



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of SIDNEY (SID) AND CAROLYN AXELROD



Sid 1919 - 1981, Carolyn 1921 - 2015

AMA Lifetime Membership Numbers: Sid #L22, Carolyn #L23

Written by JM (1978), JC (11/1981); Reformatted by JS (05/2010), Updated by JS (05/2012, 07/2014, 01/2017, 11/2020)

The following was published in a 1978 issue of Model Aviation magazine, written by Jim McNeill, AMA Historian. Sid Axelrod was later inducted into the 1980 Model Aviation Hall of Fame.

AMA's First Life Member 'Team'

This month we honor one of the truly great model airplane pioneers of this era, Sid Axelrod. His beautiful wife Carolyn is a Life Member of AMA, too – the first such husband and wife combination in the Academy's history.

Sid is President of the famous Top Flite Company in Chicago, the world's largest manufacturers of model propellers, turning out more than two million a year. "Giving kids what they want," is how he words it when describing his company's operation, making high quality product for kids of **all** ages. These include kits of George Aldrich's *Nobler*, Phi Kraft's *Kwik-Fly*, Dave Platt's *S.E.5*, and others. Sid and Carolyn have spent most of their lives with model planes.

How did it all happen? Well, strict parents to start with! Growing up in Chicago during the Depression, Sidney was required to press exactly 12 pairs of pants in his father's custom tailoring shop each day after school before being allowed to split. Family chores out of the way, it was out the back door, leap on the racy 3-cent trolley to Cicero, and wait for that thing to clickety-clack out to the edge of town to a vacant lot where his pals were waiting for him to fly miniature airplanes. With Carl Goldberg, Pete Vaco, Gerry Ritz, Veto Garfolio, and others, he flew his twin pushers, canards, and gassies. He remembers a lot of Indoor contests won, including one with his variable pitch microfilm-covered prop in 1937.

Carolyn started going to the meets with Sid in 1938. How did he do at the contests? He placed second in the big Junior Birdmen of America Championship in 1934 with a twin pusher; 1st in Indoor Duration at an Indianapolis American Legion meet, and so on. With that little lady encouraging him, he did ok. He remembers one contest never to be forgotten. At the 1937 Detroit Nats, he shared, alternately, a bathtub to sleep in with Johnny Clemens. (Johnny verified this when asked about it, and added: "Everything was fine 'til some kid on the floor above lowered a huge, lit firecracker on a string outside the bathroom window. I was sleeping in the tub with a couple of models, and when that thing went off, the models were crushed.")

Sid and Carolyn were married in 1941 and WWII found Sid in the Pacific as a Navy Machinists Mate. After the war, he worked briefly for the immortal Enrico Fermi, designing atomic device tools at the University of Chicago. Later, with two partners, he formed the Top Flite Company in 1947. Today, 22 years later, it is going strong. Along the way, Sid invented and patented the now famous Mylar material for covering models. He devised it from draftsman's Mylar and contact cement.

A charter member of the Chicago Aeronauts in 1935, he has added to his prestigious background by becoming a Life Member of the AMA.

Carolyn has important accomplishments in her own name in the modeling world. For some 10 years, she has helped children assemble and fly Delta Darts at the AMA Nats. She was recently awarded a plaque for these services. Also, she has helped emotionally disturbed children at a Chicago school, and is a hospital volunteer. Off and on, she has been a Nats helper and booster since 1938.

For their 35th wedding anniversary in 1976, Sid presented Carolyn with a thousand dollar AMA Life Membership, and also got one for himself. Both feel this donation to the Academy is a way of giving something back for all the wonderful fun years they have had enjoying the enchantment of model airplanes.

The following was published in the November 1981 issue of Model Aviation magazine, written by John E. Clemens.

Sidney (Sid) Axelrod

On this August 21st, life ended for a much admired and loved Life Member of the Academy of Model Aeronautics. Sidney (Sid) Axelrod leaves us a legacy of many of the really important technical improvements in our modeling world. He also leaves us a beautiful image of a “Model” man with his always cheerful manner and disarmingly happy smile.

Sid’s smile was genuine because of the satisfying life that he had engineered and enjoyed. He had found a way of earning his way through life doing something he enjoyed, and encouraged by someone he loved. Model airplane building and flying had been his primary hobby since boyhood. Out of his hobby he rose to become one of the most important innovative developers and manufacturers in the field of model aeronautics as head of the very successful Top Flite Models, Inc.

After rising to contest winning level in his young competitive prime, Sid came to a pivotal point in his life as he entered the model aviation business world. Sid was part of a small group of aeromodeling experts and leaders who were employed by Comet Model Airplane Company in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

Comet at that time was the largest model manufacturer. This group included people who have had much to do with the forming of the hobby industry. With Sid were Mike Schlessinger (later Sid’s partner in Top Flite), Carl Goldberg, Johnny Clemens, Vito Garofalo, Bob Reeder, and Jack Besser, all of whom left Comet and formed their own companies. Three of that group even married girls out of the Comet office.

Sid’s marriage to Carolyn in 1941 established a most handsome husband-and-wife team. After the ensuing years of love, inspiration, cooperation, and community involvement, the “team” came into sharp focus when both Sid and Carrie became Life Members of AMA in 1976. For their 35th wedding anniversary, Sid presented Carrie with a Life Membership to AMA and he also took out one for himself.

At this difficult moment of Sid's passing, we would like to remind Carrie that she is a Life Member of AMA, and we hope she will continue to be a part of who we AMA-ers are and what we AMA-ers do.

Modelers will long enjoy the products and practices credited to Sid Axelrod. Among those credits are the first practical machine for mass-producing model airplane propellers.

Another great contribution is the very popular Mylar covering for models, MonoKote, along with the splendid bunch of kits put out by Top Flite Models.

Sid was recently inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame, the highest honor that we in model aviation have to offer. A report of this award and more on the life of this fine gentleman can be found in the September 1981 issue of *Model Aviation* magazine. Many other articles about Sid can be found in other back issues.

Our sympathies certainly go out to Carrie and other members of Sid's family. I guess what those who had been close to Sid Axelrod will remember most will be his happy smile. He loved model airplanes, but even more he loved airplane modelers. As was said at his services, "He was a fine model of a man in his world of modeling."

-John E. Clemens

The following was published in the September 1981 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

During the Thirties, the name Sid Axelrod began appearing at the top of competition results lists from the Junior Birdmen, American Legion contests, all the Chicago area meets, and even AMA's Nationals.

The transition from top notch builder and flier to designer, developer and engineer was natural considering the talents of Sid Axelrod. Of his articles published during the early 1950s, many will recall the Wind Tunnel for models that appeared in *Model Airplane News*. His designs were kitted by both Comet Models and his own Top Flite Models. Each succeeding design reflected a growth in technology and development to set a standard for any comparison.

To his credit is the development of the first practical machines for turning out wood propellers in mass production technique so as to make propellers available to all modelers. These machine designs and set ups for carving and preparing model propellers are still industry standards.

He was also the moving force behind the adoption of industry standards for propeller safety instructions and directions to give the modeler a safer product and the information for proper use of the product.

Constantly in search of solutions to the modeler's problems, Sid developed the process to form and shape balsa which expanded the shapes and styles of model kits as we see them today.

The development of a Mylar plastic covering, specifically designed and modified for use in covering model airplanes, is yet another revolutionary concept from the mind of "Mr. MonoKote," as Sid Axelrod has become known.

Reasons of the award could be concluded here. The explanation of the development of Top Flite Models relates directly to Sid Axelrod, and that development is very much in evidence to all modelers. The reputation of the company and its man are without question.

But, to those who meet him, there is yet another half of this awards merit. This creative force behind one of the leading manufacturers has for decades encouraged modelers and modeling. Speaking, appearing, and performing demonstrations concerning the aspects of modeling throughout the country, there is no way to indicate the number of people who have either been introduced to aeromodeling or who have had their skills improved after meeting Sid Axelrod.

To those who meet him it becomes immediately evident that he is not a business man who happens to be in modeling, but a modeler who also is in the modeling business. A lifelong modeler, he has been a consistent booster of the hobby with physical, financial, and moral assistance.



Nats, unknown year, c. 1960s: (left to right) Matty Sullivan, Ed Manulkin (in bus), Sid Axelrod, Frank Garcher, Art Laneau. (Photo Credit: Official Photograph U. S. Navy)

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AMA History Project
National Model Aviation Museum
5151 E. Memorial Dr.
Muncie IN 47302
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

