The Descriptive Finding Guide for the Thaddeus Kerns Personal Papers
SDASM.SC.10086

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San Diego Air and Space Museum Library and Archives
11/06/2014
2001 Pan American Plaza, Balboa Park
San Diego 92101
URL: http://www.sandiegoairandspace.org/

http://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8cn7686
Online items available
Thaddeus Kerns was born in Santa Ana, California on June 5, 1894, and died in a plane crash on July 15, 1913. At a very young age, he built a full-sized plane with his own hands, with the exception of the engine, based on the Curtiss model. He taught himself how to fly with determination and courage. He even obtained a patent for a “flexible rib” in 1911, when he was only 17 years old.

Thaddeus Kerns built and flew a glider near his home in Chico, California, in April 1910. By September 1910, Kerns built his home-made airplane and flew it for the first time on January 10, 1910 at the age of 16, living up to his nickname of “Boy Aviator.” After that, Kerns accomplished many more exhibition flights around his home in Chico, at a state fair in Kansas, and was also granted permission by the Postmaster to fly a pouch of mail at the Santa Rosa, California, Driving Park Aviation Meet on May 17 and 18, 1913. Thaddeus Kerns died at the young age of 19, when he flew his last flight within 300 yards of his home. At the height of eighty feet, the lower wing spar of the airplane broke in two, causing the plane to sag and the propeller to ripping through the canvas, making the plane dive straight down into a grain field and tearing a hole into the soft ground. His mechanic, Arthur Smith, claimed the plane and the engine were in good condition, and planned to fly with him but instead witnessed the entire flight and crash. Unfortunately, so did Kerns’ mother who was watching from the porch of their house.

Immediate Source of Acquisition
The materials in this Collection were donated to the San Diego Air and Space Museum.

Scope and Contents
This Collection contains photocopies of documents and images relating to Kern’s life.

Related Materials
Images from Flickr: https://www.flickr.com/photos/sdasmarchives/sets/72157630655733538/
https://www.flickr.com/photos/sdasmarchives/albums/72157630655733538

Subjects and Indexing Terms
Home Built Aircraft
Curtiss-Wright Aircraft
Stunt flying
Kerns, Thaddeus S.

Box 01
Physical Description: One three-ring binder, titled “Thaddeus Kerns,” compiled by Gary Conklin, June 29, 2010
Photocopies on Photo Paper
Physical Description: 1. From the “Thaddeus Kerns - Kerns Family Collection” disc, six black and white photocopied photographs of Thaddeus Kerns building and flying his plane printed on photo paper.

Photocopies of Patent Certificate and Postal Card

Photocopies of Pictures and Newspaper Clippings
Physical Description: 5. Photocopies of newspaper clippings and pictures of Kerns’ flights and himself working on the plane, also found in the “Thaddeus Kerns - Kerns Family Collection” disc. 6. Photocopies of newspaper clippings and pictures about Kerns and his planes from the “Chico Air Museum Collection” disc.

Photocopies from Special Collection Departments
Physical Description: 7. Copies of five Kerns’ pictures from the Merriam Library Special Collections Department at California State University, Chico. 8. Copies of nine Kerns’ pictures from the Chico Air Museum Special Collections Department, also found in the “The Kerns Family Collection - Disc #3” disc. 9. Copies of Kerns’ flight information over Emporia, Kansas from the Kansas Historical Society and the Emporia Gazette. 10. Photocopy from the University of Texas at Dallas McDermott Library, found in the “Thaddeus Kerns - Kerns Family Collection” disc.

Copies of Article Clippings about Kerns’ Flights

One folder of DVDs