

HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE-EAST SECTION

1929 thru 1939

The history of the Middle-East Section has been interwoven with that of the "99's" since its inception in 1929. There being no elected president at that time, Louise Thaden represented our section containing the states of Pennsylvania and Michigan. On March 15, 1930, at the American Woman's Association Club House, twenty-eight women pilots present decided to have only a national secretary and a national treasurer and a board of governors representing various geographical sections. Louise Thaden was appointed to hold temporary office until permanent officers were elected.

By the middle of the 1930's, the Middle-East Section consisted of the states of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey with Dorothea Leh as the first governor.

At the first meeting of the "99" Club as it was then called, at the Hotel Drake, Chicago, Illinois, it was decided to hold a sectional business meeting every three months at a definite time and place, holding all section meetings at the same time and on the same date. Section meetings to enact important local business, or for social purposes were to be held at the discretion of the governor; national meetings, at the annual time and place of the National Air Races.

Sometime before the 2nd National Meeting in 1931, section boundaries changed slightly with New Jersey becoming a part of the New York – New Jersey Section. Washington, D. C. was mentioned in Vol. 1 #9, 1934 AIRWOMAN when Genevieve Moore Savage, a "99", entertained twelve Washington, D. C. Women pilots at a buffet supper at her home at Bolling Field on June 12th. At that time, plans were formulated for the formation of a local "99" chapter.

The important news of the Oct. 16, 1938, meeting at the home of Dorothea Leh, Allentown, Pennsylvania, was the dividing of the section into three chapters on the basis of geography. Because of the very great distance covered by the section and the mountains, the attendance at section meetings had been greatly limited. Usually, seven or eight members were present for these functions. By forming a West Pennsylvania Chapter, an East Pennsylvania Chapter, and a Washington-Baltimore-Richmond Chapter, it was felt that almost every member would be able to attend the monthly meetings of her chapter. Section meetings were then changed to the fall and spring of the year when it was hoped that the entire group would be able to meet together. Most meetings were held at member's homes.

All three chapters met for their first meetings during the month of November – West Pennsylvania Chapter, Nov. 13th and East Pennsylvania Chapter and the Washington-Baltimore-Richmond Chapter on Nov. 20, 1938. A copy of the account of each of these meetings is attached to this report. Each chapter involved was sent a copy for its file.

The above boundaries have remained to this day.

News of the meetings and happenings of our section was so rarely reported as to be conspicuous by its absence until the latter part of the 1930's. Why the members did not do something about the situation remains a puzzle, especially with the New York – New Jersey, North Central, Southwest and New England Sections giving such excellent accounts each month. This did not mean that our girls were not active. They were. Outstanding individual accomplishments were reported.

To really get an idea of the type of planes being flown, clothes worn and the activities of the girls for the first ten years of our organization is to look at the national picture.

In the early 1930's, the girls were flying such planes as: Travel Airs, Fleets, Eagles, Bellancas, Ryans, Wacos, Birds, and Lockheeds to name a few. Later Stinsons, Fairchild's and Taylorcrafts made their appearance. To fly these planes, especially the open cockpit ones, helmets, fur lined breeches, or jodhpurs and boots were the order of the day for winter graduating to jumpers with large pockets for summer. By 1936, culottes were becoming fashionable and the leather jackets shorter and more snugly fit at the waist with zipper fastenings, something we take for granted today.

The early flyers were required to take a physical examination every year for a private license; limited commercial and transport every six months. Until Jan. 3, 1930, all physicians authorized to give exams were men. The appointment of Dr. Margaret S. Witter of New York City as an official examiner for the Department of Commerce was a milestone along the line of progress of women in aviation. It was not until 1940, that women were able to retain their medical certificates when pregnant. They were finally considered to be suffering a temporary physical disability and were allowed to get time in the air by flying a dual control ship accompanied by another qualified pilot.

These early women pilots were terrific. They came from all walks of life but bound together by one common love – flying. They reached out into every facet of flying – teaching, selling, designing, airport managing, traffic managing, becoming aeronautical engineers, mail pilots, airline pilots, etc. The two things that impressed me most were their perseverance to forge ahead and their willingness to teach other women to fly. Mr. G. K. Spencer summed it up very well, "There has not been a single step in aviation's development in which the student woman, the woman of action or the woman of derring-do has not played an important role".

Flying in those days must have been really exciting and challenging. Forced landings seem to have been a part of everyday flying, especially the very early days. Breaking records, an exciting event. Some of the record holders in those days were:

International Records:

Ruth Law, Ruth Nichols, Amelia Earhart, Louise Thaden, Elinor Smith, Frances Marsalis, May Haizlip, Jacqueline Cochran, Helen MacCloskey, Genevieve Savage, Annette Gipson, Ione Coppedge and Mrs. Josephine Garrigus, Helen Frigo, Irene Crum and Mary Conrad

National Records:

Louise Thaden, Jacqueline Cochran, Amelia Earhart, Ruth Nichols, Annette Gipson, and Mrs. John Buckman

Transcontinental:

Ruth Nichols, Laura Ingalls, Louise Thaden and Blanche Noyes, Jacqueline Cochran, and Amelia Earhart

Some of these were from our section.

Besides setting altitude, speed, endurance and loop records, the girls were great air race participants. The most popular were the National Air Races held in Ohio or California and the Miami Air Races. In these, the women often out showed the men.

The girls were also busy with other worthwhile endeavors like air marking and planning scholarships. It was reported in 1936 that the Bureau of Air Commerce had appointed air marking pilots for the South and West, Louise Thaden; Middle-West, Helen MacCloskey; and East, Helen Richey. Nancy Harkness was appointed in September but later resigned. Blanche Noyes joined them shortly thereafter. She became Chief, Air Marking Staff, Federal Aviation Administration and was in charge of all air marking throughout the U. S. and its territories. She served thirty some years.

The saddest event in the first ten years of our history was the ill-fated flight of Amelia Earhart, a martyr to a small group of her friends, who against her will, mapped out the ill-starred flight which brought her to her death according to Bob Considine. He stated some data you don't often read. "She wanted to take another route – the one she had partly negotiated several months ago when a tire blew out and wrecked her plane at Honolulu. But, she listened to her friends, and embarked on her death; never knowing that the British Government had surveyed the very waters into which she finally crashed, and had reported them so shark-infested that they condemned them as a possible route for British airliners.

Amelia, perhaps, found out about that – later.

"Yes" you say, "but why on earth did she do it?"

Amelia Earhart was poor. Her financial obligations were heavier than most women's. This was to be the dernier ori of her flying career, the flight that would insure her financial future. We all would do a lot, for that.

"I really don't want to do it", she told a close friend not long before the take-off. "The day of stunt flying has passed. The world's used up. There's no place for trick stuff in modern aviation. Air travel needs only scientific perfection nowadays."

She had courage, more of it than most mortals get, and coolness developed to a remarkable degree, for a woman. But she needed more. She needed, for instance, a better knowledge and appreciation of radio.

She gave out only half a dozen position calls during her entire trip. She neglected to take along the trailing antennae that would have enabled her to transmit on a 500 kilocycle frequency – on that frequency she would have been able to contact the Itasca, the boat that was nearest to her when she sent out that last (and probably only message – the one that she had only a half hour's gas left, and that no land was in sight. Her radio was a small-range voice outfit, for it was simpler to operate.

Her so called "flying laboratory" did not even have the simplest precautionary instrument known as a drift regulator. A small ship's sextant was its primitive instrument for reading the stars.

It isn't good for America to lose women like Amelia Earhart. She was young, intelligent, brave, and able to do a man's work without losing the poise and touch that women seem to own. She, who had conquered space so often and so gloriously, combated it once too often.

Amelia Earhart did more to humanize air travel than anyone who ever lived. She helped change it from a country fair attraction to an industry of transportation. She died a victim of witless friends, but she did not live in vain.

Various memorials were discussed to commemorate her. Our section suggested dividing the sum of money allotted, among the section to airmark as many towns as

possible. In that way, they felt aviation in general and all flyers would benefit rather than one or two persons.

A majority of the national committee favored the establishment of a Blind Flying Scholarship Fund for a deserving Ninety-Nine which would be known as the Amelia Earhart Scholarship. The membership voted to try this scholarship for one year. This would require raising \$4,000, the interest from it being used for the scholarship – approximately \$240 per year. If they were not successful in raising half this fund, it would be turned over to the Amelia Earhart Foundation in California.

Thus ended the first ten years of our history.

Virginia Thompson
Middle-East Section Historian

NINETY-NINE NEWS LETTER

December 1938

MIDDLE EASTERN SECTION – West Pennsylvania Chapter

Our new chapter is now off "on" its own" having soloed with a meeting on Sunday, November 13, at the Flyers' Chub, Allegheny County Airport, Pittsburgh.

Under the capable guidance of Marge McCormick, Chairman pro tem, the meeting took off with five of the nine regular members and three prospective members in attendance. Unfortunately, we couldn't seem to inveigle the West Virginia members "outen them thar mountains" to this first meeting, but a long wire from Irene Crum of Huntington assured us they were with us in spirit and we're counting on them at our next meetings. Florence Boswell expected to bring Helen Curtis and her trusty Cessna to Pittsburgh, but unfortunately bad weather prevented her and disappointed us.

Among the many, many matters of utmost importance at this, our first meeting, was election of officers. A unanimous vote put Marge McCormick in the Chief pilot's seat (Chairman, to you), Irene Crum as Co-Pilot; Ellen Smith as Chief Mechanic (the gal who really inherits the hard work – Secretary and Treasurer), and as Radio Operator, this unworthy scribe. Ways of filling our practically non-existent treasury were discussed, and a plan agreed upon so that each member will have a tidy sum to report at the next meeting. Needless to say, we're out to make our Chapter the liveliest in the Middle Eastern Section. Some of the girls are already making plans to attend the Air Races in January and to participate in the New York-to-Miami race ... and we're looking forward to Ye Old Summertime when good week-end weather is more dependable and we can get together in our ships for Treasure Hunts and Real Fun!

Our next meeting is scheduled in Pittsburgh for Sunday, December 11. A cordial invitation is extended to members of other chapters to join us. Just drop Marge a note at Lebanon Hall Apartments, Mt. Lebanon, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The WELCOME MAT is on our doorstep permanently.

Frances Allen

NINETY-NINE NEWS LETTER

December 1938

Middle Eastern Section – East Pennsylvania Chapter

Our first trip under the new regime as separate chapter took off very successfully on Sunday, November 20, at the Lancaster Municipal Airport. Helen Jones was hostess and had arranged a delicious luncheon at a nearby hotel. We were greatly pleased to have with us as guest, Daisy Kirkpatrick, who stopped off to take in the meeting on her way from New York to Washington.

At the business meeting, a plan to raise money for our much deflated treasury was agreed upon, and at our next meeting on Sunday, January 16, at the Camden, New Jersey Airport, we hope to be able to bring together a tidy amount. Jesse Jones, manager of the airport and test pilot for the new Everell one-bladed propeller, gave us a most interesting and instructive talk on their construction, testing and operation.

Elizabeth Phillips and Lee Hazen, who flew up from Easton, Maryland, in Elizabeth's Fairchild, had to leave then to return before dark. The rest of us were taken through Sensenich's propeller factory at nearby Lititz and shown every step they undergo from the raw lumber to the last bit of polishing. It was very, very interesting and we thank Helen for arranging such a trip.

Congratulations are in order for Helen Schmaltz who received her private certificate on October 21. Any other 99's who are in the vicinity of Camden on January 16 are cordially invited to join us.