Accession # 1991-62

RUTH ALEXANDER COLLECTION

MS-009

International Women's Air and Space Museum
Burke Lakefront Airport, Room 165
1501 North Marginal Road
Cleveland, Ohio 44114

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INTRODUCTION

The Ruth Alexander Collection was accessioned into IWASM in December 1991. Juanita Andrews, whose stepfather was married to Ruth Alexander at the time of her death, donated the material. The papers in the collection date from 1929 to 1930 and are organized into the following series:

1. Business Records
2. Creative Writings
3. Autobiographical Writings
4. Odds and Ends

The material fills one Hollinger box and there are no restrictions on the use of these materials.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ruth Blaney was born to Mr. and Mrs. William T. Blaney on May 18, 1905 in Irving, Kansas. She died on September 18, 1930 in San Diego, California. In1911 the family moved to Southern Texas where Ruth's father operated a sawmill. At age seven, Ruth made a parachute jump off a barn with her daddy's umbrella, climbed trees and rode them to the ground as her father felled them, and raced horses. In 1914 the family moved back to Irving where Ruth continued to ride and train horses. She graduated from Irving High School in May 1923 and enrolled in Emporia State Teachers College for the summer term.

She left college to work as a saleswoman in a general store in Cleburne. A year later (1924) she became owner of a beauty parlor in Olathe. In November 1924 Ruth was thrown by a horse and broke her collarbone in three places. On July 8, 1926 she was married to Mac Alexander who managed his family's farm and dairy west of Olathe. Two years later she filed papers of separation. Seeking better weather after a bout of pneumonia, Ruth left for San Diego in October, earning her way by helping to drive a car for a couple traveling to California.

Ruth's choice of destination was also prompted by a desire to learn to fly ever since she had seen a barnstormer in 1917and had been up with one in 1926. She settled in Coronado and took jobs in a beauty shop and a restaurant to earn enough money for lessons. In August 1928, she entered a contest to win a course at the T. C. Ryan Flying School. Although she placed second, she was granted a scholarship for 195 hours of navigation and meteorology plus 22 hours of flying instruction.

Her progress was the fastest of any man or woman in the world. Between September 8, 1929 and November 19, 1929 she completed ground school at Pacific Technical University, qualified for FIA and NAA licenses and set an altitude record (18,000 feet) for women in a light plane. In January 1930 she learned to fly sailplanes and, according to an obituary, became the first woman instructor in glider planes.

While she was learning to fly, Ruth was writing articles about her lessons and flying experiences for The Irving Leader. In this way she earned some money and remained connected to her hometown. On June 21, 1930 Ruth was secretly married to Robert A. Elliott in Yuma, Arizona. Robert, from Brooklyn, N. Y., was an ensign in the U. S. Naval Reserve Air Corps and gave Ruth some advanced flying instruction.

She worked hard to acquire her own Barling monoplane intending to set more records. On July 4 and July 11, 1930 she reset the altitude record twice with flights of 20,000 and 26,600 feet. On September 1, 1930 Ruth departed Vancouver, Canada at 3:25 a.m. and landed in Caliente, Mexico at 7:15 p.m. This flight set three records: woman distance over a specified air course, woman speed record over the same course, and woman's tri-nation flight. Ruth made plans to set one more record, a three-day, one-stop transcontinental flight from San Diego to Wichita to New York. On the way back she planned several overnight stops including one at Irving.

Ruth took off before dawn on September 18th from Lindbergh Field and crashed at approximately 3:38 a.m. approximately a mile north of the airport. The San Diego board of air control concluded that Ruth met her death when the overloaded Barling fell into a spin while she was attempting to climb through fog. Her parents and 10-year-old brother were about to leave for Wichita to meet Ruth when the telegrams arrived, and her husband was in New York waiting for her.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The papers in this collection are arranged into four series. The file folders and the papers within each folder are generally ordered chronologically. The organization of the files is essentially the same as when they were delivered to the Museum.

Business Records, the first series, contains documents and letters related to purchase and preparation of the Barling monoplane, sponsorship of record flight attempts, and carbon copies of letters written by Ruth Alexander. The Barling was manufactured by the Nicholas-Beazley Airplane Company, Marshall, MO. It was type NB-3B, serial number 52, and had a Warner Scarab Jr engine. The Department of Commerce granted special aircraft license NR-880M. Contracts for the July altitude record attempts and the tri-country flight document sponsorship and fees paid. A telegram certifies takeoff from Vancouver and T. C. Ryan wrote prior to the transcontinental flight. The last letter written by Ruth was to T. C. Ryan remembering that "yesterday was the first anniversary of my flying career" which puts her first lesson on the tenth of September 1929.

Creative Writings, the second series, contains copies of articles written by Ruth Alexander for publication by the Irving (KS) Leader and the Marshall County News. There are stories that may or may not include the three noted in her diary as sold on October 17, 1929, February 10, 1930 and March 20, 1930. There is a reprint of an article written by someone else, and correspondence about appearances and publicity.

Autobiographical Writings, the third series, holds a draft of an incomplete autobiography written partly by Ruth's mother and partly by Ruth. The calendar that Ruth used as a diary during the first several months of flying lessons supplements the typed autobiographical sections.

Odds and Ends, the last series, includes NAA air record information, photographs, personal notes, cards and telegrams, and glider clubs correspondence.

BOX AND FOLDER LISTING

Series 1 Business Records

Folder 1-1 Statements and Receipts; April – September 1930

Most are for purchasing and delivering airplane parts, and for repairs in preparation for her September flights. Others are for gas and miscellaneous supplies.

Folder 1-2 Contracts; May – August 1930

Includes "Record of Transfer and Reassignment Form" dated August 20, 1930 for Nicholas-Beazley NB-3B Barling aircraft, consignment delivery record for Warner "Scarab Junior" engine, and purchase agreement with Bunnell Photo Shop, San Diego, CA for a CineAnsco camera. Also includes a permit for special aircraft license NR-880M for the Barling airplane; a contract and correspondence with Richfield Oil Company to use Richfield products during altitude and endurance/distance record attempts, and an advertising contract to promote Aqua Caliente during the Three Flag Flight.

Folder 1-3 Letters Received; December 1929 – September 1930

These are addressed to Ruth Alexander and relate to preparing and making her record flights in the Barling airplane. Companies include Ryan Flying School; Nicholas-Beazley Airplane Co., Inc (supplier of plane);; Great Lakes Aircraft Corporation (financial support); Richfield Oil Co. (sponsor).

Folder 1-4 Letters Written; January - September 1930

These are carbon copies of letters sent by Ruth Alexander; many precede or follow those in Folder 1-3.

Series 2 Creative Writings

Folder 2-1 Stories by Ruth Alexander; 1929-1930

Many of these are columns prepared for the Irving (KS) Leader about Ruth Alexander's experience in San Diego. There two speeches at Kiwanis Clubs and other stories. *See appended list.*

Folder 2-2 Articles by Others; n.d.

One eight-page reprint of series of articles by Max Miller of the San Diego Sun on how he learned to fly is titled "Flew, Fly, Flung".

Folder 2-3 Publicity Correspondence; December 1929 – September 1930

Most of these letters are to and from businesses with Kansas connections, such as the Marshall County News, Marysville KS. A few are requests for biographical information or pictures. Others offer promotional suggestions.

Series 3 Autobiographical Writings

Folder 3-1 Unfinished Biography; 1930

This is a combination biography (by mother Mrs. W.T. Blaney, Irving, Kansas) and autobiography (by Ruth Alexander, San Diego, California). There is one typed copy with editing in pencil; it ends May 10, 1930. A second carbon copy is not edited and is not as complete.

Folder 3-2 Calendar Diary; 1929

Fireman's Fund Weekly calendar was used to record notes about learning to fly; almost daily entries from Sep 30, 1929 to Apr 25, 1930. These entries fill in a gap in the Unfinished Biography (Folder 3-1).

Series 4 Odds and Ends

Folder 4-1 Miscellaneous; 1930

NAA Official World & American Air Records (to June 1, 1930) includes Ruth Alexander's altitude record for women on page 7. There is a press release of new altitude record of 26,600 feet set by Ruth on 7/11/30 and information about the 1930 Air Derby.

Folder 4-2 Photographs; 1929-1930

Includes 24 size 8x10, 1 size 5x7, 1 size 4x6 portrait and several smaller ones. Although undated, many can be associated with her record attempts. Several were taken before or after the Vancouver to Caliente flight.

Folder 4-3 Personal Correspondence; June - September 1930

Personal notes, letters, and telegrams from family and friends including one telegram from husband Bob dated September 8, 1930.

Folder 4-4 Glider Club; January – September 1930 scanned

Letters and telegrams about Ruth's participation in glider club and glider activities, and a blank Glider Log Book.

Articles and Stories Written by Ruth Alexander

NONFICTION

"At the end of my first week..." Letter to the Irving Leader and dated Sept 30, 1929 - written after first week of school. (3 handwritten pages)

"My second week as an aviator..." Letter to the Irving Leader (week of Sep 23, 1929) - written after second week as flier. (3 handwritten pages)

"My third week a flier and I'm ..." Letter to the Irving Leader (week of Sep 30, 1929) - written after third week as flier. (2 handwritten pages)

"Back in San Diego after my week in Los Angeles..." Letter to Irving Leader (Oct 18, 1929) - written from Coronado. (3 handwritten pages)

"Stalls & Spins" Written at T. C. Ryan Flying School (Oct 21, 1929) describing maneuvers. (2 hand written pages) [A diary entry provided date]

"I'm late with my letter this week but it's because..." Dear Leader written at Pacific Technical University (1929) - written after completion of tests at Ryan Flying School: FAI Tests passed 11-17-29; Private Pilot test scheduled for 11-21-29. (2 hand written pages)

"Every day I become more enthusiastic; ..." (untitled 1929) - completion of ground school at Pacific Technical University, moves into Great Lakes. (3 hand written pages)

"Two Months! My ground school course is finished ..." (untitled Nov 1929) - ground school finished, types of planes, ready for written exam and flying tests. (3 handwritten pages)

"Believe it or not, but out here in Sunny Southern California..." Saturday Nov (1929) - about altitude flight with instructor. (4 hand written pages)

"I flew today for an hour and fifty minutes ..." Thursday Night and All Wet (1930) - about flying Ryan Broughm into rainy weather; Peaches Wallace fails to get license. (3 typed pages). letter 1/10/30 to/from Bill Monday, Ryan - Santa Monica (Don Faulkner)

"For the past two weeks we have been enjoying our rainy season..." Flying Conversation (1930) - written to The Leader about terms used in aviation. (4 typed pages)

"I think that we are all fliers at heart...." Upon Aviation (1930) - written for the Kiwanis Club, El Centro, January 24, 1930 meeting about own experiences. (3 typed pages)

"For one reason and another I have ..." Flying Fields (1930) - written for The Leader about the Ryan and Lindbergh fields about six months before dedication of Lindbergh Field. (3 typed pages)

"Down in the lobby the other evening ..." A Polly-Wog in a Pan of Milk - about flying in fog. (2 typed pages)

"Out on the field the other day ..." To 'Chute' or not to 'Chute' (1930) - written for The Leader (3 typed pages)

"This last week I have had the pleasure..." Flies the Good Year Pony Blimp (1930) - (3 typed pages)

"The freedom. The absolute freedom. ..." Youth in Aviation (1930) - written in support of flying. (2 typed pages)

"A paramount interest is rapidly becoming manifest in this new sport ..." Gliding (1930) - (2 typed pages)

"Airial (sic) acrobatics as described by the department ..." Loops (Mar 1930) - (2 typed pages)

(5) "There are pioneers of every industry..." (untitled 1930) - about Girls Glider Club (2 typed pages)

"My flying education is rapidly progressing..." School of Experience (1930) - written six months after earning license about forced landings and crashes. (5 typed pages)

"So seldom it is that the mothers of fliers ..." Mothers of Fliers (1930) - written in honor of Mother Crosson. (2 typed pages)

(6) "I think in terms of air, always, and my readers ..." Landing Fields and Gliding (1930) - written for the Kiwanis Club of Fallbrook, California and revised to make a suitable story. (5 typed pages)

"With my flying career a whole seven months old..." (untitled Apr 1930) - written seven months after earning license. (3 typed pages)

(5) "Sure I have some things to say about gliding..." (untitled 1930) - note about H. Bollis (sic). (1 typed page)

(5) "The drivers of cars were moving them back ..." Three Million Glider Pilots in Three Years (1930) - about Hawley Bowlus, gliding, records set, Col & Mrs Lindbergh earning licenses. (2 typed pages)

(5) "Gliding and soaring have been very popular..." (untitled 1930) - about gliding history, technique, Anne Lindbergh. (5 typed pages)

"I came down here today forewarned but not fore armed...." (untitled 1930) - apparently notes for a talk. (1 typed page)

"Last November I made my first attempt at altitude flying..." Feet Up (Sep 1930) - account of second record altitude attempt set July 1930; 7/4 20,000 and 7/12 26,590. (5 typed pages)

"From Caliente to Los Angeles ..." Canada to Mexico and Return (Sep 1930) - written after record flight from Vancouver to Agua Caliente on 9-1-30. (1 typed page)

"I know all about this 'land where night overtakes you' ..." (untitled 1930) - about flying into fog and staying overnight. (4 typed pages)

FICTION

"It was November. A cold wet fog had fallen ..." Just a Short Short Story - fictional account of man and puppy. (4 typed pages)

"You know folks its positively pathetic ..." Sylloquism - about whisky and wine. (1 typed page, 2 copies)

"Soaks. Well soaked soaks..." Soaks - about whisky and wine. (1 typed page, 2 copies)

"Parties. Thrilling, sensational, phenomenal (sic) ..." Parties - about whisky and wine. (1 typed page, 2 copies)

"To Know or Not to Know. Much discussed as regarding ..." (untitled) - (1 typed page)

"It is my habit to arise early each morning ..." A Girl and a Cigarette (1930) - (2 typed pages, 2 copies)

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