

Editorial

At a recent meeting of the Directors of the Society the subject of preservation of documentary material was reviewed in the light of the long-range program. At some day in the near future a plan must be evolved to provide for the disposition of material in our own collections as well as that accruing to the Society through gift or other acquisition. For as we know, many Members of the Society have built considerable masses of data with which to document the history of aviation.

As collectors we continue to build a legacy which can be: 1) a valuable part of our estate, or 2) a burden to our heirs, whether valuable or not, depending upon how we arrange our affairs while we are alive. A collection is a tangible asset like any other part of our estate when we die.

What is your collection worth? A great deal, or nothing - and this depends upon who looks at it. Consider a large collection of books, photos, drawings, paintings, etc., on World War I aviation. An air-race enthusiast could use it as material for trading. A book dealer would be interested only for the rare or marketable books in it. An art dealer would probably not be interested at all. But another student of WW I aviation might give all he had and drive hundreds of miles to get it. Except for the latter named student, all other methods of disposal would result in its scattering to the winds.

Another example. The late A. U. "Al" Schmidt was one of the earliest Members of the Society, and was well known throughout the professional aviation photography world. His collection of negatives represented many thousands of miles traveled and dollars spent. When Al died suddenly of a heart attack, this left his wife with one problem, among the many, what to do with his collection. Where could one find a buyer at any price commensurate with the effort expended by Al to build it? Fortunately, a knowledgeable buyer was found and the collection preserved intact.

Like a painting, or sculpture, it is worth only as much as what some person will pay for it. In book collections only certain items have value as the collector's items which book dealers will immediately purchase and find a ready sale for. The balance must be disposed of for next to nothing.

The problem of what to do with a collection should be decided by each individual and implemented within the near future, rather than be left to a widow who cannot assess its value, afford to ship it, or decide to what depository it should go. Restrictions on depositories cancel out most as possible recipients.

The National Air Museum is the most likely, and many private collections concerning aviation have been placed there. However, with a vast amount of material for which display space is now and will continue to be unavailable, its chief advantage lies in that, if accepted, the material would be stored.

Under consideration and discussed briefly by the Directors of the Society, is a plan for the establishment of an A.A.H.S. library, beginning slowly with material coming to an already established library accompanied by funds for its maintenance. Later on, endowments and other funds will be sought for enlargement to a wing or department with an adequate staff. A final step to a separate facility can be made when the proper financial structure becomes real. Memorial sections can then be accepted - with suitable endowments. Lending facilities, research rooms, reproduction means and inter-library exchanges will be effected. It is intended that this be THE library of aviation history, with all of the source records either incorporated or

available to it, for the use of all Members and, under proper restrictions, other students of aviation history. A large undertaking, perhaps, but a worthy goal for the Society.

In the meantime, the preservation of these collections must be arranged. A corporation has been proposed to provide the necessary administrative structure, to be financed through a life insurance program whereby the owner of the collection will provide a 20- or 30-year life policy. In the event of his death, funds would be available for the disposition of his collection under the advice, if needed, of a board of trustees qualified to render advice upon its relocation. Such a policy need not be large but would be gauged to the size of the collection, content, and destination, since these determine the crating and freighting charges.

If you are interested, write to me at the address below. As always, to quote an Aesop's fable, "Who will bell the cat?"

THE RIFLE APPROACH

Last year, at the beginning of this term of office, I wrote that we were at a critical point in our career as a Society. We have made some progress and although membership is up and we will meet all expenses this year, the situation is still critical.

The answer to it is, of course, increased membership. We must make more use of the rifle approach than the scattergun. Advertising in newsstand publications is expensive. We are aided measurably by stories such as occur in the current Air Progress Magazine. It tells about the A.A.H.S. and we greatly appreciate this. But our growth lies in your telling your friends and correspondents about the A.A.H.S.

If you do not wish to make even a "soft sell", send me the name of a friend or correspondent whom you feel is interested in aviation history. A letter and a brochure will be sent, describing the American Aviation Historical Society and indicating that you have placed their name in nomination for membership. A courteous gesture, and a device used by some of the more prestigious organizations.

Our writer-members who contribute to the men's and trade publications, can do their Society a great service by insisting upon mention of the A.A.H.S. with their by-lines. As the word gets around and more people see the mention of A.A.H.S., they will begin to think, "I'd better look into this."

The emphasis on local meetings, which we have made, has three prime reasons behind it: 1) interest in aviation history is better shared with others, 2) it results, however indirectly, in bringing forth the grass-roots history from the participants and witnesses, and 3) through this stimulation, the cause of aviation history is aided and some of this rubs off on the American Aviation Historical Society.

The application forms included with your JOURNAL from time to time are useful. Sending one of these to a correspondent is the direct application of the "rifle approach".

Keep up the campaign. Our immediate goal is a workable salary for the Editor. What is paid now is less than desired; were it not for other sources of income and an intense interest on the part of Kenn Rust, we would never make it. A second step is printing by typeset to produce a justified right hand column margin. After that, a touch of color here and there will vastly improve our presentations. Then will come supplementary publications. These are desirable goals for the future but right now we have a strong need for 3000 active Members to attain our immediate goal.

James J. Sloan, President
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