

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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DOUGLAS PATTEN, BARNSTORMER

Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary describes barnstorming as: "to pilot one's airplane in sight-seeing flights with passengers or in exhibition stunts in an unscheduled itinerant course esp. in rural districts." This perhaps describes what Douglas Patten loved to do most during his lifetime.

He was born in Medina, N.Y. to Latour Young Patten and James Patten in 1904. His flying experience began in 1928 at the age of twenty-four when he took his first lesson at the Buffalo Airport on an Eagle Rock. This was a three place bi-plane with an OX5 engine. He soloed in March 1929 and then he had only five hours experience his engine quit. This caused him to make an emergency landing just short of an abrupt stop on a railroad track. In 1930 he got his private pilot license which was the low number of 14,965, indicative of the fact that he was one of the pioneers of modern aviation, and in 1931 he got his limited commercial license.

The old snapshot here shows him on a tour in the Adirondacks during the early 1930s. Douglas is the man dressed in white. The other person is Ed Colton, also from Medina. It was during this period that he took up barnstorming, flying in American Eagles and a Waco. At times he flew out of Sisler Field on Oak Orchard Street in Medina but quite often just flew into a field to pick up passengers for rides. In 1933 he spent many weekends giving \$3.00 rides in Hulberton, N.Y. It was while barnstorming there that he met Mary Morganti who later in 1935 became his wife.

Over the years, besides barnstorming planes, he owned four other fabric covered aircraft including a Piper J-4, a Piper U-5 and two Taylorcrafts. His last plane was a Taylorcraft which he sold in 1976. However, he worked on a home built plane, a C161, a fabric, two seater that kept him busy for over two years.

Although flying was his main interest, it was



more an avocation rather than a vocation. He was too young for World War I and too old for World II. During the second war he worked at the Curtis plant in Cheektowaga and later drove tractor trailers for Lapp Express with his own tractor.

The Pattens lived on a large farm on East Scott Road northeast of Medina where Mary still lives. Her children are: Ann Haffiy, Mary Petronio, Edgar Patten, Douglas Platten, Jr. and Paul Patten. His family relates that he was the first person to own a plane and have a pilot's license in this area. With his passing in 1986 went one of the original barnstormers of Orleans County and a real pioneer in the field of aviation.

Douglas Patten, Sr. is remembered on a memorial plaque, inscribed by the Knowlesville Flying Club, which hangs in the dining room of the Erie Inn at Knowlesville, N.Y. Here once a month the Knowlesville Flying Club gathers for their meeting. The plaque is also inscribed with names of other deceased members of the organization. But it was Douglas Patten, Sr. who was among the first - a barnstormer at heart. His motto surely must have been "Fly and feel free" for he flew throughout his entire adult life.