

# New Exhibit

by Lynne Belluscio

The Ingham Art Exhibit has been taken down and I'm gathering objects about the Donald Woodward Airport for the summer exhibit. We have lots of photographs which David Grayson at the *Pennysaver* has enlarged and there are some very interesting objects that will go in the locked cases. (Which is a way of saying that I was glad LeRoy House wasn't open this winter when the Ortez brothers were robbing all the small museums in Western New York. Never the less, security is a major issue for all of us and increased efforts are in place to keep collections safe and secure.)

On exhibit this summer will be the chair from Amelia Earhart's plane, the Friendship and benches from the observation gallery on the roof of the hangar. We also have a leather helmet and goggles worn by Alvin Stripp who learned to fly at the airport and continued to work there for a while. We have the tickets and programs from the air shows as well as promotional materials.

While I was gathering things, I remembered the large wooden airplane propeller that was in storage in the basement. It's almost nine feet long. Somewhere I remembered reading where the propeller came from and sure enough, when I headed up to the second floor of the Academic Building and went to the drawer of old accession cards, there, filed under aerospace/transportation was a card for the propeller.

It appears that it was given to the Historical Society in 1979 by George Straub, who at that time lived on Telephone Road. It was given to him by his instructor upon his graduation from the flying school at the Woodward Airport in 1933. (It's not clear who was his instructor. It may have been Russell Holderman.) The note says that George believed that the propeller was made about 1933 for a Curtis airplane. Since I'm not that well acquainted with airplane parts, it will take someone else to identify what plane it came from. Right now, it's on the mantle of the exhibit room.

Woodward flying school,

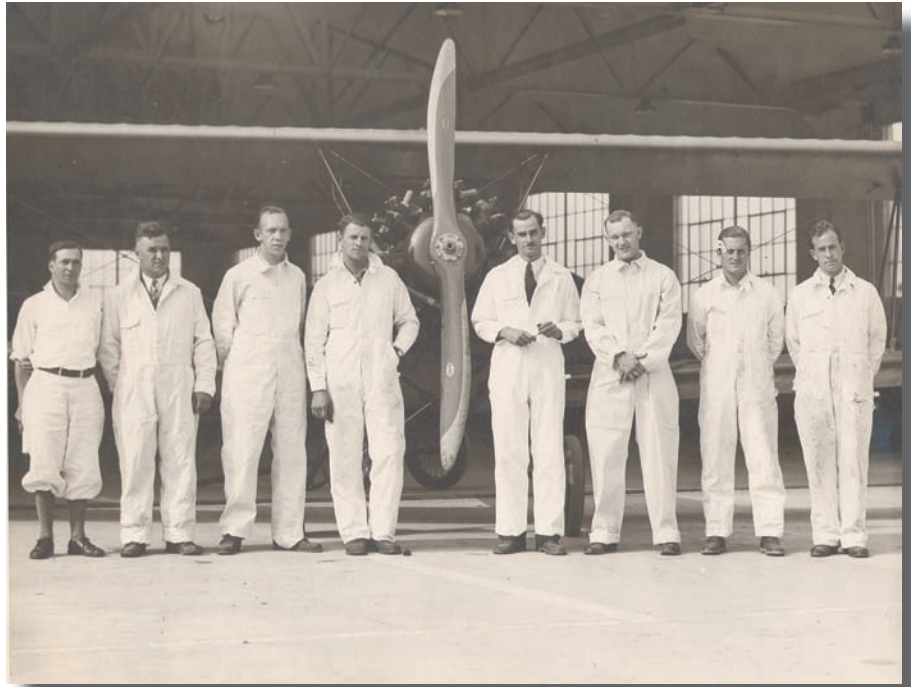
which opened in 1928, was one of the best in the country. In the published booklet about the school, it was written: "We do not consider aviation as a thrill or a fad, but as the coming industry of the nation, and this is the background of every day in our school.

We invite inspection of the school. All communications from those interested answered at once."

The benefits of the LeRoy community were described as "ideal in its surroundings and environment. LeRoy is a village of 5,000 population, healthy, clean, and free from the diversions that are apt to distract the attention of students in the city-located schools. We aim to give our very best in instruction and attention to students, and the school does not invite the attendance of young men who are not seriously bent on learning aviation and making it their life's work."

At the time George Straub was taking flying lessons at the Woodward Airport, Donald Woodward was out of the picture. By 1932, his interests led him in other directions and the D.W. Flying Service was no longer in business. Yet Russell Holderman was still involved with the airport and was trying to keep the airport open in the midst of the Depression.

In 1933, the Woodward Airport was on the radio beacon between Buffalo and Rochester, and in 1934, the airport participated in the LeRoy Centennial celebration. One of the airplanes taxied down Main Street during the parade. In the same year, Russell Holderman became the chief pilot for Frank Gannett in Rochester and three Gannett planes were kept at the Woodward Airport. The following year, Holderman relinquished



control of the Woodward Airport and became the full-time pilot for the Gannetts. A farewell air meet was held in Holderman's honor in October 1935.

In 1936, the remaining planes were sold off and the "Barn Restaurant" around the corner from the Airport, was razed. In 1938, the Airport was leased to the White Aircraft Corporation, and for a short time airplanes were assembled in LeRoy. With the outbreak of World War II there was an increased need for aeronautical instruction.

George Wilkenson, a Ford dealer from Rochester leased the Airport in 1942 and trained pilots under the Civilian Pilot Training Program. The school opened with ten aircraft and the first class graduated on July 30, 1942. In November, sixty Army Air Force and Navy trainees arrived, but the need for military pilots waned by 1944 and the school closed. The

Airport was included on aeronautical charts until 1945.

Don Woodward had sold the Airport to his brother Ernest in 1944. When Ernest died in 1948, the Airport was left to his wife Edith who willed it to Robert and Mary Jane Fussell. It was leased to the Pavilion Pipeline Company for ten years and eventually became the property of Town of LeRoy for the Town Highway Department. The Airport is designated with a historic marker, and would be eligible for state and national landmark status, not only because of the rarity of its architectural significance, but because of the historical events that occurred. It is truly a LeRoy treasure.

The exhibit will open on Wednesday evening, May 5, at 7:30 with a presentation about the "Friendship" and Amelia Earhart. The event is open to the public and everyone is welcome.

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