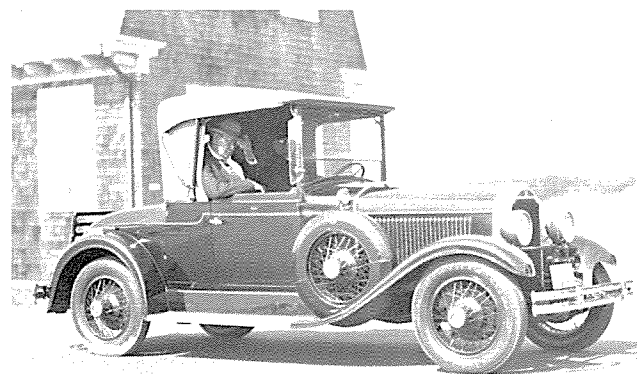
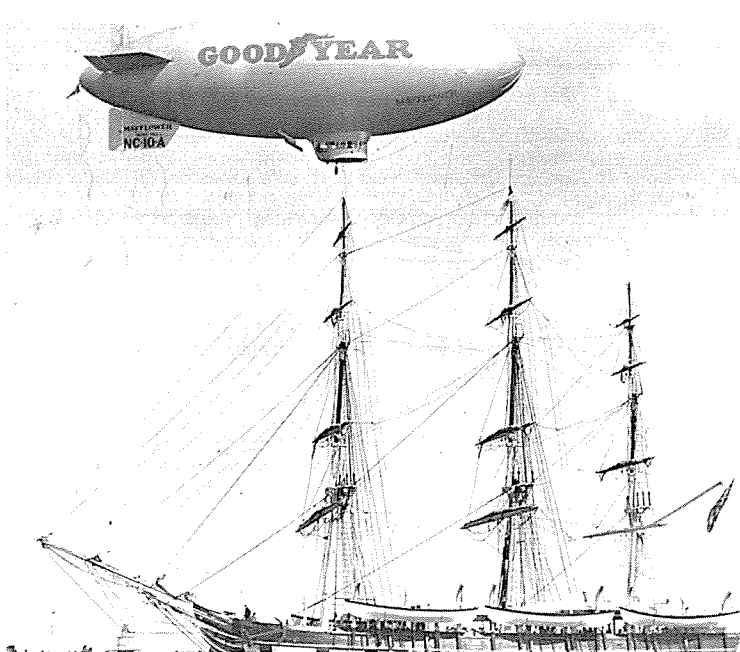




(Above) Colonel Ned Green and modified Buick.

(Left) Goodyear "Mayflower" and "Charles W. Morgan" share Green's private dock.

ROUND HILL AIRPORT

by WALLACE L. SMITH

On August 22, 1868, the wealthiest woman in the United States, Mrs. Hetty Green, bore a son whom she named Edward Howland Robinson Green in deference to several ancestors. Said antecedents had provided Hetty, notorious as "The Witch of Wall Street," with a magnificent stake amassed in the New Bedford whaling industry and she lost no time nor gained any love in parlaying it into a fortune in the stock market, hence the derogatory sobriquet.

An unfortunate childhood accident culminated in a badly infected leg for Ned (as the boy was called) and at the age of 20 his leg was amputated seven inches above the knee. Being a large man, well over six feet tall and weighing in the neighborhood of 250 pounds, Ned was left with a lifelong mobility problem.

Soon after his mother's death in 1916, Ned married for the first time at the age of 48. Work on a mansion for the newlyweds was started in 1919 on the family estate, known as Round Hill in South Dartmouth, Massachusetts. Looking out on Buzzard's Bay, the three-story, granite structure was broodingly handsome.

Colonel Ned Green (the Colonel being an honorary title bestowed by the Texas Rangers) was interested in new developments and had a special fondness for aviation as evidenced by his leasing of the Goodyear blimp, "Mayflower," and basing it at Round Hill in its own dock. Incidentally, there is no record of the Colonel flying in heavier-than-air craft; however, he did, on occasion, go aloft in the blimp.

The meeting between Colonel Green and Bert Hill, future Round Hill Airport manager, may give the reader some insight to the Colonel's pixie sense of humor. The incident took place during the late '20s on a day when the siren call of the air became too insistent for Bert to withstand. Dropping his automobile repair work, he headed for the New Bedford-Fairhaven Airport and was soon cruising over the area in his Travelair 2000. Suddenly, under his silver wings, appeared the most inviting sod he had ever seen. It just happened to be growing on the Round Hill estate of Colonel E.H.R. Green. Hill circled the spot, fighting a growing desire to roll his wheels on the velvety smooth looking surface. Temptation won out and soon the biplane was flared out in a landing. As soon as the T.A. touched down, Bert knew he'd made a king-sized mistake. The high-pressure tires left half-round imprints as they sank into the soft greensward, but the tailskid delivered the coup-de-grace, tearing up grass like a miniature plow!

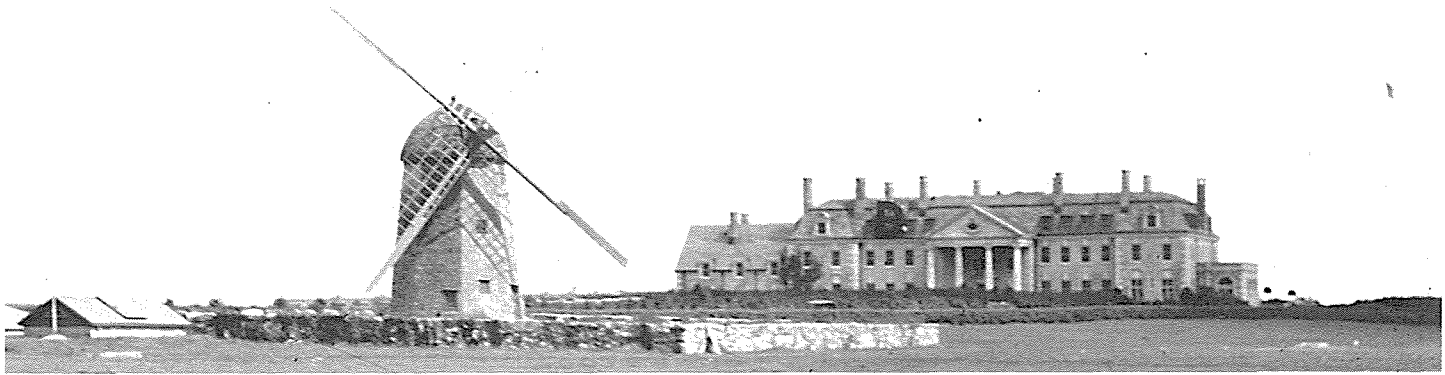
The enraged gardener who had been working nearby was close to apoplexy. His voice carried high over the still running OX-5 as he threatened Bert Hill with everything up to and including hang-

ing for his transgression. Somehow Bert managed to convince the gardener that his insurance company would take care of all damages. He was preparing to leave when Colonel Green's chauffeur approached. He tersely announced that the Colonel, having witnessed the entire incident, wanted to speak to the pilot of the plane. Bert's heart sank; he had heard tales about the 60-year-old millionaire, most of them not too good! Surprisingly enough, however, the Colonel wanted to talk about airplanes and flying, and proceeded to do so. As the conversation drew to a close and Bert once more apologized for his faux pas, Colonel Green informed him that he did have one small request to make concerning the matter. This led to the establishment of a landing area there named Round Hill Airport.

From this bizarre meeting grew an association that lasted until Colonel Green's death some eight years later. The Bert Hill School of Aviation, which included charter service and maintenance as well as student instruction, was also established. Colonel Edward H.R. Green's aviation interests ran the gamut from sponsoring an annual trophy in the Miami Air Races to underwriting expenses for a group researching fog control at Round Hill. Famed for his "Voice from Way Down East," radio station WMAF, it is said that the Colonel would supply facilities and

John "Red" Harmon (1) and Bert Hill with Hess "Warrior" powered Alliance.





funds for any project which he felt had merit, asking no share in any gains to be made. To say the least, the Colonel was flamboyant; could, on occasion, be penurious, but was also known for kind and generous deeds.

Round Hill is actually a promontory extending southward into Buzzard's Bay in southeastern Massachusetts. The mansion's entrance faces west and the airport was located southwest of the house. It offered two runways, the east/west 2900 feet long by 420 feet wide and north/south 2400 feet long by 420 feet wide. The field was equipped with floodlights, boundary and approach lights. A rotating beacon flashed code; "D" for Dartmouth and "RH" for Round Hill. The area directly west on which the mansion's portico faced, bounded by a somewhat horseshoe shaped drive, was the beautiful lawn upon which Bert Hill alighted. But this was not used as a landing field.

A seaplane ramp was constructed on the south shore adjacent to a dock which berthed the old whaling ship, "Charles W. Morgan." Colonel Green had offered to maintain facilities and a crew when the old vessel was in need of a home and so she became a fixture at Round Hill for many years. In 1941 the "Morgan" was taken to Mystic, Connecticut, where she is today at the Mystic Seaport Whaling Museum.

The spacious metal and concrete hangar had doors which slid on tracks and opened at opposite ends, one end being for land planes arriving from the field and the other to service the seaplane ramp. Once the fact had been established that Goodyear was to lease one of its airships to the Colonel, a metal hangar was constructed to house the blimp. This building served many purposes during its existence. From the original intent to host model airplanes, it finally wound up as an experimental laboratory where scientists from Massachusetts Institute of Technology labored in vain to split the atom.

Another landmark was a large windmill which stood at the edge of the airport within a field stone foundation. Upon sale of the estate, it was purchased and transported to nearby Salter's Point where it now stands, albeit minus its vanes.

Of particular interest at Round Hill Airport was the flying boat, "Miami Maid," a hybrid which wed a Curtiss type F hull and a Fokker wing. First flown as an open craft, a boxy-looking cabin was added for protection from the elements. Although equipped with a Wright J-5, the "Maid" was woefully underpowered and it was said that she flew either with full power or not at

(Above) The Round Hill Mansion.

(Below) The Crouch-Bolas "Dragonfly."



all! The Colonel purchased the MM from its Florida builders with the stipulation that the demonstration pilot, Eddie Nirmaier went with the deal. Ostensibly the plane was acquired for Mrs. Green's private use.

During the summer and early fall of 1929 a former Air Service cadet named Billie Leonard was working as New England distributor and demonstrator for the Alliance Argo biplane, a small two-place, fully aerobatic trainer. Billie was well known for air show work and his specialty, the outside loop in the Argo. When Billie visited Round Hill on his sales tour, Bert Hill fell in love with the Hess "Warrior" powered craft and ordered a couple for his flying business. They were favorites of the pilots at the field and especially of John "Red" Harmon, chief pilot. During the late 1960's Bert's son, Noel, a pilot for Delta Airlines, purchased the only known remaining Argo for his personal use and for more than a small number of nostalgic reasons. The reuniting of a Hill and an Argo was not to last, however. The spunky little craft was totally destroyed in a disastrous hangar fire at New Bedford Municipal Airport in 1972.

One experimental aircraft tested at Round Hill was the Crouch-Bolas "Dragonfly," brainchild of two Englishmen. The twin-engine cabin biplane was an early attempt at a STOL type airplane. Large counter-rotating propellers covered most of the wing area and the thrust angle was ground adjustable. When the scheduled test pilot failed to show, Philip "Red" Desmarais offered his services. The flight nearly became Red's last when he narrowly missed the blimp hangar on takeoff due to control problems, then found that it was impossible to make a power off approach and was forced to whip stall the "Dragonfly" to a landing, fracturing the gear in several places. The designer was ecstatic, however, complimenting Red on his knowledge of short field technique!

Colonel Green had cars built specially so that he could enter and leave them without excess stooping but to negotiate the Round Hill estate and airport, a small, electrically driven car called the "Cream Puff" was employed. A semi-convertible, the little vehicle usually carried, besides the Colonel, one or two of the pet terriers, Stella being one of the favorites.

Obviously an airport such as that described here would attract fliers of the era and so it was that many of the greats and near greats visited Round Hill Airport. Names such as Eddie Rickenbacker, Alex de Seversky, Ponton "Bon-bon" de Arce, Lowell Bayles, Russell Boardman, Johnny Polando and many others including well-known Army and Navy fliers were familiar with the field.

In June 1936, Colonel Ned Green died and shortly thereafter Round Hill Airport closed for good. Oddly enough, nothing has been constructed on the land such as a supermarket or housing development. A scrubby undergrowth now covers the old field. One may still find the concrete hangar foundation with its door tracks intact and the seaplane ramp is yet in evidence but all traces of the other buildings with the exception of the mansion have long since vanished.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As with most research projects (at least we suspect this to be true), the writer would have preferred much more material with which to work. However, perhaps half a loaf is better than none at this point. Special thanks to Priscilla Hill and her late husband, Bert; their son Noel; Chet Lisak; Tom Tatro; Bill Harney and Henry Olden.