

# "Wings Over Le Roy" Program

## Sunday August 10

by Lynne Belluscio

Brian Duddy will present a program at LeRoy House on Sunday, August 10 at 1 pm about his new book "Wings Over LeRoy: A History of the Donald Woodward Airport". He'll also have books for sale and will be glad to autograph copies. I have had the chance to read more of the book and Brian has really done a lot of research.

In 1929, some very important dignitaries showed up for the Air Meet held on October 11-13. Friday's event included a Garden City Long Island to Le Roy Derby, which was won by Pete Brooks. On Saturday and Sunday there were skywriting contests, (wonder if they were judged on penmanship) and dead stick landings. The pylon races were always popular and Don Woodward's Silo-Party house five miles south of the airport was one of the pylons. Pilot Russ Holderman described the race: "They flew like men possessed, and rounded the pylon in front of the grandstand at high speed, both planes making turns at 90-degree banks, the wheels of one of the whizzing ships all but touching the top wing of the other. And they were no more than fifty feet off the ground! Neither would give an inch. ("Fearless") Freddie (Lund) won and death walked away in disappointment. But it had come close to enlisting two new recruits." The guest speaker for the weekend was the Assistant Secretary of War for Aeronautics, F. Trubee Davidson who arrived in a big U.S. Army Ford Tri-Motor. With him was Major Frank Andrews from the US Army Air Forces. Major Andrews became a three-star general during World War II and gave his name to Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland.

One of the staff pilots at the airport was Hawley Bowlus. He was the glider instructor for the D.W. Flying Service, but he didn't stay in Le Roy very long. Brian mentions that before Bowlus came to Le Roy he had been the factory manager at the Ryan Airlines plant in San Diego,

when in 1927 he was instrumental in the design of Lindbergh's aircraft, the Spirit of St Louis. He had taught both Charles Lindbergh and his wife Anne to fly gliders.

In 1931, at the Air Meet in Le Roy, Bowlus planned a daring glider event. Three gliders piloted by Russ Holderman, Warren Easton and Bowlus were towed by a single tow plane. It was probably the first such event of its kind in the United States. The next year at the National Soaring Meet, four gliders were towed up and released. This pioneering effort was eventually used to deliver troops behind the lines during World War II. Russ Holderman never forgot that it was in Le Roy where multiple gliders were towed into the air, the brainchild of a daring Hawley Bowlus. After Bowlus left Le Roy he designed a number of very advanced gliders and sailplanes. After WWII, he turned his attention to travel trailers and he designed and built the "Road Chief" which was the prototype of the aerodynamic Airstream trailer.

In 1931, the Air Meet was scheduled for July 4 & 5. The Le Roy American Legion helped stage a mock battle. A miniature village was built on the airfield and National Guard troops from Rochester battled the aircraft who were trying to destroy the village. The village was blown up in a fiery finale.

The National Air Tour of 1931 started in Detroit on July 4. Forty aircraft from all the major aircraft manufacturers toured the country visiting thirty-three airports in twenty-two days. Overlooking both Buffalo and Rochester, the



Tour chose the D.W. Airport for the first overnight stop in Western New York. The first planes on the Tour to touch down were two Tri-Motor Fords. The Tour pilots were the best in the United States, including Jimmy Doolittle in a Lockheed Vega; Eddie Stinson, founder of the Stinson Aircraft Corporation; and Captain Lewis Yancey who arrived in an autogiro (an early combination of a plane and a helicopter). Lowell Bayles who had designed the notorious Gee Bee Sportster arrived with one of the Granville brothers. The Sportster was one of the most dangerous racing planes ever built and Bayles let Russ Holderman take it up for a spin. Holderman had quite a time keeping the unstable plane in the air, but managed to perform a precision "snap roll" for the crowd.

The Woodward hanger was

equipped with a custom-built grandstand on the roof of the hangar annex. I suspect that is where the wooden benches were located. Several years ago, Maybelle Anchor donated three "Airport" benches to the Historical Society. Her son-in-law, Frank Elliott fixed them up and if you stop by the Jell-O Gallery and sit on the porch, you're sitting on those grandstand benches.

In addition to the benches that can be seen on August 10, I will bring out the "Friendship" chair, and some other Woodward Airport memorabilia, including Don Woodward's marble pen set, a pilots "wings" and (if I can remember where I put them) Alvin Stripp's goggles and leather helmet. (Alvin was one of the first men to receive a pilot certificate from the D.W. Woodward Flying School.)



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