Simmons, Sheldon B., 1908-1994

Papers of Sheldon B. Simmons, 1929-1996

MS 144

4 boxes
4 linear ft.

Processed By: Kay Shelton & Gladi Kulp
July/Aug., 1997
Revised: July 2001

ACQUISITION: The collection was donated by the Sheldon B. Simmons Trust, Nina L. Brown, trustee, February 1995, accession #95-8. More items were added to the collection in 2001, accession #2001-47.

ACCESS: The collection is unrestricted.

COPYRIGHT: Request for permission to publish materials from the collection must be discussed with the Librarian.

PROCESSING: No original order was apparent in these records. Some materials are arranged by type, e.g., correspondence, scrapbooks, publications and, some are arranged chronologically. The papers are primarily described to folder level but, in some cases, to item level. Scrapbook newspaper clippings, originally taped to pages, are now coming loose, clippings are yellowed and fragile; conservation work is recommended for scrapbooks. Photographs were separated to form another collection, PCA 356.
Scope and Content Note

The papers reflect the life of Sheldon B. Simmons as an Alaska bush pilot and aviation enthusiast, and cover the period from circa 1929-1993. They consist of pilot log books from 1929-1958, correspondence sent and received, an examiner’s report including a list of applications by air carriers, membership and other certificates, passports, commercial licenses, brochures, and business records for Alaska Air Transport, Inc., Marine Airways, and Alaska Coastal Ellis Airlines which later became Alaska Coastal Airways.

Business records, which cover the bulk period from circa 1935-1968, include minutes, notices of meetings, articles of incorporation to stockholders, merger dockets and exhibits, memos, and correspondence. The collection also includes flight maps, articles on pilots and airplanes, and airlines memorabilia, such as Alaska Airlines napkins, Alaska Coastal Airways insignia patches, and an Alaska Airlines coin. A collection of publications about pilots, airlines, and airplanes also includes the bulletin, “Northern Light.” The two scrapbooks contain a chronological history of aviation in Alaska from the 1930’s to the 1980’s; they consist primarily of newspaper clippings, also photographs, certificates, magazine articles, and letters.

Simmons’ later years were replete with reunions, memorials, proclamations, profiles, and testimonials; evidence of these events is contained in several folders. The last item added to the collection by Simmons was probably a brochure from an Alaska Coastal Ellis Airlines reunion held in April 1993, a little over a year before Simmons’ death in 1994. A final tribute, “Honoring an Alaskan Legend,” is the Shell Simmons Memorial Exhibit, which opened May 15, 1996 at the Juneau International Airport.

Biographical Timeline

10/8/1908 Sheldon B. Simmons born to Benjamin Thomas and Edith Grant Simmons, Weippe, Clearwater County, Idaho.

1916 Moved with family to Richland, then Grandview, Washington.

1924-1925 Worked on freighter in Far East.

1926-1927 Worked way up to Ketchikan, Alaska, and worked for New England Fish Company, driving a delivery truck.

1927 In Los Angeles, enrolled in electrician courses.

1928 Employed as electrician at Alaska-Juneau Gold Mine.

1928-29 Quit mine and, with Russian co-worker Frank Zimniskey, took boat to Skagway, White Pass RR to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory and purchased a 14-foot rowboat with outboard, and went down Yukon River (28-day trip).

In Nome, worked for Lomen Commercial Reindeer Company as electrician and at odd jobs for other companies.

1929 Returned to Grandview, Washington, and began flying lessons in Yakima.

http://www.library.alaska.gov/hist/hist_docs/finding_aids/MS144.pdf
11/21/1929 First solo flight: five minutes. Subsequently, learns that person who had planned to hire him in Candle is now bankrupt because of stock market crash.

1930 Returns to Juneau, begins work in A-J Mine.
Enters into partnership with Fred Soberg and Wallace Bergstrand to purchase an open-cockpit Curtiss JN4D (Jenny) bi-plane from Drs. H.C. DeVighne and Howe Vance.
After a crash, Simmons reworks Jenny into floatplane.

1931-1932 Modified Jenny flies over 40 hours before being dismantled.

1933 Simmons earns commercial pilot's license in May.
Purchases Aeromarine Klemm monoplane for pleasure and training.

1934 Panhandle Air Transport Company (PATCO) hires Simmons part-time and then full-time.
Simmons quits job in mines. Flies Stinson on floats.

1935 PATCO's Stinson badly damaged during winter storm. Simmons purchases wreck for one dollar and, with investors in Juneau, inaugurates his first airline company -- Alaska Air Transport (AAT). The Stinson is repaired in Seattle and AAT begins operations.

1936-1938 Continues to use PATCO's Stinson
ATT adds Bellanca Skyrocket with floats; two Lockheed Vegas with floats; Fairchild 71 with floats.

Sept. 1938 Fairchild crashes off Chichagof Island; Simmons suffers severe facial lacerations and partial loss of his nose.

Dec. 1938 Motorship Patterson aground near Cape Fairweather. Simmons lands airplane in tidal stream to effect rescue of crew.

May 1939 Alaska Air Transport merges with Marine Airways owned by James V. Davis and Alex Holden, to form Alaska Coastal Airlines.

1940 Simmons marries Bernice "Bee" Riedle, December 23.

1943 Son, Shelby Lloyd Simmons, born, June 29.

1945 Purchased war-surplus Grumman Goose amphibians and converted them into nine-seat commercial airliners.

1949 Acquired three Navy-surplus Consolidated PBY Catalina twin-engined patrol bombers for conversion to 24-passenger airliners.

1962 Merger of Alaska Coastal Airlines of Juneau and Ellis Airlines of Ketchikan approved by Civil Aeronautics Board (April 1); Simmons becomes president and Robert E. Ellis named vice-president of Alaska Coastal-Ellis Airlines.
1966  Company name shortened to Alaska Coastal Airlines. Purchased twin-engined **Convair 240** land plane for routes between Juneau, Sitka and Metlakatla. Company enjoys virtual monopoly in SE Alaska.


1973  Alaska Airlines sells Grummans and Catalinas to concentrate on airport-to-airport schedules.

10/29/1981  Shell Simmons and Bob Ellis honored by being named lifetime directors emeritus on board of Alaska Airlines.

1983  Wife, Bernice “Bee” Simmons, dies, February 11.

1991  Son, Shelby L. Simmons, dies in Juneau.

1994  Sheldon B. Simmons dies in Juneau, November 16.

References for Biographical Timeline:


Inventory

Box 1  Folder No.


3. Correspondence Received: 1940s - 1960s.


8. Civil Aeronautics Board. In the matter of the application of Alaska Coastal Airlines and Ellis Airlines. Docket #6264 *et.al.* [1954?]


15. Napkins used on Alaska Airlines flights, (1970s?)

16. Letters, etc., on 1982 reunion. Guest book from 50 years in Alaska Aviation celebration for Shell Simmons, 1982, Seattle

17. Articles, profiles, testimonials, some undated and unsigned, on Sheldon B. Simmons

18. Memorial for Bernice “Bee” Simmons, by Alaska Legislature, February 28, 1983

Proclamation honoring Sheldon B. Simmons by City and Borough of Juneau, October 22, 1981.

**Box 2:**

**Folder No.**

1. Passports, commercial licenses, calling cards, membership certificates, etc.

2. Correspondence (1974) regarding electric fence at King Salmon Lake, British Columbia

3. ALTA (Association of Local Transport Airlines) program for May 1963 meeting


5. “The Alaska Line” Alaska Steamship brochures and bulletins, including “Northern Light”
6. Articles on pilots and airplanes

7. Airport exhibit and background information from Don Dawson, 1996.

Individual publications:
- Putnam, Burleigh. *Mostly Accidents or Things That Shouldn't Be Done with an Airplane.* (1990)
- Totem, (1932,1933,1934: Juneau High School yearbook of Bernice “Bee” Riedle)

**Box 3: Scrapbooks, Oversize materials**

Folder No.
- Pan American Airways certificates and photograph: crossing International Dateline, 1957.
- Photocopy and names list of 1982 Reunion photograph.
- Scrapbook, 1930s - 1950s.
- Scrapbook, 1940s - 1980s.
- One large stamped coin in box: bull and bear engaged above words: “Alaska Airline, Inc. ALK Original Listing, February 23,1983.”

**Box 4: Personal address and telephone books; certificates (Accession #2001-47)**

Folder No.
- Birth, death, marriage certificates for Shel and Bee Simmons; high school graduation diploma for Shelby Simmons; correspondence from Riedl family regarding a reunion, and membership cards
- Address books (2 small black binders)
- Telephone/address books (metal, pop-up organizers)

**Oversize Folder: Located in MS X-Oversize Map Case in Vault**

Posters
- 1. Wings Over Alaska, Alaskan Aviation Film Festival & Banquet, Sheraton Hotel, November 7, 1982 – 2:00pm.
- 3. Alaska Airlines Since Nineteen Hundred Thirty Two; Jim Parker 1978 ©

http://www.library.alaska.gov/hist/hist_docs=finding_aids/MS144.pdf