

# Salem's Barnstorming Days of Aviation Filled With Color, Crackups

## Preparations for Aerial Fair Honoring Lee Eyerly Recall City's 'Golden Age of Flying'

By CONRAD G. PRANGE  
Staff Writer, The Statesman

Barnstorming, balloon straining and frequent crack-ups marked the early days of aviation in Salem—days being recalled as this city now prepares for an Air Fair Sept. 18.

And there is still a scattered handful of men in Salem who participated in that "golden age of flying." They made, flew and demised their own planes with true pioneer intensity.



Lee Eyerly of Salem, prominent figure in Oregon aviation growth, will be honored at Salem Air Fair next month. (Statesman photo.)

Those were the 1920's when the "aeroplane" was beginning to evolve from a "thrill machine" into a flying speedster with vast potentials. Most flying was confined to fairgrounds, race tracks and pastures.

It was a day when many young men—to the consternation of their parents—were turning their allegiance from race-cars to flying machines. They weren't interested in the stratosphere—their main object was to get off the ground and remain aloft as long and as safely as possible.

### Enthusiasm High

World War I pilots returned home, purchased surplus Army training Jenny's and opened flying schools. Despite the financial burden involved, hundreds of young enthusiasts paid or worked their way through flying schools. Never has personal enthusiasm for flying been so high.

The roster of early-day Salem aviation leaders is a long one. But it includes names like Lee Eyerly, former airport superintendent; George Douglas, with the state board of aeronautics; Verne D'Autremont, flying school operator; Brazier Small, attorney; Elmer J. Cook, West Salem justice of the peace; Lee Inman, retired; H. G. Maison, superintendent of state police; Forrest Smith, foundry owner, and others.

### Promoted Aviation

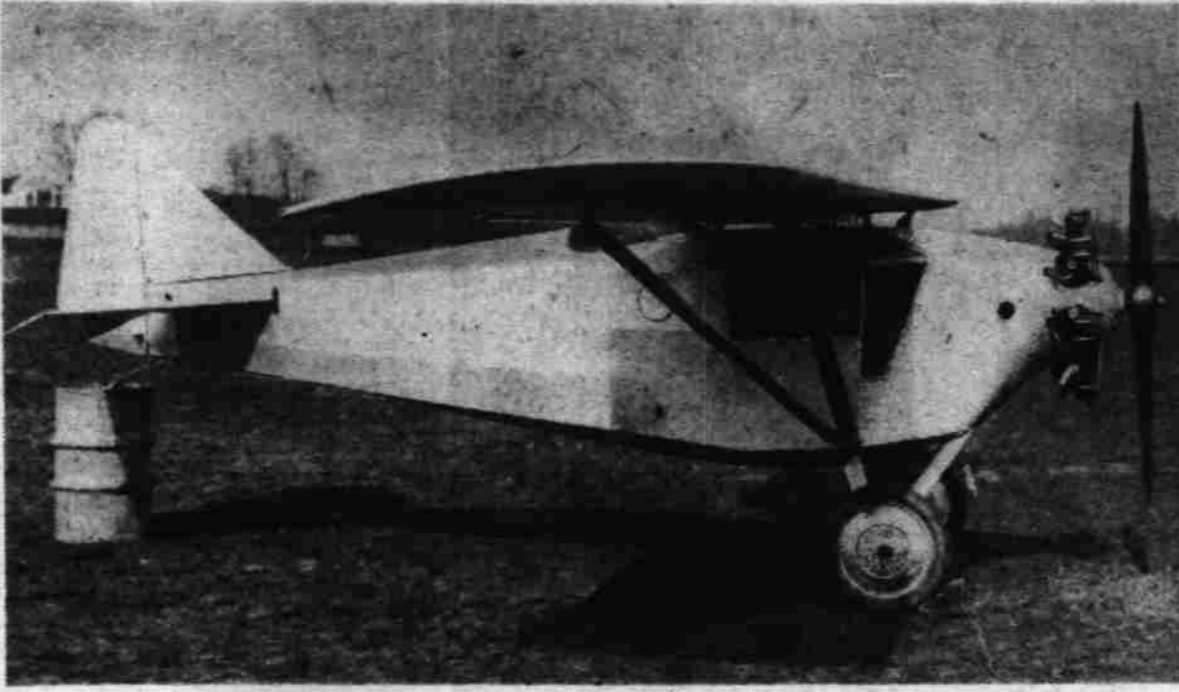
The man who is generally regarded as having played a major part in the growth of aviation in Salem and in Oregon is Lee Eyerly, operator of Eyerly Aircraft Co., at the airport.

Eyerly, who directed construction of the first modern-type plane in Oregon some 27 years ago, will be honored for his lifelong interest in flying at a Salem Air Fair on Sept. 18 at McNary Field, the airport he helped to promote.

"We did a lot of barnstorming in those early days to help spark interest in aviation," recalls Eyerly. "We pulled a lot of weird stunts to give crowds a thrill. There were very few regulations concerning aircraft."

### Drove Racing Cars

Eyerly, who as a young man built and drove racing cars in and around Salem, learned to fly in



When aviation was in its infancy, if early-day Salem pilots didn't have planes of their own they simply built them—if they could raise the money. The above picture shows Oregon's first modern plane built under direction of Lee Eyerly in Salem in 1928. Photo is from collection of Lee Inman, who helped build it.

1920. His instructor was Elmer J. Cook, now a West Salem resident, who was a World War I pilot. The flying field was located at the north end of 17th street adjacent to what is now the State Fairgrounds.

Eyerly later opened his own flying school on that field. He designed a plane. Assisted by others, including the Salem Chamber of Commerce and such men as Inman, a plumber; Smith, a welder; Jimmy MacManiman and others, Eyerly built and later flew the plane. It was hailed as the first modern plane constructed in Oregon.

A year or so later, Eyerly was straining balloons at an air event in Eugene and cracked up the ship. The plane was a total loss. Eyerly received a broken arm and a few cracked ribs.

### Picked up by Ferry

The only other serious crash in which Eyerly was involved occurred in 1931 when he was forced down in San Francisco Bay on a foggy night. Luckily he and his three passengers were picked up by the Berkeley-San Francisco ferry a short while after their land plane sank beneath the choppy waves. One of the passengers was Frank Hrubetz, still living in Salem.

In the late 20's Eyerly also designed and constructed a plane sporting the first tricycle landing gear on a modern plane. He called it the Wifflehen, after a comic strip character.

### Still Has Engine

Salem's first glimpse of an airplane came before Eyerly's time. It was in 1909 and the plane was built in Salem by Dr. S. C. Scovill and Ben Taylor, a postal employee. Eyerly says he has in his possession the four-cylinder, air-cool

ed, 25-40 horsepower Eagle motor, which powered that first plane.

"The 15 cents admission charged," reads an account of the exhibition, "nearly paid for the cost of the plane." The flight, however, ended unsuccessfully in a crash into the fairgrounds fence. Later Taylor made a successful flight.

In 1910 C. B. Ely, a local pilot, look off from Lone Oak track at the fairgrounds and circled the capitol at 400 feet and then "passed a racing car doing 51 miles an hour."

In 1928, one year after Lindbergh's transatlantic flight, the American Legion began pushing construction of airports in Oregon. A group of Salem Legionnaires including Maison, Seely Hall and Brazier Small, an ex-Navy pilot of World War I, talked city voters into approving a \$50,000 bond issue for an airport here. And in 1929, during a rousing Legion convention here, the airport was dedicated.

Eyerly, still with his arm in a cast following his Eugene crash, was appointed superintendent, a post he held until 1941. Eyerly recalls that Tom Holman and James Linn sold the city the 93 acres on the contingency that someone purchase an additional five acres, containing buildings, for \$5,000.

Eyerly finally bought the property. Today it houses his 30-employee plant which manufactures carnival rides.

### On State Board

In addition to his activities on Salem airport committees, Eyerly has been a member of the State Board of Aeronautics for the past 20 years. One of the members of the board's safety department is George Douglas, who was the first Eyerly student to receive one of the state's first Aircraft and Engine Mechanic's licenses.

One of those eager young men in the beginning of aviation progress in Salem, Douglas recalls at least one student who suddenly lost enthusiasm in flying. She was the daughter of a local paper mill executive.

She was getting ready to take off one day when onto the flying field strode C. K. Logan, reporter for a Salem newspaper and a close follower of flying. Logan was accompanied by a large bulldog.

The dog leaped at the whirling propeller blades of the girl's plane and was, of course, demolished. This so unnerved the girl, recalls George, she stepped out of the plane, walked off the field, and never returned.

### 'Air-Devils'

Frequent visitors to Salem in



Lee Eyerly, local pioneer flier (in cockpit) is shown after completing successful test flight in 1928 in the plane he designed. Congratulating him at old airport at State Fairgrounds is Lee Inman, who later built planes and operated a flying school in Eugene.

those days, via air, were such well-known "air-devils" as Tex Rankin and Dorothy Hester. Rankin was killed several years ago in a Klamath Falls plane crash and Dorothy Hester, billed as the world's outstanding "airbat" (she was famous for her outside loops) is married and resides in Portland.

Another well-known aviator then was Walter (Scout) Hazelwood, now an Air Force colonel in Tacoma, Wash.

In the early 1930's Eyerly taught to fly what was hailed by the press as the youngest pilot. She was Martha Bowman of Texas and she soloed at the age of 11.

"It was about that time, too," he recalls, "that I flew a load of fresh Salem cherries to Denver, Colo. They sold for a dollar a pound. Local growers toyed with the idea for a while of making regular air shipments of cherries to other sections of the country. But the plan fell through."

One of Eyerly's proudest possessions is a "Sporting License" issued to him in 1930 by the National Aeronautics Association. It is signed by the chairman, Orville Wright.

"You had to have one of these to compete in those air shows,"

Eyerly explained. "And, besides a plane, it was about all you had to have."

## New Beer Can Size Considered

OLYMPIA (AP)—The State Liquor Control Board will consider permitting sale of beer in 16 ounce containers at a meeting Sept. 1, a Board announcement said Tuesday.

At present the Board allows beer to be sold in 11, 12 and 32 ounce containers.

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**BREAD AND BUTTER LETTER**  
GAINESVILLE, Fla. (AP)—Alachua County jailers accustomed to abuse from prisoners were surprised to receive a postcard from Ernie Thomas, mailed in Jacksonville 60 miles away after he was released from serving a sentence for being drunk. It said "I got here O.K. Thanks to everybody for being so nice to me."

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## Witness Says Lawyer Killed By Waitress

HEPPNER (AP)—Mrs. Ann Whitney Avent's employer testified Tuesday that he saw her fire the bullet that killed Dellmore Lessard, Portland attorney, last June.

Mrs. Avent is on trial on a second-degree murder charge. She is accused of shooting Lessard, who was representing her former husband, when he went to the restaurant where she was employed, to discuss custody of her son.

Russell O'Donnell, owner of the cafe, said he came through a door just as Mrs. Avent fired at Lessard as the attorney tried to dodge behind a cigarette machine.

Circuit Judge William A. Wells is trying the case before an all-male jury.

The defense took over Tuesday afternoon with Mrs. Avent, who has pleaded innocent, the only witness. Her attorneys, John Bassett of Portland and Ralph Currier of Pendleton, contended before introducing her that no crime was committed. They said Lessard acted improperly in interviewing her at her place of work.

She testified that Lessard threatened to take the boy away from her and place him in a Portland orphanage. She said her mind went blank before the shooting and that she remembered nothing of it.

Mrs. Avent testified that she did not know "when, how or where the gun went off."

She said she divorced her husband in 1953 and their differences have been about support money for the boy.

The prosecution has two rebuttal witnesses scheduled for Wednesday morning. After that the case was expected to go to the jury.

## Judgment Day Arrives Quickly

GALVESTON, Tex. (AP)—City Judge C. C. Wright witnessed an automobile accident, then watched one irate woman driver assailed by another one. He interposed to say he thought the irate one was in the wrong.

"That will be for the judge to decide," she snapped.

"I am the judge, lady," he replied. The case was settled out of court.

## Britain Wants Cyprus For Defense Reasons

By ARTHUR GAVSHON  
LONDON (AP)—Britain told Greece and Turkey Tuesday she intends holding Cyprus so long as she has responsibility for defending the Middle East.

Diplomatic informants said this was the gist of a statement made by Britain's Harold MacMillan at a secret session of British, Greek and Turkish foreign ministers who are discussing the future of the East Mediterranean island. The informants included delegates who sat in on the talks.

In his speech, described as being conciliatory yet firm, MacMillan reportedly called on Stephen Stephanopoulos of Greece and Fatin Rustu Zorlu of Turkey to seek a reconciliation of their attitudes on the Cyprus question.

Common Interest  
The British foreign minister said it was in the common interest of the three powers to work together if the Middle East is to be defended effectively against the possibility of external aggression and internal upheaval.

MacMillan's statement led off the three-power talks on the future of the island which both Greece and

Turkey want to take over. Stephanopoulos and Zorlu are due to make their introductory policy speeches Wednesday and Thursday. Negotiations will follow on the basis of the three statements.

The British statesman was said to have emphasized this country has no intention of abandoning its vast strategic commitments in the Middle East—commitments which, in the British view, are impossible of fulfillment by smaller powers.

Vital Link  
Cyprus serves as Middle East headquarters for British land and air forces. It is a vital link also in Britain's imperial defense and communications system stretching from Europe to Asia and Africa.

It now has crown colony status which means 500,000 Cypriots are ruled directly from London. Greece, although it has never owned the island, is supporting the claims of 400,000 Greek-descended Cypriots for the right of self-determination. But Turkey, which possessed the island for 350 years until 1914, wants the island to remain under British rule if she cannot get it back for herself. About 100,000 Cypriots are of Turkish descent.

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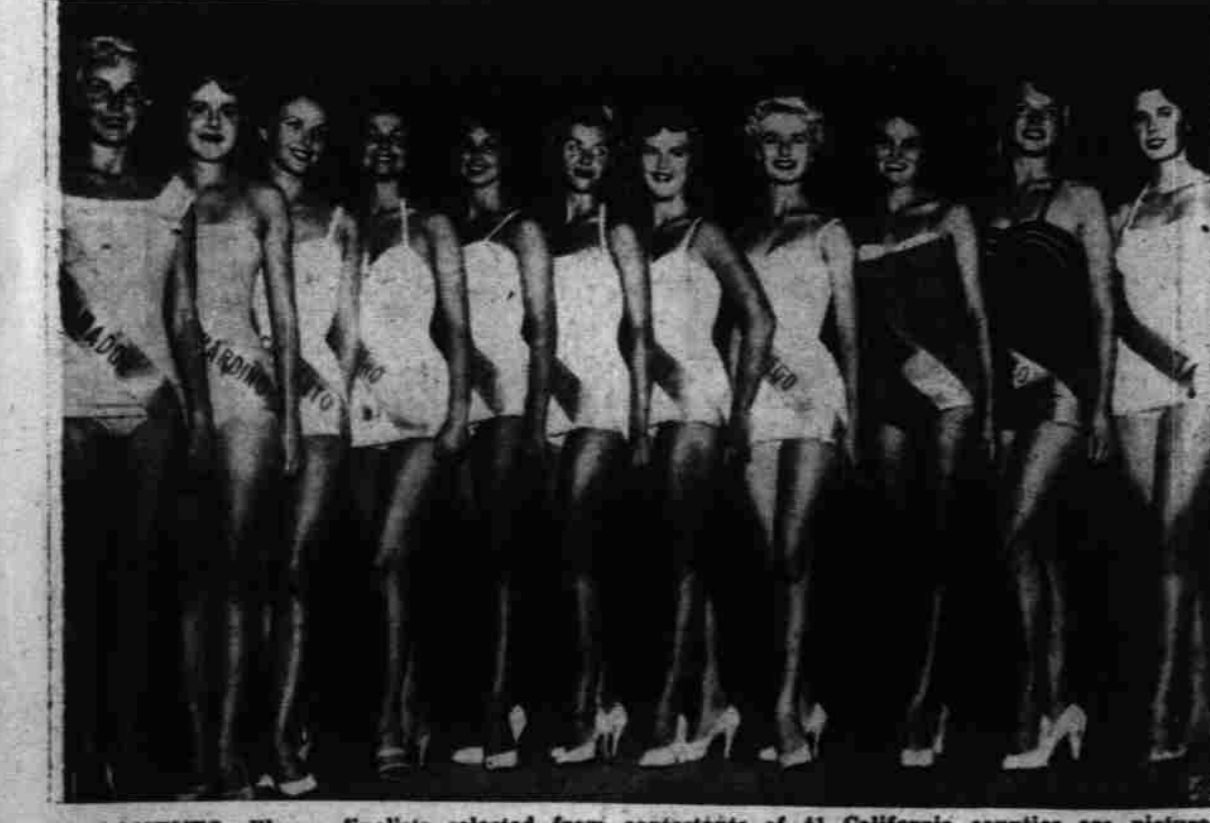
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## 'Maid of California' Finalists



SACRAMENTO—Eleven finalists selected from contestants of 41 California counties are pictured here. The winner will be selected from the group on the opening day of the state fair Sept. 1. From left, they are: Marcia Malatesta, Amador; Marilyn Van Deusen, San Bernardino; Joan Bennett, Sacramento; Joyce Monroe, Fresno; Nancy Smith, Alameda; Elaine Herrmann, Monterey; Patricia Hutchens, Trinity; Gay Cowie, San Diego; Judy Kileen, Kern; Margie Morec, San Mateo; Arlyta Grove, Contra Costa. The winner will reign as "Maid of California" during the fair. (AP Wirephoto.)

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