

Gliders, Inc

Records, 1928-1930
2.5 linear ft.

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Access: Access to the collection is open for research.

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Photographs: Box #3 (oversized)

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History

Gliding, a form of motorless flight, was pioneered in Germany. Although its roots date to the beginning of the century, glider flying became widespread as a hobby and training tool after World War I, when the Treaty of Versailles limited the types of aircraft which Germans could manufacture and operate. The sport was not introduced in America until 1928, when it spread rapidly. In the spring of that year, J.C. Penney, Jr. sponsored an exhibition of glider flying on Cape Cod, featuring eight gliders and three pilots from Germany. Mr. Penney subsequently founded a gliding school on Cape Cod, the American Motorless Aviation Company. With substantial newsreel and newspaper coverage of the demonstration, and a nationwide tour of the borrowed gliders, the sport quickly attracted the interest of two prominent citizens from the Detroit area.

In the spring of 1928, Edward Evans, President of the Detroit Aircraft Co., founded the Evans Glider Club of America (renamed the National Gliding Association in December 1928), a non-profit organization which advised and encouraged local gliding clubs throughout the U.S. In addition, the National Gliding Association issued first and second class gliding licenses to qualified individuals, and sponsored events such as the Second National Glider Conference (Cleveland, August 28-29, 1929) and the Detroit Glider Carnival (November 23, 1929).

In September of 1928, William J. Scripps founded Gliders, Inc., the first American company dedicated to the manufacture of gliding aircraft. Initially making first and second class gliders at its factory in Orion, Michigan, the company later considered the possibility of constructing a craft for soaring, which is a more difficult and advanced form of gliding. The company's first officers were Scripps himself, who acted as president, William Sawyer and Mark Kearney. Sawyer left the organization in January of 1929. Frank Blunk accepted the position of operations manager some time during the first half of 1929. In December of 1929, the Detroit Aircraft Company acquired ownership of Gliders, Inc. In January, 1930, the company hired John Pratt to serve as chief demonstrator. The precise tenure and title of each officer, and the dissolution date of the organization itself are not readily apparent from the documents in the collection.

Many issues of concern to Gliders, Inc. were addressed in cooperation with the National Glider Association. The two groups had a strong connection, formal at first and later informal. The National Glider Association approved and endorsed the products of Gliders, Inc. The two organizations also recommended potential customers to one another and planned gliding events in conjunction. Officers of the two organizations corresponded regarding safety, publicity and relations with gliding clubs and glider manufacturers from other areas of the country. Furthermore, the officers of Gliders, Inc. promoted the sport by offering training, as well as technical advice on safety, assembly specifications, and the optimum weather conditions and terrain for making a flight.

Scope and Content Note

The records of Gliders, Inc. are divided into five series, corresponding to forms of material. During the late months of 1929 and the early months of 1930, Gliders, Inc. maintained a **Clippings** File, of newspaper and magazine stories from around the country relating to the hobby of glider flying.

The **Correspondence Series** (1928-1930) appears to have some gaps. For instance, there is almost no presidential correspondence past February 1929. Between February and June 1929, there is almost no correspondence of any sort. None of the letters to and from Mark Kearney have survived in this collection. The surviving correspondence has been divided by office of origin and arranged chronologically, since each office file covers a distinct period of time. Of all the company's correspondents, Donald Walker of the National Glider Association was by far the most frequent. All three offices corresponded with Walker in order to share customer information and coordinate events. The president's correspondence file refers to the creation of Gliders, Inc. and the formation of the relationship with the National Glider Association. In addition, William Scripps attempted to form an early alliance with the American Motorless Aviation Company. The operations manager, Frank Blunk, corresponded with Walker concerning the Second National Glider Conference and the Detroit Glider Carnival. The file of the chief demonstrator, John Pratt, documents interaction with customers, concerning issues such as safety and the selection of terrain and weather conditions.

The **Miscellaneous Reports Series** (1928-1930) contains a file of reports and meeting minutes from the National Glider Association, including reports on the Second National Glider Conference in Cleveland and the Detroit Glider Carnival. Also, this file includes a copy of the suggested by-laws for local gliding clubs. Another file contains several reports on gliding. The unsigned and undated reports concern topics such as the history of gliding in Germany and America, the technical specifications for constructing a glider, and a detailed report on the various aspects of flying a glider safely and effectively. One of these reports suggests that Gliders, Inc. trained over 800 glider pilots, but little direct documentation of this function has survived. The "Salesman's Packet" includes order forms, daily report forms, and a set of specifications for the "Detroit Gull," one of the company's biggest selling gliders. The speeches file derives primarily from the First Intercollegiate Aviation Conference at Yale, held in October 1928. Three of these speeches were written by Frank Blunk. Other speeches were written on aviation topics other than gliding by individuals unconnected to Gliders, Inc.

The **Publications Series** (Undated) contains informational and publicity brochures from various aviation companies and related organizations. The Detroit Aircraft file has brochures from several of that company's main divisions, such as Lockheed-Vega and Ryan Aircraft. The Gliders, Inc. file contains a few of the company's brochures and fliers. The National Glider Association material includes two informational pamphlets entitled "Wings for Young American" and "Soaring Flight". Miscellaneous publications include a Detroit Aviation Directory for 1929, and brochures from various gliding and

aviation related organizations. Also included within this series are various magazines, all associated with aeronautics and flying.

The materials in the **Photographs Series** (Undated) are mostly unidentified and undated. Primarily, these pictures were taken at glider flights and demonstrations. There are also three photos showing the construction of gliders in the factory.

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Clippings

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2. Clippings
3. Clippings
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6. Correspondence, Executive, Jun-Oct 1928
7. Correspondence, Executive, Dec 1928-Aug 1929
8. Correspondence, Operations Manager (Frank Blunk), Jun-Nov 1929
9. Correspondence, Chief Demonstrator (John E. Pratt), Jan-May 1930
10. Correspondence – General, 1929-1930
11. Financial, 1928

Miscellaneous Reports

12. Minutes, National Glider Association, 1929
13. Notes and Reports, National Glider Association, 1929-1930
14. Notes and Reports, Glider Information, n.d.
15. Salesman's Packet, n.d.
16. Speeches, First Intercollegiate Aviation Conference, Oct 1928
17. Writings, Frank M. Blunk, n.d.

Publications, Undated

18. Detroit Aircraft Corporation
19. Gliders, Inc.

Box 2

Publications, cont'd

National Glider Association
The Aeronautic Review, March 1930
The Aeroplane, Nov. 6, 1929
Canadian Air Review, February 1930
Flight, February 28, 1930
How to Build and Fly a Glider, 1930
Junior Mechanics and Model Airplane News, June 1929
Popular Science Monthly, May 1930

Box Number--Description

Box 2 (cont'd)

The Texaco Star, December 1929

S.A.E. Journal, June 1930

Saturday Evening Post, May 31, 1930 [Oversized, Box 3]

Western Flying, April 1930

Western Flying, May 1930

Box 3

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