

THEY WANTED WINGS
CHAPTER THREE
1930-1939

THIRTIES SAW RAPID GROWTH OF DOOR COUNTY AVIATION

The stock market crash of October 29, 1929, probably slowed down the advance of aviation in Door County, but nationwide aviation was moving ahead. On November 28-29, 1929, Commander Richard E. Byrd was flown over the South Pole by his pilot, Berndt Batchen. The newsreel of that flight was probably the first sound movie both seen and heard by many Door County residents. It was one of Frank Borchert's first sound movies shown at the old Door Theater.

Anyone who saw the movie will never forget the roar of the Ford Trimotor as it flew over the spot where, in 1910, the Norwegian explorer, Roald Amundsen, planted the flag of his county. A few weeks afterward, the Englishman, Robert Falcon Scott, and his men, disheartened by the failure of their prototype snowmobiles and the ponies they'd used instead of sled dogs, arrived and began their fatal trip back to their base camp. Commander Byrd had made the same trip in comfort with a Ford Trimotor, a number which have landed in Door County, most recently in 1998.

To many, the beginning of the 1930s were the "Hard Times." But people such as Karl S. Reynolds did not lose faith in America, and continued in promoting business, which in his case was the cherry industry.

In January 1930, Reynolds sent a letter to another promoter of Door County, Earl "Mitch" LaPlant. He said, "I have just spent a very wonderful and profitable day in San Francisco in conference with the president of the California Packing Corporation, the secretary and manager of the Canner's League of California and a few others interested in our line of business. Right now I am comfortable in a chair of a 12-passenger tri-motor (could have been a Ford or Stinson) plane of the Western Air Express en-route to Los Angeles."

Reynolds went on to laud the advantages of air travel. He told of the beauties of flying over the foreign vessels in the bay, and over the orchards. He praised the dinners served in flight, and the beautiful sky with its stars and the moon as night fell. "I guess I am sold on air travel from now on," he said.

The airplane was praised as a tool in fighting insects in a statement issued by Professor A. A. Granovsky printed in the Door County News on May 8, 1930. He praised the 1925 experiment in

Peninsula State Park, in which airplanes were used to dust for a pesky hemlock leaf eating caterpillar. Deadly calcium arsenate was used; presumably, no campers or tourists were destroyed, or the professor would have heard of it in the ensuing five years.

On May 14, 1930, the same newspaper reported that Karl Reynolds had again used the airplane for business purposes, this time both as president of the Door County Chamber of Commerce, and as a part of his duties as business manager of the Reynolds Preserving Company. Reynolds drove to Milwaukee to begin his trip, then with a Kohler Aviation Company plane to Grand Rapids, Michigan. He then boarded a fast train to New York. The entire trip took a little more than 24 hours. Later on that same month, the paper announced that Karl Reynolds had received word that a group of seaplanes from Detroit was considering a stop in Sturgeon Bay while on a cruise of the Great Lakes. One of the pilots was to be the famous Gar Wood, champion motorboat racer.

Also, the paper noted, the state conservation commission had announced it wouldn't permit an airport to be built in Peninsula State Park, saying that an airport would be incompatible with the park's purpose. It may be that air travel enthusiasts thought that the nice area cleared for a golf course should be able to provide at least a little space for an airstrip. The article said, "With the exception of the landing fields on Washington Island and Chambers Island, Door County will probably be without an airport on the mainland during the present season, unless the county board or some other body takes action to provide such a field."

Meanwhile, the chamber of commerce had no problem with welcoming the group of seaplanes from the Detroit Flying Club. A group of movers and shakers met at the Carmen Hotel for a dinner with the planning group from Detroit. Among the Sturgeon Bay people were Karl S. Reynolds, Leathem D. Smith, H. R. Jones, George Pittinger, F. A. "Banty" Shimmel, Emil J. Hoslett, C. D. Brower, Walter Lee, Sumner Harris, Fred Peterson, Donald W. Reynolds, A. B. Minor, C. E. Thayer, and Palmer Johnson. Among the Detroit fliers were Lt. Richard Halliburton, the famous explorer, and H. F. Johnson, president of the Johnson Wax Company in Racine. Plans were made for 250 flyers to arrive on August 18 and dock their seaplanes near the Door County Country Club, which was located where Leathem Smith Lodge is today. (An August 13 Door County News article describes the anchorage as that of the Hotel Commodore.)

A photograph shows one of the planes at the dock, with spectators lined up along the shore to look at it. To date the photo, a

1929 Chevrolet and a 1930 Model A Ford as well as others, none later than a 1930 model, are parked along the shoreline.

A map in the May 22, 1930, Advocate showed the proposed route of the Detroit airplanes. Leaving Detroit, the seaplanes were to fly south along Lake Michigan's east side to Benton Harbor and then to Chicago. From Chicago, the route led north along the west side of Lake Michigan to Sturgeon Bay, and then on to Menominee and Marinette. Then, all along the way making stops at various cities, the route led along the Lake Michigan shore to St. Ignace, then across to Saulte Ste. Marie and along Lake Huron's south shore to Duluth. From there, the seaplanes flew along the north shore of Lake Superior and on to Port Hope on Lake Huron, then west along the south shore of Lake Erie and back to Detroit.

The Great Lakes Air Cruise was a bright spot in the Great Depression that was already deepening, and it showed that some people were looking to the future of air travel, which plays such a large part in our economy today. The cruise organizers offered to take passengers along for all or part of the 2600 mile trip for 15 cents a mile. Karl Reynolds was in charge of taking reservations from Door County residents. The fare for the entire trip was \$250.

In August of 1930, it was announced by Door County's chapter of the National Aeronautical Association that real progress was being made toward establishing an airport. The club received its charter on August 4, 1930, but apparently was discontinued for a new charter was issued on April 3, 1939. The location selected was the Frank Borchert farm, which was across the road from the present day Zahn's Green Thumb fruit stand. Backers of the planned temporary airstrip included Sanford "Duke" Hanson, L. D. Smith, C. D. Brower, Bill Paul, Minor Dagneau, E. G. Bailey, the Scofield Company, Henry Fetzer, Jack Weitemann, Clark Bassett, Harry M. Jones, Ross F. Wright, A. B. Minor, Clyde M. Stephenson, F. A. "Banty" Shimmel, John M. Lawrence, Earl M. "Mitch" LaPlant, Cully B. Thayer, Art Moeller, W. E. Wagener, Frank Borchert, Allen MacMillin, A.W. Miller, Harry C. Lau, and George Paul.

The above list is given to show that there was wide support among the prominent business people of Sturgeon Bay for an airport. Since this proposal was made 71 years ago, all of the principals are deceased, Art Moeller having lived until just recently, well past his 90th year.

The March 17, 1933, Advocate carried a front page photo of a group of Door County airplane promoters; Karl S. Reynolds, Emil J. Hoslett, pilot Ed Hedeem from Racine, E. M. Valentine and John

Bertschinger. The occasion was the donation of the use of a plane for the use of Reynolds as president of the Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce by H. F. Johnson, president of the Johnson Wax Company. Reynolds was heading up the "On, Wisconsin" promotional drive. The plane landed at the Reynolds Cherryland private airport on Highway 78 (57.)

There was no Cherry Blossom Festival planned for 1933, but the Door County Chamber of Commerce didn't let Old Man Depression get it down. The group had printed 5000 maps of the peninsula to be distributed during the cherry bloom period. And Karl Reynolds had arranged for the Reynolds Orchard Tower to be open to the public, and cherry pie huts to be open in Garland Park (today the site of the Peterson Pool), and along the roadside.

Also, a three-place Curtiss Robin cabin ship with a 185 horsepower Challenger engine was scheduled to offer airplane rides over the cherry blossom area from the Reynolds Cherryland airport from Saturday through Memorial Day. The pilot was Arnold H. Peik, an aeronautical instructor at the Sheboygan vocational school.

The June 16, 1933, Advocate announced a milestone in Door County aviation history. In an editorial, the editor said, "To Claude Cornell, Washington Island, goes the honor of owning the first privately owned airplane in Door County. Several years ago a company was formed in Sturgeon Bay and purchased a plane for commercial purposes, but the venture did not prove a successful one and was short lived." (That was the one previously mentioned, the Miss Door County, purchased by E. G. Bailey and company, and broken up while trying to make an emergency landing on Green Island.)

The editorial went on to say that Claude Cornell had recently become a licensed pilot and had purchased a Stinson Jr. four place monoplane, which was the first small multi-passenger plane produced in the United States. It was equipped with a 125 horsepower air cooled, dual ignition Kinner engine, which enabled the plane to travel at speeds up to 125 miles per hour. It was painted black and gold.

The editor said, "Mr. Cornell has most appropriately named his plane, 'Washington Island.' Washington Island has developed more interest in airplane navigation than any other part of Door County and more planes visit it than all the rest of the county combined." He said pilots from Escanaba and other cities along the shoreline frequently landed at the good field on the Island.

Cornell was scheduled to enter the American Legion Upper Peninsula Air Classic to be held at the Menominee airport on July 2, 1933. The editor further praised Claude Cornell by saying, "He comes

from that hardy race of people who have made Washington Island known to almost every part of the United States, and who no doubt his name will be known among the noted fliers of the country.”

An Art Cermak photo shows Claude Cornell's plane. But probably unknown to Cornell was that another Door County native had purchased the same model airplane, a Stinson Jr., and was to die tragically about a week after Cornell had purchased his.

The other purchaser of a Stinson Jr. was Dr. Victor Dewar (Dewarzegar), a native of the town of Gardner. He was born to the Alex Dewarzegars, who also were the parents of Mrs. H. V.(Pearl) Foshion and Mrs. LaBelle Arthur (later Van Beek.) Dr. Dewar (he changed his name for business purposes) was born on March 9, 1902, and he had attended Sturgeon Bay High School. He then attended the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and went on to earn his medical degree from Rush Medical College in Chicago in 1925. He completed his internship at a Denver hospital, where he fell in love with the West and the mountains.

But he also fell in love with a home town girl, Lucille Garot of Green Bay, the town to which his parents had moved. In 1925, Victor and Lucille were married, and Victor started a practice in Grand Junction, Colorado. They would fly back to Green Bay for visits with Victor's new airplane, and sometimes to Door County to visit relatives, who included the Dewarzegars, DeBrouxes and Foshions.

The June 2, 1933, Advocate carried the tragic news of the Dewar's sudden death. Flying in the mountains near East Portal, Colorado with another couple, their plane crashed into a mountainside and all were killed. The bodies of Victor and Lucille were transported to Green Bay for burial, where they will remain forever together in a Catholic cemetery in the outskirts of the city. The tombstone is easy to identify, for besides the traditional Christian crosses, it carries the symbol of a medical doctor as well as the wings of an aviator above their last name.

One of his relatives still has Dr. Dewar's aviation helmet. His mother for years preached at the Spiritualist church in Gardner. She was never able to contact the spirit of her son, as members of what is now called the Church of Psychic Science attempt to do, by means of seances or "sittings," as the members of the church call them.

Rose Dewarzegar told many people that on the same day, and perhaps at the same time, that Dr. Dewar died, the picture of him that had been hanging on her wall fell to the floor. She is said to have said, "What happened, my son, did you fall?" Shortly afterward, she was informed of the crash.

At any rate, Dr. Dewar was a true pioneer of Door County aviation, our first flying doctor, to be followed by a number of notable other flying doctors, including at least one veterinarian, Dr. William O. Wright.

An aviation event that no one that lived in Door County at the time can forget is the flight of the world's largest dirigible over the county in June of 1933.

The occasion was the test flight of the Macon. It was the sister ship of the ill-fated Akron, which had gone down over New Jersey. A member of the Door County Amateur Radio club, Arden Nelson, who now lives in Peshtigo, saw the Macon as it was being built in Akron, Ohio. Upon completion, it left for a 48 hour test cruise to Gary, Indiana, and Chicago, where WGN announcer Quinn Ryan described its flight. Listeners in Sturgeon Bay learned that it was headed up towards the Fox River Valley and Door County.

The coast guard sighted the Macon at the Canal Station at 10:30 on Tuesday morning, June 14. They watched her float gracefully northeastward over the lake side of Door County for over an hour. It was at that point that many parents pointed out the dirigible to their children; they could see her well over to the east, a majestic envelope of gas floating through the sky. The next day, the Macon returned heading south.

In December of 1933, the Sturgeon Bay city council brought up the idea of building a municipal airport. Mayor Jim Martin appointed Henry Hanson, Chris Nelson and Ray Marshall to see what could be done about the purchase or rental of land for an airport. They were to find out what the cost of paving would be and what would have to be done to get the field ready for inspection.

Another article in the issue of the Advocate from which this story came told of an award given to Frank Martin, the World War I aviation observer mentioned before, for his promotion of Red Cross lifesaving work he'd done while a swimming coach in Sturgeon Bay.

Nothing was found of aviation progress in 1934, but in March of 1935, Wally Arntzen, a pilot from Escanaba, aided in the search for the six Washington Island young men who went down in Death's Door. They were returning from a basketball game and went through the ice and all drowned.

Evidently the Cherryland airport on the Reynolds property continued to be used, for a big Sikorsky amphibian landed there in June of 1935. H. F. Johnson of Racine's Johnson Wax Company landed there, flown in by two of his pilots. They were invited by Karl S. Reynolds. This plane burned 40 gallons of gas an hour, but Johnson

could afford it, at ten cents a gallon. Johnson Wax was selling well, thanks to a good product, and the promotions by Marion and Jim Jordan on the Fibber McGee and Molly radio show.

In August of 1935, a big air show was put on at the Reynolds Cherryland airport. A stunt flying show was put on by a group of fliers from Curtiss Wright Field in Milwaukee. On the program was Henry Salmon, a stunt pilot from Detroit. He did parachute jumps in which he fell 8000 feet before pulling the rip cord to open the parachute. Other stunts performed were dog fights and flying upside down. Six or seven planes participated.

Airplane rides were offered in a 12-passenger Ford Trimotor, the only type of plane President Calvin Coolidge ever flew in, and of course, Henry Ford's favorite. The plane weighed 17,000 pounds, and the trip consisted of rides to the tip of the peninsula along the Green Bay shoreline. The pilot was Col. E. H. "Buck" Leighton, a veteran air mail pilot. He was commander of the Mexican federal air forces in the Mexican revolution in 1912. The opposing general was Pancho Villa.

Another group of airplanes visited the county before the air show was put on, on August 12. Six navy planes flew in circles over the coast guard canal station. They were said to be taking part in naval maneuvers in the vicinity of Milwaukee and the Great Lakes. It's good they were getting some practice. The aerial bombardment of Pearl Harbor was only six years away.

The stunt flying show on August 12, 1935, was a big success. "Buck" Leighton did loops, flew upside down, and glided with his motor shut off. Henry Salmon stepped off the wing of his plane at 2,800 feet and although he was blown by high winds, he landed at the north edge of the field, landing roughly but only scratching his face.

Once again, as reported in the May 5, 1936 Advocate, Washington Island scored a first in Door County aviation. "Air Service for Island Started," read the caption of the story.

The Island Lions Club had sold 300 fares to help pilot Wally Arntzen from Escanaba get an air service from the Island to Green Bay started. The flights were scheduled for Saturdays, to bring passengers to and from Green Bay for business and pleasure purposes. The Islanders again were seeking relief from their "splendid isolation."

As mentioned earlier, Wally Arntzen had previously endeared himself to Washington Island. He had flown several mercy missions. He had flown a patient with pneumonia to a Green Bay hospital, rushed a boy to an Escanaba hospital when he was shot in the stomach and helped in the search for the six young men who had gone through the ice coming home across the ice after a basketball game.

