



# Oregon Aviation Museum

## Newsletter

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### **TEX, DOROTHY, and N315Y:** *Two Remarkable Pilots and a Very Special Airplane*

By Ron Bartley

The surviving parts and pieces of the 1931 Great Lakes biplane owned and flown by two of Oregon's most famous pilots, Tex Rankin and Dorothy Hester, will be displayed at Oregon Air Fair '97. This historic aircraft, N315Y, was nearly destroyed when it crashed at an airshow in Pennsylvania in 1968.

The Oregon Aviation Museum, headquartered in Cottage Grove, has acquired the surviving parts of N315Y, and has started the task of restoration. This Great Lakes biplane looked like a stock factory Sport Trainer, but it was specially built to withstand the high stress of the aerobatic maneuvers perfected by Tex Rankin and Dorothy Hester.

By 1930 Tex Rankin had gained national recognition for his thrilling precision aerobatic exhibitions and participation in cross-country national air races. He was also well-known as the founder of the Rankin School of Flying in Portland.

In 1927 Dorothy Hester, barely 17 years old, rode the street car to the Rankin Flying Field at Mock's Bottom (adjacent to Portland's Swan Island) for her first airplane ride. After the ride, she knew she wanted to be a pilot, and



*Dorothy Hester and Tex Rankin with N315Y  
(Oregon Aviation Museum Collection)*

soon after, enrolled in the Rankin School of Flying. Dorothy's natural flying instincts and lack of fear was evident when Tex flew with her after several hours solo. Soon after, Dorothy was taught most of the dazzling aerobatic "stunts" for which Tex was noted, especially outside loops and inverted snap rolls. At age 19 Dorothy was the first woman known to have completed an outside loop.

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### **A NEW LEASE ON LIFE**

At its October 11, 1997, meeting the Oregon Aviation Museum board of directors authorized the signing of a lease with the Oregon Aeronautics Division for a parcel of land at the Cottage Grove Airport. The lease, effective January 1, 1998, is for the same site annexed into the City of Cottage Grove by OAM nearly two years ago in anticipation of construction of our storage and restoration hangar facility.

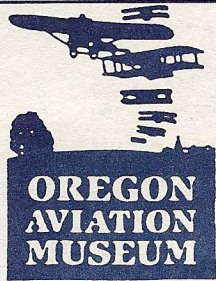
Prior to reaching the prior lease agreement, Aeronautics asked OAM to wait until the state had time to negotiate with a local developer who proposed to purchase the remote aircraft parking area on the west end of the airport. This area encompassed the parcel on which the Museum wished to build. The Museum agreed to the delay, realizing that the proposed development would have provided a positive impact for the area and the airport.

Late this summer, OAM was informed that talks between the developer and Aeronautics had terminated. We were immediately offered our original hangar site.

The Museum is in the process of determining the type of construction and projected costs. Plans call for an early spring groundbreaking with the shell to be constructed under contract. It is anticipated that interior improvements will, for the most part, be constructed by OAM members and volunteers.

This is a most historic event for the Oregon Aviation Museum. Never in its long existence has the Museum had a permanent "home." We can finally bring our artifact collection together under one roof.





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The Oregon Aviation Museum newsletter is published by the Museum (PO Box 553, Cottage Grove, OR 97424; email oamuseum@aol.com) for the benefit of its members. Editor is William Villani. Contributions by members are encouraged, but should in some way be related to Oregon aviation history.

# Random Flight

By Roger Starr

Thanks to OAM board member and Oregon Antique & Classic Aircraft Club president Hal Skinner, I was able to tag along on his coattail to the Columbia Aviation Association's May gala grand opening of their new home. Their effort in constructing the facility at the Aurora State Airport is indeed an inspiration. CAA (previously Columbia Aviation Country Club) has been located at Portland's International Airport since 1949. Members now agree that the Port of Portland's refusal to continue leasing property to the association was the proverbial blessing in disguise. The project has revitalized the existing membership and helped attract new members. They certainly have a home to point to with pride. Thanks Hal.

Thanks go out to Wilbur and Catherine Heath for transporting the Great Lakes project back home. Also thanks to Tim Talen for taking the Great Lakes to Roseburg for the Oregon Antique & Classic Aircraft Club's July fly-in.

As noted in this issue of the Newsletter, OAM has raised the funds necessary to acquire the Great Lakes. This effort would not have progressed so smoothly without the special time and energy contributed by Directors Allen Alsing, Art Lumley & Tim Talen and Member extraordinary Ron Bartley. It took less than a year for their fund raising plan to accumulate the \$8,000 purchase price, a truly remarkable feat. Thanks to all of you. A special thanks goes out to all those who made such generous contributions. Your confidence in this project is truly appreciated.

We now embark on the task of restoring this historic aircraft. It will be a long term project requiring a great deal of financial support. If you were unable to help with the purchase, please consider a donation to be used for the restoration. Checks can be mailed to the Museum address of PO Box 553, Cottage Grove, OR 97424. Please indicate that you wish the funds to be dedicated to the Great Lakes restoration. We will keep everyone informed of the progress on the project.

The building of our hanger at Cottage Grove is a project which I believe is the most important undertaking of the Museum to date. The Museum has never had a permanent home. It will allow us to properly store artifacts which I am sure will make donors more comfortable in allowing us to be the repository for even more historically significant items. You will be contacted for a pledge to assist with the building. Your directors have shown their support by pledging approximately one-half of the estimated construction costs. Please keep in mind, as the directors have, that this facility is key to the continued growth of OAM and the meeting of its goals.

## RANKIN BOOKS AVAILABLE

Walt Bohrer's excellent Tex Rankin biography *Black Cats and Outside Loops* is now available through the Museum. Long out of print, the volume offers an insightful look into the great stunt flier's life from the viewpoint of his longtime press agent. Packed with anecdotes, it's a great Christmas gift for that special flier friend.

To order your copy at the special price of \$27.95 (\$24.95 + \$3.00 shipping and handling) send your check to PO Box 553, Cottage Grove, OR 97424.

You may also call directors Elwood Hedberg, Allen Alsing, Tim Talen or Roger Starr to arrange delivery. OAM will also have a supply at the Oregon Air Fair in November.



## Great Lakes Purchased



Left to right - Ron Bartley, Tim Talen and Allen Alsing shown exchanging an \$8,000 check for 1931 Great Lakes biplane bill-of-sale at the October OAM board of directors meeting. Tim held temporary title until sufficient funds for the purchase could be raised. These three members plus, Art Lumley, carried out the fund raising effort. Thanks to Ron, Tim, Allen, Art and all those whose generous contributions made this acquisition possible.

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### HOLIDAY GIFT IDEAS

Special gifts for special friends are sometimes difficult to find. Why not consider giving a membership in the Oregon Aviation Museum to a fellow aviation history fan. For a minimum of \$35 for a one year membership, you can introduce someone to the only state-wide museum dedicated to Oregon's rich aviation history. If you wish, a special letter will be sent to the new member recognizing you as the gift giver.

Also available to those who saw the great Tex Rankin perform is a membership in the I Saw Tex Fly Club. The club members, now totaling 73, are recognized with a certificate and special historical photograph of Tex. The nominal membership fee of \$25 helps in the Museum's effort to

restore Tex Rankin's Great Lakes biplane, N315Y.

To purchase either of these memberships, simply send a card to the Museum's address, PO Box 553, Cottage Grove, OR 97424, or call one of the directors listed on page two of the newsletter. On that same page, look for another great gift item!



### Oregon Aviation Hall of Fame Established

Oregon has produced many distinguished aviators over the years. Sadly, the accomplishments of many have gone relatively unrecognized, even in their own home state.

Now, however, this may be about to change. By a vote of the museum board, an Oregon Aviation Hall of Fame has been established and copyrighted. This hall will enshrine those Oregonians who have achieved prominence in Oregon and national aviation history.

Plans for the Hall of Fame are still being developed at this time. Watch this space for future developments.



See the Great Lakes at the  
***OREGON AIR FAIR***

November 15 and 16, 1997

***- Oregon Convention Center -***

**FREE ADMISSION**

9 to 5 daily

The museum will have the Great Lakes on display with other artifacts and displays to interpret the stories behind two of the state's most noted fliers, Tex Rankin and Dorothy Hester. Copies of Walt Bohrer's Rankin biography, *Black Cats and Outside Loops*, will be available for purchase. And board members will be on hand to discuss progress of the hangar project.

So don't miss it - and be sure to bring a friend!

*Oregon Aviation Museum  
PO Box 553  
Cottage Grove, OR 97424*

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED