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Program Format - ISLAND AVIATION THEN AND NOW 15 July 1993

Participants: Goodwin Berquist, Dale Bjarnarson*, Henry Nelson **, Hal Dee***

Introduction - curiosity many contributors (JC, BW, DD)
purpose overview + specific focus (3)
time limit ... hold questions

Body

I. Wally Arntzen of Escanaba

- A. First pilot
- B. Training
- C. Island connections

cut # 1

II. 1928 - the year it all began

- A. The challenge
- B. Construction
- C. A functioning airport

cut # 2

III. Important milestones in Island aviation

- A. 1933-1941
- B. Rescue case - Dale Bjarnarson*
- C. Fly-in fish boils - Henry Nelson**
- D. 1950-1989
- E. Dick Dawley's slides
- F. Recent developments - Hal Dee***

cut # 3

Dale

Henry

slides

Hal

Conclusion - fascinating, eventful story
(invitation to share)
invitation to participate ... this Sunday
soon at Oshkosh

2 few copies of "Milestones..."

II. 1928 - the year it all began

A. The challenge

1. Conservative individuals won't ride . . .
2. Left in the wake of progress?
3. Faith in the future required
4. Establishment of rival fields
5. A note from the sky (6/1)
6. Good roads = tourists (past)
good airports = tourists (future)

B. Construction

1. Formation of private company (3 + 16) >
2. \$50 a share; capital - \$5,000
3. Purchase of the Peter Hanson farm
4. **Two weeks needed (7/27 - 8/10)**

C. A functioning field

1. Wally first pilot to land (8/3)
2. C.D. Herschberger first passenger
3. August 24 "bull picnic" >
4. Corporation papers filed Nov. 2

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Original sponsors of the airport company:

George O. Mann, president / Dr. Charles W. Colebaugh, vice
president / Wm Jess , secretary / Theo Gudmundsen, director /
Tom Goodman, director / John Christianson / Nor Shellswick /
George Hanson / Robert W. Gunnerson / Leon E. Cornell / Ben
Johnson / F.M. Hanson / Mathew Foss / Jens Hansen / Earl
Richter / Tom Nelson / Harry Hagen / Harry Hansen / Vernie O.
Richter

G. BERQUIST

W.I. ARCHIVES

July 15, 1993

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"Of special note was the arrival of the airplane at 8:30 on schedule time while the boat ferry was held up from one trip on account of the heavy seas from a storm the night before and telephone connections from the same cause were broken until noon. Thus the airplane for half a day was the only means of the island's communication with the outside world."

Door County Advocate

24 Aug. 1928

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Cut #1

AN ISLAND LEGEND

When you ask long-time residents of Washington Island about the early days of Island aviation, one name invariably comes to mind -- Wally Arntzen of Escanaba.

The reasons are many. Wally was the first pilot to land a plane here in 1927. Floyd Koyen remembers the event clearly, for Wally's "landing field" was near the center of town, the open field between the lumber company and the Lutheran Church.

According to the Door County Advocate, Wally was also the first to land at the Island's new airport in the summer of 1928. He flew a "Swallow" biplane over on Sunday to take the locals up for rides.

Sylvia Nelson recalls her first plane ride with Wally. She was babysitting two Cornell children when he landed his plane in the field next to the Anderson farm on Main Road. Wally asked the kids if they'd like to go up and of course they were overjoyed. But there was a catch: "Sis" had to go along! Apparently the dashing young aviator had a warm spot in his heart for kids

An Escanaba newspaper described Wally as "absolutely fearless" from an early age. Born in 1904, he saw his first airplane at age six. His love affair with flying began at that point.

At age twenty-one, Wally enlisted in the army, in a division

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then known as the U.S. Air Service. Like Charles Lindbergh in the class before him, Wally learned to fly at Kelly Field, near San Antonio, Texas. His schooling included instruction in navigation, aerodynamics, motors and their component parts, and weaponry for different kinds of military aircraft. Wally's friend, Jon Thorin, told me Arntzen only enlisted so he could learn how to fly. Once the course was over, he resigned his commission as lieutenant and joined the reserves.

Co-founder of U. P. Airways and later Escanaba's first airport manager and flight instructor, Wally often flew here on weekends in the thirties. He taught Claude Cornell, Mary Richter's brother, how to fly and Cornell then purchased the Island's first airplane, a four passenger Stinson. George Mann, Jr. and Raymond Richter were also pupils of his.

Hannes Anderson recalls an interesting story about the early days of aviation on the Island. As a teenager, it was his job to mow the field west of the Anderson farm buildings: "This normally took a full half day to accomplish," Hannes recalls.

I hitched old Dick and Flossy, the gray mare, to the mower and began cutting. Even though Dick was years older than Flossy, he always did the most work. Each horse was hitched to a whippletree, which in turn was fastened to a

* You may wish to note that Raymond Richter was
the first pilot on the Island. His first plane was
a Stinson. He was a pilot in the U.S. Army.

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device called an evener. The evener pivoted in the center and the driver could easily tell which horse was pulling the hardest. Dick's side of the evener was always thrust forward while Flossy's was always hanging backward.

Suddenly the sound of Wally Amtzen's plane filled the air and Flossy's ears perked up and the position of the evener was reversed. As Wally was selling barnstorming rides, using Charlie Schmidt's field where the bank is now located, he made repeated flights passing over our west field. I had to tighten down on the reins to keep Flossy at a slow trot. I finished the field shortly after 11 a.m., returned the horses to the barn and fed them.

When I entered the house, Ma asked "What happened? Did the mower break down?"

I replied "No, I finished mowing the field." She seriously doubted me until I said, "Ma, any time you want to get real work out of old Flossy, just get an airplane overhead!"

Between 1936 and 1938, Wally made regularly-scheduled weekly flights from the Island to Green Bay and Escanaba, a venture that ultimately failed due to insufficient traffic.

Dozens of Islanders experienced the thrill of their first flight with Wally. He was a "regular" at Tom Nelson's bar and sometimes he would arrive after dark and have to buzz the tavern until friends

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heard him and drove to the airport to use their headlights so he could make a safe landing. . . . Just as the French did when Lindbergh landed at Paris in '27.

Wally's first move after he returned from Texas was to purchase a used Curtis Jenny, a biplane with two open cockpits.

The price was the then astronomical figure of six hundred dollars. (A photograph of this craft, taken on the ice at Detroit Harbor, is available for your examination.)

Wally taught his wife how to fly and served as a test pilot for a Menominee company . And for a time he managed as Escanaba flight school for returning servicemen who financed their lessons through the G.I. Bill.

Many Islanders like Ami Richter, recall Wally's skill as a barnstormer in the tradition of Waldo Pepper.

And they remember with gratitude his prompt aid whenever a rescue search or medical transportation was needed.

More than any other person, Wally Arntzen personified aviation to this community. His flights here were popular events long remembered. In time, he became an Island legend.

World War II interrupted his visits: Wally was busy ferrying bombers to Europe and Africa. He recorded over 1850 hours of flight time in the three and a half years he served with the Air Transport Command.

The first pilot to carry the mail in the U. P., Wally was supremely confident and would fly any time he could start his engine. Despite the dangers of his chosen profession, he died of natural causes at Escanaba in 1984.

A U. P. historian tells us that "whenever some of the 'oldtimers' get together and discuss the early days of aviation in the Delta County area, the conversation inevitably centers around 'Wally' Arntzen." And so it does here on Washington Island.

Wally Arntzen was a pioneer aviator no Islander who ever met him will ever forget.

G. Berquist
Washington Island
Wisconsin