

Retired "Mattie" Laird Was One Of The First "Barnstormers", Designed Own Plane

"Mattie" Laird had already designed and built his own airplane at the age of 15, when most boys are just getting interested in cars.

"I built a 12 horsepower, 4-cylinder engine made from old automobile parts," recalled Mr. Laird, sitting in the living room of his comfortable Toxaway home.

In 1905 E. M. Laird started on his airplane. The whole plane wasn't ready to go until 1913 when he was 17. For some time "Mattie" taxied up and down spare lots and fields, getting the feel of his plane.

"I had to teach myself to fly. If I got advice, it was usually to be careful. The pilots made fun of my one-winged plane with such a little engine in the front—but they were the first to congratulate me when it flew."

Before he flew, Mr. Laird worked in the First National Bank in Chicago. In 1910 Walter Brookings put on the Wright School of flight put on a demonstration at Grant Park. "That started the fire in my veins."

"I made my first public flight in 1915. Several men booked me for a fair. After that, I took a leave of absence from the bank for a day and never came back."

As a pre-World War I barnstormer, Mr. Laird was the fifth pilot in the U.S. to loop-the-loop. From 1915 to 1918 Mr. Laird toured county fairs making "as much money in a day as I would in a month at the bank."

Mr. Laird's real love is aircraft designing. In 1916 he designed a plane with a French

Anzani engine. He used this plane for several barnstorming seasons. This airplane is now at the Ford Museum at Dearborn, Mich.

Mr. Laird pointed out that the pre-World War I meaning for a "barnstormer" was a flier who would make a contract with a fair where the owners were doubtful about their gate intake. The pilot would then take a percentage out of the gate.

A bad accident put Mr. Laird in the hospital for almost five months. "I spun out from 25,000 feet and never recovered. It gave me a bad leg and a stiff arm. That kept me out of the service."

After the war, Mr. Laird started his own aircraft company in Chicago. The E. M. Laird Airplane Co. built several famous planes from the time it started operations after World War I to the end of World War II.

One of the most famous Laird planes was the Laird "Solution," a stubby-nosed racing plane which could attain speeds of up to 200 miles per hour. Pilots like "Speed" Holman and Jimmy Dolittle flew the Laird planes in races.

Dolittle set the intercontinental speed record in 1931 by flying from Burbank, Calif., to Newark, N. J. in a Laird "Super Solution" airplane.

This same plane will soon be placed in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington.

During World War II, the Laird Co. made airplane parts for the large plane companies. After the war, Mr. Laird retired. "I had a feeling the

government would flood the market with surplus planes like they did in World War I. When this happened many companies were knocked out of business. I don't regret retiring at all."

After bowing out gracefully from the airplane business Mr. Laird took up residence in Boca

Raton, Fla. The Lairds found Toxaway when they brought their daughter up from Florida to play the piano for a choir group in the area.

Mr. Laird will have a book published soon about his high-flying life as one of America's earlybird aviators.

Dr. Pinkney Herbert Says Lake Toxaway Most Beautiful US Area

"When I was single and 21 I used to come up here to the Toxaway Inn for the weekends," recalled Dr. Pinkney Herbert of Lake Toxaway.

"I was a doctor in Asheville for 45 years and I guess I know every stream in these mountains," Dr. Herbert said as he chomped on his unlit pipe.

Before 1916, the young surgeon from Asheville enjoyed the company and the sights at the fabulous Toxaway Inn. It was a haven for a young man.

Dr. Herbert's bushy grey eyebrows wrinkled in a frown. "Rained for four days back in '16 when the lake went out. We

were the last people out in a car. Car dropped in a big hole out of Rosman. Mr. Silversteen made us a new axle and we drove on to Asheville. That was Friday. On that Sunday the dam broke and washed away half or north South Carolina.

"Then when the lake was rebuilt it was natural that I would be interested," Dr. Herbert now lives in his old stomping grounds just in the summer. His winter home is in Laurens, S. C.

"It's natural that I should gravitate back to the mountains—I've known them for so long. This is the most beautiful area in Eastern America."

Bill McNeely

Lake Toxaway Native Is Now Building Many Homes In Area

Bill McNeely drove by the gaunt frame of the old McNeely's store. "I lived there for 20 years," he said, wagging his head in the store's direction.

The old frame housed the

company store back in the pre-1916 era. Then it passed on to Mr. McNeely's father. In 1957 the new store was built just down the road from the old site.

Mr. McNeely is a local con-



E. M. "MATTIE" LAIRD was the fifth pilot in the U.S. to loop-the-loop as an early barnstormer. Here he is shown looking at one of the models

of his famous race plane, the Laird "Solution", which his company designed and built.

structor, building in the Toxaway area since 1961. In the second World War he was in the Pacific in the SeaBees doing construction work.

"We start building a home for the mayor of Atlanta the first of August."

This sort of thing isn't unusual for Mr. McNeely, who has built 30% of all the homes on the lake. He is, at present,

at work on the unique George Cecil home. Mr. Cecil is head of the Biltmore Dairies.

Mr. McNeely seems to excel in building off-beat homes. The Cecil home will incorporate a log cabin in its frame. The James W. Mueller home is a quasi-alpine affair with a cordwood shingled roof. The shingles were cut by hand in British Columbia. "By blind people,

probably", said Mr. Mueller "Not a single one is like another."

The bricks in the Mueller home were imported from an old English church.

Mr. McNeely also built Dr. Pinkney Herbert's home. Dr. Herbert says, "If Bill McNeely ever leaves, I'll leave five minutes after!"

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