

Hemlock - Cleveland Handicap Air Race

Margaret Wemett

The Livonia Gazette

March 26, 1975

From 1928, for about ten years, there was a flying field in Hemlock. A hanger and air strip were maintained by Dr. Harold W. Trott of Hemlock on land now known as the Charles Rolfe Farm.

Its runway, which wasn't at all like the runways of today, ran parallel north and south to Rt. 15A and was approximately 200 feet west of the road. Planes could land east and west also. To do this, the telephone company, considerably enough, lowered the telephone poles to a shorter length so that the planes could easily miss the lines.

Well, these years of the late twenties to the late thirties were bright, exciting ones for the small Hamlet of Hemlock.

Hemlock on the Map

On August 31, 1932, an eclipse was not the only big event to take place. For the people in the Hemlock area, there was much excitement - the era of airplane has arrived. Hemlock was to be the scene of the Hemlock - Cleveland Handicap Air Race.

Plans for the air race to start on a Wednesday were arranged by Harold W. Trott, M. D., who owned a Stinson cabin plane, and was a pioneer aviation enthusiast in this section of the state.

Planes were handicapped according to top speed so that they would theoretically arrive in Cleveland at the same time. Of course, the actual speed of the airplane made all the difference. This handicapping gave a pilot with his plane - a small two-cylinder motor which traveled at about 60 miles an hour - an equal chance with a pilot with a 169 mile an hour plane.

The original plan was to have local people and pilots involved in the race, but Dr. Trott allowed for outsiders to enter.

Those who entered the derby were: "Russell Holderman, Leroy with a Stinson; John Blum, Dansville, with a Fleet biplane; Maurice Mann, Mout Morris with a Challenger Robin; Elmer Ace, Holcomb, with a Challenger biplane; Ray Hyland, Rochester, with a Waco F biplane; Honky Reese; Harold Jackson, Rochester, with a Stinson; Warren Brazee, Rochester, with a little two-cylinder Buhl Pup mono (Warren my have to start the night before); Wm. Sturges, Geneseo, with a Curtis Robin monoplane; possibly Victor Evens of Leroy; Lynn Pickard, Dansville, with a Mercury Pup monoplane; Dr. H. W. Trott, Hemlock, with a Stinson cabin plane."

The race ended at Cleveland, where they were having the National Air Races from August 27 through September 5.

All of the planes were to be at the airport at 8 a.m. to prepare for the start. The first planes were leaving at 8:30, and the last, faster ones, were to leave about 10:30 a.m. Each pilot was sure to have an equal chance of winning.

The prizes for the event were: "First prize was the Wemett - Shell trophy, a beautiful silver trophy standing twenty-seven and a half inches high, and bearing a winged emblem, awarded by Clarence E. Wemett of Hemlock. Also for first place, Mr. J. D. Dibble offers a cash prize of \$50."

“For second place, Mr. Dibble offers a Dibble - Kendall trophy similar to the Wemett trophy, though slightly smaller, and also a drum of Kendall airplane oil. For the third place, the Rochester Times - Union presents a silver trophy, while for fourth place, Sears - Roebuck Co. gives a Royal Rochester coffee percolator set, consisting of percolator, tray and cream and sugar combination.”

On that fine Wednesday morning, many people were shoulder to shoulder, crowded around the Hemlock Flying Field, which used to be standing on Rt. 15A, just up the hill from Dr. Trott's home. All the pilots had participated in many air events before, since those who did own airplanes would fly-in to see each other, and have get-togethers, but this was the biggest air derby to ever brighten Hemlock's skies.

“Elmer Ace was the first to leave the Hemlock Airport under the direct of Otto Enderton, the starter.”

“Henry Hammell of Wayland followed Ace in a Command-Air at 8:51. L. L. Welch of Rochester with a Waco F biplane was a third starter. He left at 8:56 just a minute before Ray P. Hyland took off in a sister ship. Sturges left the Hemlock Airport in his Curtis-Robin at 9:01.”

“The last starter in the derby was its promoter, Dr. Trott of Hemlock, who took the air in his Stinson cabin plane at 9:03.”

So, all the planes had finally taken off and the crowd began to diminish. Those that did attend were vital supporters.

When the long-awaited phone call came, the winner was announced as Ray H. Hyland from Rochester. He had arrived in Cleveland at 11:42, and he left from Hemlock Airport at 8:57 a.m. His flight took 2 hours and 45 minutes. He won the Wemett - Shell trophy, and \$50, the gift of V. D. Dibble. The distance from Hemlock to Cleveland was 235 miles, as Hyland flew his Waco F biplane.

“Second place was won by Dr. H. W. Trott, who promoted the event. He left Hemlock at 9:03 and arrived at Cleveland in his Stinson cabin plane at 11:47. His prize is the Dibble - Kendall airplane oil, gifts of J. D. Dibble of Batavia.”

“The Times-Union trophy was won by Philip Sturges of Geneseo with his Curtiss - Robin. He left Hemlock at 9:01 and arrived in Cleveland at 11:50.”

“Elmer Ace of Geneseo, flying a Challenger biplane, won the Sears, Roebuck & Company trophy. He was the first to leave Hemlock, getting away at 8:42. He arrived in Cleveland at 12:14.”

“Henry Hammell of Wayland, fifth pilot to reach Cleveland, was in the air from 8:51 to 11:33 in his Command - Air. L. L. Welch of Rochester was forced down outside of Cleveland by lack of gas. He landed without mishap and continued to Cleveland Airport later.”

Mrs. Trott, who accompanied her husband on this flight, reports that Dr. Trott probably could have won first place, but since he was the sponsor he didn't think it would look right. Most of the pilots brought their ships back to Rochester or their home ports that day, but some remained in Cleveland for the air races.

Events Remembered

The many witnesses of this era remember the exciting events of the Hemlock Flying Field. The most vivid memories are of . . .

Seeing their very first airplane - watching it “take off” in a cloud of dust. The tension in the air while the propeller is wound up. Stunt men giving their barnstorming exhibitions.

Glen Johnston of Springwater at age 21 flying his home-made monoplane. Hemlock Lake from an aerial view. The packing of the many parachutes in nearby barns. Parachute jumping exhibitions at Hemlock

Fair, and the ultimate experience of riding in an open cockpit plane for their first time.

Thus, an era has come to a close as the memories and enthusiasm are such that this time in history will never be recaptured.

The Livonia Gazette

Editor's Note: The following article was written by Margaret Wemett on March 26, 1975 as a Governor's Trophy research report. At that time, Margaret was an eighth grader at Livonia Middle School and a member of the Solomon Woodruff Yorkers.

Margaret later went on to become a graduate of Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, one of the top schools of communications in the country.

Use of all photos and/or text in this article have been approved and granted use courtesy of
<http://www.hemlockandcanadichelakes.com/> and <http://www.conesuslakeny.org/>

Click on or copy and paste the link below to go to the page that was referenced.
http://www.hemlockandcanadichelakes.com/hcl_business_hemlock_flying_service_news_1976_hemlock_to_cleveland_derby.htm