

BOGARDUS FILE

By Richard VanGrunsven

Note: The following is my attempt to describe my acquaintance with George Bogardus over a period of nearly 40 years. Most of what has been written about George centered around his homebuilt aircraft advocacy and his successful dealings with the CAA to favorably alter their policy on offering airworthiness certificates to homebuilt planes. At this time, very few people remain who had known George to any extent. I hope to be able to reach out to those few that I know of and see if they would be willing to also share their remembrances of George. If we don't get the personal side of George chronicled, it will be forever lost.

FIRST AWARENESS: Uncle Paul's mention of George Bogardus that was prompted by my excited discussion about the Experimental Aircraft Association. Uncle Paul Dickman, my Aunt Laura's husband was a newly minted private pilot in the early 1950s. He has taken some flying lessons in the late 1930s/early 1940s but was unable to meet the vision requirements for a Pilot 3rd class Medical. Eventually, after working with the optometry department at Pacific University in Forest Grove, OR., he was able to improve his vision and pass the 3rd class CAA airman's medical. When we visited, we always talked airplanes and I had read about the newly formed EAA in Hales Corners, WI under the leadership of Paul Poberezny. I was probably around 14 or 15 years of age at that time. When I mentioned that the EAA had originated the Experimental Amateur Built licensing he countered that this had been done years earlier by a local pilot, George Bogardus. While passing mention had been made of George and the American Airmen's Assn. in aviation magazines, I had not had access to these and even if I had, I was only 7 years old at the time of Bogardus's historic flight and probably wouldn't have appreciated its significance at that age. For a few years I was confused by this conflicting info from Uncle Paul, but eventually learned of the overlap of efforts between the AAA and EAA.

(Paul had been a "airport kid" at the Beaverton-Bernard airport in the late 1930 at the end of the "Beaverton Outlaws" era. Following the end of the war when Bogardus began campaigning for the homebuilt licensing cause, Uncle Paul was still frequenting the Beaverton Airport, knew George, and along with many others, contributed funds to George's campaign.)

First Meeting with George: Possibly at HIO when Anders Lundberg stopped on his round-the-USA trip in Poberezny's homebuilt. I was aware that George was anti-EAA, perhaps as a result of comments made by the early EAA members of the Eugene chapter. In 1958 a round-the-USA promotional flight was made in the Pober-Sport by a volunteer pilot named Anders Lundberg. His stop in the Portland area was made at the Hillsboro Airport, and George showed up at that meeting. This surprised me because of the animosity I thought that he had toward the EAA. (in the EXPERIMENTER coverage of this promotional flight, George was noted as having attended the stopover that Andes had made at a LA area airport as well.)

I had met acquaintances of George at early EAA Chapt. 31 meetings in Eugene, OR. They all mentioned George's disdain for EAA leadership.

George occupational status could easily be categorized as "under-employed". When I first met him in the late 1950s he described himself as a linotype repairman. He had become familiar with linotype operation and maintenance when he was publishing his AAA house organ, "Popular Flying." Linotype printing equipment was still being used by small-town newspapers and needed repair because replacement printers were no longer in production. Thus, George traveled and helped these small local newspapers. Whether or not this was in any way gainful employment or just a feel-good hobby is uncertain. At the time I accepted that this was meaningful employment. George's wife Lillian had full-time employment as a highly skilled lithographer at a printing business in Portland and was the true breadwinner of the family.

George had been employed by Ryan Aircraft in Hemet, CA during the 1937 – 1942 years and held a responsible supervisory position there. He was also employed at the Portland Air Base during the 1942-1946 years. Following that, I am not aware that George was gainfully employed for any period of time for the remainder of his life. I think that he was talented enough, but perhaps lacked motivation as he aged. Also, with Lillian as a capable breadwinner, he was able to pursue his other varied interests without being tied to a work schedule. This permitted him to devote full time to the AAA efforts and to travel, advocacy, and otherwise tend to AAA affairs. Following the demise of AAA in the mid-1950s George probably fell into a pattern of pursuing one or another of his hobbies to occupy his time.

Probably my first one-on-one visit with George was my flying in, either to his home airstrip or the nearby Sandy Airport, and touring with him to visit other of the few homebuilders in the area at that time.

Little Gee Bee: When I first met George in 1957 and flew into his home airstrip, his Little GeeBee plane was tied down near his house. He stated that a hangar was going to be built on this spot and there were concrete blocks placed at the four corners of this future building. The hangar was never built, and I seem to remember that the cornerstone blocks were still there about forty years later, after George's death. At some point in time his plane was dismantled and placed in storage. I can't recall if this was before or after I left the area for military service in 1961.

"Steal & rebuild" effort. Almost all local homebuilders recognized George's Little GeeBee as an increasingly important artifact and felt that it should be renovated for display. Yet George made no effort to do so. I believe that even the dismantling and indoor storage of the airframe was done by volunteer friends who witnessed its deterioration sitting outside without even a canvas cover.

At one point in the late 1960s in early 1970s several Portland area homebuilders realized that George was unlikely to ever rebuild his Little GeeBee and had rejected offers of help. So they devised a plan to "spirit" it away and do the rebuilding. The idea was that they were going to help George move the dismantled plane to a better storage location, but in reality, move it to some other facility for restoration. I was aware of this scheme and was basically in favor of it because I trusted that the end would justify the means. These were all casual friends of George who really had what they thought to

be his best interests in mind. Apparently George got wind of this scheme and did not permit those volunteers to help move his plane to a better storage facility.

EAA Chapter 105 held annual fly-ins for many years, and George (despite his vocal distain for EAA HQ.) usually showed up and visited with his many friends there. He also attended the annual Antique airplane (NWAAC) fly-in/airshow at Evergreen Airport in Vancouver, WA.

George Hardie was an early EAA member and the unofficial EAA historian, having written many magazine articles on historic homebuilts. He was a Millwaukie area resident and had attended school with Paul Poberezny's brother Norman. He was in the early EAA inner circle. I was contacted by Mr. Hardie sometime around 1990 about the status of Little GeeBee. He too felt that this historically significant plane should be rebuilt and displayed. I agreed to work with him in yet another effort to get Little GeeBee rebuilt. I had a number of conversations with Bogardus offering to arrange labor and financing to accomplish this. By this time Van's Aircraft had become prominent and Bogardus liked to think of me as one of his successful protégées. Thus, I thought I had George's confidence as much or more than anyone else. Our discussions went well for several months, and I really thought that it was going to happen. Then George summarily decided that "he and his friends" were going to accomplish the rebuild. It was his plane and obviously he could do with it as he pleased. I had little confidence that "he and his friends" would ever succeed, as time later proved.

Though I rarely saw George in the late 1980 and into the 1990s, I was aware that his wife Lilian had died (1992) and that his health was deteriorating. I did visit him once when he was in what turned out to be his final weeks. He was in a care facility and had suffered a stroke and had pneumonia and other things, perhaps related to his long-term diabetes. It was an awkward visit because we no longer had much in common, and his speech was severely impaired. What are essentially one-way conversations are difficult. Other of his close friends, including Joe Brockway, were visiting him regularly. I believe remembering that Joe entered to visit George just as I was leaving on that occasion.

George's death and surprising estate bequeath.

With a few weeks of my visit, George died. I don't recall who told me this. However, a couple of weeks after that I received a call from a person, a bank officer from Sandy, OR. He informed me that he was the executor of George's estate and that EAA Chapter 105 was the sole beneficiary. This took me by surprise for a couple of reasons. One was that George had long expressed bitterness toward Poberezny and the EAA organization. The other was that, despite his disdain for the EAA, I had heard (perhaps through Dean Sigler) that George was considering leaving his estate to the Mulino, OR EAA chapter which was located closer to him and had members in closer contact with him. After mulling this over, particularly his naming me as the agent of Chapter 105, I realized that he trusted me to best guide the disposition and use of his estate. By that time Van's Aircraft had risen to a leadership position in the industry and George viewed me as a protégé of his and apparently trusted me.

George's estate was greater than most anyone would imagine. He and Lilian had lived in a very modest house on their rural property near Sandy, OR. The acreage was larger than I would have estimated, about 30 acres. It was mostly level land in an agricultural area. Perhaps half of the land was a fir tree forest, and the trees were of harvestable (marketable) sizes. The house and outbuildings were modest and ill-kept so were of limited value.

The other surprise was the monetary assets of his estate, equally about the same value as the land. Combined, it was a figure approaching \$500,000 in 1997. Chapter 105 BOD officers formed a committee to receive and utilize this windfall. Eventually it was decided that a portion of the funds would be used to arrange a long term lease of a hangar on the Twin Oaks airport and make improvements on it such that it would serve as a chapter headquarters and meeting place. In addition, a trust was formed for the purpose of making periodic grants to organizations engaged in aviation education and promotion, particularly those directed towards youths. George's Will, or better stated, letter of intent, indicated his desire for his estate receipts be directed toward youth aviation education and activities. The George and Lilian Bogardus Memorial Trust has been making grants since its formation in 1998.

Little GEEBEE airframe.

Took Possession of airframe in 1998 or so.

Rebuild finally accomplished in 2006 long after Georg's death and bequeath of estate to EAA 105

Origin-upgrade to Little GeeBee, historic flights, retirement (possible contributing factors), failed restoration efforts, eventual restoration & disposition.

At the time of George's death his dismantled Little GeeBee was stored in two locations. The wings were in an outbuilding on his property and the fuselage/tail was in a hangar on the property of Cliff Krum at the nearby Sandy, OR airport. Shortly after George's death the wings were moved to Joe Brockway's property near Sandy as a means of safekeeping. There were other items of archival value in George's house and outbuildings, along with an unbelievable amount of "stuff". It could be said that George never threw anything away, and if he did, he didn't throw it far. Several small outbuildings were filled with stuff. There were several abandoned cars and vans in the yard, all filled with "stuff". There were piles of garbage covered with berry vines.

Stuff that was saved.

Long Harlequin engine-disassembled.

Wittman "S" prop.

Aeronca 2 cylinder engine

2 Cont. A-40 engines, at least one disassembled.

Section of Yates geodetic fuselage.

Bushell boxes full of aviation magazines dating from the late 1920s.

Ham Radio equipment.

Linotype printing machine (s) and set type for old "Popular Flying Manual" magazines.

Essentially all personal mail that he had received since the early 1940s. This included all mail pertaining to his American Airmens Association leadership.

The Little GeeBee airframe languished for several years as the chapter officers mulled over its disposition. In general, it was felt that it should be restored and donated to a museum. The EAA Museum would have been a logical destination if it weren't for George's stated dislike for that organization. I felt it important to honor his wishes, whether or not I agreed with them. George has stated that he would like the plane to remain in the Northwest, as that was its origin. Toward this end I contacted the relatively new Evergreen Aviation Museum in McMinnville, OR. They gladly agreed to accept the Little GeeBee after its restoration. Meanwhile, I had come upon a contact at the NASM who was represented as a person of interest. This was Russell Lee, at the time an assistant curator there. He had knowledge of the significance of Little GeeBee and agreed to accept it. My rationale in choosing the NASM over the Evergreen museum was the prominence of the NASM. I felt that it would be viewed by a greater audience there, and that George would have been pleased that it was revered by an institution of this prominence.

As I recall, the airframe remained at its Sandy, OR locations for a couple of years after becoming Chapt. 105 property. Perhaps around the fall of 2000, we arranged a work party and with a borrowed trailer collected the airframe and brought it to my home shop for storage. My shop had recently been vacated by Van's Aircraft after their move to the Aurora, OR airport. We had no specific plans regarding its restoration at that time.

After several years I realized that restoration efforts would not happen without my taking the initiative. So, I solicited volunteers and began the restoration in my shop. Fortunately both of my aviation brothers, Jerry and Stan, were among the 7-8 volunteers.

We had been able to solicit some outside help and donations. Poly-Fiber Co. had donated all of the fabric covering and necessary paints. Sensenich Prop Co. had provided a new wood prop for it. The Aviation dept. of Portland Community college refurbish the Continental A-65 engine to display status.

When the work was finalized in 2006 we had the Little GeeBee looking better than it had in its hay-day when it had made its historic transcontinental flights. We painted it silver as had been its original color, but without the patches and repainted spots per the original.

Russell Lee, a curator at the NASM had agreed to accept and display Little GeeBee in the Udvar-Hazy museum near the Dulles International Airport in Wash. D.C. However, we needed to ship or deliver the plane to that location. I believe that we were able to get the transportation donated by a trucking company that we used to deliver RV Quick Build kits to distant USA locations.

George's opinion of Tom Story.

Tom Story had built the Eyerly /special in 1939 in some form of partnership with Lee Eyerly. Lee was a minor industrialist and had built (or had built for him) several other planes. I think that he may have had some commercial motive, potential manufacturing market, for the plane. It had apparently flown relatively little with its original 40 HP Continental engine. It had been dismantled and placed in storage around the time that WW-II started, and all civil flying ended. Following the end of the war Lee Eyerly decided to sell the plane and George Bogardus was able to acquire it. Whether or not it included the original engine is not known. I don't know if George had purchased it for the expressed purpose of using it to lobby the CAA (FAA.)

George's claim to have built the Little GeeBee stems from his explanation that the plane had never been well tested and that his restoration and re-engining the plane contributed more towards its final form than Tom's original construction had. As far as can be determined, George's friends, primarily Cliff Krum, did more of the actual work than George had.

(George Bogardus was not the only person interested in buying the plane from Lee Eyerly. Bruce Schroeder and another young friend had made an offer on it. Apparently, Lee was apprehensive about selling to these boys, probably in their late teens. So, Lee consulted with Tom Story and collectively they decided to sell it to George who because of his more mature age would be better suited to do justice with it. So, Tom unwittingly placed in motion this battle of words that played out for years.) My information source for this was the late Bruce Schroeder.

Tom Story's opinion of George: Tom viewed George as an opportunist who had very little drive or ambition and was able to con others into doing work which he ultimately got credit for. To a degree this is true. George was never a "ball-of-fire".

George Meets Paul Poberezny:

George regularly attended the annual Reno Air races. He knew at least one of the regular Formula I competitors who was (I believe) the son of an earlier AAA member. I flew to Reno and attended a couple annual races in the late 1960s. George helped me with ground transportation during these outings. On one occasion, at Reno, I was present when George and Paul Poberezny met for the first time. Their conversation was casual and friendly, but a bit stilted and awkward because of George's resentment toward the EAA.

George in Public:

For many years there was a Saturday Lunch Bunch that meet at the Troutdale airport, at Holly Fletcher's AeroFlight Hangar, and then lunched at a small nearby restaurant. Holly's hangar at the time housed several homebuilts including his Half Nelson. Though George was anti-EAA, he was none-the-less interested in homebuilt aviation and identified with the local airport bums. A few years later when Holly retired and moved to Dietz Airpark in Canby, OR, the group continued to meet there. Holly had built a large hangar adjacent to his home and leased space to many of the same homebuilders he had accommodated at Troutdale. George B. continued to be a regular attendee.

George also regularly attended Sport Aviation events at Portland area airports.

Though I knew that George harbored ill-feelings toward EAA, for a long time I hesitated to invited him to attend any EAA Chapter 105 functions, not wanting to provoke him. After I had heard through the grapevine that he had attended and spoke at some aviation group function, I invited him to attend as guest speaker at an annual EAA diner/banquet. Though he expressed a reluctance to speak, I assured him that it would be an interview format and would not be too challenging. This worked well, and George appeared to enjoy the event and did well during the interview/talk that I conducted. Though I was not an experienced interviewer, my knowledge of George's background and of the audiences' interests, it was made easy.

In retrospect, I think that George had placed himself in a difficult position. He quietly wanted recognition for his aviation efforts and achievements yet didn't want to credit EAA leaders for much. Since EAA was the only homebuilt aircraft venue at the time, any involvement with or recognition of EAA could be seen as a contradiction in principle.

Van's Homecoming Banquet.

At one of the annual Van's Aircraft Homecoming fly-ins, I invited George to be feature speaker at our banquet, along with Ed Ball, another prominent pilot from the earlier days of flying in Oregon. All went well until it was Georges's time to speak. I had assumed that we would follow the interview format that had worked well at the aforementioned EAA Chapter dinner. However, George informed me that he had made his own speech notes. Unfortunately, they were voluminous notes with much elaboration. He just droned on-and-on, for over two hours. And his theme was mostly along the lines of how badly some people and the world in general had treated him. It was a minor disaster. I couldn't find any way to cut him off and didn't realize how much longer he could keep going. After people had started drifting away and he finally came to an end, one of the attendees commented to me; "that is one bitter old man".

It was unfortunate in many ways. The listeners went away with memories of George as a self-proclaimed victim rather than as a man of achievement that had benefited all of us. This experience perhaps distanced me more from George than it should have. Thus, in his final 5-10 years I rarely communicated with him. Not that I had ostracized him, but that we had less and less in common. I would have liked to help facilitate the restoration of Little GeeBee, but he had not accepted my offer which was probably the most reasonable that had been offered or available to him.

George's non-aviation interests: Ham Radio, Trap Shooting, Lapidary, Printing, Radio Repair.

THE FORGOTTEN YEARS

There had been a reasonable amount of publicity and awareness of homebuilt airplanes during the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s. Much of this activity, at least the flying part, was either a violation of CAA regulations or somewhat questionable. Oregon and Utah (perhaps CT) had written their own state aviation rules such that planes that complied with their standards (more user friendly than the CAA standards) could fly legally within that state's airspace.

By the late 1930s the CAA had managed to better control illegal "homebuilt" flying and had managed to severely limit the activity in the "renegade" states. Also, factories had begun producing very light airplanes helped fill the needs of the low-budget pilots. The Cubs, Aeroncas, Porterfields, etc. were becoming more plentiful and in used-plane category, offering a reasonable option to the "really cheap" homebuilts.

WW-II brought about dramatic changes in all of aviation. Private flying was severely curtailed during the first half of the 1940s, particularly in the coastal "defense zone" states. However, lightplane production increase dramatically to fill the needs of military training and light observation airplanes. Following the end of the war, thousands of these became available on the military surplus market at affordable prices. In addition, the light airplane factories upgraded and added many new model lightplanes to their established production lines, in anticipation of a dramatic post-war General Aviation demand. The failure of the market demand led to rapid price deflation because of this over production. Pilots in the late 1940s and early 1950s had a plentiful supply of relatively new planes to choose from, at prices below the that of a "homebuilt" plane. Remember, much of the appeal of the homebuilt in the 1930s was the lack of affordable (depression years) planes.

There had always been a small number of "experimenters" who chose to build their own planes for their own reasons aside from market economic factors. This was true even during the postwar 1940s. Dozens of new "homebuilt Race planes" were developed for the new "Goodyear" class midget racers. These could be licensed in the Experimental Racing category that included severe flight operational limits. So, they were built and operated without the need for a dedicated "Homebuilt" category.

Lack of Organization and publicity.

1951 Air Trails Magazine article. 4 years in the making. Many letters preceded the eventual publication. It was probably the most extensive article on homebuilt since pre-war. It brought a greater awareness to homebuilt activity and potential.

AAA and Popular Flying Manual

The Popular Flying Manual was a periodical house organ of the AAA published by George Bogardus during the 1946 through 1951 period. It was financed through a subscription fee and organization membership dues. It was a reasonable quality black & white small magazine printed on a linotype printing machine. Linotype had been a common newspaper printing process for many years but had been superseded by other more advanced printing equipment by this late 1940s period. Thus, George was able purchase a used linotype machine with his limited budget. By studying this printing process

and learning how to service and repair the equipment, George was able to function as a one-man organization.

From this it would follow that an archive of the PFM issues over those years would provide a good history of the scope of homebuilding then. The problem is that George never seemed able to print more than one issue per year, if even that regularly. Searching through all of his correspondence archives, etc., yielded only a total of 4 issues ever published. Even that, along with his other challenges in running the AAA, was a reasonable accomplishment.

Persons of Interest: Gleaned from correspondence archives.

Jack McRae

Alexander Jack McRae was an engineer living in New York and working for Grumman Aircraft at the time Bogardus was communicating with the CAA and making his car and plane trips to Washington DC. Jack was instrumental in helping George navigate the NY/D.C. airspace and accompanied George to D.C. in 1947, flying along in his Cessna 140. Jack was present during some of the discussions with the CAA and it is entirely possible that his engineering and technological knowledge helped convince them that those advocating for homebuilt aircraft were capable of designing and building safe aircraft. Jack at that time was in the process of designing his "Super Dart" to meet CAA certification standards, a fact that no doubt impressed the bureaucrats immensely.

Joe Lutz

Russ Stewart: First Experimental amateur built certificate. Vocal Advocate/protagonist. (Poison pen letters to CAA.)

Steve Wittman

George Meyer: Designer of the plans built "Little Toot" biplane. Popular during the early EAA years, but few were finished because the construction was too difficult.

Tom Cassutt

Designer of the Cassutt homebuilt racer. Without doubt, more Cassutts and highly modified Cassutt planes were raced at Reno than any other design.

Roy Bohrer

Kermit Troyer

Homebuilder and propeller manufacturer in the 1930s.

Harry Tallman

Designer and builder of the Tallman T-4 homebuilt in the early 1950's.

Bernie Pietenpol**Granville (Bob) Roberts****Walt Rupert****George Yates****Less Long**

Long's Airport Personalities:

1. Less Long
2. George Long
3. Ed Ball
4. Norman Ralston
5. Anna Ott Long Hart
6. Robert Porter
7. Jesse Watson
8. Bernard VanGrunsven
9. George Bogardus
10. Norris O'Rear
11. Phil Wessels
12. Leland Jacobsmullen