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OREGON AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

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Our Mission

The Oregon Aviation Historical Society was incorporated in June 1983 through the efforts of a group of aviation enthusiasts who recognized the need to preserve Oregon's rich aviation heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations.

Its purposes are to collect, preserve, restore and exhibit aviation artifacts; to develop facilities for the restoration and preservation of artifacts, public viewing and exhibition of the collection; to establish and maintain an Oregon Aviation Hall of Fame; establish a resource center for Oregon aviation historical research and to disseminate information about Oregon aviation history.

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Make sure we have your
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Write us at OAHS, PO Box 553,
Cottage Grove, OR 97424

or send us an email at
oregonaviation.org@gmail.com

Vern Gorst, Oregon Aviation Pioneer

In honor of Ron Bartley's passing, we thought we'd take a look at his book "Vern Gorst and the Pacific Air Transport Air Mail." This is but a small sample of the details contained in Ron's book.

Vern Gorst was born in Minnesota in 1876 and moved with his family to the Puget Sound area of Washington in 1888. From the ages of twelve to nineteen, Vern spent much of his time in the solitary activities of sailing, fishing, and crabbing along the coastline of the sound. He left Washington at nineteen to seek his fortune in Alaska just ahead of the gold rush. In 1896 he and an unnamed partner sold their claim for \$21,000 (that would be worth approximately \$560,620 in 2015 dollars*). He then studied business, mining, engineering, surveying, and assaying at the University of Washington, after which he returned to the Klondike gold fields, an experience that helped to shape his awareness of the need for more efficient methods of transportation.

While working the gold fields in Alaska, Vern met the woman who would soon become his wife. Julia Johnson married Vern a year after their first date and in the summer of 1902 they left the Yukon for Port Orchard, Washington. It was in Washington that Vern started his first transportation business, a boat launch service between Bremerton, Port Orchard, and Manette Washington. After a brief foray into Nevada and California to try mining again, the Gorsts moved to Jacksonville, Oregon with the intent of developing a gold mine. Vern realized the venture was very high risk and decided to focus on something less risky: a stage line between Jacksonville and Medford. Starting with a single Cadillac in 1910, the line was successful enough to bring on a partner and a second Cadillac the next year. Thus was born the Oregon Stage Line, which put the local train service out of business. While on a trip to the North Bend area in 1912, Vern noticed the lack of a similar stage along the coast and set up the Gorst-Kind Marshfield-North Bend Auto Lines Company.



Vern Gorst and Mrs. Clark Kinsey on Vern's land-and-water machine in 1913. Note the OX-2 engine.

Vern Gorst, Part II

Business was booming so the Gorst family moved to North Bend, where Vern met and became friends with Silas Christofferson. Silas was selling rides in North Bend before and after his famous flight off the roof of the Multnomah Hotel in 1912. Vern not only witnessed that flight, he paid Silas \$30 for two rides for himself, which really sparked his interest in aviation.

In 1913, Vern purchased a Glenn Martin Hydroplane (very similar in design to the Curtiss biplane) with an OX-2 V-8 60hp Curtiss engine. He also ordered a second engine and two extra laminated propellers. He partnered with mechanic and pilot Ed Steele to operate a barnstorming and ride business along the coast. To protect themselves from personal liability, they registered the aircraft in the name of the Coos Bay Aircraft Company. Unfortunately the hydroplane was destroyed in a flight from North Bend to Waldport late in 1913. Mrs. Gorst convinced her husband that perhaps flying was a bit too risky while they had small children, so Vern focused instead on a “land and water machine” that combined a Hupmobile chassis, that extra OX-2 engine he purchased from Martin’s, and two large pontoons. He used this amphibious vehicle to ferry passengers between North Bend and Florence, a beach route of about 45 miles. In doing so he recognized the need for another stage company, so he organized the Gorst and Kenny Auto Stage Line. In 1916, Julia needed to see a medical specialist in San Francisco, and while in the area Vern created the Vallejo Bus Company, hiring a nephew with streetcar conductor experience and a driver from Coos Bay.

Skipping ahead several years, we come to 1925. Vern had been paying close attention to the growing field of aviation as a viable means of transportation. As we have seen, he had already created several successful transportation businesses over the years, and he knew he could make a go of such a business. So in 1925 he acquired Commercial Air Mail Route No. 8 (CAM-8). Air mail deliveries were set to begin September 15, 1926, so he was on the leading edge of this new industry. When deliveries began, the 1,120 mile West Coast route was deemed to be the “longest and the meanest” air mail route in the country. It was extended in 1928 to include San Diego, bringing the total length to 1,245 miles. Before the first air mail flight was made, Vern filed a Certificate of Incorporation for the Pacific Air Transport Company with the State of Oregon on January 8, 1926. This meant he could sell stock, which he did wherever he could. He sold \$30,000 of stock to Julius Meier of Meier & Frank and \$22,000 to an Eastern banker named Comstock who eventually became a Pacific Air Transport vice president. Vern also borrowed money from Wells Fargo Bank, and the loan officer, William A. Patterson, eventually became president of United Air Lines, which held a majority of Pacific Air Transport stock.

In 1928, Philip Johnson, president of the Boeing Company, gained controlling interest in the Pacific Air Transport and took over as president of the now combined firm. The infusion of Boeing capital meant more and newer aircraft could be purchased to carry both mail and passengers. Though the newer planes were larger and faster, they were still susceptible to harsh winter weather. The Canyonville air mail crash is an excellent example of that fact. October 2, 1928 saw pilot Grant Donaldson and passenger D. P. Donovan (*pictured right, from Vern Gorst and the Pacific Air Transport Air Mail, p.118*) take



Figure 9-8: Bill Boeing shaking hands with pilot Grant Donaldson on the wing of a Boeing 40-C mail plane at Seattle's Boeing Field in 1928. Jules V. Hyde (shown middle) was the Boeing field manager, and Phillip G. Johnson (shown left) was President of the Boeing Company. (photo courtesy of Boeing Museum of Flight)

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RANDOM FLIGHT, *by President Doug Kindred*

The 2016 season is over. That said, the weather was better and attendance was up at all our events this year. Starting with Wings N' Wheels and ending with the Jim Wright Memorial Stearman Fly-in I'd say it was a good summer. Thanks to all the volunteers who made it possible. Special thanks go to DJ, our administrative assistant who led the crew that painted the library, entry hall, bathrooms and galley. Gads, she was like the energizer bunny. Needless to say, it was worth it.

That brings me to the sad part of this missive. DJ will be leaving us. She needed a full time job and found one. I hope they appreciate her as much as we did. Her replacement will have a steep hill to climb. Our organization is so much better thanks to her efforts. **DJ, YOU WILL BE MISSED** and I hope you won't forget us. The coffee will always be on when you and Mitch stop by.

As I noted in one of my previous columns, we now have heat in the main hangar. I'm hoping to put together some programs and invite the elementary and middle schools to visit. A movie night complete with popcorn and soda is another idea. First, I have to see if the heater can do the job on a cool autumn evening. Anyway, keep checking the web site for the latest.

Doug Kindred, President

WISH LIST

As we work on the media center, we find there are some things we could really use.

Like sound-proofing for the interior walls (carpeting would work well), seating for the media center (old airline seats would be fantastic), and something to help us clean the upper reaches of the display area (there are spots that we simply cannot reach). If you have ideas or can help, please let us know. Thanks!

A final note and a fond farewell

By Davena Amick-Elder



As I prepare to take my leave and move on to a new set of experiences, I thought I'd take a look back at my time here with the OAHS. I find it hard to believe that it's been a little over five years since my first day at this desk. When I started here at the OAHS, all of the clerical tasks required to keep a small non-profit going were handled by various board members around the state, the Facebook and LinkedIn pages did not yet exist, the website was managed offsite, and we only produced three newsletters per year. I'm delighted that I could help pull all of the supporting tasks together under one roof and create better ways to get the word out about our programs and events. I am particularly proud of the newly revised Collections Management Policy and procedures that I helped develop. Working with the archives has been my favorite part of this job and I will miss digging around in the files and reading the stories of Oregon's aviation pioneers. Having the opportunity to peruse and catalog old photos of all sorts of vintage aircraft, of the Beaverton crew, of Lee Eyerly and his aircraft-themed carnival rides, and of all the men and women who pushed the boundaries of flight and social norms related to flight has been a true joy.

I hope that you will all be as kind and supportive of the new administrative assistant as you have been to me. It is the people who make any organization worth working for, and I cannot say thank you enough to the members and the board for their support over the years. Many thanks, and happy flying.

Vern Gorst, Part III

off in a Boeing 40-C aircraft with a load of mail from Medford at 9:10 AM. Visibility was poor due to low clouds and clinging fog, and around 10:00 AM the plane went down nine miles south of Canyonville. The wreckage remained in place until 1993, when the BLM granted the Oregon Aviation Historical Society permission to recover the remaining pieces for storage and display. This wreckage is shown in the photo below, and was eventually used by Addison Pemberton to rebuild the Boeing 40-C.

This summary is a paltry reduction of the detail and care that Ron put into his research and his writing. If you are interested in the early days of air mail and passenger flight, want to know more about how the Pacific Air Transport company became United Air Lines, or just want to know more about Vern Gorst, you owe it to yourself to pick up a copy of Ron's book. Talk to an OAHS member for more information.

"Vern Gorst and the Pacific Air Transport Air Mail," by Ron Bartley, Interactive Media Publishing, 2006.

*<http://www.in2013dollars.com/1896-dollars-in-2015?amount=21000>

Gone West



Ronald C. Bartley

February 2, 1931 – August 11, 2016

We are sad to announce the passing of Ronald Clark Bartley, long time member and avid supporter of the Oregon Aviation Historical Society. Ron passed peacefully from mortality August 11, 2016 in Medford, Oregon. He lived an amazing and full life, and valiantly fought his battle with Alzheimer's disease for over 13 years. Ron was a geologist, an avid outdoorsman, and world traveler but his favorite place to be was by the side of his wife of almost 63 years, Margaret (Mix) Bartley. They traveled extensively together including hiking the Chilkoot Trail, and drifting 760 miles alone down the Yukon River in a rubber boat. Their love and friendship were admired by many, and they were fiercely loyal to one another. He had a passion for aviation, earning his pilot's license at age 15, even before he could drive a car. He later restored two airplanes, and won many air show awards for his beautiful blue Hatz biplane. A life-long history buff, he also wrote a book on the history of aviation air mail on the West Coast ("Vern Gorst and the Pacific Air Transportation Air Mail"). Despite his many accomplishments, Ron was a very humble man, always looking for the good in others, and enjoying the simple pleasures of life. His gentle nature will be missed by all who knew him, especially his family. Always a true gentleman, his influence and example will live on for many generations to come. We offer our condolences to his wife, his three children: Raymond (wife Kathy), Annette (husband Virgil), Wayne; and all of his extended family. We have been advised by the family that a memorial will be held at a later time.

Ron's father Ray was a mechanic for Tex Rankin and Ron was gracious enough to share many of his father's photos and documents with the society. He was a good friend, an avid researcher, and will be greatly missed by many. Here you see a photo of Ron helping to recover the wreckage of the Boeing 40C from its resting place near Canyonville. Shown are Ron Englund, Al Alsing, Tim Talen, and Ron Bartley (left to right).

