

Chief Executive Officer's Message

Sitting in the airport café on a foggy morning, an L-2 bravely doing pattern work in the low overcast, I ponder the low visibility conditions of aviation history. Many long standing organizations have shuttered their doors, due to lack of support and resources; the balance between success and ruin being precariously close.

One of these organizations is Aerofiles, a well-known aviation history website begun in the early 1990s by AAHS member K.O. Eckland, who wanted to record and preserve histories of early, obscure aircraft. After its introduction to the Internet in 1992, Eckland's Aerofiles quickly became a trusted site for information on all kinds of powered, fixed wing aircraft, agency registration data, and photos.

By 2008, Eckland's Aerofiles was seeing 11,000 visits per day (per website stats), and publishing aircraft updates from enthusiasts around the world. The work was still largely the effort of K.O. Eckland, who passed away in May 2009 at the age of 83. We at AAHS (also users of Aerofiles) contacted the Eckland family, offering to take on the responsibility maintaining Aerofiles to preserve K.O.'s legacy. The family declined, saying they would be continuing their father's work themselves.

By 2012, however, the Aerofiles website was no longer being updated. The Eckland family (a son and two daughters) had migrated to Paradise, California. While escaping the 2019 fire, which destroyed all the known residences (and we suspect much of K.O.'s personal collection), the family seems to have dropped off the face of the earth.

AAHS has continued the effort to locate and connect with the Eckland family regarding the transfer of responsibility of Aerofiles to AAHS. Certified letters were sent to all known addresses of direct relatives, returned as undeliverable. Purchased background information provided phone numbers and email addresses – all non-functional. All known living former associates were contacted, hoping to find someone with information. We even approached the Aerofiles Internet domain administrator asking if they would reach out to their registrant asking them to contact us. Everything was a dead end.

Then a source turned up a new address in just the past couple of weeks. So we again have extended our offer and are waiting to see if we can finally establish contact. In the meantime, we are taking steps to preserve the Aerofiles content and have been in contact with a number of individuals that formally supported Aerofiles offered to assist keeping a future Aerofiles website updated. We have established a domain (Aerofiles2.com) in order to create an enhanced, updated version of the site, with the data in a standardized format and a functioning search engine.

Our mission of aviation history preservation can sometimes be foggy, as we must always choose where to spend our limited resources, and try to predict what preservation efforts today will provide the greatest future dividends. In the case of Aerofiles, it is clear. We will continue to honor K.O. Eckland's legacy of aviation history preservation.

Other actions we're taking to expand our ability to preserve more history is through the grant submissions to organizations that have similar preservation objectives to ours. We are collecting information now with the help of volunteer Alexander Barnes, for a grant submission to the National Endowment for the Humanities, which can be up to a 50 page submittal. Alex also has plans to help AAHS submit several other grants throughout the year. A successful grant award will go a long way for helping get our slide collections digitized and available to the public. Thank you again, Alex!

In more exciting news, for the future of AAHS, we are introducing Tyson Smith (AAHS member since 2015) as our new AAHS President! As you know, I've performed the President's role for over a decade, and a few years ago, we chose to create a separate CEO and President's position, to essentially 'divide and conquer' the many important tasks it takes to keep AAHS viable.

While it's taken us some time to successfully fill this position, I am entirely confident that Tyson has the creativity, energy and interest to help AAHS reach another generation of aviation enthusiasts. After all, why WOULDN'T a guy who has a DC-3 cockpit in his backyard not make an excellent president?

Jerri Bergen
AAHS CEO



AAHS Director Les Whittlesy, Carl Scholl, President Tyson Smith, wife Klara Smith, and CEO Jerri Bergen, in front of Carl's B-25J 'Pacific Princess' at Cable Airport, Upland, California.

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