

A FUTURE for the A.A.H.S.

By HARVEY LIPPINCOTT, President

CONNECTICUT AERONAUTICAL HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Throughout the history of mankind his multifarious activities have come and gone in an interminable array that often leaves the observer in a state of bewilderment. So much has transpired that, inevitably, history is fragmented into areas of speciality. The history of transportation -- man's means of movement -- is one broad segment, while that portion due to aeronautics is but a sliver. The historical specialist has his place but he must take care lest he lose his sense of balance in the overall history of mankind.

In aeronautics we have witnessed the close of a 180-year period of lighter-than-air history. Though a few balloons and blimps may continue to fly from time to time, it seems unlikely that any significant renaissance of the type will occur. Aside from documents and pictures, what has been preserved to remind mankind of this important and interesting phase of aeronautics? In the U.S., very little: Three balloon baskets, two gondolas, one small blimp car, a few engines, propellers, structural members and relics. In Europe, somewhat more has been preserved, of similar vein. No complete balloon or airship seems to have been preserved anywhere in the world. More importantly, no organization has existed to take positive steps in this purpose. More of this fascinating period of human endeavor should have been retained. Now, it is too late to do much about it.

In some spheres even the airplane is being phased-out. The jet engine brought speed, performance and capability previously unheard of. Now the rocket motor brings a new capability, taking man's activity from the air into outer space. Today's historic B-52, fulfilling a significant role in a tense period of man's history, will in a few short years become obsolete, a junkman's pleasure. How many will be preserved for the future? Those preserved will certainly spend their days unprotected out-of-doors from economic limitations of proper housings.

In the twenty-five years between 1920 and 1945 few people had the perception, and the push, to make an effort to preserve the aeronautical history of man. In the U.S., three men stand out in this period, Paul E. Garber, Henry Ford and U.S. Army civil service employee whose name is now forgotten. The fine effort of this Army employee to create and establish the Wright Field Museum in 1934 was doomed to the most cruel fate when, in 1941, a new commanding officer ordered this priceless collection of early Army historical aircraft to be piled and burned -- lost forever.

Henry Ford's fine collection of non-military historical aircraft and the Wright Brothers shop and home are carefully preserved for all to enjoy. For all of Ford's "history is bunk" allegations, Henry Ford was one of the greatest preservers of historical artifact the world has known.

However, the man to whom we owe the greatest debt for historical aeronautical preservation is Paul Edward Garber. For many years the only employee of the Smithsonian Institution engaged in aeronautics, Garber single-handedly created the interest in the preservation of nearly every aircraft and related artifact placed in the Smithsonian between 1920 and 1955. His behind-the-scenes activities to acquire some of history's most historic aircraft, SPIRIT OF ST LOUIS, 1905 Wright Flyer, WINNIE MAE, NC-4, his efforts to overcome the indifference, lack of funds, storage facilities and assistance are little known. There may be others, but Paul Garber has not been exceeded in this dedication and service to the American people.

With the end of World War II, a surge of interest

developed in aviation's history. In the '50's young people began to read of the days past -- of the Wrights, Curtiss, World War I, the Air Mail Service, adventure over the Atlantic, and the flowering of air travel. This interest has grown at a rapid rate, resulting in a surge of historical writings, books, collecting activity, recording, documentation and the formation of aeronautical historical societies such as our own American Aviation Historical Society, the Antique Airplane Association, the Connecticut Aeronautical Historical Association, the Cross and Cockade, Wingfoot Lighter-Than-Air Society and others. Instead of a handful of individuals, hundreds are at work. Museums and full-scale aircraft collections have doubled, attendance has increased tremendously.

Yet, with all of this interest, the destruction and discard of our heritage is going on at a tremendous rate. To cite a few examples:

a. A few years ago a prominent Eastern airplane manufacturer destroyed its early photographic negatives and most of its correspondence and records in a move to Texas.

b. Because of lack of storage space and non-use a prominent engine manufacturer has ordered all of its Sales Department correspondence, photographs, drawings, and records destroyed from its beginning to 1950.

c. In the records belonging to the public, a better job of preservation is done, but there are many famous lapses in this area, as the destruction of the early Air Force negatives at Wright Field.

Fortunately many private collectors have entered the picture. Some of these collectors have done a fine job of gathering together historic material. But the one common factor of private collections is their usual inaccessibility to the researcher who might need material or information from them. No index on their contents is available, nor are many collectors, for justifiable reasons, overly anxious to open their collections to the general public. The collector is thus in danger of amassing a large collection of objects yet contributing nothing to the preservation of history. He may look at the scrap book of an aging pioneer as something to add to his library shelves, but makes no effort to record this man's history, to write about it and to bring it to the public's attention.

Dealers in aeronautics may acquire, from an aging pioneer, his memorabilia to sell, but makes no effort to record his contributions to aviation. These valuable relics are thrown upon the market and scattered to the winds.

In many instances a pioneer will not let his moments go during his lifetime. He would rather keep them than sell them for a few bucks to a collector or dealer. But when he dies, his heirs often throw the "old junk" into the fire and sell his books to the secondhand man or give it to a half-interested neighbor.

Museums, libraries and institutions have the problem of having too much of one thing and not enough of another. Often their character is such that they can neither give nor sell their surplus to individuals. But non-profit groups and institutions, including properly incorporated local historical groups, can often receive this material as a gift or indefinite loan.

With this passing of an age, and with the need to preserve and record the history, what can be done? Or can anything be done? Fortunately, yes, -- by group action! The power of group action can do much to preserve, promote, foster and disseminate aviation history. This is not without its problems and pitfalls, but the good that group action can do far overrides the

debts it may occur.

There are already several stable institutions which will continue their work of preserving and disseminating aeronautical history. The most important is the National Air Museum established by Congress, and which is likely to be with us forever. The permanency of this institution is a force in itself. Other permanent institutions are the Edison Institute and Museum (Ford Foundation), and the Library of Congress.

Others are semi-permanent institutions such as the Air Force Museum or the Marine Corps Museum which can be disbanded by military command. Finally, there are the private museums such as Ed Maloney's Air Museum and Harold Warp's "Pioneer Village".

One of the great weaknesses of all aforementioned institutions is their inability to record and preserve adequately the less significant local aeronautical history. Much of this local history is of little interest or importance on the national scale. They have not the funds, manpower or time to go into the four-corners of the nation and spend the many hours necessary to record and gather local aviation history. AND IF THEY CAN NOT DO IT, WHO WILL?

The obvious solution is in local organizations. The emergence of local aeronautical historical groups is in force. The first important local group to come into being and the first state organization is the Connecticut Aeronautical Historical Association (CAHA), founded in November, 1959. The Indianapolis Aviation Historical Society and the Texas Aviation Historical Society are now in existence. Others are in the embryo stage.

These state and local groups can do a tremendous job in recording and perpetuating their area's aeronautical past. In time, as their collections of data, history and material mount an exchange of material with the national institutions will evolve. Such national cooperation could do a reasonably effective job of preserving, stimulating and disseminating our American historical heritage to all.

One important link is required -- a national coordinating body. The logical coordinator is already in being -- the American Aviation Historical Society. A serious problem remains: -- the AAHS is not ready to assume this position of national coordinator. It does not yet have the prestige, permanency or funds to properly assume the mantle. But these deficiencies are correctable, however, if the Membership (and the leadership) will undertake a constructive program to enhance itself.

The A.A.H.S. has established a sound base upon which to build. President George Hardie and the Officers and Directors of the Society clearly see the opportunity and are working to obtain a national charter on the level of the American Historical Association. It is a large order, one that will require much time, effort and hard work.

The creation of local aeronautical historical organizations and their affiliation with a national coordinator, (as A.A.H.S.) will be an important force in the preservation of history. In turn, local organizations can derive much strength and support from a strong and influential national coordinator. As coordinator, the A.A.H.S. can help to organize local groups, advise and assist locals to overcome their problems, coordinate information interchange through indexes, bulletins and special publications, and assist in contacts with national institutions. This national program needs serious consideration from all Members. To point the way to establishment of local organizations, a review of the Connecticut Aeronautical Historical Association is worthwhile.

Before any organization can be established there must exist a group of interested persons from whom founders can be drawn. For several years a small informal group of aviation people at Hartford, Conn. occasionally gathered to listen to lectures, to visit an old airplane or track down an item for the National

Air Museum. Some joined A.A.H.S. when this Society came into being. Through the years a realization developed that some form of local organization with a planned program was needed. Occasional forays into early Connecticut aeronautical history revealed a fascinating story of an extensive and long forgotten activity. But no one was doing anything to preserve this history. Finally an event came to pass which dramatized the need for a formal organization: -- to save an old Connecticut airplane.

In November, 1959 this informal group gathered to discuss steps necessary to save this airplane. Before the evening was out, the airplane became a minor issue and the true feelings of the group were expressed in the formation of a state-wide aeronautical historical organization. The CAHA came into being to fill the vacuum in historical activity which the A.A.H.S. was not providing. Many in this group were interested in working with and restoring hardware, others in historical research, some in educational work, some in writing and publishing, many in fellowship. To embrace the varied interests of all, a four point program was inaugurated by CAHA:

1. To investigate, document and disseminate information of the significant events of Connecticut aeronautical history.

2. To promote the saving, acquisition and restoration of aeronautical records, material, relics, and objects of historical interest and significance.

3. To further the association of persons of like interest by means of various meetings, programs, and activities.

4. To foster education of the public in aeronautical history.

To implement this program four Standing Committees were organized with the committee chairmen appointed annually by the president. Each chairman enlists the assistance of interested members to form working sub-committees.

1. Research Committee

Plans, establishes and directs an over-all historical research program, with major emphasis upon Conn. projects.

Interview (and record) aeronautical pioneers, search for and acquire aeronautical documents, prepare drawings and reports, disseminate acquired information through seminars, lectures and writings. Maintain custody of related research materials and equipment and be responsible for their upkeep and repair.

2. Materials Committee

Acquire significant aeronautical material, aircraft, engines, aircraft accessories and components. Establish a program for active participation in reconstruction, restoration, preservation, display and use of the acquired material. Establish and manage a museum or collection of aeronautical artifacts.

3. Program Committee

Arrange, plan, and conduct the program for all general meetings, field trips, special events, and exhibitions. (Three lecture-meeting programs, an annual business meeting, and at least one summer outing are the usual yearly fare. Past programs have included, First Wasp Engine, Wiley Post, Calbreth P. Rodgers, 50th Anniversary of Naval Aviation, A. Holland Forbes and the first aeronautical law, Otto Luyties and Ellehammer helicopter programs and Civil War aeronautics. Outings have included a visit to Cole Palen's Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome.)

4. Education Committee

Collect, establish and maintain a library of aeronautical books, documents, memorabilia, papers, letters, and reports. Compile, edit and publish suitable publications for the Association. Assist with or prepare historical programs, lectures, exhibitions for public education in schools, the press, other organizations, radio and TV.

Policies of the CAHA are established by the Board of Directors, (nine elected on staggered three-year

terms) and the officers. The officers include President, Executive Vice-President, Vice-Presidents, Corresponding Secretary, Recording Secretary, and Treasurer. Committee Chairmen attend Board meetings without vote. Other variations of the CAHA organization could be equally workable.

Four classes of membership were established: - Founding (thirty-five original founding members); Charter (those who joined before June 1, 1960); Honorary (those of state and national note who have made significant contributions to aeronautics -- only three elected so far); and Member (those who join after June 1, 1960). Dues are set at \$5.00 annually.

After the CAHA had been in operation for a time, it became obvious that, even though Connecticut is a small state, most membership activity was centered in the headquarters area around Hartford. Yet, fifty miles away were the Sikorsky, Avco and Norden plants with thousands of employees, many of whom certainly should be interested in a program such as that of the CAHA. But, only five members were in this significant area. It became necessary to break CAHA down into even smaller groups to bring a greater degree of participation into local areas. A chapter system was established on the basis of land area. (To de-emphasize rivalries between competing aircraft companies and create an interchange of fellowship between members of different company affiliation, chapters by aircraft companies were prohibited.) When the Southwest Chapter was formed, membership in that area jumped from five to sixty-five. This experience indicates that larger states would have to establish the chapter system, with an annual meeting drawing the delegates from the chapters together at the central organization. Many factors, such as area size, population concentration, aeronautical activity, etc., affect the problem in different states. Each state must understand its situation and work out its own procedures.

Fortunately, Connecticut is steeped in history and rich in museums and historic buildings. CAHA has been rewarded with the backing of state officials and industry heads, many of whom are members. State, private and industry officials have been interested in our desire to establish an aeronautical museum and much encouragement has been received. The State Librarian urged us to establish an aeronautical collection to include such items as were manufactured in the State. It soon became evident that a non-profit educational institution of public citizens, unattached to other organizations, was required to act as the rallying point for such civic action. Such an organization must be properly incorporated under the state laws and receive state and federal tax exemptions before gifts, donations and museum projects can be considered.

In view of this public expression of support, the CAHA adopted a program to establish an aeronautical collection and a museum to house it. After careful consideration CAHA decided that specific aircraft material to be collected must have been built, flown, used, associated or in some way used by Connecticut people. No effort will be made to duplicate or compete with other large museums such as the National Air Museum; cooperation is the requirement. A carefully selected list of aircraft desired covering the span of Conn. history has been prepared. Our searches have already turned up two aircraft of national significance, but which do not fit into our plans, and the CAHA has alerted the national museums to these.

The museum is now becoming an actuality. We believe that Connecticut will support a museum, which may not be possible in some states. However, it is not necessary to have a museum to include full-scale aircraft. A headquarters building helps to provide something tangible and important to an organization. Into such a facility can be established the library, memorabilia collections, offices and small meeting rooms necessary for this type of organization. A home, even though

it may be an old house, gives a sense of permanency and being. Perhaps this home can be a portion of a cooperating existing institution, an aviation, industrial or scientific museum, a historical society, a library, a state museum, etc.

As a non-profit educational institution CAHA has received support and assistance from state and industry sources that a private collector could not obtain. Storage and work facilities have been supplied by the State in unused structures. Industry has turned over aircraft material, photographs, books, library material which was slated for destruction, unavailable to individuals but willingly given to CAHA because of its nature and for what it stands. Documentation and industrial correspondence have been saved by CAHA member-employees who agree to reduce it to historical matter only on their own time. Some companies have agreed to preserve in their files a reasonable amount of historical material.

Many momentos and memorabilia collections have been deposited with the CAHA by their owners as a means of insuring preservation and to put the material to a useful purpose. Such material has been saved from destruction by alert CAHA members who convinced families of deceased pioneers not to destroy records, but to place them in CAHA's archives. The original factory drawings of all the GEE BEE aircraft were saved for all in this manner. They were about to be burned!

Unless an organization, going under the banner of an educational institution, gives some educational service, it is not properly serving its stated purpose. Accordingly our lecture-meetings are generally open to the public and well advertised in the press. Also, CAHA has established a lecture service. Its prime lecture is "The Story of Connecticut Aeronautics", but other lectures are worked up from time to time to meet specific requirements. These lectures are given, upon request, to schools, organizations, clubs, etc. Contributions to the treasury are often obtained through these, but the promotion of CAHA is the chief benefit.

Much can be done on limited funds, provided enough willing volunteers show up to do the work. However, funds are needed beyond those of annual dues, which usually cover correspondence, newsletters, postage, stationery, and general operating expense, but leave no funds for photocopying, aircraft purchase, restoration costs, headquarters expense, museum, etc. A local organization must use its ingenuity to generate funds, but they will be scarce unless the organization is properly organized and has attained the proper public image. The public image of a historical organization is peculiar, but definite. The image is of a serious, genteel, quality organization. It must not have raucous, cheap; bally-hoo, leather-jacket tendencies. If a historical organization can find a wealthy angel, it has been fortunate. Generally some form of financial campaign must be organized to secure the funds to carry out its program. People can be persuaded to give, but the cause must be worthy.

In summation, the time is now propitious for the establishment of aeronautical historical organizations. Indications of general public support at this time are evident. More pressing, though, is the rapid disappearance of priceless historical material because proper organizations do not exist to save this material. Aging pioneers are rapidly leaving us, many with their complete stories unrecorded. And there is a growing demand for historical materials and participation in historical work to satisfy the growing interest in our aeronautical past. We, the CAHA, urge you in all other States to unite with us in preserving all of aviation's unique and glorious history.

**Every Member get
a new Member this year**