



**INVENTORY TO
THE CLIFFORD HENDERSON COLLECTION
ON THE NATIONAL AIR RACES, 1928-1936**

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Descriptive Summary

Creator Information	Henderson, Clifford William, 1895-1984
Title	Clifford Henderson Collection on the National Air Races
Collection Identifier	
Date Span	1928-1936
Abstract	Scrapbook of newspaper clippings of National Air Races, two autograph albums with comments and signatures of attendees, and one photo album of the races.
Extent	3 cubic feet (4 flat boxes)
Finding Aid Author	Angela Day, October 2007
Languages	English
Repository	Archives and Special Collections, Purdue University Libraries

Administrative Information

Location Information:	ASC
Access Restrictions:	Collection is open for research.
Acquisition Information:	Purchased from Heritage Auction Galleries
Custodial History:	
Accession Number:	20071016.1
Preferred Citation:	Clifford Henderson Collection on the National Air Races, Archives and Special Collections, Purdue University Libraries
Copyright Notice:	
Related Materials Information:	George Palmer Putnam collection of Amelia Earhart Papers, 1785-1948 Correspondence, photographs, creative writings, printed material, scrapbooks, personal belongings and ephemera relating to the life and career of aviator Amelia Earhart.

Subjects and Genres

Persons

Henderson, Clifford William, 1895-1984
Barnes, Pancho, 1901-
Loy, Myrna, 1905-1993
Bendix, Vincent
Turner, Roscoe, 1895-1970
Kalep, Elvy
Haizlip, May
Aldrin, Edwin Eugene, 1896-
Noyes, Blanche
O'Donnell, Gladys
Lindbergh, Charles A. (Charles Augustus), 1902-1974.
Thaden, Louise, 1906-

Topics

Airplane racing—United States
National Air Races
Aeronautics
Air pilots
Women air pilots

Form and Genre Types

Scrapbooks
Autograph albums

Biography of Clifford Henderson

Clifford William Henderson (1895-1984) was managing director of the National Air Races from 1928 until 1939. Known for his showmanship and promotional talent, he was called a “master of ballyhoo” and a “roman candle promoter.” A 1936 National Air Races press release gives Henderson’s “genius for organization . . . full credit for the development of this great international aviation sports classic,” including the original conceptions of the Bendix, Thompson, Shell, and Aerol trophies.

Henderson was born in the Quaker colony of Lenox, Iowa, the son of a druggist. He moved to California when he was fourteen as part of the first transcontinental trip by motor truck, riding as mascot from Colorado to San Francisco. From an early age he showed an inclination for promotion and organization, producing circuses and shows for his friends. When an air meet was held near Los Angeles in 1910, it inspired young Henderson to organize a model plane building contest. He later worked his way through high school and college with his own small dance band, graduating from the University of Southern California in 1917.

Henderson enlisted as an ambulance driver in World War I and transferred to the Air Corps just before the Armistice. After the war he bought an old “Jenny” plane from the government, flying solo after only four hours of instruction. In 1924 he managed his first air show, arranging the departure from and return to Santa Monica of the U.S. Army’s round-the-world tour. He then went on to manage local air races in Santa Monica and Los Angeles until he was hired to promote the 1928 National Air Races at Los Angeles. His work at this event brought him success and national prominence.

Henderson continued to organize other air races and expositions along with the National Air Races, including the Western Aircraft Show of 1929, the New York Aircraft Salon of 1930, and the Pan-American International Air Races of 1934. However, his consistent commitment was to the National Air Races, which he successfully staged annually from 1928 until the races were suspended after 1939 due to the outbreak of World War II in Europe.

In 1935, Henderson and his brother Phil (business manager of the National Air Races) built the Pan Pacific Civic Auditorium in Los Angeles. After resigning from the Air Races in 1939, they managed and promoted sporting and cultural events, expositions, and conventions there. During World War II, Henderson again volunteered for service in the Air Corps, rising to the rank of colonel and eventually becoming military commissioner at Dakar in North Africa. He received the Ordre de l’Etoile Noire du Benin from the government of French West Africa for his wartime service.

Following the war, Henderson founded the community of Palm Desert near Palm Springs, California, in 1946. He maintained his interest in aviation in later years and was made a member of the Aviation Hall of Fame in 1972. He was named an “elder statesman of aviation” by the National Aeronautic Association in 1976, and in the same year was presented with the Aerospace Trophy by the International Order of Characters. Henderson died at Rancho Mirage near Palm Desert on March 26, 1984, survived by his wife, the former actress

Marian Marsh.

The National Air Races were a major public and sporting event and an aviation industry testing ground throughout the 1930s. Almost from the beginning of manned flight there were air races and exhibitions of skills, stunts, and equipment, but they were, until the late 1920s, loosely organized sporadic events. From 1920 until 1928 air meets were held in, among other places, Omaha, Detroit, St. Louis, Dayton, and Philadelphia.

In 1922 the National Aeronautic Association was established in Detroit and began to organize these various races and meets into a single body, which became the National Air Races. The 1928 Los Angeles meet began the great era of the National Air Races. It involved hundreds of airplanes, 500,000 spectators, and a ten-day program of races, exhibits, and stunts.

At this time in Cleveland the Municipal Airport had recently been completed. A group of Cleveland businessmen, seeking a vehicle to focus the eyes of the world on Cleveland as an aviation center, visited Los Angeles to attend the races. Impressed with the event, they arranged to bring the 1929 races to their city, under Henderson's management. Most of the races over the next ten years were held in Cleveland, the exceptions being 1933 and 1936 in Los Angeles and 1930 in Chicago.

During this period the policy and general control of the National Air Races were vested in a board of directors numbering 101. The Cleveland Chamber of Commerce and other civic organizations participated in promoting and backing the event. Any income from the nonprofit races was turned back into a fund for the advancement of aviation in Cleveland.

During their golden era (1928-1939) the National Air Races attracted the participation of such noted aviators as Charles Lindbergh, Amelia Earhart, Jimmie Doolittle, and Roscoe Turner in events such as the races for the Thompson, Bendix, and Greve trophies. The program regularly included cross-country races, short races, army and navy maneuvers, stunt flying, parachute jumping, gliders, dirigibles, balloons, and model planes.

The National Air Races were considered a "working laboratory" for the aviation industry, where new planes, equipment, engines, and fuels were tested before coming into general use. A few refinements tested in this way included controllable pitch propellers, streamlined landing wheel pants, retractable landing gear, landing flaps, high-octane fuels, and engine supercharging. Additionally, the races were also used to further public acceptance of and confidence in commercial air transportation, emphasizing the development of "safety, speed, economy, and comfort."

After 1939, and for the duration of World War II, there were no National Air Races; it was not until 1946 that the races were resumed. The postwar races, however, were much different without Henderson's management. They were also affected by changing times and technology, including jet, rocket, and supersonic aircraft. Ever faster speeds began to make closed-course races dangerous and, eventually, obsolete. This fact was underscored by a tragic crash in 1949 in Cleveland which caused public concern, thereby leading to changes in the format and location of the races. In 1950 the Bendix transcontinental dash from Los Angeles

to Cleveland and the Thompson free-for-all pylon race were discontinued, marking the end of a colorful era in aviation history.

Today the Clifford Henderson Award for Achievement is awarded to honor those individuals for their outstanding contributions that further the development and advancement of aviation.

Collection Description

Scope

Clifford Henderson Collection on the National Air Races (1928-1936; 3 cubic feet) consists of a scrapbook of newspaper clippings of the 1928 National Air Races and Aeronautical Exposition, two autograph albums with comments and signatures of attendees from the 1929 and 1932 National Air Race competitions, and one photo album of the photographs from the 1929 races. The collection is organized chronologically.

Arrangement

1. National Air Races press clippings scrapbook, 1928 (2 cubic feet)
2. Cleveland National Air Races photo album, 1929 (0.6 cubic feet)
3. National Air Races autograph album, 1932 (0.2 cubic feet)
4. National Air Races autograph album, 1936 (0.2 cubic feet)

Descriptive Rules Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Processing Information

Books are surrounded with acid-free tissue and housed in acid-free flat boxes.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLECTION

National Air Races press clipping scrapbook, 1928

2 cubic feet

Box 1

The scrapbook documents the National Air Races of 1928 that were organized by Clifford Henderson. Also included with the scrapbook is a folder which contains loose clippings of newspaper and magazine articles that were tucked inside it.

Cleveland national Air races photograph album, 1929

0.6 cubic feet

Box 2

The book contains photographs of the races and people attending and participating. The images are arranged in no clear order within the book.

National Air races autograph book, 1932

0.2 cubic feet

Box 3

This album contains notes and signatures penned by some of the most prominent American aviation personalities of its day. Among the hundreds of entries are notes signed by race sponsors Charles Thompson, and Vincent Bendix, signatures of aviators Amelia Earhart, Jimmy Doolittle, and Roscoe Turner, and an autograph of radio announcer Graham McNamee.

National Air Races autograph album, 1936

0.2 cubic feet

Box 4

This album includes signatures of such Hollywood greats as Jack Benny, Eddie Cantor, Gary Cooper, Cliff Edwards, Cary Grant, Ginger Rogers, James Stewart, and Robert Young. There is also a note signed by Amelia Earhart reading, "Please keep the air Races going until I can win something better than fifth place in the Bendix."