



# *South Milwaukee Historical Society*

*717 Milwaukee Avenue  
South Milwaukee, WI 53172*

## **NEWSLETTER April, 2021**

### **OFFICERS**

President	Richard Thinnies	762-6214
V. President	Lois Schreiter	762-5214
Secretary	Sue Ziarek	520-1959
Treasurer	Judy Balestreiri	630-8604

**Curators:** Judy Balestreiri  
Richard Thinnies  
Stephen Schreiter

### **BOARD OF DIRECTORS (Term Expires)**

Don Bulley	(2021)
Stephen Schreiter	(2021)
Vicki Bartoshevich	(2021)
Carol Muni	(2021)

### **The President's desk!**

Hello all our friends,

It's been a long lonesome road we have been on during this pandemic. Our board hasn't met since last March, 2020. Good news-we are still here, and plan our next meeting this April, 2021. Hopefully, it will be the start of a return to normal life!

During our "shutdown", of course, not much has happened here at the museum. We have tried to open-up on the first Thursday of the month back in Feb., 2021. Not a lot of visitors have come, but we know it would be a long, slow restart. We are planning to be back to our past status by summer and look forward to seeing our members, friends and visitors!

Please, feel free to visit us as soon as you feel comfortable.

*Richard G. Thinnies, president*

### LAWSON – Part 3 L-4 Plane

Double the passenger capacity, more power, longer range. Those were the obvious improvements needed but Alfred Lawson wanted more. His demonstration flight to Chicago, Buffalo, Washington D.C. and New York was a tremendous publicity success. Newspaper reporters, politicians and dignitaries were contacted in advance and crowds had witnessed the “leviathan” of the air.

Lawson purchased about 3 acres of land, including a large brick building in the city of South Milwaukee (909 Menominee Ave., building demolished in 2003.) previously used by Federal Rubber. It had a railroad siding and was suitable for aircraft sub-assembly but was not large enough for final assembly.

The two Liberty engines were salvaged from the L-2 airplane and a 3<sup>rd</sup> engine bought as WWI surplus.(about 21,000 engines had been built) Gasoline tanks were increased to 733 gal. A cockpit heater was to be added after Lawson complained that his feet got cold flying from Chicago to Milwaukee during November of 1919 when returning from the demo tour. Multiple tire failures had also occurred during landings so a more robust landing gear and 4 ft diameter Palmer brand aircraft tires were specified. The biplane wing was increased from 95 to 120 feet and the fuselage lengthened from about 55 to 62 feet. Seating was changed from a seat each side of an aisle to 2 abreast on one side and a single seat on the other (ie. 3 seats in each row.) In order to advertise as “the midnight airliner” the plane could be configured with 4 bunks and a washroom for a small number of passengers. Lawson told the press that he would offer airline service to the west coast. The plane included space for “air” mail on board and a system for transferring mail bags between planes in the air.

Lawson spoke of having 50 planes under construction (he never had more than one) and publicized his “hub” airline interconnect plan. He visited many cities and emphasized the need for public airfields. His specifications for a field were 2 runways, 300 feet long each 66 ft wide total with a 40 ft width paved. When the US Postal Service asked for bids on airmail service Lawson was the only bidder and received a \$650,000 contract.

At this point, fate in the form of the depression of 1920 and 1921 intervened. Stock sales plummeted and loan funds were difficult to obtain. Lawson put ads in newspapers offering a 10% return but he was forced to lay off almost all his employees and return the air mail contract to the Post Office. L-4 wasn't finished until December 1920 and how could it be tested? Hamilton Field was only a few miles away but Tom Hamilton, who had been employed by Lawson was fired by him some months earlier. Would Hamilton allow the plane to be tested at his airport? Would Lawson even inquire? Were funds available to disassemble the plane and transport it to an airport?

A short cinder runway was built on the Lawson property and arrangements made with John Hughes, a farmer whose land abutted Lawson's. The field-stone fence between the properties was opened and Hughes' field would serve as an extension of the runway. The

runway ran north and south with the hanger at the north end, Hughes was to the south. Aircraft almost always take off into the wind, using the wind speed to get additional "lift"

There are several mentions from South Milwaukee residents of the plane being taken from its hanger and the engines warmed over the early months of 1921. Corporate matters had reached a critical point however, investors and investor committees tired of Lawson's promises finally issued an ultimatum – Action or resign!

On Mothers Day, May 8<sup>th</sup> 1921 the plane with Lawson, pilot Wilcox and mechanics Surini and Schory on board was prepared for takeoff. Rolling to the south it encountered John Hughes' field which had been plowed the day before in an east west direction. Diminishing acceleration caused the plane to climb slowly and farmer Hughes house, on a slight hill on Blake Avenue was right in line with the plane. Wilcox banked to the left (east) one wing struck a power pole and the plane crashed east of 9<sup>th</sup> avenue in a field. No one was hurt, Lawson had a slight scratch, but damage to the plane was extensive. Repairs were estimated at \$10,000.

Probably as a result of the financial depression, funds could not be obtained and bankruptcy ensued. The Lawson Aircraft Company was formally declared bankrupt in 1922

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#### Donation & Inquiry

Ken Tangen dropped in the Museum On Thursday April 1st and donated several photo holders marked Breakfield Photography. Breakfield was located on the southwest corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Milwaukee Avenues. Thanks Ken!

He also showed us an interesting painting,. Interesting because it included a reference to a long time South Milwaukee business. The picture is about 16 by 24 inches, nicely framed and is of a Northwood cabin scene. Its signed Phillip G. Goodwin. We understand that the painting hung in the lake home of Freida Kuppert Linke about 1932 .(Ken's grandmother)

Near the cabin door is a representation of a wood box marked "Dibble and Son" This firm is listed in the South Milwaukee City Directories from 1911 to 1938, mostly at 1022 Milwaukee Avenue. (Note: even street nos. are on the north side.. This group of buildings was purchased by Bucyrus when their office bldg. was erected)

Lois Schreiter recalls that Otto Kuppert was a local attorney and a past member of the Society's Board of Directors. (sfs, 4/4/2021)

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## Microfilm Newspaper Digitization Project Report

Tristan Marshall, the new South Milwaukee Library Director, has managed to decode the 96 files sent to us by the State Historical Society Microfilm Lab.. She called us one day to inquire of the project status and quickly solved the problem of the file transfer protocol that is used by the Lab. She advises that the files are readable and searchable

These files represent the first year of the South Milwaukee newspaper, 1893. Project goal is to have all the Library's run of the paper digitized and searchable

We are sincerely grateful and thankful to all those persons and organizations that have donated to this project! (sfs, 4/4/2021)



In a recent interview (published in the Spring/Summer 2021 Bridges magazine) with newly promoted Captain Kurt Egner of the South Milwaukee Fire Department, he stated that if he were to check out one book from the South Milwaukee Public Library it would be Gert Endthoff's book on the history of South Milwaukee, "Then to Now". Members of the South Milwaukee Historical Society decided that he should have his very own copy of the book. Shown here is South Milwaukee Historical Society President, Richard Thinner, presenting the book to the very appreciative Captain Kurt Egner.

*Meetings are held on second Monday of Month at the Museum , 6 pm*

**Open House** - First Thursday of Month, 1:00pm to 3:00P

**Books on Sale at the Museum**

*Images of America*, South Milwaukee, a picture history book by Nels Monson and Dean S. Marlow, Jr. \$20.00.

*Then to Now* (History of South Milwaukee) by Gertrude Endthof is \$10.00,

*Letters to Mettie* Civil War Soldiers letters to Mettie Rawson, \$7.50,

*Growing Up Polish in South Milwaukee*, by Carol Wagner Demarco, \$15.00

**Genealogy by Steve Schreiter:** One hour of genealogy for anyone with the new \$10.00 membership.

Basic information forms must be filled out and returned with dues to

South Milwaukee Historical Society, 717 Milwaukee Ave. , S.M. 53172

The South Milwaukee Historical Society would like to extend our wishes, condolences or congratulations to its members. Please contact Sunshine Chairperson, Vicki Bartoshevich, 414-764-2836. Please leave a detailed message including where the card should be sent (home, hospital, nursing home) and a number where you can be reached if Vicki has questions.

Contact us at southmilwaukeehistory@gmail.com

H.S. News Feb 2021 I find this amazing.

If you miss your Saturday evening cocktail and are restricted to Club Living Room, you may be limited to the ingredients found in your house. You can go to [makemeacocktail.com](http://makemeacocktail.com). List all the booze, wine, beer, mixers and garnishes you have in the house, and it will generate a list of every possible cocktail you can mix with those ingredients, including nonalcoholic recipies.

From the Kitchen:

To make a small Cheese Ball (to go with your cocktail)

4 oz cream cheese (I like goat cheese for its tang.)

½ teaspoon cinnamon

2 tablespoons honey, ( or enough to make it stick together)

2 tablespoons chopped craisins

Mix till it sticks together in a ball.

Roll in ground or finely chopped nuts

Serve with your favorite cracker

Wrap in plastice wrap for storage.

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## **LAWSON AIRCRAFT EVENT**

In honor of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the flight of the Lawson L-4 Midnight airliner on May 8, 1921, the South Milwaukee Historical Society Museum will be open from 1:00 to 2:00 pm on Saturday May 8<sup>th</sup>.

A newly built model of the plane will be on display along with other photos and artifacts associated with the event

A short talk on the plane's construction and first flight will also be presented..