

What We Found In Rhinebeck

by Lynne Belluscio

When I was planning our recent bus trip to Hyde Park, Terry Headley suggested that we stop at the Rhinebeck Aerodrome. I had never been there, and I was interested in seeing the WACO 10 in their collection. It is probably the only surviving plane from the Donald Woodward Airport in LeRoy. (I wrote about the plane in the May 2, 2010, *Pennysaver*).

Several years ago, when Nancy Durante Holderman published her uncle Russ Holderman's memoirs, "Between Kittyhawk and the Moon,"* she mentioned that she had been to Rhinebeck to see if they would carry her book, and was dismayed to find her uncle's plane stuck in the back of a dusty hangar. The display board didn't even mention her uncle, a true pioneer in aviation.

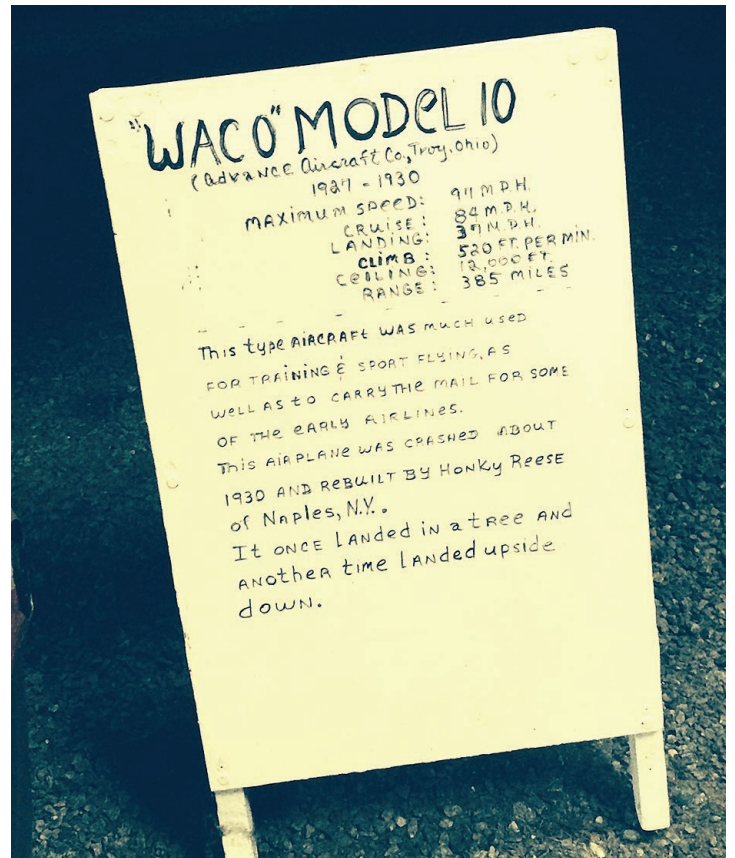
Brian Duddy, in his book about the Woodward Airport, compiled a list of the planes from the Woodward Airport. There were four WACO 10s. The WACO 10 that is Rhinebeck was registered as NC940. This was the plane that Russell Holderman flew in an air show in Perry in the fall of 1929. It was no ordinary plane.

He had sent the engine to Kirkham, the Curtiss Company's engineering genius. "If any man knew how to soup up a motor, give it extra ginger, more power and consequently greater speed, he was the man. "Here is Russ's account of what happened: "Ken Hebner came to me before the Perry race and said, "You've had good luck with that motor all winter and summer, but I think you'd better let me take it down and check it over thoroughly before you race with it again." I told him he was probably right but that I only wanted one more race and then he could do what

he wanted about overhauling the thing.

... The race required five laps in all and at the third lap, I felt Bennett gaining perceptibly, so I pushed the motor until was nearly wide open. ... my souped up OX5 turned up 2,400 RPM's, 1,200 more than it was designed for. I knew it was too much, but I wanted to beat Dick Bennett. We were only about 50 feet off the ground and I began to gain, and nose ahead of him. Then suddenly I felt as if the whole world had exploded in my face. There had been no warning other than the 2,400 RPM's turned up by my motor. That should have been enough. The whole front of the plane flew in all directions. A wave of oil from the outside and inside, dashing dirt and muck and hot grease, was flung in my face and covered me completely, coating my goggles.

All this happened at 50 feet, at more than 100 miles an hour. I think it was instinct that it made me reach for my goggles and rip them off. I was still in the air, skimming a farm at 20 feet. The shattered plane was tail heavy. One side cowling was flat against the flying and landing wires on the left and threatened to put me in a spin. A spin at 20 feet is as surely fatal as being hit by a train. I jiggled the plane and the cowling fell off. I slipped to the left. Straight ahead, almost close enough to touch, was a grove of trees, much too close to miss hitting, I was sure. I booted the rudder first to one side then to the other with frantic kicks. This gave the plane's tail a wagging motion like a whale's tail in the water. It killed my speed pronto. I pulled the stick back and pancaked to a perfect landing a scant few feet from the trees.



Handwritten sign in front of NC940.

It all happened so quickly ... the explosion of the motor, the deluge of oil, the threatened spin, cutting the speed and landing suddenly and flat to miss those trees that I was out of the ship and inspecting the damage before I realized what perhaps subconsciously thinking of what to do in just such an emergency had pulled me out of it, nothing else ... the crankshaft had broken just back of the first two cylinders. The front of the motor, the propeller and all the cowling had ripped off. Seven of the eight bolts holding the motor to the plane had broken, leaving one to keep it from falling out.

My good fortune had been in not losing all of the motor, for without it, the ship would have been too heavy in the tail to control and would certainly have crashed. One small bolt had saved me from such a fate ... Amos McGuire, the parachutist, went up for an exhibition jump and left the plane with an improperly packed parachute. It failed to open completely and he fell from 1,500 feet to his death. Thus our 1929 season bowed out with a coffin on its back."

It's not certain what happened to NC940 after the crash. According

to the handwritten sign in front of the plane in Rhinebeck it says that it was rebuilt by Honkey Reese of Naples. Cole Palen who established the Rhinebeck Aerodrome purchased NC940, but had been told it was a plane from World War I. He knew that was impossible, since the WACO 10s were built after the war. Never the less, today, NC940 is under a dry roof, and Russell Holderman's niece and I are planning to have a better sign made for it, with the story of her uncle.

*We have copies of this book in the museum shop. It is a great story and fun to read."



Russ Holderman's WACO.