As historians and museum professionals we are generally comfortable evaluating events and ideas through the long lens of time. With decades or centuries of intervening context, we can more easily understand the long-term implications of a chaotic reality. Impactful people, places, events, and innovations can be separated from the noise and evaluated more clearly. Though it is a bit cliché, in 2020 we were forced to live history in real-time. Whether we liked it or not, we had a front row seat to natural disasters, pandemics, economic devastation, social unrest, political battles, and the Tiger King. Even in the bucolic Finger Lakes, there wasn’t much of an option to look away.

Regardless of political persuasion, we are constantly bombarded by an array of ‘experts’ attempting to tell us all what it all means and why we should be happy, sad, fearful, or downright despondent. Is society making progress or are we on the fast train to the end of civilization? If there is one thing a deep study of history can tell us, it is that we do not yet have enough information to answer those questions definitively. Museums, historical societies, and other non-traditional heritage institutions can and should play a critical role in actively collecting and preserving history in the moment. Though uncomfortable, citizen historians can channel their discomfort to preserve and protect the data, allowing current and future leaders a broader archive of information from which to learn and make better-informed choices.

For 60 years the Curtiss Museum has proudly served in this capacity, and we look forward to the next 60 and beyond. Will you join us?

BENJAMIN JOHNSON
Executive Director
the lid and they started to emerge, placed it on the floor. He pulled off an awkwardly long archival box and he returned a few minutes later with "the others." "How many more to go on," he asked. "Lots," he chuckled. After some additional digging, our speculations were confirmed.

Our collection was primarily from the golden age of early naval aviation when open-cockpit biplanes launched from the decks of the earliest aircraft carriers, U.S. Navy forward bases, and even battleships! Many could be directly connected to U.S. Navy units from the 1920s to as late as 1940. Training units, utility aircraft, early fighters, torpedo bombers, and more. The titans of early American aviation were represented: Boeing, Vought, Martin, and of course, Curtiss. Some ships involved were equally astonishing: USS Lexington, USS Saratoga, USS Ranger, and perhaps the most unexpected, the USS Arizona. Yes, THAT Arizona. The history nerds inside all of us rejoiced, but a few questions remained. What about the other pieces, the ones that were tightly rolled in an unmarked cardboard box? Based on the image styles, and a few expertly worded Google searches, we initially thought they could be French. After a few fruitless hours scouring the internet I came upon a link that appeared to offer hope. I sent out a quick email, not knowing whether the author spoke or read English, or was even still alive.

To my astonishment, Philippe responded within 90 minutes. A few minutes and 30 euros later I ordered the book. Thirteen days later the book arrived with the confirmation we needed: the remaining pieces were definitely French and definitely from World War I! The remaining six images represented French squadrons roughly dating from 1914-1918. All but one are in fantastic condition for their age. Squadron numbers and iconic early manufacturers jumped off the page once again: Salmson, SPAD, Farman, Breguet, Fokker, and Nieuport.

In total, our collection of original aviation insignia had grown to nineteen unique pieces (with a few duplicates), each a window into the past. As an unrepentant aviation history nerd since childhood, I am genuinely astonished by what we found. From French airfields to the decks of the Saratoga, from interwar Hawaii to the seaplane hoist of the USS Arizona, these pieces survived over a century to end up in Hammonton, NJ. What stories they could tell!

No matter how long one works in this field, the opportunity to identify a collection like this doesn’t happen very often. Though unseen for decades, they resurfaced at the exact right time, when the combination of people and resources came together.

In the end, I think Buddy Macon said it best when summing up his thoughts on the collection:

"It is the finest collection of its type that I have ever seen in over 40 years, and I would be amazed if there is anything that currently exists that could rival it. The fact that the collection has survived over 100 years and is being preserved to be made available for the next 100 is truly a once in a lifetime opportunity. Everyone should take the time, make the pilgrimage to the Glenn Curtiss Museum and take it all in."

ROBERT R. "BUDDY" MACON
Deputy Director,
National Naval Aviation Museum

In the first major global pandemic in over a century. As Covid-19 like a wildfire across the globe, both agreed the Curtiss Museum and National Naval Aviation Museum were closed to the public. Many of the people and resources we relied upon were quarantining at home. Buddy and I traded emails as he forwarded information to his research contacts. Even though they couldn’t hold the pieces in their hands, Buddy and his team were convinced that they were each with silvery paint on a decidedly old fabric backing.

To learn more we reached out to our friends at the Naval History and Heritage Command (NHHC), the group responsible for the preservation, analysis, and dissemination of U.S. naval history based at the Washington Navy Yard, Washington DC. NHHC recommended we touch base with the National Naval Aviation Museum in Pensacola, FL. Our request was forwarded from Washington, DC to Pensacola in late February 2020, where we began our digital excursions through history with Deputy Director Robert R. "Buddy" Macon and his team. Shortly after our conversations began, the world became gripped...
Squadron insignia was often roughly-painted art on the fuselage canvas. These images of pelicans, cartoon characters, dragons, etc. came to be more than just identification painted on a plane; these pieces united crew members, represented the emotions of war, and the lives of the pilots and crews.

Since prehistoric times, humans throughout the world have used colors and symbols to identify friend and foe alike. Over the millennia, organized tribes and governments used symbols and colors often placed on shields or banners. During the 12th and 13th centuries crusading knights began utilizing symbols which were painted on their shields and embroidered on their ‘pennons’ (cloth banners) attached to their lances. These devices were increasingly systematized to more easily identify individuals, families, and communities. Eventually these symbols became heritable, passed down through families or clans, later evolving into the Coat of Arms.

Throughout the 16th – 19th centuries the navies of seafaring powers, and even individual pirate ships, identified themselves through the use of colorful banners and flags to prove national allegiance, or to identify a particular individual or group. Lighter-than-air craft of the 19th century, such as the Union Army’s Intrepid, were clearly labeled in large contrasting letters for all to see.

As the 20th century opened the door to heavier-than-air flight, aviators began using color and shape for easy identification. The earliest flying daredevils frequently identified their manufacturers or sponsors in large painted letters readable from below. As the use of aircraft expanded during World War I, insignia denoting national origin or squadron affiliation became more common. Squadrons from across Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and most other nations began identifying themselves with unique images and color patterns. On May 6, 1918 the Chief of the Air Service – American Expeditionary Forces, Brigadier General Benjamin Foulois, established a policy the insignia of aerial units, declaring that each squadron would have an official emblem painted on the middle of each side of the airplane’s fuselage. “The squadron will design their own insignia during the period of organizational training. The design must be submitted to the Chief of Air Service, AEF, for Approval. The design should be simple enough to be recognizable from a distance.”

Some of the most famous American designs from the period were the “Indian Head” of the Lafayette Escadrille, and the iconic “Hat in the Ring” of Eddie Rickenbacker’s 94th Aero Squadron which represented Uncle Sam ‘throwing in’ with the Allied nations. During the war, the War Department approved the emblems of 45 squadrons that served in France. Though many units and their insignia were disbanded after the Versailles Treaty in 1919, the tradition of heraldic images within squadrons remained strong. For the U.S. Navy and Army Air Forces, the interwar period witnessed the adoption of iconic squadron insignia whose artistic style defined generations of “nose art” from World War II through the 21st century. World War II expanded the use of Air Corps symbols and insignia, with hundreds of new pieces appearing both officially and unofficially. In many ways these symbols were windows into the daily lives of young men at war, both aviators and ground crew alike. Some symbols, such as shark teeth from the “Flying Tigers” of the AVG, and the maiden from the Memphis Belle became iconic symbols of the war that reached far beyond the battlefield.

**PHOTO EXAMPLE: TOP HAT**

US Navy VF-1B Fighter Sqn. (USS SARATOGA)
Nickname: “High Hats”
Emblem: Black Top Hat

The squadron operated Curtiss F1C-2 “Goshawks” on the carrier USS Saratoga (CV-3), Pacific Fleet, from 1933 – 1939. The squadron has undergone many changes in designation over the years and is the oldest continuously active squadron in the U.S. Navy, now known as “VFA-14 ‘Top Hatters.’”

AVIATION COMES OF AGE
THE HAMMONDSPORT AMATEUR AERO CLUB
Richard Leisenring, Curator

As a result of all of the newsworthy activity taking place in and around Hammondsport regarding aviation, seven young men ranging in age from 15 to 19 formed the Hammondsport Amateur Aero Club with the intentions of following in Glenn H. Curtiss’ footsteps. The group consisted of William Babcock, Charles Locke, Elmer Robinson, Edmund Gleason, Harry Hall, Milan Brace and Charles Glover.

With the combined talents of the seven young men they built three gliders to test between September of 1908 and February of 1909. Their focus was to design and build a relatively small aircraft powered by as small an engine as possible.

The third glider, a monoplane, christened the Snow Bird flew at Hammondsport for a distance of 200 feet at a height of sixteen feet on February 22nd carrying two passengers. What made the flight newsworthy and was reported in major city newspapers across the country was the fact that the craft was half the size of the Wright Flyer and the Curtiss June Bug and carried two people.

Their next attempt was a biplane simply known as the Babcock machine. Still small in size compared to other aircraft of the period; the biplane was first powered by a one cylinder 3 hp motorcycle engine. Running on the ground, the plane built up a speed of 18 mph before it lifted into the air and flew a distance of over 75 feet before giving out. The next flight was made with a two cylinder Curtiss 7 hp motorcycle engine which proved even more successful.

So important was this young club’s experiments that the Aeronautics magazine of 1909 featured two articles on them and Jane’s All The Worlds Airships for 1909, a prestigious London publication, listed them among the important U.S. aircraft of the day alongside the accomplishments of Glenn H. Curtiss, their inspiration, and other top names in aviation.

THE JUNEBUG
flown June 23, 1976

While not technically built in the museum shop, this project started the restoration and reproduction work at the Museum. The Junebug was built by volunteers and supported by Mercury and a host of local citizens. The Junebug was the first reproduction Curtiss aircraft to be built in Hammondsport and flown under the auspices of the Curtiss Museum. The original Junebug flew on July 4, 1908 making history with the first pre-announced, public flight of a kilometer or more.

THE MODEL E FLYING BOAT
flown June August 6, 1999

Work on the Model E began in 1995, following the restoration of the Museum’s Jenny. Blueprints were drawn from an original hull on loan from the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. An OX6-100 HP engine was rebuilt to power the craft and construction of hull and wings used identical wood species as the original, i.e., pine ribs, Sitka spruce keel, even a walnut steering wheel. The reproduction flew on August 6, 1999 as part of the Seaplane Homecoming that year.
MEMBER NOTES:

The Army-Navy "E" Award was an honor presented to companies during World War II whose production facilities achieved "Excellence in Production" ("E") of war equipment. This honor was only accorded to 5% of wartime industries, Mercury Aircraft receiving it for their contribution to the war effort.

AEROGRAM 09

Keep up with Curtiss Museum news and member events via our monthly e-newsletter, the Insider Update. Share your email and name with us at Community@CurtissMuseum.org to be added to the distribution list.

LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, OUR PLANS ARE EVOLVING EACH WEEK. FOR NOW, MARK YOUR CALENDARS AND WATCH FOR SPECIFIC INVITATIONS TO EVENTS.

JUNE

Date TBD: MEMBERS ONLY Art at War opening party at the Curtiss
June 25: 60th Anniversary Party & Public Dedication of Art Wilder Restoration Shop

AUGUST

August 7: Curtiss Classic Motorcycle Show & Swap Meet
August 16: Curtiss Classic Golf Tournament
August 27: MEMBERS ONLY Summer’s Last Hurrah!

SEPTEMBER

September 18: Wings and Wheels & Pilots Dinner

NEW MERCURY EXHIBIT

Many area families have a connections to Mercury through personal or family employment. Mercury was founded here in Hammondsport in 1921 and today is part of the global economy with partners and customers around the globe. The new display tells the story of the company’s founding, its alignment with Curtiss and the early airplane industry, and contributions to the Great War efforts. The display also celebrates Mercury’s diversification into a variety of other goods and international products.

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REMEMBERING KATHERINE SAUFFERER MEADE

Longtime Curtiss Museum friend and supporter Katherine Saufferer Meade went home to be with the Lord at the age of 70 on Saturday, (February 13, 2021). Katherine was born on January 8, 1951 in Faribault, Minnesota. After growing up and attending high school in Faribault, where she fell in love with playing the alto saxophone, Katherine received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Education from the University of Minnesota in 1973. A few years after returning to Faribault to teach at her alma mater, she met the love of her life, Joseph F. “Bud” Meade III on a golf course in Minnesota in 1977. A year later they were married and shortly started a family. In 1981 they moved to Hammondsport, N.Y., where they have resided since.

She volunteered for many charitable organizations but her most accomplished work was her integral role in the fundraising, design, and building of the Fred & Harriet Taylor Memorial Library, where she later served countless hours serving her community. As a result, she was named Citizen of the Year in 2006 by the Hammondsport Rotary Club. Other notable organizations include many years of leading Sunday school at the United Methodist Church, work with the Keuka Lake Association, and leading the construction of a community playground in Hammondsport. She served various boards including the Fred & Harriet Taylor Foundation, Hammondsport Community Services, and served as President of the Fred & Harriet Taylor Memorial Library.
WHAT MAKES A PLACE SPECIAL?

Is the landscape? Is it the feelings? Is it the stories? I’d argue it’s the stories…

The stories of winemaking, steamboats, Glenn Curtiss and the recollections of personal tales and family memories make this region special. For 60 years the Curtiss Museum has preserved and shared the delightful stories of this area - from historic world-changing events to local stories with citizen heroes.

Preserving stories, securing the connection for future generations, is part of the mission of the Curtiss. You can help the Curtiss Museum continue this work, it’s easy - by including the museum in your Will you can make a significant gift that ensures your legacy becomes part of this very special place.

A gift in your Will does not affect your cash flow during your lifetime and can be revoked or amended if your situation changes. You can add the Museum to your will or trust with this simple phrase, “I give the sum of ______dollars ($__________) or ______ percent of my estate to the Glenn H. Curtiss Museum, a nonprofit corporation for general purpose or use.

If you would like to chat about your plans or learn more ways to give through your estate, call Amy Gush, Chief Relationship Officer, at 607-569-7063 and she will be happy to discuss your options and desire to help the museum.