

AVIATION News

Florida & National

Happy Landings

May - 2024

• YESTERDAY • TODAY • TOMORROW

PUBLICATION OF FLORIDA AVIATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY



SUN 'n FUN
AEROSPACE EXPO

50
SUN 'n FUN
Lakeland
FLORIDA
1975 2024
FLY-IN

Fly-In
HAPPY
for 50 Years!

April 9-14 | 2024

The poster features a vibrant, colorful design with a rainbow background. A smiling sun wearing sunglasses is on the left. A large blue '50' is in the center, with a circular logo below it that says 'SUN 'n FUN Lakeland FLORIDA 1975 2024 FLY-IN'. The logo includes a palm tree and a stylized airplane. In the foreground, a red and white biplane is flying. Other smaller aircraft are visible in the background. A person in a floral shirt is also depicted. The text 'Fly-In HAPPY for 50 Years!' is in the bottom left, and 'April 9-14 | 2024' is at the bottom center.

President's Message

By the time this May edition is out, we will have inducted two aviation greats into the



Mary Fletcher

Florida Aviation Hall of Fame:
**Owen Gassaway, Jr. and
1st Lt. James Polkinghorne, Jr.
USAAF.**

The pages of this edition show the installation of these two men and the people who came for this event. We also are featuring the Sun 'n Fun fly-in, the second largest fly-in event in the nation for those of you who have never been to Lakeland.

Would anyone like to sponsor this newsletter every month? To print it each month at 400 copies, costs \$720. We will give you a full page ad on page 10 for your business or acknowledge you as our sponsor. The cost of printing a hard copy plus mailing, has the Board thinking that sending it by email is what will happen. But some members do not have email or do not want an email sent, so it is a dilemma not taken lightly. To me, I like a hard copy that I can pick-up and read again and again instead of trying to read it on the phone that so many are doing now.

Our new website is up with new features and hopefully better ways to navigate through it. It is easier to find all the newsletters that get posted once the mailed copy has been delivered.

www.floridaahs.org

**Thank You to our members who
continue to renew your membership
from the due date on your label.**



AVIATION News Florida & National
Happy Landings

May Edition - 2024

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FAHS meets the fourth Saturday of each month, unless otherwise noted, at the AWAPS building, Albert Whitted Airport, Gate 5, 10:30 AM. All are invited to attend.

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Welcome and Introductions
Nicholas Mathes; Museum Director,
Florida Air Museum

Remarks from Gene Conrad
Gene Conrad; President & CEO,
Aerospace Center for Excellence

Presentation of Inductees
Terri Griner, Chair,
Florida Aviation Hall of Fame

Closing Remarks
Nicholas Mathes



The Florida Aviation Hall of Fame Class of 2023 event was held April 12, 2024 in the Florida Air Museum at Sun 'n Fun. The 3 pm ceremony was well attended and family members from both Owen Gassaway, Jr. and 1st Lt. James Polkinghorne, Jr., USAAF were in attendance.



Owen Gassaway, Jr.



1st Lt. James Polkinghorne, Jr. USAAF



Maggie Wilson, youngest sister of 1st Lt. James R. Polkinghorne is shown here with Lt. Col. USAF George Hardy. Alexis Wilson her granddaughter drove her from Pensacola to Lakeland.

Family members in attendance were Aiden Clark, Alexis Wilson's son, Samuel Wilson, Maggie's son, Charles Coleman her nephew and his wife Karen.

On April 11, Gov. Ron DeSantis signed Florida's 22nd state holiday into law: Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day.

Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day was set as the fourth Thursday in March, as it is in several other states. The first one will be March 28, 2025.

March was chosen because it was the month when the first cadets received their wings. It's also the month when the 99th was activated.



Lt. Col. USAF (Retired) George Hardy, a Tuskegee Airman and Red Tail Pilot is shown here with Belinda Morgan-Sterling Chapter Historian, General Daniel “Chappie” James, Jr. Chapter Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. Belinda and her husband Jock Sterling drove Lt. Col. Hardy from Sarasota to Lakeland for the event.

By their last mission in 1945, the Tuskegee Airmen had flown 1,578 missions in two years and destroyed 111 enemy planes in the air, 150 enemy aircraft on the ground, 57 locomotives, 58 boxcars, sank one destroyer and 16 barges and boats, among others, according to the personal record of airman Lt. Col. Walter Downs.

There are several Florida connections to the Tuskegee legend. The 99th Pursuit Squadron trained at Dale Mabry Field near Tallahassee. The first class of advanced training cadets and pilots used Eglin Field in Okaloosa County for gunnery and combat tactics. **Gen. Daniel “Chappie” James, Jr.** of Pensacola was the first Black person to achieve the rank of four-star general in the Armed Forces. **2nd Lt. Charles P. Bailey, Sr.** of Punta Gorda, was the first aviator from Florida to become a Tuskegee Airman pilot of the 99th Pursuit Squadron. **Lt. Alvin J. Downing**, of Jacksonville, was a special service officer and renowned musician and educator in the Army Air Forces Band. **1st Lt. James Polkinghorne, Jr.**, of Pensacola, was the first Tuskegee Airman aviator from Florida to earn his wings, the first Floridian Tuskegee Airman of the 301st Fighter Squadron, later lost in a combat mission on May 5, 1944.

2nd Lt. Alphonso Simmons of the 100th 53 Fighter Squadron, of Jacksonville, became a casualty of war on March 3, 1945. **Lt. Col. George E. Hardy**, a Sarasota County resident, was a famed “Red Tail” P-51 pilot of the 332nd Fighter Group. **Lt. Daniel K. Keel, Jr.**, a Lake County resident, was one of only five triple-rated airmen serving as pilot, bombardier, and navigator. **Callie Odom Gentry**, a Pasco County resident, was a female Tuskegee Airman and a stenographer. **Chief Master Sgt. Richard R. Hall Jr.**, formerly of Winter Park, was an aircraft mechanic in the 99th Fighter Pursuit Squadron, served 30 years in the military, and was one of the first African American Chief Master Sergeants. **Lt. Col. Robert C. Hughes**, formerly of Brevard County, was a Caucasian flight instructor. **Lt. Raymond Cassagnol**, formerly of Seminole County, was one of five Haitian-born Tuskegee Airmen.



The children of Owen H. Gassaway, Jr. are shown here celebrating their father's induction. L-R: Susan Gassaway Heller, Owen Gassaway III, Debbie Gassaway-Hayward.

Neal Holland writes:

As I recall the founding of the Florida Aviation Hall of Fame, these are the events leading up to the beginning of this great institution honoring the men and women that contributed so much to Florida Aviation.

The late John Ingle and I, Retired Eastern Airlines Captain Neal Holland, attended the Georgia Aviation Hall of Fame at Warner-Robins Air Force Base in Warner-Robins, Georgia. The installation of Captain Eddie Rickenbacker was being inducted into its Hall of Fame. Coming back to our office in Jacksonville, Florida we discussed the possibility of Florida having a way to recognize the aviation greats that contributed so much to Florida's aviation history like Georgia had just done. The late John Ingle was a founding member of the

Florida Aviation Historical Society – Jacksonville, Florida Chapter. At the time, I was its President. We talked to Dr. Warren Brown about this and at a FAHS Board meeting held in Orlando, we presented the idea for such a Hall of Fame. It was decided and voted by the Board to create such an organization. We, John and I, proposed Captain Eddie Rickenbacker as a member of the first class to be so honored. He was voted into the Florida Aviation Hall of Fame along with six others in the first class.

It is an honor that John and I were part of this history and great institution – The Florida Aviation Hall of Fame. - Neal Holland



Nicholas Mathes
Museum Director



These photos give you just a brief glimpse of what is inside the Florida Air Museum at Sun 'n Fun where the Florida Aviation Hall of Fame is located.

Top photo is the Benoist exhibit. Photo bottom left is the Ford Fliver built by FAHS and on loan to the Museum.

Bottom right is the Howard Hughes exhibit, Spruce Goose.





The first Sun 'n Fun in 1975, attracted 500 registered aircraft and over 2,000 participants. The 2023 Sun 'n Fun Aerospace Expo hosted over 3,000 aircraft and 200,000 attendees. The volunteers alone now number over 2,500. Guests hail from every one of the United States and over 80 countries. Over 500 exhibitors help make Sun 'n Fun the largest convention of any kind in the state of Florida and the second largest aviation convention in the United States.

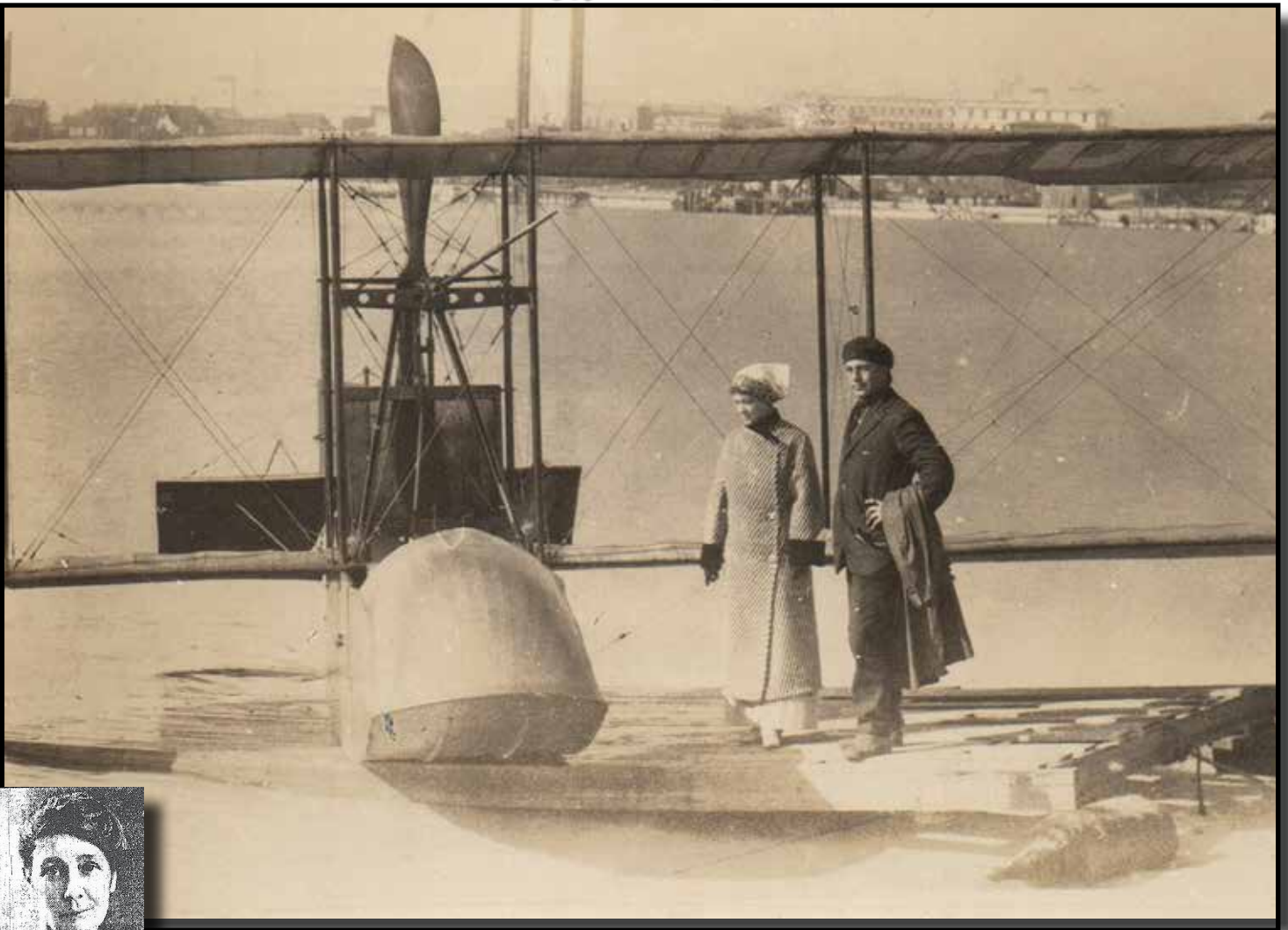
The photos on Page 8 and 9 show just a sampling of the activities and flight line of planes and people admiring them.



The public's support ensures the continued success of Sun'n Fun's year-round mission to Engage, Educate and Accelerate the next generation of Aerospace Professionals.







WOMAN WILL FLY WITH JANNUS ON TRIP TO TAMPA

This was the headline in the local St. Petersburg newspaper January 2, 1914. The article went on to say, "Miss Mae Peabody, of Dubuque, Iowa, will be the first woman to take a trip in an aeroplane on a regular run between two cities and will be the first passenger on the first regular trip of the St. Petersburg-Tampa All-air route. Miss Peabody will go to Tampa and return with Tony Jannus in the airboat Benoist on its regular run tomorrow morning. She arranged the trip with P. E. Fansler, manager of the company's boat line."

"Miss Peabody is a wealthy woman from Iowa who is the guest of Mrs. Lew B. Brown. She has been a visitor in Florida before, but this is her first trip to St. Petersburg and she is very much pleased with the Sunshine City."

"She has been anxious to take a ride to Tampa in the airboat ever since she heard of the line being started and this morning bought her ticket for the first regular run."



Fansler, Mayor Phile and Tony

T *a look back into the archives of history* THE WOMEN OF AVIATION N

Katherine

Stinson

as the fourth licensed woman pilot in the United States, she attracted attention early and soon was known as the most daring female stunt flier of her generation. In 1913, she became the first woman to fly the mail—from the fairgrounds outside Helena, Montana, into the city proper. In succeeding years she set successively longer endurance and distance records. She toured England, China and Japan, giving exhibitions to admiring crowds.

Late in 1916, Katherine did an exhibition tour of Japan and China. Her first appearance drew 25,000 people to Tokyo's Aoyama Parade Ground. The crowd was thrilled by the fearless pilot's breathtaking aerobatics. She described the mob scene around her plane after the first Tokyo flight, "The women were wild with enthusiasm and the men were not far behind."

When Katherine returned to the United States in May of 1917, she left behind her not only a heightened interest in flight among the Chinese and Japanese people but a dawning awareness among their women of her often-expressed philosophy, "If other people can fly, she said, "I don't see why I can't."

Perhaps her most famous flight was from San Diego to San Francisco in 1917. Cruising along at 62 miles per hour, waving at trains and school children and finally coming down to be greeted by the cheers of soldiers assembled at the Presidio Army base in San Francisco. She had flown 610 miles, a new nonstop distance record for both men and women.



Above: Youthful Chinese admirers doff their caps to an appreciative Katherine Stinson as she climbed from her cockpit in Peking in March, 1917. The press of well-wishers was typical of her many appearances in China and Japan.

An Osaka geisha presents a floral tribute to the adventurous flier.

Right: Katherine Stinson waves gaily from a throng of the curious in Tokyo. A newspaper in her hometown of San Antonio, Texas, reported that representatives of the press accompanied her almost everywhere.



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We have some memberships that are behind sometimes two years or more. As we have never gotten notice that this person does not want to be a member still, we will start taking them off the mailing list.

FAHS hopes you will still want to be our member as we have held the dues at \$20 for years. Our new website is up and we will continue to make improvements on it.

Thank you in advance for being a member.

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