Finding aid of the Walter R. Brookins Aviation Collection

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Walter R. Brookins Aviation collection

Dates: 1900-1954.

Collection number: h1950.1

Creator: Brookins, Walter R., 1888-1953

Collection Size: 1 archives half-carton (0.2 linear foot).

Repository: Claremont Colleges. Library. Special Collections, Honnold/Mudd Library.

Claremont, CA 91711

Abstract: Photographs of the Wright glider and flyer, 1900 and 1902, and of various air meets circa 1910-circa 1912, as well as of reunions of the Early Birds, and of Walter Brookins; a loose-leaf binder containing typed transcripts of newspaper articles and book chapters concerning the Wright brothers and Brookins' career; a portfolio of photographic plates published in 1952 by the National Aerographic Society, a subsidiary of the Institute of Aeronautical History, commemorating important events in the history of flight; newspaper article, 1930, containing reminiscences of Brookins of his early days with the Wright brothers.

Physical location: Please consult repository.

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access

Collection open for research.

Publication Rights

All requests for permission to publish must be submitted in writing to Special Collections.

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Walter R. Brookins Aviation collection. Special Collections, Honnold/Mudd Library, Claremont University Consortium.

Acquisition Information

Donor and date of acquisition unknown. The collection came to Special Collections together with the James Carruthers Memorial Aviation Collection of the Institute of Aeronautical History.

Processing Information


Biography

Walter Richard Brookins was born in Dayton, Ohio, on July 11, 1888. He first knew Orville and Wilbur Wright at the age of four, and was a student of their sister, Katherine, a school teacher. As a teenager he spent much time at the Wright brothers' bicycle shop, observing them testing their theories, and after their successful first flight the brothers promised Brookins a plane as soon as he was old enough. Brookins, along with J. W. Davis, Spencer C. Crane, Arch Hoxsey, and Arthur L. Welch, was one of the five men chosen to be trained as pilots to engage in exhibition flying for the Wright Company, and with Davis was the first to arrive at the Wright Brothers' training camp, at what is now Maxwell Field, outside
Montgomery, Alabama, on March 19, 1910. Brookins was the first civilian pilot taught to fly by Orville Wright, taking to the air after two and a half hours of instruction, controlling a flight from start to finish on April 30, and flying alone for 12 minutes on May 6. On May 10, Orville Wright left Montgomery to return to Dayton, leaving Brookins in charge of training the other two students. As a member of the Wright Company’s exhibition team, Brookins was under a two-year contract, receiving a basic salary of $20 a week, supplemented by $50 per day for every flying day; prize money was turned in to the company. Brookins was one of the most daring and accomplished members of the Wright team. On July 10, 1910, at Atlantic City, he became the first person to reach an altitude of one mile in an airplane, winning a $5,000 prize for the Wright Company from the Atlantic City Aero Club, and on September 29, 1911, he set an American distance record by flying 192 miles from Chicago to Springfield, IL, making two stops.

Although he broke with the Wright team in 1911 and retired as an instructor in 1914, Brookins remained active in aviation throughout his life. In 1928, He was a founding member of the Early Birds, an organization of those who had piloted a glider, airship, or airplane before December 17, 1916; he was also president of the organization in 1937. In his later years he was a partner in the Davis-Brooking Aircraft Co., of Hollywood, California, which developed the wing assembly used on all World War II B-24s. He was also sometime president of the Institute of Aeronautical History, and a leading member of the Friends of Aeronautical History, which in 1949 organized the Brookins Lahm Wright Aeronautical Foundation (incorporated in December 1953, after his death) to support (1) the Portal of the Folded Wings, a burial place for pioneer aviators in Pierce Brothers Valhalla Memorial Park, in North Hollywood, California; (2) the Library of the Institute of Aeronautical History (incorporated 1933), now the James Carruthers Memorial Aviation Collection of the Institute of Aeronautical History, Claremont McKenna College, deposited in the Honnold/Mudd Library, Claremont, California; and (3) the Gillette Museum Center of International Aeronautical Documentation, of which nothing further is known at present (cf. the James N. Gillette Aviation Collection, Photographic Collection P-140, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of the County of Los Angeles).

Brookins died at his home in Hollywood, California, on April 29, 1953, after an illness of four months. He was the first aviator to be buried in the Portal of the Folded Wings, in Pierce Brothers Valhalla Memorial Park, in North Hollywood, California.

Sources:

Scope and Content of Collection
The collection contains photographs of the Wright glider and Wright flyer from circa 1902-circa 1903, and of various air meets circa 1910-circa 1912, as well as of reunions of the Early Birds, and of Walter Brookins. It includes a loose-leaf binder of typescript transcriptions of newspaper articles and book chapters concerning the Wright brothers and Brookins' career, as well as a portfolio of photographic plates published in 1952 by the National Aerographic Society, a subsidiary of the Institute of Aeronautical History, commemorating important events in the history of flight, and a newspaper article from 1930, with reminiscences of Brookins of his early days with the Wright brothers.

Arrangement
The collection is arranged in two series: (1) Photographs, and (2) Printed Matter.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.
Aeronautical sports--History
Aeronautics--History
Brookins, Walter R., 1888-1953
Early Birds of Aviation (Organization)
Photographs
Prints
Wright, Orville, 1871-1948
Wright, Wilbur, 1867-1912

Related Material
James Carruthers Memorial Aviation Collection of the Institute of Aeronautical History, Special Collections, Honnold/Mudd Library, Claremont.

Physical Description: 6 folders.

Series Scope and Content

The earliest photographs are of the Wright glider of 1900 and of Wilbur Wright in the Wright Flyer at Kitty Hawk in October 1902. These photographs were probably a gift to Brookins from the Wright brothers. The bulk of the photographs date from circa 1910 to circa 1912, and are of various air meets in which Brookins participated, first as a member of the Wright team, later as an "independent". Later photographs include an undated studio portrait of Brookins, and two photographs, 1945 and undated, from reunions of the Early Birds. The collection includes two reproductions of an original photograph, then in the collections of James N. Gillette (cf. James N. Gillette Aviation Collection, Photographic Collection P-140, Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of the County of Los Angeles), of Brookins with Orville Wright, General "Hap" Arnold, and others, at the dedication of the Wright Brothers Memorial at Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio, on August 19, 1940; these items are of unknown provenance, but are catalogued with the collection as the original photograph was inscribed to Brookins by Orville Wright.

Arrangement

Arranged in approximate chronological order.

Folder 1  circa 1900-1903

Physical Description: 1 folder.

Folder : Item 1 : 1  Wright glider strains against the ropes that tether it to the ground. Kitty Hawk, North Carolina 1900

Physical Description: 1 photograph : b&w ; 2.5 x 3 in.

Folder : Item 1 : 2  Wilbur Wright flying Wright glider, Kill Devil Hills, Kitty Hawk, North Carolina October 24, 1902

Physical Description: 1 photograph : b&w ; 2.5 x 3 in.

Folder : Item 1 : 3  Wright flyer n.d.

Physical Description: 1 photograph : b&w : 2.25 x 3 in.

Folder 2-4  1910-1912

Physical Description: 3 folders.

Folder : Item 2 : 1  Dominguez Field Air Meet 1910

Physical Description: 1 postcard : hand-tinted ; 3.5 x 5.5 in.

Folder : Item 2 : 2  Albert Bond Lambert (L) and Orville Wright (R) before takeoff, Simms Station, Dayton, Ohio May 18, 1910

Physical Description: 1 photograph : b&w ; 4.5 x 6.5 in.

Folder : Item 2 : 3  Roy Knabenshue and dirigible 1910

Physical Description: 1 photograph : b&w ; 3.5 x 5.5 in.

Folder : Item 2 : 4  Biplane at an airshow [possibly Belmont Park] October 15, 1910

Physical Description: 1 postcard : b&w ; 3.25 x 5.25 in. Annotation at lower left corner: "Brookins, 10-15-10."
Folder : Item 2 : 5  Walter Brookins and Frank Garbutt in aircraft, Los Angeles, California December 1910
   Physical Description: 1 photograph [reproduction] : b&w ; 5.5 x 9.25 in.

Folder : Item 2 : 6  Walter Brookins with male passenger [Frank Garbutt] seated in aircraft, Los Angeles, California December 1910
   Physical Description: 1 photograph [reproduction] : b&w ; 7 x 10 in.

Folder : Item 3 : 1  Man with cigarette in two-seat biplane 1910
   Physical Description: 1 photograph : b&w ; 3 x 5.25 in.

Folder : Item 3 : 2  2 men and a woman at an air meet circa 1910
   Physical Description: 1 postcard : b&w ; 3.5 x 5.5 in.

Folder : Item 3 : 3  Crowd of men hoisting triumphant flyer circa 1910
   Physical Description: 1 postcard : b&w ; 3.5 x 5.5 in.
       Note
       Photograph taken at same time as #4.

Folder : Item 3 : 4  Two men flanking flyer circa 1910
   Physical Description: 1 postcard : b&w ; 3.5 x 5.5 in. (image 2.75 x 3.5 in.)
       Note
       Photograph taken at same time as #3.

Folder : Item 4 : 1  Group of men on airfield, Salt Lake City Aviation Carnival April 6, 1911

Folder : Item 4 : 2  4 men standing on landing strip at Salt Lake City Aviation Carnival April 1911
   Physical Description: 1 photograph : b&w ; 3.25 x 5.5 in.

Folder : Item 4 : 3  Pilot and 4 men at air show April 20, 1911

Folder : Item 4 : 4  Glenn H. Curtiss watching the aerial antics of Horace Kearney, Souvenir of San Diego aviation meet April 6-7, 1912
   Physical Description: 1 postcard : b&w : 5.5 x 3.5 in. Annotated on back: "From Collection of T. P. Faulconer, San Diego, Calif."

Folder : Item 4 : 5  Walter Brookins with a group of men on the field at an air meet 1912
   Physical Description: 1 postcard : b&w ; 3.5 x 5.5 in. Message on back: "Just returned from Canton Mrs. [?] N. Mrs. L. Jane and I had dinner with Mr. Atwood and Mr. Steevens they left town at 7:15 PM Sunday".
       Note
       Brookins identified in picture with year "1912" in green ink.

Folder 5-6  1940-1945
   Physical Description: 2 folders.

Folder : Item 5 : 1-2

(L to R) R. M. Wright; Bernard Whalen, Robert G. Fowler, General Hap Arnold, Orville Wright, Capt. Kenneth Whiting, and Walter Brookins, taken at Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio, at the dedication of a plaque honoring the pioneer fliers who had trained at Wright Field. August 19, 1940

Physical Description: 1 photograph [reproduction] (2 copies) : b&w ; 8 x 10 in.

Inscribed to Brookins by Orville Wright.

Note

Reproduction of the original in the James N. Gillette collection.

Folder : Item 5 : 3

Caption for #’s 1-2, indicating that the image is a "[c]ollectors Item photo from the files of James N. Gillette" 1940

Physical Description: 1 sheet : 8 1/2 x 11 in.

Folder : Item 6 : 1

Formal portrait of Walter Brookins circa 1940

Physical Description: 1 photograph : b&w ; 10 x 8 in.

Folder : Item 6 : 2

"Earlybirds", group portrait of 18 pilots posed in front of a military airplane September 1944

Physical Description: 1 photograph : b&w ; 8 x 10 in. Annotated at lower left: "556 BU 18 SEPT. 44 1048.1 EARLYBIRDS". Annotated on back: "Property of Walter R. Brookins, 6547 Cahuenga Terrace, Hollywood 28, Calif"; "I used this head for the portrait--which I thought more suitable--L.E. Thompson".

Folder : Item 6 : 3

19 men in civilian clothes, wearing medals, by brick wall circa 1945

Physical Description: 1 photograph : sepia ; 8 x 10 in. Annotated on back: "Property of Walter P. Brookins, 6547 Cahuenga Terrace, Hollywood 28, California".

Folder 7-8

Series 2. Printed Matter 1910-1953

Physical Description: 2 folders + 1 loose-leaf binder.

Series Scope and Content

The materials in this series include a legal-sized loose-leaf binder containing typescript copies (primarily carbon copies) of book chapters and newspaper articles, 1910-1952, concerning the early history of fixed-wing flight in the United States, in particular the contribution of the Wright brothers and the career of Walter Brookins. The materials also include numbers 2-8 and 10-14 of a portfolio of photographic plates published on December 17, 1952, by the National Aerographic Society, a subsidiary of the Institute of Aeronautical History, to commemorate important events in the history of flight. Much of the material reproduced is now in the James Carruthers Memorial Aviation Collection of the Institute of Aeronautical History, Special Collections Department, Honnold/Mudd Library, Claremont, California. The remaining materials in the series are a page from Popular Mechanics Aviation Album, reproducing a photograph of Roy Knabenshue demonstrating the motor airship Arrow at the St. Louis World’s Fair in 1904, and a limited edition reproduction of the line sketch "Evolution of Flight", commemorating the golden jubilee (1953) of the Wright brothers’ first flight.

Aviation Folio

Typescript copies of newspaper articles and book chapters, 1910-1952, concerning the Wright brothers and the career of Walter Brookins 1910-1952

Physical Description: 1 loose-leaf binder : 14.5 x 12.5 in.

Note

The binder contains multiple copies—primarily carbon copies, with some originals—of most items. A full list of the contents, arranged chronologically, is appended to this finding aid. A 1953 typescript copy of a 1948 account by Charles E. Taylor, "My Story of the Wright Brothers", formerly in this binder, is now in box 12, folder 8, James Carruthers Memorial Aviation Collection of the Institute of Aeronautical History, Special Collections Department, Honnold/Mudd Library.

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Folder 7  
**Prints 1931-1953**

Physical Description: 1 folder.

Folder : Item 7 : 1


J. C. McCoy making a balloon ascent outside New York in 1910.

August Piccard, seen through the glass-barred porthole of the aluminum sphere in which he reached a record altitude.

Roy Knabenshue demonstrates the motor airship Arrow at the Saint Louis World's Fair in 1904.

Folder : Item 7 : 2

**Wright brothers' first flight. Golden Jubilee Plate, "Evolution of Flight" 1931**

Physical Description: 1 line sketch : cream paper ; 11 x 8 in.

Note


Folder 8

**Portfolio of photographic plates published by the National Aerographic Society, a subsidiary of the Institute of Aeronautical History, to commemorate important events in aviation history December 17, 1952**

Physical Description: 1 folder ; 15 sheets : 11 x 8.5 in.

Folder : Item 8 : 1-3

**Plate II. Blériot for France officially embraces Navy aeronauts Noville and Byrd, Paris, July 1927, honoring trans-Atlantic flight of 'America,' one month after Lindbergh's crossing in thirty three plus hours July 1927**

Physical Description: 3 copies.

Note

Attribution: Lt. Commander George Noville Archives, President National Aerographic Society.

Folder : Item 8 : 4

**Plate III. General Lahm's winning flight plan 1906-Gordon-Bennet Race; First military pilot trained by Wright Brothers 1908-09 1906, 1908-1909**

Note

Attribution: Institute of Aeronautical History Library, Lahm Collection.

Folder : Item 8 : 5-6

**Plate IV. Santos-Dumont 1901. Paris first gas-powered dirigible 1901**

Physical Description: 2 copies.

Note

Attribution: Santos-Dumont Aeronautical Foundation.

Folder : Item 8 : 7

**Plate V. Langley Book Lilienthal's copy 1891 first edition 1891**

Note

Attribution: Institute of Aeronautical History Library Claremont, Carruthers Collection.
| Folder : Item 8 : 8 | Plate VI. Kitty Hawk Wright plane 1903. Original signature by Orville Wright 1903  
Note  
Attribution: Institute of Aeronautical History Library Claremont, Carruthers Collection. |
| Folder : Item 8 : 9 | Plate VII. Original piece of Kitty Hawk Hangar 1903, first in the world 1903  
Note  
Attribution: Institute of Aeronautical History Library Claremont, Carruthers Collection. |
| Folder : Item 8 : 10 | Plate VIII. Kitty Hawk fabric from 1903 first plane 1903  
Note  
Attribution: Archives of Walter Brookins President of Institute of Aeronautical History. |
| Folder : Item 8 : 11 | Plate X. Moisant circling the Statue of Liberty 1910  
Note  
Attribution: Institute of Aeronautical History Library Claremont, Moisant Collection. |
| Folder : Item 8 : 12 | Plate XI. "The Brothers Montgolfier, 1783 ..." With text from Francesco Lana Terzi, Prodromo (1670) 1670, 1783  
Note  
Attribution: Institute of Aeronautical History Library Claremont, Carruthers Collection. |
| Folder : Item 8 : 13 | Plate XII. Lana 1670 lighter than air device 1670  
Note  
Attribution: Institute of Aeronautical History Library Claremont, Carruthers Collection. |
| Folder : Item 8 : 14 | Plate XIII. D'Arlandes and De Rozier 1783 Paris: first free flight by men 1783  
Note  
Attribution: Institute of Aeronautical History Library Claremont, Carruthers Collection. |
| Folder : Item 8 : 15 | Plate XIV. First use of "Aerographique" 1783: first five balloon ascents-Paris 1783  
Note  
Attribution: Institute of Aeronautical History Library Claremont, Carruthers Collection. |

Folder 9  
Series 3. Correspondence circa 1940-circa 1954  
Physical Description: 1 folder.  
Series Scope and Content  
The correspondence series consists of two items: (1) the second page of a letter, circa 1950, from Brookins to an unnamed correspondent concerning exhibition flights, and (2) a sheet of blank letterhead, circa 1954, for the Brookins Lahm Wright Aeronautical Foundation.

Folder 10  
Series 4. Newspaper Clippings July 26, 1930  
Physical Description: 1 item.  
Series Scope and Content  
The newspaper clippings series consists of a single clipping, "Air Pioneer recalls start with Wrights," Los Angeles Times, July 26, 1930, section 2, p. 3:3-4, with reminiscences of Brookins of his early days with the Wright brothers, with a photograph of Brookins and Roy Knabenshue at the Dominguez Hills air meet in January 1910.
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**ADDENDUM: 1910-1952**

**Scope and Content Note**


This binder contains multiple copies—primarily carbon copies, with some originals—of most items. A 1953 typescript copy of a 1948 account by Charles E. Taylor, "My Story of the Wright Brothers", formerly in this binder, is now in Box 12, Folder 8, James Carruthers Memorial Aviation Collection of the Institute of Aeronautical History.

The items are arranged in the binder without apparent order. The following is a list of the items in chronological order by the date of the event(s) each item describes. The number(s) preceding each entry indicate the relative position of each item in the binder. Unless otherwise noted, all items are carbon copies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item #</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29, 31</td>
<td>Extracts from the Montgomery Advertiser, Monday, April 18, 1910-May 22, 1910, concerning the Wright flying school [include references to Walter R. Brookins]. 5 p. 2 copies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Extracts from Montreal Daily Star, Monday, June 27, 1910, concerning the aviation meet at Lakeside. 4 p.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10, 13</td>
<td>&quot;Brookins more than a mile up. / In Wright biplane he breaks all world records for height / Flies more than an hour / Final figures of remarkable flight not determined yet, but official recognition is certain. / Progress in high flying&quot;. New York Tribune, Sunday, July 10, 1910. 3 p. 2 copies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, 25</td>
<td>&quot;Aviator-Brookins is hurt. / High flight record holder imperils life to save spectators. / Bruised and nose broken. / Machine turns over in quick shift to avoid onlookers&quot; [article on Walter Brookins]. Chicago Daily News, August 10, 1910. 1 p. 2 copies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>&quot;Brookins Makes 12-Minute Flight&quot;. Evening American [Chicago], vol. 11, no. 77, Tuesday, September 27, 1910. 2 p. (2 copies of p. 2).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>