

Alaska State Library
Historical Collections

Guide to Collection

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
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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

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|-----------|---|
| 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. |

- 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.
- 1967-1968 Alaska Coastal Airlines merges with Alaska Airlines. Regional float plane schedule continues through 1973. Simmons and Ellis on Board of Directors of Alaska Airlines.
- 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:

- Dawson, Don, "Sheldon B. Simmons," p. 423-428 from *Encyclopedia of American Business History and Biography: The Airline Industry*, edited by William M. Leary. New York: Facts on File and Bruccoli Clark Layman, Inc., 1992.
- Satterfield, Archie and Jarman, Lloyd, "Shell Simmons, Panhandle Air Transport Co. (Patco), Alaska Air Transport, Alaska Coastal Airlines," p. 50-67 from *Alaska Bush Pilots in the Float Country*. Seattle: Superior Publishing Co., 1969.
- Satterfield, Archie, *The Alaska Airlines Story*, chapters 19-20. Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Pub. Co., 1981.

Inventory

Box 1

Folder No.

1. Pilot Log Books (8): 1929 - 1958
2. Correspondence with Rep. Anthony J. Dimond, regarding air mail service, 1937-1938.
3. Correspondence Received: 1940s - 1960s.
4. Examiner's Report: *ALASKA AIR TRANSPORTATION INVESTIGATION, Report of Raymond W. Stough, Examiner, to Civil Aeronautics Board*. Served December 17, 1940. [Advisory report on applications by air carriers for certificates of public convenience and necessity to engage in air transportation between places in Alaska.] 405 pp. + Appendices.
5. Civil Aeronautics Board. Alaska Coastal Airlines: *AIR CARRIER OPERATION CERTIFICATE no. 804* (June 30, 1949).

6. Alaska Air Transport, Inc. *Minute Book, vol. 1, 1935-1951*. Includes minutes, notices of meetings, articles of incorporation, reports to stockholders.
7. Marine Airways: Notice to Stockholders, September 29, 1953. 1 p.
8. Civil Aeronautics Board. In the matter of the application of Alaska Coastal Airlines and Ellis Airlines. Docket #6264 *et.al.* [1954?]
9. National Transportation Safety Board. *Factual Aircraft Accident Report of 4/18/1980*: [Aircraft found after missing over 20 years.] 8/21/1958: G21 Grumman Goose, N720 - 50 N.M./NW Arctic Village, AK. (ANC79-F-A084). photocopy.
10. Alaska Coastal Ellis Airlines: Directors' Meetings/ Annual Meetings 1963.
11. Before the Civil Aeronautics Board, Washington, D.C. In the matter of the Alaska - Alaska Coastal Merger, Docket No. 18408. Direct Exhibits submitted by Alaska Airlines, Inc., and Alaska Coastal Airlines, Inc., June 12, 1967.
12. Docket No. 18408. Testimony of Charles F. Willis, Jr., President of Alaska Airlines, Inc. Docket No. 18408. Testimony of S.B. Simmons, President and Chairman of the Board of Alaska Coastal Airlines, Inc.
13. Memo. 6/28/1967; re: Stockholders Agreement with Alaska Airlines and Willis
14. Alaska Coastal Airways: Insignia patches [2]; two brochures with flight maps.
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
4. Brochure from Alaska Coastal Ellis Airlines Reunion, April 2-4, 1993.
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:

- Ellis, R. E. (Bob). *What...No Landing Field?* Haines, AK: Lynn Canal Pub. Co., 1979.
 Jarman, Lloyd. *Bush Pilot's Log #2*. (1982)
 Kennedy, Kay J. *The Wien Brothers Story*. 1967.
 Putnam, Burleigh. *Mostly Accidents or Things That Shouldn't Be Done with an Airplane*. (1990)
 Satterfield, Archie. *The Alaska Airlines Story*. Anchorage: Alaska Northwest Publishing Co.,
 1981. (1982 Presentation copy to Shell and Bee)
Totem, (1932,1933,1934: Juneau High School yearbook of Bernice "Bee" Riedle)
 Wirt, Sherwood. *Cracked Ice*. Juneau, 1937.

Box 3: Scrapbooks, Oversize materials

Folder No.

1. Pan American Airways certificates and photograph: crossing International Dateline, 1957.
2. Sheldon B. Simmons "Commercial Pilot Examiner" Certificate, 1950; Certificate: Appointment to Alaska Territorial Aeronautics and Communications Commission, 1949.
3. Photocopy and names list of 1982 Reunion photograph.
4. Scrapbook, 1930s - 1950s.
5. Scrapbook, 1940s - 1980s.
6. 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.

1. 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
2. Address books (2 small black binders)
3. 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.
2. Alaska Airlines Aircraft Through The Years: A History of Service; ©1992 Mike Tobin
3. Alaska Airlines Since Nineteen Hundred Thirty Two; Jim Parker 1978 ©