

Oregon Aviation Historical Society

Newsletter

Vol. 15 No. 3

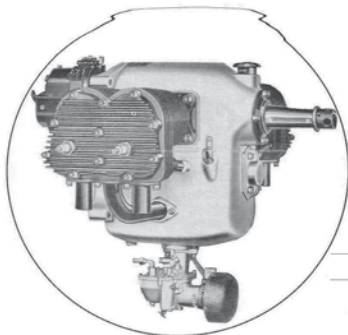
• P.O. Box 553 • Cottage Grove, OR 97424 •

December 2006

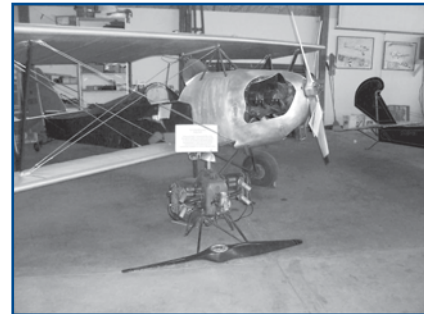
Original Engine and Propeller Donated for Oregon Bi-plane

By Tim Talen

Oregon Aviation Historical Society has just received a wonderful donation from Eugene resident David France – the original engine for the 1931 McManiman “Springfield Cadet” biplane. This is a very early production Continental A-40 engine and shows the initial stages of engine development that the A-40 went through during its production run from 1931-1938. The A-40 serial numbers started at 100 (this one is s/n 175) and as many as 2500 of these engines were built. During the depression years the availability of low cost horsepower spurred production of many light airplanes and as many as 12 different designs were certified with the Continental A-40 engine along with many Oregon homebuilts and other one of a kind experimental designs. Chet Peek, in his book “Flying with 40 Horses”, states: All the developments in aircraft engines would not have been possible without the little Continental A-40 to lead the way. It’s introduction in 1931 represented an historical milestone in American Aviation. For more than 6 years it remained alone on the scene, the only practical powerplant available to the low-horsepower market. Together with the Cubs and Taylorcraft it powered, the A-40 lifted those eager young pilots of the 1930’s into the air. It deserves a special place in our aviation history.



CONTINENTAL A-40



The “Springfield Cadet” with original A-40 engine and propeller awaiting installation

Also included with the engine is the propeller for it and the first Oregon license plate issued to the plane in 1931! Our thanks to David France for his generous donation.

Great Lakes Restoration Activity

By Tim Talen

Progress on Tex Rankin’s Great Lakes has been focused on bringing the tail surfaces to a ‘ready to cover’ stage. This included completion of the hinges and attach points for the control surfaces. Another big step was to complete the trim mechanism unit and it’s installation in the fuselage. Work will continue on the control system – specifically installing controls in the front cockpit with the eventual goal of getting the fuselage ready to cover. The 4 wing panels and ailerons have been covered and within the next several weeks the tail surfaces should be all in fabric. Thanks to all who have contributed and volunteered in this effort.



Tim displays the finished horizontal tail pieces



Board of Directors

Roger Starr, President
Canby (503) 266-4282

Wilbur Heath, Vice-President
Cottage Grove (541) 942-2567

Tom Bedell, Secretary
Philomath (541) 929-5598

Gretchen Bencene, Treasurer
Philomath (541) 929-5598

Bill Austin
Roseburg (541) 679-7276

Ray Costello
Corvallis (541) 745-5175

Albert (Al) Grell
Tangent (541) 928-7068

Jan Hedberg
Corvallis (541) 754-7315

Rex Hume
Williams (541) 846-6620

Doug Kindred
Eugene (541) 687-9490

Hal Skinner
Springfield (541) 746-3387

Tim Talen
Springfield (541) 746-6572

Tom Urban
Springfield (541) 741-4117

Annette Whittington
Creswell (541) 895-3910

Lloyd Williams
Cottage Grove (541) 942-1268

The OAHS Newsletter is published by the Society (PO Box 553, Cottage Grove, OR 97424) and edited by Hal Skinner for the benefit of the members. Member contributions are welcome but should relate to Oregon aviation history. Contents © 2006 OAHS.

www.oregonaviation.org

RANDOM FLIGHT

By Roger Starr

Thanks to all of you who helped make 2006 a very successful year for your Society. We hope you will continue your support for next year. If you have not already done so, please take time to respond to the letter I sent earlier this month by renewing your membership and/or making a contribution to OAHS. Can not find the letter? Just use the form below.

OAHS has agreed to a five-year lease with the Oregon Department of Aviation in anticipation of building a second facility planned to exhibit the Society's growing collection of artifacts. The property is located just west of the current History Center and "tower lawn" and would provide additional space for an office and gift shop. The Board is presently considering a fund raising and construction plan.

Should you have any questions or comments regarding the Society, we would be pleased to hear from you. In the mean time, I wish the best to you for 2007.



Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year From the OAHS Board of Directors

Join the OAHS!

If you're not yet a member, we invite you to join the Society in its efforts to preserve and celebrate Oregon Aviation History. Fill in the blanks and return to: OR Aviation Historical Society
PO Box 553 • Cottage Grove, OR 97424

Contributor - \$100 Sustaining - \$50 Family - \$35 Associate - \$25

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____ Home Phone (____) _____ - _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Current/Former Occupation _____

I am Interested in Volunteering _____

Skills and Interests _____

2006 OREGON AVIATION HALL OF FAME

Three native Oregonians who have made significant contributions to aircraft homebuilding were inducted into the Oregon Aviation Hall of Fame at the Columbia Aviation Association clubhouse on the Aurora Airport. Sixty-six people were in attendance for the October 8th reception, luncheon and induction ceremonies. George Bogardus, Leslie Long and Richard VanGrunsvan were honored at “The Year of the Oregon Homebuilder” event. A narration and Power Point program of historic photographs was presented on each inductee.



Stan Long, Christine Long Plunkett, Dean Sigler
And Dick VanGrunsvan with Harlequin engine

Accepting the posthumous award for George Bogardus was his long time friend, Dean Sigler and Stanton Long and Christine Long Plunkett accepted for their father, Leslie Long. Dick VanGrunsvan was present to accept his award. Also present were 14 members of the Long family and nine VanGrunsvan family members.



Attendees enjoying luncheon

Several artifacts attributed to the inductees were on display and a flyover of RVs arranged by members of EAA Chapter 105 brought attendees outside the building to watch the formation demonstration and the taxi and parking with the aircraft propellers all stopping in unison. A tarmac display of Van’s Aircraft line of RVs and George Bogardus’ recently restored Little Gee Bee, since shipped to the Smithsonian Air & Space museum, were great additions for all to see. Inside the building was one of Les Longs’ Harlequin engines and two of his hand-carved propellers.



Bogardus Little Gee Bee



Van's Aircraft line up

EUGENE’S “SWEET” AVIATION HISTORY

By Mike Saunders

A Eugene Register Guard reporter in the ‘40s wrote, “The history of Eugene’s aviation is almost the history of Mahlon Sweet.” It was a fair assessment then, and remains hard to dispute today.

Born in Western Springs, Illinois in 1886, Sweet came to Eugene in 1909 to attend the University of Oregon. In 1913 he joined a Eugene Studebaker dealership. He loved machines and was fortunate to live in the heyday of America’s fascination for cars. At a time when it took two days to drive to McKenzie Bridge, he became the first person to take an automobile over the McKenzie Pass.

“I drove before there roads,” he used to say.

It was only fitting that Sweet was on hand when a Canadian “Jenny”, piloted by a man named Hoagland, landed in a pasture near Friendly Street in the spring of 1918. The pilot had flown non-stop from Mather Field in California.

In 1919, Sweet was named chairman of the Eugene Chamber of Commerce Aviation Committee. That year, at his urging, Eugene’s first municipal airport was established, the Eugene Air Park. It was the first municipally owned airport on the West Coast.

The Air Park was located on Chambers Street, and in later years was also known as the Chambers Street Airport.

The first airplane to be bought locally was purchased by R.A. McCully and R.H. Pierce. The two men operated commercially for two years, charging \$15 for a 15-minute ride.

Sweet, along with his friend and fellow aviation enthusiast, E.C. Simmons, organized Eugene’s first air show. On July 4, 1919, Lt. James Krull, “one of the best stunt flyers in the service,” thrilled the citizens by doing aerobatics and buzzing the Independence Day Parade on Willamette Street.

Lyle Bryson, a Eugene Daily Guard reporter, went for a 30-minute ride with Lt. Krull, and gave this account:

Skinnners Butte looked perfectly level with its old “O” sparkling in the Sunshine. Zip, pop, pop sang the little machine and we bounced into the famous Immelman Turn. I grasped the sides of the machine firmly, my eyes bugged out and for a moment I was in a state of semi collapse.

Lt. Krull and his 90-horse-powered Curtiss bi-plane were very popular with the general public. “Small boys forgot their business of shooting off firecrackers”, and men recently home from the war in France “champed at their bits” as they watched Krull go through his maneuvers. At the end of his performance, Krull took several additional riders, including Oregon’s governor, Ben Olcott, who hitched a free ride to Salem.

In the early 1920s Eugene was home base for the Forest Patrol, a group of Regular Army flyers on loan to the Forest Service commanded by H.H. “Hap” Arnold. Arnold was a five-star general in World War II, and the commander of the Army air corps.

Arnold and Sweet became close friends. Years later, near the end of World War II when the U.S president ordered the general to take a rest from the strain of commanding the largest air force on earth, General Arnold came to Eugene and was whisked away in secret by Mahlon Sweet. They went to Sweet’s cabin on the McKenzie for a few days of fishing before returning to combat.

The Forest Patrol flyers were well known in Eugene. They moved about in the community circles, visited homes and generally enjoyed themselves. One of these men, Lowell Smith, commanded the first airplane flight around the world.

The first circumnavigational flight of an aircraft around the earth excited the imagination of the civilized world, and was first conceived in Eugene, Oregon.

As far as the government and national media were concerned, the official starting point of the trip was Seattle. But for the flyers, the air park on Chambers Street was the beginning.

The ships were bi-planes, built special-order for the Army by Douglas Aircraft. Thirty-six feet from prop to tail, they had wingspans of 50 feet, and 12-cylinder, 450-horsepower Liberty engines. Their names were the Seattle, the New Orleans, the Boston, and the Chicago.

It was a cold April in 1924, and while the world waited for Seattle to launch the great adventure, the flyers tuned and overhauled their machines at the Eugene Air Park. On the morning set for departure, the cold engines refused to start. These planes didn’t have electric starters, and the propellers had to be spun by hand to turn the engines over. Mahlon Sweet recalls the incident:

“I said I could fix that so I jumped into my car and dashed back to the shop and got a small can of ether and dumped it into the exhaust and the engines roared. In doing this I had to remove a little

gadget and when I got done he reached down and took a screwdriver out of my hand. He said, "That's a pretty handy little tool; I'll just take it along."

Sweet's screwdriver was returned 172 days and 26,245 miles later. The four airplanes flew north to Seattle, stopped for the official beginning, then continued north to Alaska. The lead plane, the Seattle, crashed into an Alaskan mountain. Major Rodrick Martin and Lt. Alva Harvey were missing for 10 days, they walked to Point Moller, Alaska. The remaining three planes flew across Alaska, down the Aleutians to Japan, across Asia to Europe, and across the North Atlantic via Scotland, Iceland and Greenland.

The Boston sank off Iceland, but Lts. Leigh Wade and Henry Ogden were rescued by the Navy, and the Boston II soon rejoined the flight. The New Orleans was flown by Lts. Lowell Smith and Leslie Arnold. The Chicago was piloted by Lts. Eric Nelson and John Harding.

When the three remaining aircraft returned to Eugene on September 27, 1924, they were greeted by Sweet, Mayor Earl Simmons, the governor, and 8,000 spectators – the largest crowd ever assembled in Eugene for any event. According to one account, "The procession of automobiles coming to the air park was a mile long, bumper to bumper, and raised a cloud of dust that looked like an approaching army."

The flyers were honored at a sell-out banquet at the Palm Room of the Osborn Hotel, and nothing was too good for them. The McDonald Theater, then under construction, was known as the Lowell Theater for some time, and the Lowell Apartments on the same block also bore the popular pilot's name.

During the following years the Eugene Air Park continued to be very busy. Pacific Air Transport (later the United Airlines) organized in the late '20s, and while Eugene was only an emergency stop during bad weather, their ships used it regularly. Mr. and Mrs.

Sweet had personal acquaintances with the flyers.

In 1927 Charles Lindbergh, on his tour of the country after his historic non-stop flight from New York to Paris, flew low and performed stunts over the city.

By 1939, Mahlon Sweet convinced city officials that Eugene needed a larger, more modern airfield. A section of land was purchased north of the city, west of Highway 99, and work began on the new airport in 1941.

May 1, 1943, was declared Eugene Aviation Day, and 8,500 spectators turned out to witness the new airport's dedication. Four North American B-25

bombers from the command of General "Jimmy" Doolittle thundered in for a landing and when they left, the crowd cheered and waved as the Star Spangled Banner played through a loudspeaker.

When the first commercial airline, a United Airlines DC-3, landed in Eugene, Mrs. Elisha Large, wife of Eugene's mayor, christened it the City of

Eugene and cracked a bottle of champagne over the nose gear. The crowd applauded, photographers snapped their photos, and when the plane soared away, its cargo included three "redside" trout packed in ice to be delivered to General "Hap" Arnold from Mahlon Sweet.

Ten days later, on May 11, 1943, the airport was named Mahlon Sweet Field, marking the first time in history that the Army named an airport for a person still living. Sweet accepted the honor and continued to be the leading supporter of aviation in the community. He was named Eugene's first citizen in 1945, then on Christmas Eve, 1947, he died. Indeed, "The history of Eugene's aviation is almost the history of Mahlon Sweet."

This article, printed by notification, first appeared in March/April 1984 Lane County Living, no longer in publication.



Mahlon Sweet (foreground) with Dorothy Hester and Gladys Lidykie seated in a Stanley Steamer with a Great Lakes bi-plane in the background

- BOOKS FOR SALE -

“Black Cats and Outside Loops”

By Walt Bohrer

The story of Tex Rankin as told by one who flew and worked with him from 1928 until Tex's death in 1947.

\$25.00 plus \$5.00 shipping and handling

**“Vern Gorst and the
Pacific Air Transport Air Mail”**

By Ron Bartley

A well research account of early West Coast air mail and Vern's Yukon Territory experiences. Includes many photographs.

\$30.00 plus \$5.00 shipping and handling

Order from: OAHS P.O. Box 553 Cottage Grove, Oregon 97424

**Oregon Aviation Historical Society
PO Box 553
Cottage Grove, OR 97424**

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



**OREGON
AVIATION
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY**