

South Milwaukee Historical Society

717 Milwaukee Avenue
South Milwaukee, Wi. 53172

November, 2020



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From the Presidents Pen

Greetings fellow History Buffs! The Coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on your S. Milwaukee Hist. Society! We have been closed for much of the time since March. We have tried to open on the 1st. Thursday of the month again, but our visitors have been few. Sue and Judy have been trying to work on Wednesdays, but it has been difficult to do so each week.

On a positive note, Steve and Lois have been working on our digitization project, when possible! We have completed the installation of the new water heater and are hoping to replace our "falling down fence" in the back alley. Also the furnace/heating system will be checked for the winter season.

We continue to rely on our membership for their financial support and volunteer efforts to make the Hist. Society a vibrant source for our community.

We, of course, cannot predict the future, so much of our vast activities have been put on hold for the foreseeable future. We appreciate the efforts of all our members and volunteers and look forward to the time when we can resume our normal activities

Speaking of help, we are trying to update our website. If you can help or have any needs, concerns or advise. Please, feel free to let me know.

Please, remember our thoughts and prayers are with you. Stay safe, follow the guidelines and stay healthy, wealthy and wise.

A famous person once said. "Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible and suddenly you are doing the impossible."

Respectfully, Pres. Richard G. Thinnes

Founded March 1972 by Mr. & Mrs. Dennis Rankin. Initial Directors-Dennis Rankin, Penny Rankin, George Hook, Mary McCarrier, Bruce Rayeske, Dora Lee Szewczuga, William Domoe, Lillian Dishong, Chester Grobschmidt

Lawson History in Four Parts

- 1 Baseball, MT-1,2, "FLY", Green Bay
- 2 L- 2 Airliner
- 3 L- 4 Airliner
- 4 Lawsonomy

He played semi pro baseball, edited a popular magazine on flying (FLY), started 3 corporations, built 3 impressive airplanes and founded a philosophical movement that attracted over 350,000 members.

Wrote 13 books, ran a college, raised hundreds of thousands of dollars, sold thousands of shares of stock, went bankrupt several times and was called before a congressional investigating committee.

Conceived of the "hub" airline route connection technique used today, probably built the first airliner aircraft and invented the name airliner. Received a \$650,000 airmail delivery contract from the United States Post Office.

All of the above apply to one man, Alfred W. Lawson (b. 1869, d. 1954) a man who planned to put

South Milwaukee, Wisconsin on the map as the center of the aircraft industry.

Lawson left home at 17 years of age, just as his brother George had done at the same age. He had no particular training other than working with cloth as a tailor, but he did have physical skills as a baseball player and the early years of the 1900's were a hotbed of the sport. Various leagues and teams and sponsors were popping up everywhere and the rigid organization we know today was non-existent.

Lawson could pitch (there is some question on his fastball) and play outfield and infield positions. But one game contracts with 3 different major league teams, none of which were successful caused him to forsake the sport and seek other efforts to make a living.*

Orville and Wilbur Wright had demonstrated flight in 1905 and the United States was absorbed in any activity related to flying. Capitalizing on this interest, Lawson began the Magazine "FLY" in 1908. It appears to have been very successful since an article of November 16, 1913 describes Lawson as "New York's First Airboat Commuter" traveling the 30 miles from his home in Seidler's Beach to Manhattan in 1/2 hour utilizing a float plane (what we would call a seaplane). Lawson wrote numerous

articles about aircraft and their use in the forthcoming world war both in "Fly" and in "Aircraft" a second magazine he edited and published.

Lawson left the magazine industry in 1917, taking several of the technical editors (who were aircraft designers) with him and moved to Green Bay, WI. It appears that several investors in Green Bay wished to start an aircraft construction business and invited Lawson to head the activity. The initial trainer (MT-1) airplane for the US Army Air Force was unsuccessful but a follow up design (MT-2) received a very positive review by the government inspector. Unfortunately by this time it appeared World War I was winding to a close..

On November 4, 1918 the Chief of Aircraft Procurement sent the following to Lawson Aircraft in Green Bay, Wisconsin:

"You had, through Mr. Lawson, every reason to feel that when your financial position was squared with our views on the matter, a formal order for the planes in question would be forthcoming from me. However since that date and today there has been a decided change in the training program. which leaves me without a purchase requisition upon which to base an order."

World War I Armistice was signed on November 18, 1918

* “Baseball Fiends and Flying Machines” by Jerry Kuntz, 2009.

First of four chapters on the life of Alfred Lawson, his airliners and his philosophy. Copyright Stephen F. Schreiter Oct. 12, 2020. Parts 2,3 and 4 will follow in future SMHS Newsletters.



A New Donation

Mark and Jeanne Nicholson (life members) have donated a beautiful framed photograph to the Society. It is a scene titled "The Poplars" and shows a small group of trees with the Lake in the background. The picture is signed C. Oscar Lindquist. According to his World War II draft card Carl Oscar Lindquist is a commercial photographer located at 929 North Jackson in Milwaukee. Mr. Lindquist has a connection to South Milwaukee, he appears in the 1919, 20 and 1930 census at 1214 Marshall with his parents Nels and Karan Lindquist, and brothers Harry and Norman.

Mark Nicholson told us that the picture has been in his family for two generations and that his father found the scene calming.

Our Museum has a 2nd framed photograph signed by a Lindquist. Its titled "The Lagoon" but the initial preceding Lindquist is confusing. It may be "R" however its not conclusive. The 1930 census shows Harry Lindquist as a photographer also. Takes a stretch to interpret the initial as an "H".

Announcement
By Linda Daly

One hundred years ago there was an airplane factory in South Milwaukee. Its owner, Alfred Lawson, was a man known nation wide as a leading aircraft inventor of whom great things were expected. Then all came to an end for Lawson with a crash on a test flight along 9th Avenue in South Milwaukee of his futuristic L4 - Midnight Airliner. On May 8, 2021, the South Milwaukee Historical Society and the Mitchell Gallery of Flight (at Milwaukee Mitchell International Airport) would like to mark the 100th anniversary of that dreams-ending flight with an exhibit on Lawson. Leading up to this, the South Milwaukee Historical Society Newsletter will publish a series of articles on Lawson starting with this issue.

Another Donation :

Mr. James Rothschadl (member, former Board member) has donated a copy of George Hardie, Jr.'s manuscript listed below. It is a comprehensive study of Lawson's manufacturing activities in Wisconsin, both at Green Bay, Milwaukee and South Milwaukee. Jim was fortunate to receive this material from George just prior to Mr. Hardie's death on June 19, 2001.

May 8, 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of the crash of Lawson's largest and last aircraft, the L- 4 or "Midnight Airliner" which was built in South Milwaukee at 909 Menominee Avenue.

"The Lawson Airliners, pioneering airline transportation" unpublished manuscript, George A. Hardie, Jr, June, 2001

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Remembering Kris Schell (1946-2020)

We were all saddened by the passing of our friend & colleague Kris Schnell at the end of August. Although Kris was a relatively recent addition to the Society she quickly became one of our most active members joining the board of directors within months. She volunteered for any activity she could fit in her schedule and happily shared her expertise from years of running South Milwaukee Human Concerns. She was instrumental in organizing the archive files, turning mountains of jumbled papers and pictures into a usable treasure trove of information. Her joy and excitement when she shared a particularly fun tidbit of history sheâ€™d found was contagious. Weâ€™re going to miss her a lot. Our heartfelt condolences go out to her family and many friends. And our thanks also to everyone who made a donation to the Society in her name.

Sue Ziarek, Secretary

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