

CORBEN COURIER

April 2009

Published for the members of the Experimental Aircraft Association,
Chapter 93, Madison, Wisconsin



NEXT CHAPTER MEETING:

See you at Blackhawk Airport in the Chapter Hangar on Thursday, April 16 at 7:00 p.m.

Also, at the April Chapter meeting, be sure to check out the EAA Founders Wing brochures and letter from Paul Poberezny for all to view, borrow, and pass around as these are worth the read.

Visit Your Chapter
Online at
<http://corben93.org/>

NOTE: Please e-mail any items for the newsletter to the editor by the first of each month. Thanks!
mdifrisco@brandxculture.com

Get to Know a Chapter 93 Member:

From Circus Performers to Props Fred Leidel's love of aviation remains

By Michael Goc

Courtesy *Forward in Flight*, Spring 2009, Quarterly magazine of the Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame

Fred Leidel was 18-years-old in the summer of 1934 when he walked six blocks from his home on the east side of Madison to the North Street Airport. For a bright young man looking for adventure, he was in the right place at the right time.

Perched on the edge of the city in the shadow of the tall Oscar Meyer plant, the North Street Airport was about 5-years-old. Louis Schoelkopf, the first Ford auto dealer in Madison, had followed Henry Ford's directive that Ford people should also become aviation people. Weighed down by the Great Depression, North Street was not a beehive of activity, although the place had started to buzz a few years earlier when Orland "Ace" Corben came to town.

Inventive mechanically and a natural showman who had honed his talent as a circus performer, Corben had acquired the Ace Aircraft Company and set up shop to manufacture and market kits and completed airplanes at North Street. He and Schoelkopf partnered up to sell airplanes and promote the airport.

On the day young Fred Leidel turned up at North Street, he was enlisted to sell tickets for rides in a six-place Travelaire owned and operated by Walter Blake. Even at the reduced Depression rate of \$1 per head per ride, the going was slow. Then the Ringling Brothers Circus came to town. The circus train unloaded in the yards on the east side and set up the tent with its fabled three rings at the end of the runway at North Street. Leidel helped the roustabouts raise the tent and let them know he was authorized to sell them tickets for a plane ride discounted to fifty cents. It was an offer they couldn't pass up.

Then the circus performers came, both headliners and sideshow "freaks" as they were known in those "less sensitive" days. There was the "tallest man in the world," who carefully folded his long limbs into the Travelaire. He was accompanied by the "girl with no limbs" zipped up in her custom traveling bag. Last to board was the "fat lady" who more than filled the front seat and required help from five men to climb aboard. It was a good day for Fred, who sold more tickets than ever.

In time, he made a deal with Walter Blake to sell tickets in exchange for flight lessons. They traveled around southern Wisconsin in the Junior Ace Blake had acquired from Corben. On rainy days, Fred built airplane ribs in the Corben shop. Already a model builder, Fred decided to make miniature



continued next page

Spring is in the Air...and I'm not. (Oops!)

Yes, it's getting that time again (for me; better check out the old log book and see when the next BFR is due. No I did not forget this time, but time did run out for me as the weather was soured and I did battle with a flu bug, missed a number of work days, and then just felt BAD for some time afterwards.

But as spring tries its best to push winter further north I pull out the P.O.H. of my favorite aircraft and reweiv some of the numbers and proceedures that the manufacturer publishes. I also sit and watch the Sportys BFR flight reveiw video a couple of times through before the big day and usually find something to jot down to ask the Instructor about. May want to also give the aircraft a good looking over (pre-flight) if not flown much this winter (mice). And I check NOTAMS, TFR's, and weather and then go have fun!

On a chapter note, plan on a special evening at the next meeting as our scheduled speaker will offer an interesting chance to learn some new aircraft building skills to take home with you. Then stick around for a special after meeting/hanger flying-treat night as number of members suggested and volunteered to bring ICE CREAM and the FIXINGS to build a few SUNDAES.... coffee will be available and others may want to bring treats or thier best sundae toppings to share...see you on the 16th!

—Don Ripp



Despite construction work, Corben parked a Super Ace on Madison's State Street to promote a film at the Orpheum Theater.

license but the eye exam revealed that he had monocular vision. His dream to be a pilot was not to be realized, but his interest in flight was not diminished and his experience in the Corben shop showed where he could use it. He enrolled in the University of Wisconsin School of Mechanical Engineering and perfected his skill as a draftsman. He was so proficient that, after two years as a student, he hired on as an instructor, and continued in his dual role as teacher/student until graduating in 1940.

Although many doors were open to a mechanical engineer of his ability, Fred chose to stay in aviation. He surveyed every corporation related to aircraft design and manufacture in the country and found that he could head to the West Coast, Kansas, or the East Coast. He went east to the Hamilton Standard Company of East Hartford, Connecticut.

The United States began to rearm for war just as Fred moved east. Hamilton Standard propellers were at the hub of the action, so to speak, and so was Fred Leidel. As a design engineer, he helped create, test and perfect the props for some of the most important airplanes in the American military fleet, including the P-51, B-29, B-25, and B-26.

He invented and built a test rig for propeller spinners. The prop can't spin without a spinner and testing a spinner after it is mounted on an airplane motor costs time and money and of course, is potentially dangerous. Fred's rig enabled designers and engineers to test a spinner for efficiency and reliability before it left the factory. It was one of many unheralded contributions to the American victory in World War II made by civilians working in industry.

When the war ended, Fred saw the demand for propellers diminishing as jet engines replaced prop jobs. He returned to Madison and joined the faculty of the university to teach engineering, drawing, and descriptive geometry. He eventually rose to the rank of full professor and Associate Dean of Engineering, even though he did not acquire a postgraduate degree.

Fred has never lost his interest in aviation, spending many hours in the air with friends like Madison's Bill Rewey. He is an EAA Corben Chapter 93 member in Madison and since 1993, has volunteered for every EAA AirVenture Oshkosh.

Thanks to the Wisconsin Aviation Hall of Fame for allowing us to reprint this article. For more information, visit www.aviationhalloffamewisconsin.com.

Corbens. He made his own drawings and printed them on the blue printer at Madison East High.

The aviation bug had so bitten him that he spent his pay on train tickets to downtown Chicago where he hopped on the trolley running to the city airport not yet named Midway. He would spend the day near the runway taking snapshots of the planes big and small as they landed there. He just happened to be around with his camera when Ace Corben landed a Baby Ace and parked it next to the largest commercial aircraft of its days, the Curtiss Condor.

After logging about 5-hours in Blake's aircraft, Fred was ready for his



Fred, far right, volunteers at EAA AirVenture Oshkosh. Photo by Rose Dorcey.

EAA "Work Party Weekend"

June 27th & 28th.....mark your calendars. Seven have signed up for this event, which is scheduled to include a evening walkthrough the "Founders Wing" with Mr. Paul Poberenzy himself...thanks

EAA Corben Chapter 93— Hoot and Betty Gibson Memorial Scholarship

Purpose: To encourage deserving student pilots to continue their flight training to completion and to continue their participation in EAA and it's activities.

Chapter 93 Scholarship

EAA Corben Chapter 93 is a non-profit aviation organization with it's main mission that of encouraging participation in aviation through it's ongoing educational programs and activities. The Chapter will offer a \$1000 scholarship to a deserving student pilot applicant to support their continued flight training activities. The scholarship will be named the Hoot and Betty Gibson Memorial Scholarship in honor of their many years of dedicated service and support to the Chapter and EAA in general. Qualifications for the scholarship are as follows:

- Citizen of the United States
- Active student pilot training through solo flight
- Member in good standing of EAA

All applications will be reviewed by the Scholarship Committee, and the recipient will be notified of their selection. The scholarship recipient and their guests will be invited to the next Chapter meeting to receive the award.

For more information or an application, please contact:

EAA Chapter 93 Scholarship
c/o Gary Chenier
3702 Rebel Drive
DeForest WI 53532
aviation@inxpress.net
608-837-2557

See Secretary's Report on Page 4

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EAA Chapter 93 publishes *Corben Courier* once a month for and about its members who are interested in all phases of aviation. Articles to be submitted must reach the editor by the first Saturday of the month. Meeting night is the third Thursday of the month unless otherwise stated. Members may advertise items free of charge. Business card size ads are \$5 per month or \$50 per year.

Disclaimer: The *Corben Courier* newsletter serves as a clearinghouse of ideas and suggestions for homebuilt aircraft and owner operated aircraft. No responsibility or liability is assumed, expressed, or implied for the suitability, accuracy, or approval of any information contained in this newsletter. Any parties using suggestions or ideas expressed herein do so at their own risk without recourse against anyone.



Corben Courier
EAA Chapter 93—Madison, WI
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SECRETARY'S REPORT

03/19/2009

It was announced that April 4th is the Steve Wittman Breakfast in Oshkosh. Don R. informed the members that the Poker Run had been cancelled this year. Don R. also informed members that a hanger was for sale at Sauk Prairie. The date has been set for the 2010 Chapter 93 Annual Banquet which will be held on February 13th 2010 at Rex's Innkeeper in Waunakee. Gary C. re-informed the members about the Betty & Hoot Gibson Scholarship and requested that applications for candidates be turned in to the Scholarship Committee by May 30th. The EAA

work weekend dates were discussed and the weekend of June 26-28 would be the EAA work weekend of choice. The Chapter received a letter from EAA Headquarters about donations for the Founder's Wing at the EAA museum. The donation amount was discussed by the members and it was decided, put into a motion and passed by the members present that the Chapter would donate the amount of \$1000.00 to EAA Headquarters on behalf of Chapter 93 for the Founder's Wing. Our speaker for the night was Mike Cushway, who did a very interesting presentation on his aviation and building experiences. Thank you, Mike for sharing you experiences with the Chapter members.

—Earl P. Martin

HEY!

Check out the April issue (page 124) of *EAA Sport Aviation* magazine for "Aerobatics—Why You Should" by Chapter 93 member, Randy Whitson, an EAA Flight Advisor. Congrats, Randy!

