

CAROLYN JEAN WEST COLLECTION

MS-005

International Women's Air and Space Museum
Burke Lakefront Airport
1501 North Marginal Road, Cleveland, OH 44114

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INTRODUCTION

The Carolyn Jean West Collection was accessioned into the International Women's Air & Space Museum in June 1996. One box of memorabilia from Mrs. West was donated by her daughter, Jacquelyn West Hillier, and delivered by her daughter-in-law, Margaret (Mrs. Gordon) E. West on May 15, 1996.

Most of the material in the collection is dated from 1930 to 1948. This material documents Mrs. West's flying experiences and aviation activities primarily in the early 1930s and the late 1940s. Her most notable piloting achievement was winning the All-Woman Air Race on March 11-13, 1947. The papers fill one Hollinger box and six file folders. They are organized into three series:

1. Scrapbooks Albums
2. Other Papers
3. Original Album Pages

There are no restrictions on the use of these materials.

In addition to these papers the Museum received the trophy awarded to Mrs. West for winning the 1947 All-Woman Air Race, a leather flying cap, and a framed AWTAR Award of Merit.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Carolyn Jean West (CJW) started flying in 1930 while living in Seattle, Washington, with her husband, John R. West, also a pilot. She received her license in 1931 flying a Waco. In 1935 they lived in Columbus, Indiana, and in 1937 moved into the Los Angeles area where they settled and raised a daughter and a son. During World War II, CJW served with the Civil Air Patrol on search and rescue missions.

In 1931 CJW participated in the Pacific Northwest Air Tour, a ten day swing through Oregon, Idaho, and Washington. As many as fifty planes were on the tour, flying exhibitions at seven major stops and many intermediate airports. The tour ended with a July 4th air circus at Boeing Field in Seattle. Gladys O'Donnell was one of the other women on the tour.

Carolyn West was also a professional writer. During the Pacific Northwest Air Tour (June 25 - July 4, 1931) she served as "flying reporter" for the Seattle Times and sent columns from cities like Tacoma, WA, Albany and Portland, OR, and Nampa, ID. Her manuscript of a novel titled "Down Wind" (scheduled for publication in the fall of 1937) was recognized by the Womens International Association of Aeronautics (WIAA) with an award presented by Elizabeth McQueen, the founder of WIAA. The November 1945 issue of Western Flying included her article titled "Airports Need an Airing." As an activist on behalf of aviation and airports she spoke at many events and served as chairman of numerous promotional activities.

By the beginning of 1947 CJW was serving a second term as chairman of the Southern California Chapter of the Ninety Nines and was on the board of directors of the local NAA chapter. She was a member of the Aviation Country Club, the Aviation Breakfast Club, and the Oakmont League. She and John, an advertising executive, lived in La Canada with daughter, Jacquelyn Alexa, 8, and son, Gordon, 4. At a 99s meeting in January 1947 an letter from Florida led to her award-winning flight.

The Florida Chapter of the Ninety-Nines planned to host an all woman air show on March 15-16, 1947. To generate interest and attendance, they invited other chapters to race to Tampa, the site of the air show. The Southern California chapter accepted the invitation and three pilots agreed to participate. One, Barbara (Erickson) London of Long Beach, withdrew when she couldn't find a sponsor. The other entrants were Dianne (Cyrus) Bixby of Santa Paula in her A-26 bomber and Carolyn West in the family's 85HP Ercoupe.

Weather prevented leaving from Clover Field in Santa Monica on Tuesday, March 11. Departure was rescheduled for the next day at dawn from Palm Springs. CJW and her co-pilot, former WASP Beatrice "Bea" Medes of Newport Beach, took off first. After seven stops, five for gas and two for weather - in Tucson, AZ, El Paso, TX, Dallas, TX, Shreveport, LA, Monroeville, AL, Cross City, FL, and Dunellen, FL - they arrived in Tampa on March 13th. Flying time for the 2242 mile distance was 21 hours and 47 minutes. Not until after West and Medes landed did they learn that Bixby had never left Palms Springs due to persistent engine trouble.

Trophies were awarded to West as pilot and to Medes as copilot for winning the 1947 All-Woman Air Race, the first transcontinental air race for women since Jacqueline Cochran won the Powder Puff Derby of 1938.

The next year CJW took charge of the West Coast arrangements for the Jacqueline Cochran All-Woman Trophy Race in which eight women flew from Palm Springs to Miami's Amelia Earhart Field. The 1949 race was called the Jacqueline Cochran All-Woman Transcontinental Air Race. In 1950 the race received the name that is used today, the All-Woman Transcontinental Air Race.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection consists of two scrapbook albums and some miscellaneous papers. Only one album had covers which were discarded since they had no archival, intrinsic, or personal value. The pages were copied onto archival paper and numbered to preserve the original sequence. The page order of the albums is retained in the series, Scrapbook Albums. The remainder of the collection constitutes the second series, Other Papers. The original pages are stored in envelopes in a separate series, Original Album Pages.

Although this collection spans the years of 1912 (one photograph) to 1980 (one photograph), most of the newspaper articles and photographs are from two events. The first is the Pacific Northwest Air Tour of 1931 and the second is the All-Woman Air Race of 1947. Other clippings and photographs relate to West's interest in aviation. The contents of two albums occupy two file folders in the Scrapbook Albums series. In both newspaper articles are interspersed with photographs.

In the first album, most of the photographs are 3" x 4" black and white. One shows CJW sitting with her brother in a biplane and is dated 1912. The most recent item is a newspaper clipping with photo of CJW and a dog dated 1967. Most of remaining photos and newspaper clippings are dated between 1931 and 1948. These include coverage of the Pacific NW Air Tour in 1931 and the cross-country All-Woman Air Race in 1947. The original pages of this album are in Series 3-1.

Most of the material in the second album is dated 1946-1948. Some, but not all of the photographs, are identified and dated, and most are 4" x 6" or smaller. There is one 1930 photograph of CJW in Seattle and one 1980 photo of CJW with a cat in front of a fireplace. There is a good picture of Margo Tanner, 1939. The articles cover CJW's activities in the Ninety-Nines including her election as chapter chairman, the 1947 air race with typed itinerary, some fly-ins, and the 1948 air race start. There are also articles and photographs of the family and different airplanes, her advocacy for airports, and the National Aeronautics Association's "Ladies Night" on June 6, 1946. Original pages are in Series 3-2 envelope.

In the second series, Other Papers, there are two small files. The first, Miscellaneous Air Race, includes three newspaper clippings, a letter from CJW to "Mom and Dad" about entering the 1947 air race, an autographed All-Woman Air Show program dated March 15-16, 1947*, two photographs of CJW with trophy (both 8" x 10", one mounted on cardboard) dated March 1947. A copy of the framed Award of Merit certificate is included. The second file folder, Booklets, contains a 1972-1973 Ninety-Nines Membership Directory and a program for the 30th Anniversary Commemorative Flight of July 1-4, 1977.

The third series consists of the original pages of the two scrapbook albums. In some cases the newspaper clippings were copied onto archival paper and the deteriorating originals were destroyed.

BOX, FILE, AND FOLDER LISTING

Series 1 Scrapbooks and Albums

Folder 1-1 Scrapbook (copy); 1912-1968

Newspaper articles are interspersed with photographs, most 3" x 4" black and white. Original pages in Series 3-1 envelope.

Folder 1-2 Scrapbook/Photo Album (copy); 1930-1980

Newspaper clippings and photographs, most 4" x 6" black and white, of aviation related subjects. Original pages in Series 3-2 envelope.

Series 2 Other Papers

Folder 2-1 Miscellaneous Air Race; 1946-1947

Loose papers related to the air race and air show of 1947.

Folder 1-3 Booklets; 1977

Two bound booklets.

Series 3 Original Album Pages

Folder 3-1 Scrapbook; 1912-1968

See Folder 1-1 for description of contents.

Folder 3-2 Scrapbook; 1930-1980

See Folder 1-2 for description of contents.

*Among the legible autographs are those of Rachael Williams, Carolyn Cullen, Ruth C. Hubert, Caryl Jones, Marjorie B. Davis, and Dick Flynn of Miami.