



---

# The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of DONALD (DON) J. LOCKWOOD



January 14, 1912 – June 13, 2011      Started modeling in 1922  
AMA #4776

---

Written by DL; Submitted by CB (05/1998); Transcribed and Edited by SS (7/2002), Reformatted by JS (10/2009)

---

## Career:

- Went as part of the Illinois Model Aero Club team to the National Air Races near New York in 1925 at age 13; the team won the Mulvihill trophy.
- Held about six recorded national records by 1928.
- Learned to fly full-sized planes and became the 200<sup>th</sup> and youngest member of the Aero Club of Illinois in 1929.
- Served as contest director for many of the Illinois Model Aero Club main events.
- Elected as president of the Aero Club of Illinois in the mid-1960s; donated much material to big museums for financial reasons.
- Bought a racecar in the late 1920s whose profits paid his college tuition.
- Won numerous model contests at Ashburn Field.
- Was the last living member of the Aero Club of Illinois.

## Honors:

- 1992: Society of Antique Modelers Hall of Fame

---

*The following autobiography was written by Donald (Don) J. Lockwood and submitted to the History Project (at the time called the AMA History Program) in May of 1998 by Charlie Bauer.*

---

Today I am the only survivor of the once famous Aero Club of Illinois (ACI) and I still cherish the memories this organization provided. As with most of great aviation history, the ACI created was before and after World War I, but its model branch, known as the Illinois Model Aero Club, stayed on top since its inception in 1911. It's still tops today.

My father, as a financial executive and insurance broker for Insull Utilities, etc., knew many of the wealthy Chicago society people that comprised the 1,200 plus members of the Aero Club of Illinois. Its president, Charles Dickinson, vice president, James Stevens, secretary, Lee Hammond, and my father met on Samuel Insull's Olympia Fields Golf Course. One day I sort of tagged along and on this day in 1922, they soon assigned to Walter L. Brock, a famous pilot and engineer, the task of making a model airplane builder out of a spoiled 10-year-old brat. Mr. Brock was a genius because within three years he had trained me to build and fly winning model airplanes at Ashburn's weekly contests. In 1925, the ACI sent their model flying team to win the Mulvihill trophy event at the National Air Races near New York – including the 13-year-old boy. By 1928, I held about half of the dozen national records shown in the model airplane history books.

Mr. Brock also managed Ashburn Flying Field for the ACI, so I was a well-known character around the Laird Airplane factory, the hangars, and the downtown clubroom (number 132 at the Auditorium Hotel). At Ashburn, the rich Lockwood boy was always good for gas money for a ride in any aircraft. So, by the time I purchased student time from a legal instructor, Mr. "Tony" Mackowitz and I had many hours of unrecorded dual. He quickly taught me the right way and turned me loose in his OX-5-powered Park's biplane. Very shortly, I was asked to join the Aero Club of Illinois. My membership card indicates that I was the 200<sup>th</sup> (and youngest pilot) on the big club's 1929 roster.

I still fly with the Illinois Model Aero Club and was in the past, contest director at many of our main events. This group has never quit and has had a constant influx of new young talent to carry on with. This might be one of the many reasons the big Aero Club faded from the scene – no new people.

Publicly, Mr. Dickinson's demise in 1935 was probably the turning point. Even though he willed Ashburn to the Aero Club members, he had paid none of the bills since 1927 and had only paid the interest on the penalties for all past due taxes. This and 26 years of stalling court lawyer fees stopped in 1953 under Mr. Dickinson's successor, President Walter Brock. His 8 million dollar sale of Ashburn Field to Scottsdale, Inc. meant over 7 million dollars went for taxes, etc. In 1965, when Mr. Brock died, all ACI money was gone. Just before this, I had been elected president (succeeding Mr. Brock) and soon found out that protecting the ACI's big collection was a real drain – on me! Most remaining members meant to help financially, but they just died – broke. I have had to donate much ACI material to the big museums and today it is the base for many recently published aviation history volumes, etc.

A book about Ashburn Field should be written. It is well known how the government left tons of "Jenny" parts of Ashburn in neat canvas-covered mounds between the line of canvas hangars along Cicero Avenue. After the 1923 military air show there was a government surplus sale (my father bought a new Canadian-built JN-4D biplane for \$75, still in the crate). Most of the Jennies were unsold and they were stacked up and burned.

Still, the flight line of Ashburn Field was crowded with tired World War I aircraft – and pilots! There were several British Aces and when you addressed them you had better state their military rank, etc. – or else! They were all broke, but had managed to import Sopwith 1-1/2 strutters or Avro #504s, etc. There were two French Aces that had a French-built Avro and I witnessed their demise. Too drunk on Elderberry wine, both were standing up in the Avro cockpits punching each other as they passed a few feet over my head. Unfortunately, the unguided airplane caught on the door framework of the steel-framed east hangar. It spun around in through the open front, smashed and burned on the exact floor space that it was usually parked on. I had paid for many a flying lesson ride in that aircraft – when its owners were sober. Likewise, the Tony Yackey's imported Italian Ansaldo SVA-10. Plywood-covered, this aircraft was kept in a west side canvas hangar south of the big wooden ACI building. In the next of the canvas tent types was stored "Case" Jones – Curtiss Oriole. Mr. Brock put "Tommy" Thomas and Harold Laird on this race plane rebuild job. I was Harold's helper. Most of the model club boys had much full size aircraft

repair experience and had actually made the Chinese cook's (Ye Ham's) J-1 standard's (Waco-type) wings. (This one suffered from his constant crashes, but Ye Ham finally learned.) Today, Marion McClure owns it.

I remember the Curtiss Oriole well, because when we removed the rotted wing cloth, the ribs fell on the floor. I spent a lot of time building ribs, stitching the envelope, etc. Finally, I was alone in the tent one day. This tent had "No Smoking" signs attached all over its exterior. I had stopped spraying the nitrate dope on the finished wings and was watching a wave of dope vapor roll across the floor. At that instant, a young male stranger stepped through the tent flap with an unlit cigarette in his mouth. Unwittingly he brought a matchbox up with his hands and I saw this. I dived and rolled out under the tent edge. A second later, the tent, airplane, open barrel of dope, etc., went up with a "whoosh." My visitor died quickly – his lungs burnt to a crisp. Since 1925, in the 30 years of summer weekends that I was around Ashburn and other fields, I can recount dozens of fatalities. You don't forget them as each one taught a lesson and most were avoidable. Most were unthinking foolish mistakes by people that knew better.

Now I made a few mistakes myself...but I survived. One foolishness I participated in was volunteering to make a parachute jump to entertain the Sunday crowd when the regulars were laid up, etc. In the 1930s parachutes were made of silk which sometimes stuck together too long. For a low-level drop, I clung to a Jenny's outer rear strut and just threw the canopy out of the bag. This was known as a safe-pull off jump – unless you hit the ground on a downswing. The time I almost landed on a picket fence, the lesson sunk in. (I quit after about 18 jumps.)

Another bad arrangement: I became obsessed with building up flying hours. Once Tony Mackewitz let me fly the plane I soloed (in 1928) in his OX5-powered Parks biplane, my goal was a limited commercial ticket. My parents forbade the owning of my own plane, but secretly I owned share in many, including Charlie Aren's Waco. Now an unnamed wealthy Chicago brewery owner was supplying the ACI club members with good whiskey. Our Chicago's top families did not have to deal with gangsters. So, at Ashburn this unnamed brewery owner had a J-1 standard aircraft converted to a five passenger, Hiso-powered biplane by Nicholas Beezley Company of Saint Louis, Missouri.

There were times when my mother thought I was working late for Laird's at Ashburn or was at Armour Tech that I was night flying. My father never found out as he died in a car crash near Ashburn just before the 1929 stock market crash. This financial disaster ruined my millionaire's son's image and I became just another Aero Club boy. As such, I flew the Hisso standard east and north, passing above or below Detroit, Michigan. I came back after dark carrying a full load from Canada – following the Nickel Plate Railroad tracks, using the steel mills as a guide, the route back to Ashburn was easy. You did not indicate your cargo in your logbook.

Meanwhile, my airplane owner ran racecars in the AAA. Between him, Dewey Biggs and my father's ex-chauffeur, Cris Hede, I gravitated into driving racecars at Roby Speedway. Starting in 1927, I drove at this Hammond, Indiana, one-mile dirt oval, but was barred later as too young. So, I bought a racecar to get back in – car owners had no age restrictions. I also eventually owned the Hisso Standard aircraft. During the Depression, aviation was starvation. Owning some

good racecars was not. (I owned an ex-Indy Ford, a fast D.O. cam job that was Ralph Eckstrom's famous #66 in the AAA circuit.) My racecars, with good drivers, paid my tuition through college, etc. As my cars made money down south, etc., I stayed home because of my nighttime college courses and such. Many of my Ashburn Sundays were rewarding also because the first prize in the model contest was always the same – a free ride in the #40 Laird LCR biplane piloted by E.E. Ballough. Mr. Dickinson owned this cross-country race-winning aircraft.

Ed Ballough was an expert – he could roll the plane's wheels on the hangar roof (that roof became the Scottsdale bowling alley roof). I was by far the winning recipient of that thrilling ride, but Mr. Dickinson never failed to smile and shake my hand after I climbed down out of his #40 Laird airplane. It seemed like I was a grandson to him or Mr. Brock. I would ride down to the Auditorium Hotel early Sunday morning and open up the clubroom for Walter Brock to prepare for the day's events. Usually I would open the roll top desk to turn out a drunk, William Brock (no relation to Walter Brock). He was later famous as the Brock and Shey team that flew around the world. Mr. Dickinson didn't mind Billy Brock's hangovers. He supported many down-and-out pilots in many ways.

For instance, I was the strong young man who left clubroom #132 with Mr. Dickinson and headed for south Walter Street's early morning market madhouse. He would buy and I would carry to his taxi (he rented a Yellow cab by the day!) a crate of eggs, bushels of lettuce, tomatoes, tub of butter, etc. We would stop at Schultz's bakery on 55<sup>th</sup> Street for many loaves of white bread. Upon arriving at Ashburn, I would carry this food into the backend of the middle of the three eastern steel hangars. Here Dickinson's Chinese cook, Ye Ham, lived and presided over an always-open free lunch counter. That's right – free! As long as one could stand egg sandwiches, coffee, tea or milk, the starving pilot crowd survived. They slept through the week in the ex-Army pilot bunkhouse. This building was northeast of the east and beyond the well and control tower (with windsock). After 1928, the bunkhouse became the Partridge airplane factory until Mr. Partridge crashed. The model club purchased it from the Partridge heirs and used it Sundays only. We opened up weekdays for homeless pilots, etc., at Mr. Dickinson's request. He was such a kindly man. Several times, I would lose the winning model due to darkness. Mr. Dickinson would tell the cab driver to drive across that rough field. The cabby would do it because those early Yellow cabs were really built strong. We would bump along until the driver observed the model's white wings by using his standard swivel spotlight. Anything, big or little, that Mr. Dickinson could do to further public approval for anything that flew – he would do it!

I wanted #40, but Mr. Dickinson willed that Laird to Ed Ballou. When Mr. Ballou died in bed much later, his widow had the #40 Laird hung in Jacksonville, Florida, Technical Vocational High School. This school offered to trade #40 for a post-World War II trainer. I answered their trade-a-plane ad and offered my Waco UPF-7 #N-29903 in trade. The school accepted my trade, but Mrs. Ballou's lawyer blocked it. They did not want it flown again. #40 went into a load of scrapped aircraft deposited in the hold of a ship that was bought by the Japanese about 1960. We have all lost out on many famous aircraft. I could write a lot on personal disappointments, like this during 1936 at Mr. Dickinson's executor's order (his sister, Dr. Frances Dickinson), I helped smash with a tractor the rest of Dickinson's airplane collection – this included the big cabin job. This was an ex-World War I French bomber and was a Renault-powered Breuget biplane. Also

destroyed was a stored 1920 Verville Packard race plane plus two mid-1920s Curtiss R3C3 racing type biplanes. She also scrapped a pre-World War I Baldwin Red Devil aircraft. Now Mr. Brock did not approve of this revenge by a bitter family and I helped him save parts of Mr. Dickinson's treasures. I still have managed to hold or donate much of the good stuff – but that is another story.

*(signed) Donald J. Lockwood*

---

**This PDF is property of the Academy of Model Aeronautics. Permission must be granted by the AMA History Project for any reprint or duplication for public use.**

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

