

## Aviation interviews

May 26, 1993 Eldred Ellefson recalls a story from his Uncle Harry in the forties: Harry lived at Washington Harbor and recalled hearing a plane engine sputter & die to the northwest. Plane disappeared. Similar to Jay Gowley's stories in The Great Lake Triangle.

Eldred thinks a DC-3 once landed at Island airport.

## Aviation interviews

May 25, 1993 Floyd Koyen recalls seeing dirigible Macon out over lake in 1933. Plainly visible. Looked to be 200-300 yards away.

Rode with Wally Arutgen. Says Wally first came to the Island on fishing boat with Garden Peninsula baseball team.

Wally's first landing was in field between lumber company and Lutheran Church.

Floyd thought Wally was "young and carefree." Wally used to be on Island "about every Saturday night."

In 1928 Floyd was sceptical of the value of an airport since there was so little traffic at the time.

George Meredith of Sturgeon Bay was considered to be a "much safer" pilot than Wally.

Floyd's neighbor a farmer flew upside down with Wally "... shit in his pants" for the first and only time.



## Aviation interviews

May 25, 1997. Joy Gunnlaugsson recalls Wally Arntzen landing in field other side of road. Scared Trini's cows so they ran all the way home to Basquas (Gunnlaugsson homestead.) Wally was friend of Dr. Farmer who came from Escanaba [?].

George Meredith made charter flights regularly from Island to Sturgeon Bay as early as 1946. Joy recalls this because Hagen sold their log cabin on Main Road that year. Family members had to go to L.B. to close deal.

~~Floyd Hagen~~

Interview with Jack Couell

Dec. 9, 1992

Served as aviation maintenance-electrician for 3-4 yrs. in military. Living in Kenosha. He & a friend interested in flying, bought plane together. Jack was 23 at the time.

"Gravel Ray" Anderson had a plan and served for many years as the unincorporated "airport manager". Jack, having learned to fly, was a natural successor to Ray. Served as airport manager for 21 years. With development of FAA & state dept. of Transportation some town agreed to pay Jack \$15 per month, then \$90. Currently eleven hangars at airport. Jack purchased Tike Imigo.

Town owns airport property, ∴ tax-free. Hangar owners pay annual fee to lease space, plus a personal property tax.

Wally Arn and Jon Thoin were earlier flyers who came here from Escanaba. John still owns Thoin aviation at Escanaba which does both charters and instruction.

Office 906-786-6204

Farm 906-786-4909

Duties? (as airport mgr.)

2601 18<sup>th</sup> Ave

Escanaba Mich 48829

Memorable events?

mentions "Gravel Ray" Anderson, Ray Rasmussen, Ron Mantel,

Beard Gordon,



## Interview on Island aviation

Dec. 10, 1992 - Dale Bjarnason recounts story of his brother's hunting injury in 1946 (March 3). Incident occurred in Boyce's woods, about a quarter of a mile southwest of corner of Town Line & Airport Roads, behind Fairhouse. George Meredith's carburetor froze up over Rock Island as he was headed for Eskanaba, landed on ice at Jackson Harbor. Dickie transferred to Wally Autzgen's plane. Fell through ice as he was taxiing to take off. (Fishermen had been cutting ice from harbor for coming season.) The challenge was to 1) save Duke's life and 2) his arm if possible.

Since there was no means of getting to E. Dr. Worcester & nurse flew up from Sturgeon Bay. Operation for amputation of arm at elbow performed on Dr. Pannier's kitchen table (present Kahlshover's)

97 Winchester weapon used - quite unreliable.

Auto lights used at Detroit Harbor so Worcester could land after dark.

Dale recalls seeing stunt flyers fly beneath rope extended between two poles. Also pilots would sometimes fly upside down.

1979 rescue on Thanksgiving eve to bring in oxygen.

Thorsten Adkinson's mother an early flyer.

Terry Atkins Dale's nephew was an Eskanaba-based crop duster. Good pilot but tended to be



reckless. Survived island plane crash. Took up Dale & his wife as wedding present. Ferry lost with two passengers in c. Dec. 1982.

Dale agreed to tell the story about his brother's dramatic rescue at Anclines program on July 15, 1993.

Other early landing fields included area north of Red Barn and opposite Alas Gunnlaugsson's garden on Town Line Rd.

## Interview on Island aviation

Dec. 12, 1992 Muriel Gunnlaugsson

Thirty Indians camped on father's farm north of Mountain & Jackson Harbor Roads. Muriel recalled the visitors "looked pathetic"; she thought they all had TB. The chief came to visit grave of his father, located somewhere on the east side off Lakeview Road.

Muriel reported that before the airport was built small planes used to land in a field near the corner of Lakeview & East Side Roads.

Sylvia flew with Wally Autzgen c. 1928. (She thought she was about 18 at the time.)

Suggested Hannis Hansen (at Velcomee) might have some recollections of early aviation.

Alva Jens of Madison might have some early Hansen-Jens photos involving aviation.



## Intercourse on Island aviation

Dec. 12, 1992 - Sylvia Nelson - Wally Arntzen was an exciting figure "all the girls were wild about." Part of the initial appeal of aviation was adventure and romance.

Sylvia recalled 1928 "bull festival" - annual meeting of the Holstein Breeders Association held at the newly completed airport. Group of Potawatomi Indians came. Dance held that night at Nelson's - "a big event" to which whole Island was invited.

Sylvia also recalled stunt flying over the baseball field and elsewhere on the Island.

In 1927 before airfield was built, Wally Arntzen landed in field north of Anderson farm on Main Road. Sylvia was babysitting two Cornell kids at the time. Wally asked if they'd like to go up. Condition was that baby sitter had to go along. Asked about her reaction to the flight, Sylvia said she "was scared to death."



Interview c Tom Jessen

12/17/92

1. The first native islander who learned to fly since Claude Cornell, Tom took lessons from Jack Cornell in 1926. He had 9 1/2 hrs. of flight time before he soloed and had passed his written exam at Green Bay & earned his license in 12 1/2 hrs.

Jack Cornell wanted a larger plane to accommodate his family so he sold his Kenosha-lease plane to Leonard Rheul, who in turn sold the plane to Tom.

Tom views the island airport as a "gem" for small planes, well-packed sod, well-maintained.

2. Claude Cornell had Ray Cornell build a hangar for him. Before WW II he ran out of gas and crashed up at Northport beach. Never flew again. Smashed plane brought to the island and housed in hangar there until 1950's. Plane sold to off-islander. Hangar housed Grand Ray Anderson's plane thereafter.

3. Re: 1928-29 airport - throughout the depression, commercial fishermen flourished. No depression here. Tom thought key men in airport were George Mann, Teel Gudmundsen (Tom's grandfather), Will Jess and Tom Goodman. Wally Anson infused a spirit of adventure. 18 boaters were men of means, far-sighted. (No need to transfer fish since most was salted in those days.)

Wally was drunk more often than sober. Even kept a bottle in the plane. A partner of Jan Thorsen. Wally was a burn-stormer. "if the engine started he took off" ... even though plane was held together by boiling wine.

W's plane  
"barely held  
together"



Tom says Wally originally came here during prohibition, hanging out at Tom Nelson's "bitter bar". Wally, a colorful "wild pilot," would buzz tavern for night landing.

2 or 3 cars would drive to field & supply night flights.

In plus Escanaba lights installed when island got electricity in 1948.

4. In the fifties, Pake Smig brought his own hanger from Sheboygan.

5. "Bull picnic" included parachute jump. jumper blown into woods behind Nick Dub's. Indian chief, K, came to visit father's grave "Silver Band." Tom Nelson interested in Holstein-Friesian Assoc. because of his Danish heritage. no cows of his own. Not an ox roast, more likely a pot luck.

6. Most memorable events - Lions Club Fish Boils - started by Harley Hancorn shortly after WW II. Harley flew C-47's in Kenona Theatre. Involved in Harley in bowling alley. Also strong member of the lions. Sitting around bar one night Harley suggested idea and it caught on. (See Henry about plane count)

7. Usual post-WW I planes cheap enough to buy were Steermans (used as trainers).

8. Sturgeon Bay aviators included Dr. Dan Dochester ("short & heavy set"), Nelson Sheets, George Meredith (WW II pilot who managed S. B. airport, a commercial pilot).

9. In 1951 Tom had slight stroke; shared room with S. Door revenue agent who arrested Tom Nelson. Took Nelson in handcuffs to S. B. Nelson's lawyer purchased bitter locally, presented bottle to judge. Case dismissed.



Thursday - June 24<sup>th</sup> visit to Sturgeon Bay (1995)

Checked materials at Door County Library. Publication entitled Cherryland Airport History only extends back to 1979 and is a camera-ready set of documents. George Meredith is listed as Airport Manager, starting in 1944.

Procured DCA obituary of George Meredith.

Took taxi 6 miles west to Airport in Nasawauyamus [?]

Memorial window at Airport highly political - stresses early eighties only. Airport Manager Keith Kasolin a graduate of NW Tech but in Green Bay. Allowed me to examine four red bound looseleaf notebooks 1940/1950/1960/1970. Most records of county supervisor meetings re: airport. A few clippings. Much less data than one would expect.

Keith called Art Cernak an ETA veteran and asked him to drop by for a chat. Very interesting 45 minute interview ensued. It seems ~~that~~ an airport manager, George (after Meredith) destroyed all early records in the interest of being "progressive" & forward-looking. Consequently, aside from DCA, there is no existing body of useful data on the pre-1979 aviation era in S.B. Cernak allowed me to print copies of two shots of Claude Cornell's "Washington Island". He also gave me some helpful negatives. Cernak knew Wally Antgen. Came to live in S.B. in 1938. Original Reynolds field in Sevastopol too small for larger planes. No new airport (due to lack of capital) until 1946. Recent expansion of hangars & local interest in aviation - (as on Washington Island). Enthusiastic, interested, knowledgable source.\*

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