was falling
A nearby cock tolled either
They watched the sky with an eager eye
For the west bound mail was late.

The rain beat down on the hangar roof
The station chief stood by
Then the drumming tone of a motor drone
Came from the misty sky.

The beacon sent its welcome beam
To the rider of the night
And he brought her down on the soggy ground
Up to the landing light.

They swap the mail and shout "Okay!" Then she roars and lifts her tail She's up again in the snow and rain On with the west bound mail.

The dim blurred lights of a city Loom in the space below Their work is done but the mail flies on And on through the blinding snow.

The rain is freezing on her wings
She seems to feel the weight
It'll soon be dawn but she staggers on
Hopin' she won't be late.

The crystals stick on the windshield Formin' a silvery veil ley struts and a man with guts And sacks of west bound mail.

Over the peak of a mountain now Clear of the treacherous rim Away up there in the cold night air Just God, the mail, and him.

His thoughts turn back to a summer night And a girl not so long ago Who shook her head and firmly said, "As long as you're flyin, No!"

He tried to quit the bloomin' job
And stick to the concrete trail
But the wish came back for the canvas sack
And the feel of the west bound mail.

Submitted via Christine Brown

Upcoming MAHS Meetings and Calendar of Events

March 8
April 6-12 All Day Sun 'n i . , Lakeland, Florida.
April 12
May 10
May-17-18 All Day Aviation Flea Market, Hampton, NH Airport.
June 1
June 14
June 21-22 (tentative) All Day Dakota Aviation Museum Open House, Sanford, Maine.
June 28-29 10 a.m Military Aviation & Aerobatic Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
July 12 9 a.m MAHS Meeting, TBA.
July 18-19 All Day Great State O' Maine Air Show, Brunswick Naval Air Station.
July 31-August 6 All Day Oshkosh EAA Air Show, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.
August 9
August 9-10 10 a.m Aerobatic Air Show, Owls Head Transportation Museum.
August 31
September 5-7 All Day International Seaplane Fly-In, Greenville, ME.
September 13
September 20-21
October 5
October 11 9 a.m MAHS Meeting, TBA.
October 26
November 8
December 13

The meeting sites can be flexible. We are looking for suggestions on locations for many of these meetings. The same goes for the weekend hikes — let us know. We are also looking for guest speakers, slide shows, etc. Call Leo at 207-854-9972 or Jim at 207-269-3281 if you have any ideas or can be of help. In addition, we will be scheduling hikes to aircraft wrecks from spring until fall. The search for the "White Bird" will resume as soon as the weather permits. Stay tuned for further details — it's going to be an exciting year!

Mystery Photo

At least four P-47s made belly landings at Dow Field, Bangor in 1947-48. This P-47N 44-89433 (18th from last P-47 built) was one of them. Can you help identify which one this was? We need the date, pilot and unit and any other information you may have.

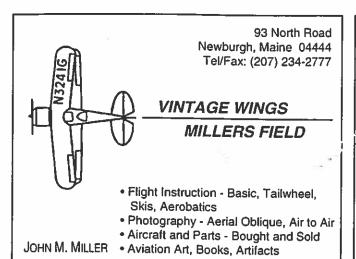
Win an MAHS T-shirt!



Roland Jackson Photo via Marc McDonnell

Answer to Last Month's Mystery Photo —

We received lots of answers to the beautiful Beech Staggerwing. Most people knew it as that, and many people knew it was owned by Goodall-Sanford of Sanford, Maine. It was C/N5, NC-12583 and was a model A-17F, powered by a 690 hp Wright Cyclone. Bob Fogg, noted New Hampshire aviator, was the pilot. Goodall-Sanford took delivery on May 30, 1934 and sold it to Howard Hughes in November 1934. It raced in the 1937 and 1938 Bendix Races with Bob Perlick as pilot. Member Bill Thaden of Kittery Point had all the right answers and wins the T-shirt.



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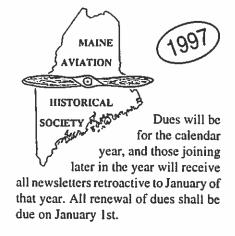
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JOIN US!

Saturday, March 8, 1997

9 a.m.

General Aviation Terminal Bangor Airport