

Alaska State Library
Historical Collections

Guide to Collection

Jones, Roy Franklin

Roy F. Jones Manuscript Collection, 1922-1973

MS 4-38-1

2 Folders:
Newspaper and Magazine articles
23 black and white photographs

Processed By: Alea Oien &
Anastasia Tarmann
June 2009

ACQUISITION: The collection was de-accessioned and transferred to the Alaska State Library Historical Collections in May of 2007, by Mark A. Green, Director, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming. Accession # 2007-013. The collection was originally donated by Carol Jones Tokcaer in June of 1985.

ACCESS: The collection is unrestricted.

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PROCESSING: This collection has been described at the folder level. All items have been placed in mylar and into pH-neutral folders.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Roy Franklin Jones (October 16, 1893- Feb. 17, 1974) was the first pilot to fly an airplane to Alaska from Seattle, landing in Ketchikan July 17, 1922. He is credited with starting the first commercial flights in Alaska.

In 1922 he purchased a Curtiss MF flying-boat hull and wings from the naval supply depot in Philadelphia and a French Hispano-Suiza Model I motor from an aviation supply house in Dayton, Ohio and had them shipped by rail to Seattle, Washington. He assembled and tested the plane in Eddie Hubbard's hanger on Lake Union. (The building was erected by William Boeing for his Boeing Airplane Company.) The plane, the "Northbird," had only 180 horsepower. For commercial use it was a little underpowered, but could carry three passengers in the open cockpit and fly 90 miles an hour at top efficiency. Roy Jones stayed in Ketchikan and formed the Northbird Aviation Co.

The first Alaskan airline closed business after the "Northbird" crashed into Heckman Lake in August of 1923. Although short-lived the business served a great purpose showing how important aircraft were for transportation in Alaska. The birch propeller from the "Northbird" is in the Alaska Transportation Museum.

Roy had first come to Ketchikan while serving as a rod man aboard U.S. Coast & Geodetic vessels in the summers of 1915-16. While in Ketchikan, he was invited to a party hosted by the Forrest J. and Harriet Hunt family. There he met his future wife, Alice Kincaid. She was one of two in the first graduating class at Ketchikan High School, Class of 1916. She was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Sam Kincaid.

Roy and Alice became engaged while Alice finished college in Reno, Nev. They were married in 1919, after the end of the first World War and moved to Seattle. In March of 1922 Alice gave birth to a daughter, Dorothy. Eight months later the young mother died and Roy took his baby daughter back to Ketchikan to be raised by her grandparents. Then he went south continuing toward his goal in aviation and would return just four months later with the "Northbird" to become a local hero. He lived in Ketchikan until approximately 1928.

Roy Jones retired as an officer for the U.S. Customs Service and was a Vancouver, Washington resident for 19 years until the time of his death. He was a member of the O-X Five Club of old-time aviation enthusiasts. He was a past president of the Oregon Archaeological Society and belonged to the Oregon Historical Society and the Fort Vancouver Historical Society.

ROY F. JONES Chronological ladder of personal activities that has filled a life span of varied interests. [From collection]

- 1893 October 16. Born at Sumas, Washington, the son of Arvilla and W.W. Jones. See his historical account of the area and boyhood days in "Boundary Town."
- 1909 Was in Seattle for two years, during which he worked at the Alaska-Yukon Pacific Exposition, produced on the University Campus.
- 1913 Entered the University of Washington in the Class of 1917.

- 1915/16 (Summers) First experiences in Alaska, as a crew member with the U.S. Coast & Geodetic Survey. Under Captains John A. Daniels and L.O. Colbert.
- 1917 February. Was called from studies to work on special assignment surveying the floor of San Francisco Bay. Work was preliminary to Congressional approval of construction of Mare Island Navy Base. Erected signal towers on the bluffs, north side of San Francisco Bay at point where Golden Gate Bridge now takes off. Thrilled with the romance of the sea when watching the great liner "Northern Pacific" and the sleek coastal steamers, Yale and Harvard, passing through the Gate. Watched long column of crab-fishing boats heading out of San Francisco for the "Potato Patch" crab fishery.
- 1917 Back in college, when on April 6, war was declared on Germany. Enlisted in an ambulance Company for service with the French. There were delays.
- 1918 In February secured transfer to Aviation Section of the Signal Corps. [The Armistice ended his hopes of flying combat in Europe.]
- 1919 Discharged into Reserves, as 2nd Lt., Junior Aviator. Went to Alaska as draftsman for Valuation Engineers, Inc., making fish cannery appraisals. Secured engineer training assignment with Hydraulic Section of Puget Sound Bridge & Dredging Company. Worked on building of earth dam at Prineville, Oregon. Next, at Seattle, building the University of Washington Stadium.
- 1920 Financial depression; all hydraulic jobs cancelled. Went to work at Standard Oil Company service station in Seattle.
- 1921 Transferred to the Standard Oil Marine Division. Served as Assistant Agent on the Ms. Petroleum III in the Alaska coastal trade. Was then greatly impressed with the possibilities of aviation in Alaska.
- 1922 Left Standard Oil to embark on the first Alaskan aviation venture. Purchased a war-surplus Curtiss Navy type flying boat, installed a Hispano-Suiza engine and made the first commercial airplane flight to Alaska. Was first of the later much-publicized "Bush Pilots" (See "Alaska Bush Pilots," by Jarman and Satterfield). Lost the first aircraft ("Northbird") in a crash, late Nov. 1923. Then was in building and gov't work at Ketchikan and was [re]married in 1925.
- 1929 With Vern C. Gorst and C.R. Wright organized Pioneer Airways. Was Operations Manager.
- 1931 For family reasons accepted a Gov't offer for flying in U.S. Customs at Seattle. Appropriations cancelled for service, account Depression, so accepted appointment as Inspector and assigned to searching of vessels in foreign trade. Was placed in charge of Searchers in 1934, continuing in that capacity.

- 1942 With leave of absence entered military service. Assigned to research problems in Arctic Aircraft Operations, out of Ladd Field, Alaska.
- 1944 Transferred for service in western China with Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and with the 14th Air Force. Was in Chinchiang when Japanese surrendered. [He served in the Air Corps in WWII and retired as a major from the Air Force Reserve.]
- 1946 Returned to the U.S. Customs Service. Retired in 1955, moving to Vancouver, Wash.
- 1958 Published "Boundary Town," a local history book about Whatcom County.
- 1959 Joined Ft. Vancouver Historical Society. Appointed Editor of "Clark County History." Served 10 years, meanwhile becoming much interested in archaeology of the area.
- 1970 Was President of the Oregon Archaeological Society, based at Portland, Oregon.
- 1972 Published book on Indian Archaeology, titled "Wappato Indians."

Beloved wife, Grace Chapman Jones, was University of Washington graduate and Alaska school teacher. The children are: Dorothy (deceased); Carol, resident of New York; Gwen, now Mrs. Ronald A. Whyte of Longview; and son Douglas C. of Dixon, Montana. There are eight grandchildren.

- 1974 NORTHBIRD MOUNTAIN and ROY JONES MOUNTAIN named, overlooking Ketchikan.

Propeller of the NORTHBIRD and photos of Roy F. Jones displayed in lobby of Ketchikan International Airport.

SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE

The Roy Jones Manuscript Collection contains newspaper and magazine articles by and about Roy Jones' air service activities from 1922 to 1923; two typed autobiographical stories written by Jones, one story about his experiences as a pilot titled *An Air Epic of Alaska*, and one story about fishing practices on an Alaskan halibut schooner in the early 1900's titled *Running the Square*. Folder 2 contains 25 B&W related photographs of Roy Jones and his flying boat.

SUBJECTS

Ketchikan, Alaska, Northbird, first Alaskan commercial airline, Curtis MF flying-boat

INVENTORY

Folder 1

Newspaper and magazine articles, 2 stories written by Roy Jones.

Folder 2

25 photographs of Roy Jones (including duplicates).