

South Milwaukee Historical Society



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From the Presidents Desk

Hello, all you lovers of history! I'm sorry to say we're still in a coronavirus shut-down. However, we are hoping for that "silver bullet" that will put an end to this virus. It looks like there is some progress. Let's hope it comes sooner than later, so we can reopen and get back to normal. We do open on the first Thursday of the month from 1-3pm. We have lost, as you know, all of our four fund raising activities in 2020(Christmas tea, plant exchange, garden tour etc.) So it's been difficult, but "hope springs eternal!"

We are still hoping we can update our website and need help with this project! If you know anyone qualified or have any ideas as to content to include in our newsletter, your input will be greatly appreciated.

We hope you're keeping informed on the progress of the Downtown Public Place Concepts(the exciting project which I hope you support with your advice and suggestions). We have about 150 members, but we seldom see or hear from you! Maybe, your voice and ideas could help us serve our city better!

This Spring we will need to replace our fence in the alley. We will need to get proposals for the project. Please let us know of a good contractor.

We hope this newsletter finds you all in good health and spirits. We miss seeing you at your museum! God bless you.

Respectfully, Pres. Richard G. Thinnas

LAWSON – Part 2 L-2 Airplane

Discouraged – No! Disappointed – Perhaps.

The news that the Army would not purchase any trainer airplanes was certainly unwelcome!

However, now Alfred Lawson could pursue his dream of a passenger airplane. He had written about such an aircraft in FLY and AIRCRAFT – his design team was intact – but what about funding. The revenue from a sale of 100 trainer planes (probably several hundred thousand dollars) would have enabled design and prototype of the passenger craft but that did not occur.

Green Bay investors were not interested in a passenger airplane.

Vincent Burnelli had contacts in Milwaukee so it was decided to move Lawson Aircraft Company to Milwaukee. Working out of an office in the First Wisconsin Bank building Alfred Lawson, who had once sold Singer sewing machines door to door, began selling his idea of a passenger airplane to the public and anyone who would buy stock at \$10 per share. Using Lawson's concept, Burnelli and Wallace began the design for a 16 passenger airliner. The cockpit was to accommodate two persons, there were dual controls and it was inside the fuselage. (no more pilot in the air stream.) Engines were to be 400 hp. Liberty engines, government surplus from the engine program initiated at the beginning of WW I. * Plywood, then quite new, was to be used in engine mounts, fuselage skin and internal bulkheads. Wings, fuselage and tail were constructed of spruce wood in a box shape reinforced with "X" wires. Landing gear was to consist of fixed mounts under each engine each consisting of two tires. Wings, tail and aft fuselage were covered with cloth and coated with tautening dope, a clear aircraft cloth finish.

Burnelli rented space in the Cream City Sash and Door Company and construction of the craft began. Lawson had two logistical problems however. Although the rented facilities were large enough to build the plane parts they were too small to fully assemble the machine. And he needed a airfield from which to test the airplane.

Lawson wrote a letter to Daniel Hoan, the mayor of Milwaukee, suggesting that an airport would "put the city on the map" for the new airline industry. As a result a committee was formed, with Lawson as a member, to locate a suitable site. They selected a location on Milwaukee's northwest side (Now Currie Park **) A grass runway and buildings were quickly constructed. Permission was obtained to use a building at State Fair Park for final assembly of the airplane.

Today a plaque at Currie Park reads in part:

"The nation's first commercial air transport, the Lawson Airliner, took off from this field on August 27, 1919 on a demonstration flight to New York City and Washington, D.C. and returned on November 14, 1919"

Alfred Lawson had envisioned a grand tour of the eastern United States and had written to various cities, flying clubs and aircraft manufacturers soliciting use of their landing fields and airports for his demonstration flight. He also made sure that newspapers were aware of his plans.

Extensive documentation exists for the tour, mostly as newspaper headlines from Chicago, New York, Washington D.C. and others. It was very successful from a publicity standpoint, but technically not so much.

Over New York City, with a full load of 15 passengers (one seat behind the pilots cabin was used by a mechanic (a flight engineer today) who had instruments in front of him on the bulkhead) the plane achieved 5,000 ft. altitude and 90 mph. This was well under the projections of 10,000 ft and 100 mph. In addition, Lawson had come to the conclusion that a greater passenger capacity was required to compete with the railroads.

Upon returning to Milwaukee, design work began on a larger, more powerful aircraft. The L-4 or "Midnight" airliner.

* Just prior to WW I the Army recognized the need for domestically produced airplane engine. Two engine designers, one from Packard Motorcars and one from the Hall-Scott Company were summoned to Washington, lodged in a hotel room and given the task. They designed the engine, a V-12, water cooled conventional ignition design in 5 days, between May 30 and June 4th of 1917. Called the Liberty engine over 20,000 were produced. It is believed that the WW II PT boat engines, manufactured by Packard had their roots in the Liberty.

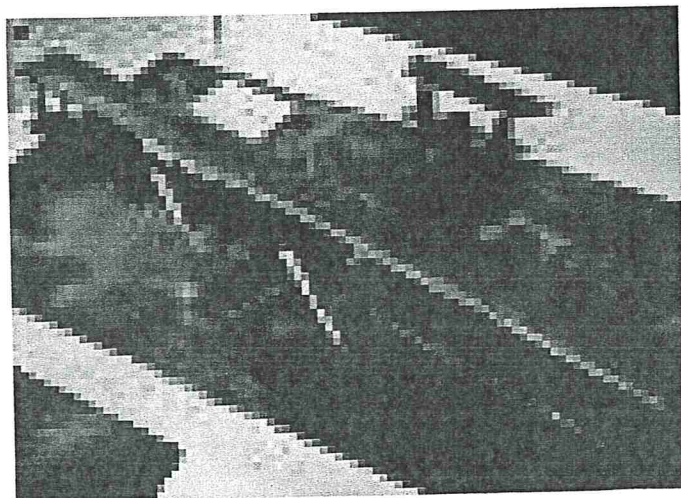
** Currie Park (New Butler Field) was eventually deemed unexpandable and decommissioned in 1926 when Milwaukee County bought Hamilton Field, now General Mitchell International Airport.

Note: Part 1 is in South Milwaukee Historical Society Newsletter Fall, 2020 Part 3 – The L-4 Airplane & Part 4 – awsonomy will appear in future Newsletters

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DONATION

We have received a model of the Lawson L-2 (2 engine) airplane constructed and donated by Mr Greg Meka. Greg has previously built a model Viking ship for our South Milwaukee Library display case "Vikings to America" presentation. He graciously offered to build this model upon hearing plans to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the May 8th 1921 Lawson aircraft flight.



Book Review

90 YEARS CROSSING LAKE MICHIGAN

1892 – You can ask almost any South Milwaukeean and they'll know the date this area achieved a population of 517 and was chartered as a village by the Wisconsin State Legislator. (We became a city in 1897)

But it was also an important date for the Toledo, Ann Arbor and North Michigan Railway, which first carried railroad cars across the Lake from Frankfort Michigan to Kewanee, Wisconsin on November 24, 1892. The Railroad had commissioned 2 unique ships for this service. They incorporated reinforced bows for ice breaking and port and starboard water tanks that could be used to rock the boat and a 3rd propeller in the bow which could be used to create water movement and aid in ice breakup.

The author has written a story of interest to all who enjoy lake boats, railroads, business, bravery, adversity and above all – ice! Lots and lots of ice and ice related stories. He categorizes the types of ice found on the Great Lakes and describes how each type affected winter boat traffic.

Numerous photos of the ferries in action and sometimes inaction – stuck in the ice! My favorite was a middle of winter photo of skaters on the Lake ice outside of Frankfort as the ferry went past them..

Steve Schreiter
sfs69@att.net

“Ninety Years Crossing Lake Michigan, The History of the Ann Arbor Car Ferries” by Grant Brown Jr. University of Michigan Press, 2008.

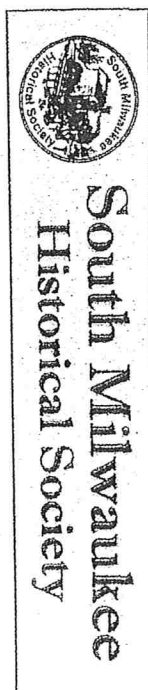
SPEEDY DANISH COFFEE CAKE

1 pkg. active dry yeast
1/4 C warm water (105 to 110 degrees)
2 C sifted all-purpose flour
2 T sugar
1 t salt
1 C butter
1 egg, beaten
1 t vanilla
Fruit filling

Dissolve yeast in warm water. Sift together flour, sugar and salt. Cut butter into flour mixture with pastry blender. Combine dissolved yeast, beaten egg, and vanilla. Stir into flour mixture, blending until smooth.

Place dough on floured board and roll into 10 x 14 inch rectangle. Transfer dough carefully to greased 11 x 7 x 2 inch baking pan, allowing extra dough to hang over sides of pan.

Spread fruit filling evenly over dough. Fold overhanging dough back over fruit. For a crisp topping, sprinkle 1/2 C sugar on top of dough. Bake in a moderate oven at 375 degrees for 30 min.



**South Milwaukee
Historical Society**

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Individual: \$10.00 - Annual

Family: \$15.00 - Annual

Business: \$25.00 - Annual

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717 Milwaukee Avenue

South Milwaukee WI 53172

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MR & MRS S SCHREITER (L2)
104 BROOKDALE DR
S MILWAUKEE WI 53172

Dennis Douglas Rankin passed away on January 13, 2021 after a month long struggle with the Coronavirus. He was born on April 26, 1937 to William Douglas Rankin and Lillian Marie Fowle Rankin (daughter of Horace and Ellen Fowle and granddaughter of John Fowle). Dennis and first wife, Penny Ann Fabinski founded the South Milwaukee Historical Society in 1972. I can remember Jan Schumacher saying to me, "You like history, you should come to our meetings. They are once a month at the library." So I started attending the meetings and I did enjoy the history. There would be 35 to 40 people attending each month. One of my first volunteer jobs was doing a history of our Railroad Depot. One thing led to another and Dora Lee Szewcuga and I worked for three years to get our Depot on the National Register of Historic Places. I am glad I did it. It was a great learning experience, and it only took 3 trips to Madison to figure out it should be done.

Penny convinced her parents to donate a rental house they had on Milwaukee Ave. for the new museum. A committee of 5 ladies got together to decide how the interior should look. Since the house was built in 1892, they decided to keep a Victorian home look with Victorian wallpaper. One of the ladies who taught sewing at MATC, made the curtains. Donations arrived. I met Dennis 2 years ago at his retirement home. He thanked the historical society members for all the work they have done and for keeping the dream alive. I heard many fireworks going off at the cemetery on the day of his burial. Blessings and speedy journey, Dennis . Thank You!

Lois Schreiter – Jan. 26, 2021