



Dirigo Flyer

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society

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KEN DeWITT

06/28/1908-03/26/2008

(Central Maine Flying Service)

DeWitt Field

Old Town Municipal Airport

And surrounding area

By Ray Gibouleau

(Part 1) Kenneth George DeWitt, an aviation legend in his own time, came out of the hangar and into the world June 26, 1908 in Bradford, Maine. George and Clara DeWitt were Ken's parents. Around age 12 his family moved to a farm in East Bradford. Ken would be the oldest of the four brothers. The family was nearly entirely self-sufficient, growing most of their own food and having chickens, cows, pigs and other farm animals, and "a good deal of venison" according to Ken. George DeWitt was an all-around handyman, a trait necessary in those days to run a farm and survive. George was a blacksmith by trade, and a good woodworker and welder. Ken learned these skills from his Dad, and they would serve him well in his aviation career, and even before. At age 15 Ken acquired a 1923 Model T Ford and converted it into a snow mobile that could cruise around the area in the winter. To make some money, at age 18 he converted another T into a movable firewood saw, one that could be moved from job to job to cut the winter's wood for families in the area.

When the family went to Bangor, they would walk six miles to Charleston and take the Electric Car (trolley). This was done a couple of times a year. When a working Model T was acquired, trips were easier and more frequent.

At 19 Ken was selling cars, and during the slow months of the winter he would work in the woods cutting fifty to sixty cords to sell. Some railroad ties were also produced.

Ken graduated from Bradford High School in 1929. He worked at Crosby's Ford in Bangor and then Webber Motor Company for seven or so years as an auto mechanic. Wanting to earn more than \$16 a week, Ken started his own business: Ken's Motor Service at 140 N. Maine Street in Old Town. The building had three stories; the garage on the first floor, living quarters on the second (where he resided for three or four years) and an airplane workshop on the third. This was around 1932. Norman Doliber worked for Ken, and stayed with him for a long time. Ken said Norman could fix anything, and between the two of them they could and did.

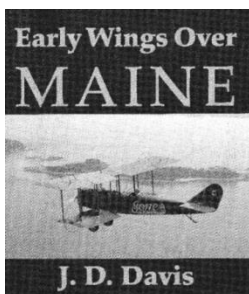
Apparently Ken and his Dad always had an interest in flying. Being skilled craftsmen they considered building an airplane. Plans or blueprints were ordered from a magazine and after careful review of the work, requirements and materials required to actually produce an airworthy aircraft they decided against it. Ken later stated that "It was a good thing we didn't" (build it).

Somewhere along the way Ken actually took some flying lessons, perhaps from Doane in Brewer, but that is unconfirmed. Ken had somehow acquired what is believed to be a Waco biplane. The fuselage of this plane was displayed in a front window on N. Main Street for some time. Every youngster and many other residents of Old Town and beyond were aware of this fuselage. There were no wings for the plane. Ken heard of a plane like his for sale in

Farmington for \$200. He called the owner and inquired about the plane. He was told it runs good and was used every Sunday to take passengers up. As Ken had not flown for a couple of years, the owner made him perform a couple of takeoffs and landings before putting in ten gallons of gas and turning the plane over to him for \$200. Ken left Farmington about 4PM and headed toward Bangor. Approaching Skowhegan the engine began to overheat and steam was hissing from the wing mounted radiator. A landing was made where the Skowhegan fairgrounds now exist. A man came walking across the field carrying a water can and told Ken he hadn't ought to be flying this thing, water was running out of it and it leaked like a sieve. Ken told this man who he was, and the man got tools and repacked the water pump, tightened some hoses and filled the radiator with water. Ken again headed east. Percy Billings, another well-known aviation enthusiast at the time, was operating Godfrey airfield in Bangor. Percy knew Ken was coming and set out 8 firepots to mark the runway, as it was dark by then. When Ken arrived he overflew Godfrey airfield and proceeded to Frost's field. That field was in complete darkness, and it took Ken three approaches before the airplane was in the proper position to land in the darkness before it. The aircraft touched down perfectly, and during the rollout something loomed ahead in the darkness. Ken tried to steer around this object but could not clear it, hooking one wing on it. This caused the airplane to veer sharply and stand on its nose. Steam and hot water came hissing from the radiator and engine. Ken exited the airplane, and even thought the cockpit was only about 8 feet off the ground he was sure he dropped 100 feet getting out. Ken had been on the field that very day and there were no obstructions. Mr. Frost had, however, taken a manure spreader to the field in the afternoon and it had broken down. It was left precisely in the middle of the field! Ken either owned or had access to an airplane hangar on or in the vicinity of Frost's field (near where Husson University is currently located). Percy Billings arrived a short while after the incident, having seen Ken bypass his lighted field. He inquired of Ken as to why he didn't land at Godfrey. Ken replied that he wasn't licensed, the plane wasn't licensed, nothing was licensed, and he shouldn't have been flying it in the first place. Percy understood and between them they got the plane back in a normal attitude and towed it into the hanger. Ken later said that the wings were no good and he'd have to build a set for his Waco. So with the pieces from the Farmington plane Ken rebuilt his plane and made new wings for it. He said it looked just as good as a brand new plane when it was finished. He flew it for at least two years.

Ken tells of the time when his partner, Herbert "Herb" Sargent, of H E Sargent construction, said to Ken that he'd like to have a new Cub so they would have something reliable to fly and could maybe go somewhere without having to worry about radiators, cranky OX-5 engines with water pumps and leaky hoses. Ken went to Rockland and bought a rebuilt J-3 Cub for \$400; \$200 each. A factory new Cub at the time cost between \$800 and \$900. One fine winter day they decided to take a trip around Mt. Katahdin, a feat that was not attempted with the older planes because of reliability concerns and the fact the older engines were water cooled with the possibility of leaks and freezing. The Cub had a four cylinder air cooled engine, so it had none of cooling problems the older engines did. Bundled up in cold weather gear, the two climbed to around 5000 feet and headed for Katahdin. After circling the mountain they flew over a deer yard on the West Branch of the Penobscot River. At that point the engine made a bang and began running rough. Ken opened the throttle wide and was going to run the engine as long as it would run, rather than risk a landing on a frozen river out in the bush. It did run long enough to carry them to a fairly clear spot in the river with smooth ice, and next to a logging operation headquarters. After a smooth landing, Ken exited the airplane and turned the engine over. It did not make normal sounds. After calling his shop, the mechanics came up and found the magneto drive shaft had failed and chewed up the rotor – they couldn't believe the engine ran long enough to get the plane to where it was. Ken said that they didn't dare try this flight with the older engines, but then noted that in several hundred hours of operation of the older engines, not one had quit and let him down like this one did!

Ken received his Commercial pilot's license from Randy Maharon. Randy told Ken he should get an instructor's license, and he could arrange for him to attend a school in Nashua, New Hampshire, at no cost as the Government was looking for instructors. Norm Doliber would look after Ken's auto service business while Ken was in school, which was about a month. Ken owned a 40 HP Taylor J-2 (later Piper) at the time, so he flew back and forth to Nashua. Ken was asked if he'd like to go to work, under contract, for 'a flying company' training pilots for the military. This would require being away for quite some time. His first assignment was in Waterville. That school had 100-150 aviation recruits being trained under CPTP, the Civilian Pilots Training Program. Graduates of this program could proceed into the military flight schools. After a couple of years there, Ken went to Danville, Virginia, a larger school with 300-500 students, then to Ft. Bragg, leaving there in 1945. **(to be continued...)**



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Another exclusive book from the Maine Aviation Historical Society. Softbound, 134 pages, 151 illustrations.

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President's Message

Another summer season is here. This summer we are in need of members to step up and help open the museum this summer. I will be meeting with some of the Directors from Bangor International Airport to go over the future of the Maine Air Museum and if they can help us in any way to help the museum move forward. We are always looking for people to help out. We need people to help redesign displays and to build new displays. We also need people to help man our display table at the Pittsfield Fly-in. Word of mouth is important, tell your friends about the museum and try to get them to join. Memberships are great gifts anytime of the year.

If you can help man the museum please contact us. Leave a message or email us. We have a lot of history to display and to present. Maine has a vast aviation history background, let's help preserve it.



May 28, 1939

Pilot Thomas H. Smith and his 65 Horse Power Aeronca Chief (NX22456) are ready for takeoff from Old Orchard Beach, Maine to Croydon Airport just south of London, England. The aircraft was not seen again until found in Newfoundland in August 1941.

Canadian aircraft sighted the Baby Clipper but no trace of Smith was ever found. He left a note stating that he was going to try to walk out as it was sleeting and he was afraid of freezing to death if he stayed in the aircraft.

ENFIELD INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

by Gary Chandler, as told to Charyl Chandler Stevens.

My name is Gary Chandler. I grew up in the back of an airplane in a small town called Enfield, Maine. My dad was a hunter, trader and trapper. He had a J3 cub and we flew all over the Maine woods and lakes as I grew up. When I was 13, I wanted to learn to fly but I was too short to reach the rudders. I could not get enough cushions behind and under meI still was not long enough! As soon as I could reach the controls, I was flying. I soloed, with my instructor, Norm Houle's permission in two and a half hours. I used to use my dad's cub to fly to Brewer to take lessons from Norm. Under

his tutelage, I got my private and commercial license within one year. I have been flying now as a flight instructor for over fifty years!

My dad learned to fly after World War two. It was the new craze but not many people could afford the airplanes. He was one of the lucky ones. A guy named Herb Swazey owned some land in Enfield and he let my dad and his buddy put an airstrip on it. They had two nice strips, one was short and it crossed the long one. My dad, Lawrence Chandler, and his buddy Vinal Applebee had J-3 cubs. They built two hangers and each housed their airplane in them. They called it "Swazey's Airport." Allie Cole bought the land, closed the airport and plowed it up for a potato field. Allie was a nice guy and offered to help us move the airport. Vinal's brother had a farm near there. His brother Sylvan had died but his widow Hazel told us we could put a strip in on her land. I was 13 years old. The year was 1950. We started by cutting thousands of gray birch and poplar trees down with an axe. Allie Cole had a bulldozer and he loaned it to us to pull the stumps.

My dad was a carpenter. He built a lot of houses and woods camps. He had a guy that worked for him, named Don. He and I drilled holes in the large rocks to put dynamite in. I held a star drill while he hit it with an 8 lb. sledge hammer. A star drill looks like a huge spike with a cross shaped end to break into the rock. One guy holds it with his hands while the other guy pounds it with the sledge hammer. The guy on bottom turns it 90 degrees and the guy standing hits it again. The guy on bottom has to be very trusting :) We did this until the hole got 6 inches deep. Then you moved about 3 feet away and put another hole in line with the first. You did a row of these then placed dynamite in them. The dynamite would split the rock when you touched them off. My dad built a wooden drag. It looks like a toboggan. You roll the rocks on it and the horses pulled the rocks out of the airstrip. Then we used Allie's bull dozer to smooth it out. I loved riding on the bull dozer! What 13 year old boy wouldn't!

Then we seeded the strip. I wore a thing like a feed bag around me. It had a crank on it and you filled it with seed. The bag was on the front of the guy seeding. You walked along and cranked the handle. The seed fell out of the bag onto a spinning wheel. It spread seed in front of you about 6 feet wide in a fan shape.

Finally, we had to move the hanger from Cole's land to Hazel's. A J-3 cub has a 36 foot wing span, and the fuselage is 18 feet long. The hanger was about 25x40 feet in size. It was t-shaped to match the airplane. My dad was an old time Mainer who could figure anything out! He had built bridges in the woods across streams for his horses and logs, and he powered his whole woodworking shop with a car engine! In order to move the hanger, dad jacked it up, put two log skids on either end of the wide part of the "T" and two long logs down the middle. He sheared off the front ends to make the logs into skids. They tied in together and hitched a tractor to one side, a bulldozer in the center and a wrecker on the other end. All three had to pull slowly and TOGETHER or they would have pulled the hanger apart!

There was a 250 foot length of plowed up ground they had to go through first. They went up and down the ditches to cross the potato field. Then the pulling leveled out and they moved the whole thing about 1/4 mile to the new airport. Vinal watched this process and decided to build a new hanger instead!

The grass strip we built was 1600 feet long and about 100 feet between the trees. Because of the Cole farm, it had a drainage ditch at the end, 3 feet deep and 2 feet wide. It was just big enough to ruin your whole day if you were not paying attention! We used to be very careful to land beyond that ditch! They named the new airport "Sylvan's Lane Airport" in honor of old Vinal's brother. I always called it Enfield international!

MEETINGS

June 9... Monthly meeting of the Maine Aviation Historical Society at 10 a.m. Check web page for location.

June 14-17... Cole Transportation Museum hosting the 5th Armored Division reunion. There will be warbirds from the Texas Flying legends at BIA. Static display may include P-51s, P-40, B-25, F4U, and a Japanese Zero.

June 30-7/1... Portsmouth, NH Airshow

July 7/21... Pittsfield Maine Fly-in in conjunction with the Egg Festival.

Aug. 4-5... The Great New England Airshow at Westover, MA

Aug. 25-26... The Great State of Maine Airshow at Brunswick.

Sep. 6-9... Greenville Seaplane Fly-in.

Sep. 6-9... Horizon Hobby Air Meet at Sanford Municipal Airport with six model venues, RC planes, helicopters, cars, trucks, boats, and tethered aircraft. This is a nationally sponsored show.

Maine Air Museum staffing

Due to staffing issues the Museum will be open on Saturdays only or by appointment during the summer. The hours will be 10:00 to 4:00 each Saturday. If you can fill in for a day or part of a day please give the Museum a call and leave a message. There is a calendar on the web page that will show you the dates where help is needed but we welcome the help on any Saturday that you can work.

Association Officers

President: Scott Grant targete2007@yahoo.com

Vice President: John Miller, Newburgh, ME vintagewings@cs.com

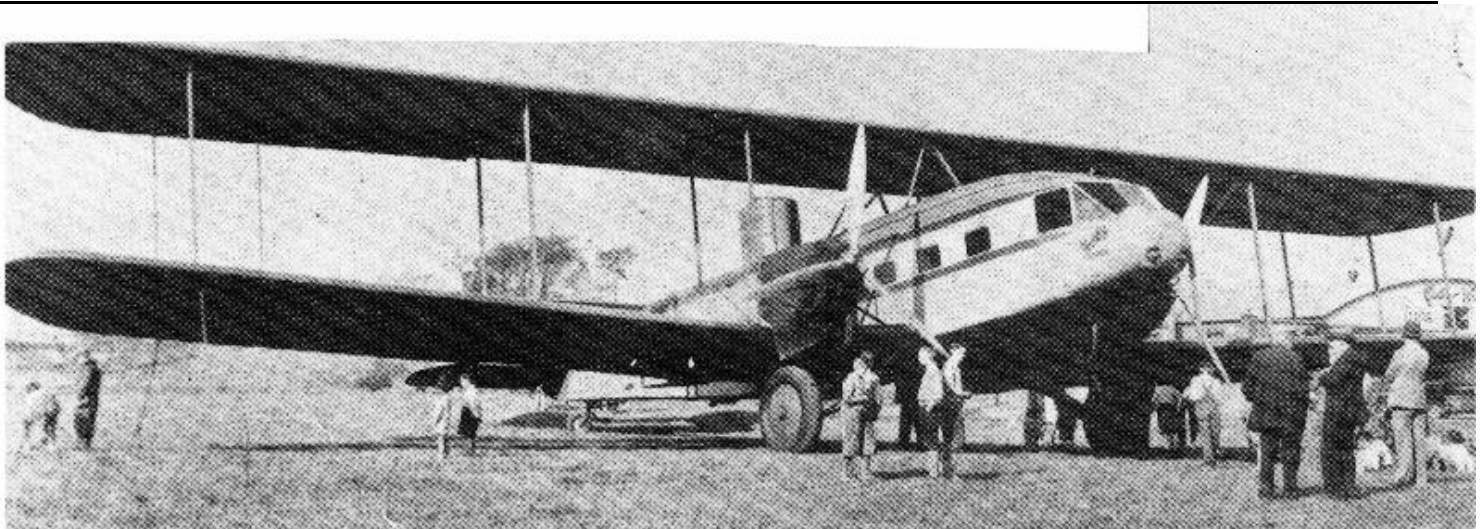
Recording Secretary: Les Shaw les989@yahoo.com

Corresponding Secretary: Al Cormier acormier3@roadrunner.com

Treasurer: Joe Quinn, Levant, ME, 1966corvair@gmail.com

. The Maine Air Museum is located at the 98 Maine Avenue adjacent to the Bangor International Airport

44° 48' 2.10" North 68° 48' 36.02" West



Clarence Chamberlain's Curtiss Condor – civilian transport version of the B-2 bomber visiting the Curtis Wright Airport in Rockland, Maine about 1936.



Maine Aviation Historical Society Maine Air Museum * Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Special Interests: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

**All dues expire on
June 30th of each year.
If joining mid-year,
pay \$2.00 for each
remaining month**

Annual membership
includes six newsletters!

Mail payment to:
Maine Aviation
Historical Society
PO Box 2641
Bangor, ME 04402-
2641

Membership	Dues	Benefits
Regular	\$25 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Family	\$35 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Corporate	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Supporting	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission, .
Lifetime	\$500* * 2 annual \$250 payments	Newsletter, Lifetime Membership Number, Museum Admission,

We need volunteers-docents, mechanics, maintenance, librarians and exhibit specialists, etc.

Please call me. I want to be active in the organization.

I cannot join now, but would like to help. I am enclosing a check for \$_____.

Contributions over \$20 are tax deductible within the limits of the law.

I wish to support and obtain membership by purchasing a memorial brick.

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