We're breaking ground!

OAM will break ground on its new restoration hangar at Cottage Grove on Saturday, March 14, 1997. This will be in conjunction with the annual meeting. All members are encouraged to attend this historic and long-awaited event.

The day will start with a no-host lunch at the Village Green Inn’s Cascadia Dining Room. (The Village Green is located across from the Cottage Grove Airport and is easily accessible from the I-5 freeway.) This will begin at 11:30. All members and their guests are welcome.

A presentation will then be made (approximately 1PM) by board member Tim Talen. Tim will discuss the history of the Museum's recently-acquired Great Lakes biplane and its connection with Tex Rankin and Dorothy Hester. Rare vintage film will highlight Tim's program.

Immediately following Tim's presentation, the meeting will adjourn to the future hangar site where the groundbreaking will be celebrated.

Please mark this on your calendar and plan to attend. This represents a great step forward for our museum.

Board member Tim Talen will speak on the history of the Museum's Great Lakes at the annual meeting.

Memories of Tex (quotes from the I Saw Tex Fly Club Members)

"I was held in mouth-gaping awe."
"I recollect his amazing control and precision aerobatics I did not believe could be done in any airplane."
"I remember Tex flying through the hangar upside down in his Great Lakes trainer."
"Tex Rankin was about 50 years old but he did things with his plane that I didn't think could be done. He was still a "young" pilot."
Random Flight

By Roger Starr

I am delighted to announce that the ground-breaking ceremony for our hangar will take place directly following the annual meeting of the members on March 14, 1998. Please make a special effort to attend both events that day. As always, guests and prospective members are welcome. In addition to enjoying a very interesting and unusual program, you will be able to look at the current detailed plans for the building and be brought up to date on other museum happenings.

One of the premier events for the OAM is our participation at the Oregon Air Fair. We are indebted to the Northwest Aviation Association for again providing us an excellent exhibit area at the Oregon Convention Center this past November. We were also very fortunate to have an article published in the official Air Fair program. The article, written by Ron Bartley, introduced Air Fair participants to Tex Rankin, Dorothy Hester and their Great Lakes, NC315Y. The partially-restored fuselage and tail surfaces were the focal point of our presentation. Thanks to all of the members who helped bring Oregon aviation history and this airplane with such a colorful past to the attention of Air Fair attendees.

The response to our recent request for pledges for the storage and restoration hangar fell short of expectations. It is not too late to make your commitment. If you need a pledge form or have any questions, please contact myself or any director. This is a very significant undertaking for your museum in its effort to preserve Oregon’s varied and rich aviation history. Thanks to all who have made a comment of support.

I wish to thank Paul Meyerhoff for accepting the recent invitation to join our board of directors. Paul is the former Aeronautics Administrator for Oregon and previously was the executive director of the Anchorage and Fairbanks International Airports. He is currently the director of corporate development for the Pape’ Group, Inc. in Eugene. Paul’s experience and many accomplishments will make him a valued member of the board.

RANKIN BOOKS STILL AVAILABLE

Walt Bohrer’s excellent Tex Rankin biography Black Cats and Outside Loops is still 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 value for the money.

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 or inquire at the annual meeting.
A Flight in Time

By Ron Bartley

On the morning of May 22, 1931, a flight of three Great Lakes biplanes took off from the grass strip of the Lakes Aircraft Company factory in Cleveland, Ohio, and headed west for Portland, Oregon. For the three pilots it must have been an exciting and unforgettable moment. They had safely taken off from the small field surrounded by factories and houses, and the days of waiting for the two new Great Lakes to be completed were finally over. The 2,400-mile cross-country flight was underway.

The youngest of the pilot trio was 19-year-old Robert Hofer, flying his new 2T-1A Sport Trainer NC11129. (Hofer is third from the left in the adjacent photo, taken at the 1931 Cleveland Air Races. The others are Col. E. Hofer, Dorothy Hester, and Tex Rankin.) It was his first long, solo cross-country and the first of many transcontinental flights he would make, in later years flying more modern aircraft.

The second new Great Lakes was NC315Y, which was being flown by Dorothy Hester. With its tan fuselage and orange wings it was nearly identical in appearance to sister NC11129, but its structure had been built to withstand high-stress aerobatic maneuvers. Dorothy was rapidly becoming the nation’s premier woman aerobatic pilot, and had recently set new women’s records for outside loops and inverted snap rolls. Recognizing Dorothy’s amazing aerobatic accomplishments, the Great Lakes Aircraft Company had just presented her with a gift - NC315Y.

The third pilot from Portland was, of course, Tex Rankin, founder of the Rankin School of Flying where both Robert and Dorothy had recently learned to fly. Tex was also a nationally-known “stunt” pilot, and Dorothy’s aerobatic instructor as well. The identity of the Great Lakes Tex flew is not definitely known.

The first three days of the trip home were relatively uneventful. Overnight stops were made at Chicago, Omaha, and Cheyenne. Flying west from Cheyenne they found their route through the Medicine Bow Mountains blocked by clouds and fog. For more than an hour, with Tex in the lead, they circled, trying to find an opening or a place to land. Finally they glimpsed an opening through a narrow canyon with meager clearance on each side of the wings. Tex went through, followed by Dorothy. As she flew through the pass her altitude increased. Engulfed in clouds, she was no longer visible to her fellow pilots.

A concerned Robert continued to circle, but soon decided to go through and see if Dorothy had come down on the other side. He found Tex’s plane all alone. Where was Dorothy? Tex flew back through the canyon to look for her, but soon returned. At that moment they saw Dorothy’s plane through a break in the clouds two miles away. Shortly they all landed at an emergency field to appraise their situation, and to collect their thoughts. It was an emotional experience not to be forgotten.

They arrived at Twin Falls, Idaho that evening, after spending eight noisy, windy, and sometimes cold hours in their open cockpits. The next day they arrived in Portland after landings at Boise, La Grande, and The Dalles. Their ground speed for the 2,400 mile trip averaged about 75 mph.

A few days later, Dorothy was honored at a reception and banquet at the Swan Island Airport with her gift Great Lakes biplane appropriately displayed. Robert Hofer and Dorothy Hester married three years later.

It is interesting to look back in time and try to imagine the hardship, danger, and spirit of adventure of early-day aviation. Certainly there is little to compare with today’s world of high-speed aircraft loaded with electronic flight equipment. Yet, Robert Hofer’s biplane is still in existence. Dorothy’s Great Lakes, NC315Y, became a famous aerobatic show plane when later owned and flown by Tex Rankin, and others, before it was nearly destroyed.

Dorothy’s NC315Y makes a guest appearance at the Oregon Air Fair this past November.

at a Pennsylvania airshow in 1968. Now owned by the OAM, and with the assistance of a generous air-minded public, it will fly again.

Please contact the Museum if you would like to help.

The writer would like to thank Robert and Jeannette Hofer for their hospitality and for providing information for this article.
Memories of Tex

More quotes from the “I Saw Tex Fly Club”:

“He was a fun guy and the big deal was to fly from Eugene to Springfield in formation. The only thing I remember of the flight was that Tex flew all the way upside down.”

“I heard Tex as he apologized for running out of smoke as he was showing the assembled group the finest and most complicated aerobatic demonstration I have ever seen.”

“At a Tulare demonstration, the engine would quit, inverted in a low-level 4 point roll. He kept repeating until he was able to complete the maneuver.”

“As a 17-year-old president of our model flying club I invited Tex to meet with our club. He came to our house where he spoke with some 8 or 10 members. He seemed right at home and we were all thrilled that such a celebrity would meet with us.”

This display board telling Tex’s story was prominently featured at the Oregon Air Fair in November.

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