

# Oregon Aviation Historical Society

Newsletter

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## Eyerly Flies into Hall of Fame

By William Villani

When Lee Eyerly was inducted into the Oregon Aviation Hall of Fame at the Oregon Air Fair at Albany on September 15, it brought recognition to one of the most diversified and remarkable aviation careers in the state's history.

Eyerly was born February 22, 1892 in Illinois. The boy, a natural tinkerer, found some outlet for his mechanical inclinations when his family moved to the plains of Montana in his youth. Farms of the day offered many machines and gadgets to meddle with, but not enough, for in 1911 young Lee traveled to California to spend time at Dominguez Field. Here he was introduced to the early aviators of the era and their stick-and-fabric machines.

Stuck with the flying bug but unfortunately lacking the resources to pursue it, Eyerly returned to the cowtown of Hobson, Montana to set up his own auto shop. He continued to experiment, however, with gliders and, reportedly, at least one homebuilt. Eyerly then moved to Salem, where he had a job driving for State Engineer Nunn and also founded the city's first greasing station, which he named the "Grease Spot."

Local barnstormer Elmer Cook introduced him to the ubiquitous Curtiss Jenny in 1920 and there was no letting down from there. After three hours of instruction costing a princely \$100, Eyerly soloed.

Aviation adventure was put on hold when Eyerly moved to Waldport for family reasons. There he operated a ferry-boat service and a garage. But the Willamette Valley still called and it was here that Eyerly was to make his mark upon Oregon's aviation history.

Returning to Salem in October 1927, Eyerly set up a flying school and repair shop named the Pacific Airplane Service. He also lobbied city fathers hard for Salem's need for a modern flying field. It helped bear fruit as a \$50,000 levy was passed and, with the backing of the American Legion (which was an important force in getting airfields built in the state) what would become McNary Field was soon dedicated.

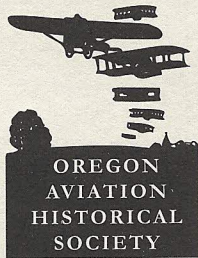
Eyerly had modern ideas for building airplanes and came up with an advanced design, a three-place cabin monoplane that was the first successful modern type to be designed and built in the state. It flew in 1928. The craft was to be short-lived, however. While attending a pioneer celebration in Eugene in July 1929 there was a crash during a balloon-busting competition. Eyerly was left with a broken arm and cracked ribs.

Undaunted by the setback, Eyerly returned to Salem and designed and built a number of planes that expanded on his original concept. One of the most notable was the Whiffle Hen, a high-wing cabin job that reportedly featured an early



Lee Eyerly (Eyerly Family Trust photo)

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## RANDOM FLIGHT

BY ROGER STARR

For those of you who have followed the long and arduous task of planning and constructing the History Center, it may have seemed as long as Oregon aviation history itself! When I reflect on the progress and discussions leading up to its construction, there is no way we could have envisioned all of the benefits such a facility has brought.

Our main focus was on having a "home": someplace to store and preserve the collection, prepare displays, and plan for the future. We certainly knew that a physical presence would help legitimize the organization, hopefully attracting new members and artifacts. It has done all this and more. The "more" is the unexpected utilization of the Center by other groups. This summer there were three major fly-in activities and a group overnight stop at our facility. All of these events have garnered positive exposure for OAHS. For those who worked so hard in helping construct the History Center, thanks once again. Your commitment will help pay dividends for a very long time.

From both personal observation and reports, the participants at these events have been very impressed with the History Center. And they should! There are not very many airports with shower facilities available. And we have two of the newest!

We now have a website. Take a look at [www.oregonaviationhistoricalsociety.com](http://www.oregonaviationhistoricalsociety.com). It is currently under construction and will become more interesting as new items are added. Thanks to webmaster Preston White for his efforts in what promises to be a most impressive site. Your suggestions for enhancements are encouraged.

The website has already generated one very interesting contact. Through a search, a Central Point man tracked me down to inquire about our 1935 Stinson SR-5E currently being restored by Rex Hume of Williams. (Your geography lesson for today is to locate Williams!) This man was thrilled since his father owned that very airplane during the 1950's. He has pictures of the aircraft during that period and, if we treat him real nice, perhaps he will provide some personal recollections of him and his father flying the family Stinson.

## LETTERS

Dear Mr. Starr,

I read Wendell Davenport's "I Saw Tex Fly over Oakland" (*Newsletter* April 2000) with interest, because he remembered things that happened with clarity, and also things that didn't. Undoubtedly he was there, but in the paragraph beginning with Roger Don Rae he seems to be confusing pilots and planes with events that took place elsewhere, like Detroit or Cleveland, or not at all.

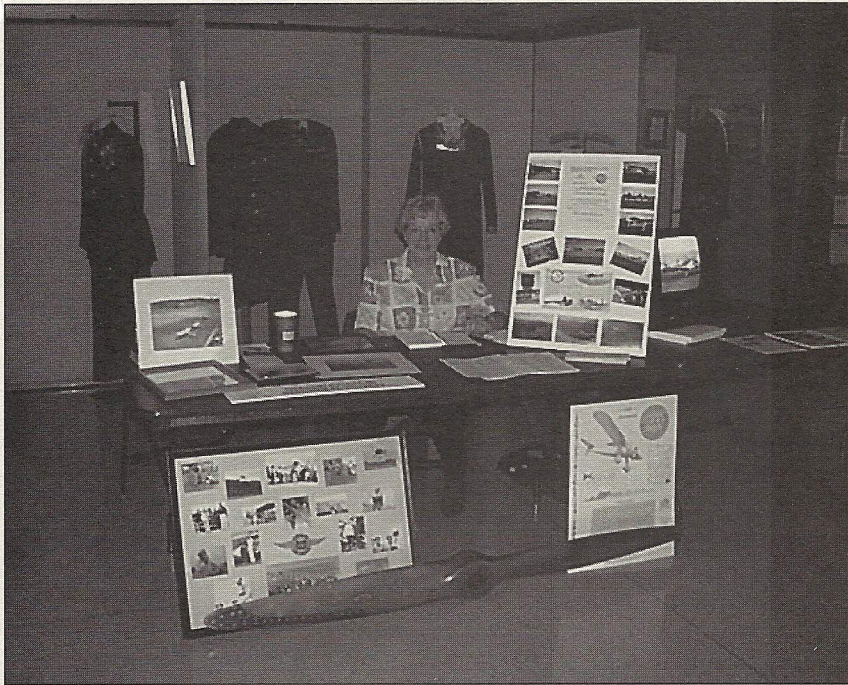
Tony Le Vier never flew the "Goon," which had not yet flown. Crosby was there, but he was flying only *Pilot* magazine's Aeronca KC, because he had not yet finished his racer. Don Rae was not racing either, and the Folkerts Special was flown by Gus Gotch with tragic results.

The OAK event was a bust for almost everyone involved. One fatality before it even started and two more on Saturday and Sunday, the day Davenport remembered, which was when Mike Murphy crunched his J-2 Cub and Mikey Morgan was injured. It was also a disaster for the promoters, who ended up bankrupt.

Tex Rankin demanded his fee in cash each day and sat on the office floor counting it out in stacks of dollar bills collected at the gate. Others didn't get paid at all.

Sincerely,

John Underwood  
Glendale, CA



***OAHS Out-And-About***  
*OAHS could be seen at the Oregon State Capitol in Salem for Aviation Day on May 29. This was a joint effort between OAHS and the Oregon Antique and Classic Aircraft Club, coordinated by Tom Bedell. Here Gretchen Bencene can be seen spreading the word about the Society at our booth. Thanks, Gretchen!*

## ***Wish List***

*Please review the list below for any item(s) you may be able to donate, or offer leads for a contribution. Thanks!*

- Small Milling Machine
- Shop Cabinets
- Golf Cart/Tow Tug
- Planer/Jointer - 6"
- Toolbox/Rollaway
- Chain Hoist/I-Beam/Trolley
- Portable Air Tank
- Portable Tool/Parts Cart
- Solvent Spray Gun
- Drop Work Lights (2)
- Metal Shear
- Metal Brake
- English Wheel (or kit)
- Carpet Vacuum
- Small Riding Mower

## ***I Saw Tex Fly News***

*By Ron Bartley*

It is interesting to note that this year marks the 70th "birthday" of our Great Lakes, N315Y. On the morning of May 22, 1931, with Dorothy Hester at the controls, N315Y departed the Great Lakes factory in Cleveland, Ohio and headed for Portland.

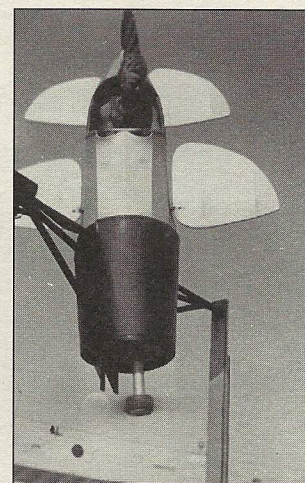
Accompanying Dorothy, each in their own Great Lakes biplane, was Robert Hofer and Tex Rankin. After four long, noisy, and windy days in their open cockpits, they arrived in Portland.

It seems rather remarkable that a 70-year-old airplane that languished for several years in a Pennsylvania junkyard will take to the sky again. When N315Y is restored it will be possible for today's airshow fans to see one of the most famous aerobatic aircraft of early-day aviation. What a shame that Dorothy and Tex are no longer around to see it. *(Photo: Dorothy, Tex and N315Y at the Great Lakes Factory, 1931. Courtesy of Jeannette and Robert Hofer, 1998.)*





Wiffle Hen (OAHS Collection)



Aeroplane (Eyerly Family Trust)

## Eyerly

(Continued from page 1)

tricycle landing gear in its original configuration. The name was derived from a character in the "Popeye" comic strip who, not spinach, was the original source of the title character's muscular prowess. Due to the economic conditions of the Great Depression, however, only two were built.

Eyerly's designs had been aeronautical, but not financial, successes due to the Depression. Prosperity was to come via another avenue. In 1931 Eyerly had designed a device for his flying school that simulated flight conditions while remaining on the ground. It was a forerunner of the Link machine and the flight simulators in use today. Many persons sought amusement to take their minds off the miserable economic conditions of the time, so it made sense to convert the device into a midway attraction. Named the "Acroplane" (seen at right), it soon became a staple at carnivals and fairs across the land.

The Acroplane was followed by the Roll-O-Plane, the Loop-O-Plane, and the Octopus, among others. They offered decades of entertainment to people worldwide.

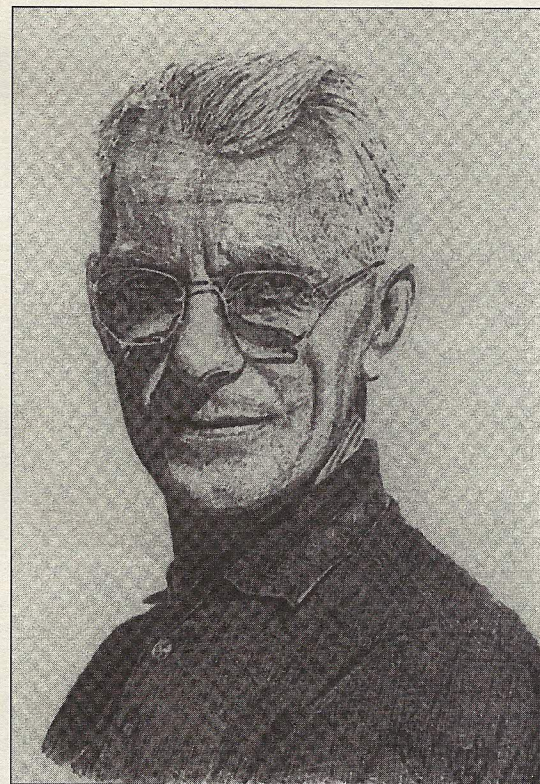
Eyerly continued to fly and his career continued to be enlivened by adventures. With three other men he ditched a Stinson in foggy San Francisco Bay when the engine quit. They were fortunate to be picked up by the ferryboat *Mendocino*, ironic in that the former ferryboat operator was now rescued by one. And he took in a 12-year-old girl as a flying student, which attracted much media attention. That girl successfully completed her training and now resides in Washington State.

Eyerly also served as a member of the Oregon State Board of Aeronautics from 1930 to 1958. Other activities involved operating the Flying E Dude Ranch in Wickenburg, Arizona, and owning a mobile home park. Eyerly had experience building mobile homes as early as the 1920's.

Lee U. Eyerly passed away March 23, 1963 at the age of 71 after a battle with cancer. He left a long list of accomplishments that truly establish him as a pioneer of Oregon aviation history.

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Lee Eyerly - Oregon Pioneer Aviator  
1955 pen and ink drawing by Ray Eyerly

## UNDER FOREIGN FLAGS

By William Villani

Over the years a number of Oregon pilots have traveled overseas to wear the uniforms of foreign air arms, or to fly alongside them on detached service. Most of these were anxious to get into the fight of the time and hesitant to wait for the U.S. to become involved. The following are a few examples.

World War I was truly an international effort and drew a number of American enlistees to the service of the combatants. One of these was Portlander Stanley Glendenning, who enlisted with the Canadians and spent two years flying reconnaissance missions over the front. Unfortunately, he survived the perils of combat to be killed in 1918 while instructing students in Ontario.

At least three other Oregonians flew with Allied WWI forces on detached service. Reed graduate George Marion Kyle flew Breguet 14 bombers with France's Lafayette Flying Corps after transferring from the ambulance service. 2nd Lt. Newell C. Barber of Medford also flew the bulky Breguet and received the Croix de Guerre while on loan to the French, but disappeared in the midst of a battle on August 11, 1918. To honor him, Medford dedicated its new airfield as Newell Barber Field in 1920. His name appears on the Tablet of the Missing at the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery in France.

Another Oregonian, Vere Windnagle, went to Italy to fly an aerial behemoth of the time, the Caproni Ca450. He was one of approximately 400-450 Americans (Foggiani) who were trained at Foggia's 8th Aviation Instruction Center, but unfortunately fell foul of the Italian bureaucracy and the Caproni's disreputable servicability. This led to limited combat opportunities for all involved. In later years he was a coach and vice principal at Washington High School.

World War II saw Yamhill County's Ken Jernstedt leave for service in China with the American Volunteer Group (Flying Tigers), where he became an ace. Also serving the Nationalist Chinese was Portland's Arthur Chin, a former pupil of Al Greenwood's who achieved ace status flying Curtis Hawks and Gloster Gladiators against the Japanese. Chin's combat career came to an end when he was shot down and terribly burned on December 27, 1940.

Portland's Chinese community was so taken with Chin's exploits that they raised funds to purchase a fighter to get him back in the air. Instead the ace instructed that the funds be used to acquire three new T-6 trainers. These were then used by Chinese students at Arizona's Luke Field.

Other Oregon boys headed north to enlist with the Royal Canadian Air Force. Probably the most successful was the aptly-named Thomas Ace White, a native of Hillsboro. White reportedly saw European combat in Spitfires before being transferred back to Canada in an instructor's role. Preferring to return to combat, White switched to the USAAF and claimed 6 German fighters flying P-38's with the 82nd Fighter Group's 97th FS.

Another enlistee with the Canadians was Grants Pass' young John Huddleston, who went north in 1941 at the age of 17. Son of a San Diego Navy man, Huddleston returned to Grants Pass for a visit in 1943 with his British friend Frederick Cross. Cross related to a Grants Pass *Daily Courier* reporter a previous visit to

the community while on a hitchhiking trip. At that time the residents had mistaken his dark blue RAF uniform for a Greyhound bus driver's outfit.

Unfortunately Huddleston's war came to an end April 15, 1944 in England.

While assigned to 1664 Heavy Conversion Unit as a wireless operator/gunner, his Halifax EB203 plunged to earth and disintegrated two miles south of Ripon, Yorkshire. The entire crew was killed. Huddleston's friend Sgt. Cross also died in the same time period. WOP/AG Huddleston is buried in Stonefall Cemetery, Wetherby Road, Harrogate, Yorkshire. He is one who did not return to these shores. (Photo courtesy Yorkshire Air Museum.)



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- With thanks to Geoffrey Negus, Phil Richart, and the Yorkshire Air Museum, England.

## Of Sabres and Such



Oregon has seen a number of F-86 Sabres over the years. The Air National Guard once operated the type, and several Oregon fliers distinguished themselves over MiG Alley during the Korean War while piloting NAA's product. Notable examples were Felix Asla and Clyde Curtin.

It follows that the state would be a haven for several surviving examples of the early jet fighter. Most of the display examples have been the radar-nosed "D" or "L" variants. As an aircraft spotter, the Editor has attempted to keep tabs on these planes, and what follows is a brief rundown. Of course there are still a lot of questions - and information would be welcome.

While we're on the subject of jets, does anyone out there know what an F5D Skylancer is doing on the ramp at Ontario? - *WFV*

**F-86A, serial number unknown** - reportedly displayed at Roseburg into the 1970's. Did this one go to Ben Hall of Seattle in exchange for an F-86E? Anyone out there have a photo?

**F-86L**, once on display at Bob Sturges' Troutdale operation. I've seen pictures of this one but never with a serial. Is it still around? Another **F-86L** was noted by the author on the line at Ontario this year in company with the below Skylancer, among others. Idaho ANG markings.

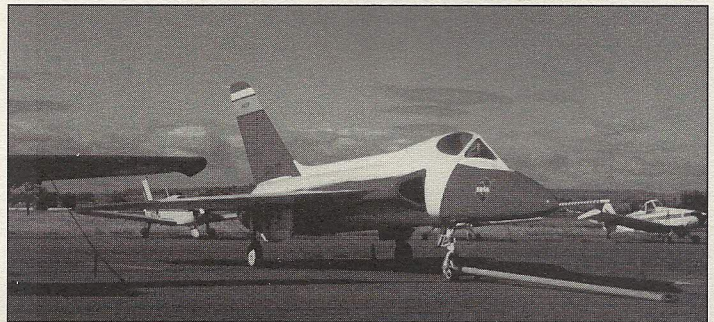
**51-3024**, listed in Leslie Hunt's *Veteran and Vintage Aircraft* (Scribner's; Great Britain 1974) as being at Astoria. Anyone know what became of this bird?

**51-6055**- On display at Albany for many years. Rescued and in good health at Hill AFB, Utah.

**51-8467** - Listed by Hunt as being on display in Corvallis. Again, what happened?

**53-781** (left, author photo) - Still on display in Vale behind a fence, which protects the plane but makes photography very difficult! In Idaho ANG markings.

**53-838** - Listed in Hunt as being on display in Portland during the 1970's.



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