

CASS & BERRIEN COUNTY, MICHIGAN PROFILES  
PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY  
WITH PEOPLE, EVENTS & PLACES  
By Jeannie Watson

# FRANK MONROE HAWKS

Frank Monroe Hawks was a local pioneer aviator, and proponent of powered airplane flight in the early 1900s. He was a resident of Benton Harbor, Berrien County, Michigan, who flew airplanes for the Heddon's Company, Dowagiac, Cass County, Michigan. As a young adult, Frank, had relatives in the Silver Creek Township region, and started his flying career in Southwestern Michigan. He flew for the Post Cereal Company of Battle Creek, Michigan. Frank inspired many local family members to fly for recreation. "We knew him before he became famous," and he was respected as a native son, although he was born out of state, traveled often, and moved to California. The Heddon's Company Museum in Dowagiac, and the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago maintain exhibits of his historic exploits. After leaving Southern Michigan, news of his daring flights filled the newspapers, and the local area embraced Frank as their "favored aviator when the newness of human flight inspired the public awe."

Born on March 28, 1897, to Charles A. Hawks and Ida Elizabeth Addington in Marshaltown, Iowa, he attended grammar school there. His parents had dreams of becoming famous actors, and joined a stock company, touring Minnesota. Frank was brought along to play juvenile acting parts. The "Roaring Twenties" brought with it Vaudeville, dreams of "show biz success," and finally moving motion pictures.

Frank is related to Cass and Berrien County Hawks family members from Massachusetts through Charles M. Hawks (16-12/23/1798) and Thankful Corse (5/4/1722-12/6/1800), both of Charlemont, Massachusetts.

In 1903, when Frank was 6 years old, Orville and Wilbur Wright achieved the world's first powered, controlled, sustained flight in an airplane. Technology was bringing great changes to American culture, and news of airplane flight swept the country. Aviators became heroes in the eyes of the public, and to be a pilot was viewed as glamorous and exciting. That influence brought Frank to love flying and he started to see it as a great adventure.

Living in Benton Harbor, Frank became involved in "heavier than air flight." He began experimenting with flying small simple planes, and gliders (no motor). He then began crop dusting for local farmers. From those beginnings, he moved to "daring" airplane performances at county fairs, and earned money by selling airplane rides at air shows.

Frank came to the attention of the Heddon's Company, and was hired to fly one of their newly acquired airplanes. His landing and take-off strip, was a rented farmer's field. Frank crash landed a Heddon's airplane, and survived the disaster. However, he was fired from his job, because of the accident. Being pink slipped from Heddon's motivated Frank to leave Michigan, where his real adventure really began.

World War I broke out in 1914 when Frank was age 17 years. The family moved to California, where Frank attended a Long Beach high school and graduated in 1916 at age 19. While in high school, Frank had another exposure to the thrill of flying, where he was given a free ride. Then he went to the University of California, "where he was a halfback on the freshman football team."

In 1917, at age 20, Frank quit college and enlisted in the U.S. Army, with plans "to become a pilot in the Aviation Section of the Signal Corps." He went through rigorous flight instruction, "received his pilot's wings," and was given a Second Lieutenant's Commission. He then "became a flying instructor at Dallas Love Field, receiving a promotion to Lieutenant. A short time later, he was made the Assistant Officer in Charge of Flying at U.S. Army Service's Brooks Field at San Antonio, Texas." Frank was a risk taker, and was willing to push his planes to their limits.

In 1919, Frank left the service, and was given the rank of "Captain in the U.S. Army, Air Corps Reserve." The planes he was flying at this time were small and slow due to the era's technology. This was a fact that saved his life when, during a flight exhibition to support the World War I "United War Work" over a San Antonio football stadium, Franks' small airplane collided with that of Lieutenant Wendell Brookely's plane in midair. Both men survived the crash and Frank was reprimanded for "dangerous flying."

Franks's first wife was Newell Hensley, 1897-1977. They had one child Frankia Ailene Hawks (9/27/191-8/21/1998 Los Angeles Co., CA). Frank was absent from home due to his work, traveling a lot when he was flying, and had the attention of many adoring fans who viewed him as a heroic and an interesting public figure. The marriage to Newell did not work out and they divorced. Newell then married Norman Douglas Vaughan. Norman adopted Frankia (Frank's daughter), and changed her name to Dolly Vaughan. As an adult, Dolly (Frankia) married a Ward and they had 2 children.

It was after this time frame that Frank attracted the attention of a wealthy young socialite, Edith Bowie. He courted her in a very public arena, and they married. This marriage was successful and they stayed together until his death. She bore him a son, David.

With his fame spreading, The Heddon Aircraft Division in Dowagiac, Michigan, despite past differences, would service Frank's aircraft when visits were made to the area. Heddon's, to this day, still maintains a small museum room, in the old plant office, that displays Frank Hawks' memorabilia. Heddon's had three airplanes: "Canuck (aka "Jenny"), the "Flying Fish," and the "Laird Swallow."

After World War I ended, Frank became an "aerial barnstormer," which means that he toured rural districts of the country and towns, putting on stunt flying exhibitions. He gave airplane rides at state fairs, put on educational flying shows, and gave speeches that informed the public about flying. Frank's speeches included tales of his WWI air flight exploits, and the "glories of flying like a bird." However, this occupation was not funded well, and he moved to California.

On December 28, 1920, while in California, Frank's luck started to change. He was at a state fair in Los Angeles, California giving airplane rides to spectators for \$10.00 per ten minute ride. Amelia Earhart was there with her family. Her father "arranged for a flight and paid the \$10.00 fee for a 10-minute hop." Michigan's Frank Hawks, was the first pilot to give Amelia Hart, the young debutant, her first plane ride. Amelia, of course, went on to become a famous female air plane flier,

and forged the way for women to enter the arena of flying.

Frank then joined the Gates Flying Circus. He was involved in the plane to plane "first in-flight refueling" ever to occur in 1921 at age 25. "Flying his Standard J-1 World War I trainer (airplane), carrying wing-walker Wesley May aloft" who had a five gallon can of gas, Frank joined Earl Daughterty (in the air) who was flying his JN4D Jenny aircraft. "Circling over Long Beach, California," Mr. May, "stepped over to Earl's ship from Frank's aircraft, in mid air, and poured gas into the Jenny's tank." The public, already mesmerized by air flying refueling went wild. After all, one mistake and the refueler would have fallen to his death. After that stunt, the public started hearing more and more about the fearless pilot, Frank Monroe Hawks.

The newspapers would write articles about him that focused on his bravery, portraying him as an adventure seeking, risk-taking champion. He had to constantly travel.

In 1922, Frank flew down to Veracruz, Mexico for an inaugural ceremony and landed at the Stadium at Xalapa. There the Mexican "Compania Mexicana de Aviacion" hired him as a "pilot flying special charter service routes." His Standard J-1 two person plane was modified to carry five passengers. While there he managed a ranch near Tampico, would fly to Mexico City to run errands, and carried the oil fields payroll. Eventually, he returned to the U.S.A.

By 1927, Frank was age 31 and still "eking out a living flying." Around this time he met Edith Bowie. She was wealthy, impressed by the poor but glamorous "fly-boy." They courted, and then married. She bought him a Mahoney Ryan B-1 Brougham (NC3009) airplane, and he called it the "Spirit of San Diego."

After Charles Lindbergh made his transatlantic flight, Frank flew Edith to Washington, D.C. to greet Lindbergh. While there "the Ryan Aircraft Company hired Frank as their official representative. With his new job and Edith's support, Frank's outlook on life began to soar. He won a flying contest and a substantial cash prize. He started using self-promotion techniques to get his name in print more often. He was then offered a contract with the "Maxwell House Coffee Company" to help promote their image, and inspire the purchase of their products.

All of that publicity led to a job offer from the Texaco Oil Company, who hired Frank to head up their Aviation Division, as a Superintendent to market aviation products." The company had a custom built Ford Trimotor (NC3443) airplane built for him. They called it the "Texaco One," and many promotional exhibitions followed. After that, Frank went on a nationwide goodwill tour (for Texaco), visited 175 U.S. cities, flew 56,000 miles of cross country flying, and carried 7,2000 passengers."

During his time with Texaco, Frank made a number of trips to Michigan for promotional and family visits. His sojourns are documented at the Heddon's Company Museum in Dowagiac, Michigan with pictures, his signature on paperwork, and displays. Frank was "on his way," and his career soared.

Frank convinced Texaco to fund the building of more technically advanced airplanes, which flew faster and higher than the last. He broke speed records, transcontinental flight records, and experienced a number of crashes which he survived. Texaco was receiving so much good publicity

from Frank's antics, they followed his lead and funded his increasingly advanced airplane desires. Frank encouraged air courier service, pioneered gliders, championed long-distance flying, passenger planes, and excelled in airplane racing contests.

Frank worked with the Lockheed Aircraft Company in Burbank, California to build bigger, better and faster aircraft, which he then convinced Texaco executives to buy for his use. When he flew an airplane it was technologically "cutting-edge" and the best that money could buy.

The U.S. Army and Navy became interested in Frank's ideas and exploits when he bested their finest planes in air races. Airplane design and technology was improving so rapidly with Frank's urging, as well as with other famous pilot's flying exploits, that "fly-boys" in the media became things of legend. Goodwill tours of Europe had Frank flying across the Atlantic and touring Western Europe's major cities. His name was always in local and national newspapers.

How did Frank's flying exploits effect the Hawks family at home in Southwestern Michigan? Frank's many cousins were in awe. They grew up hearing over and over again about Cousin Frank Hawks, and his airplane flying exploits. In 1932, when Frank crashed the "Texaco 13" airplane., the fascinating "hair-raising stories" spread quickly. His bravery, his love of flying, and his hero-like fun filled adventures, dazzled an already enamored public and family. Occasional plane crashes never dimmed the memories of their glorified Cousin Frank Hawks. These early childhood impressions of flying would stick with local relatives for their entire life. Several generations of relatives were urged to learn to fly, and the Dowagiac Airport became a refuge, and meeting place, for local pilots, who would fly for the pure joy of the experience.

By this time in Frank's history, he was kept busy on his job at Texaco and was doing sideline promotional stunts for Lockheed. He decided to cash in on his notoriety, and write his autobiography. It was entitled "Speed" and was published in 1930, "documenting his life and aviation career." The book became very popular. The Texaco Company was extremely pleased with Frank, and the image he helped promote for the company. A new Northrop Gamma 2A airplane was designed especially for Frank. When the Sioux Indian nation gave him an honorary title of "Chief," Texaco named the new airplane the "Texaco Sky Chief" and called their premium gasoline by the same name. Frank continued to promote the glories of flying and the advancement of air technology. Texaco made the gasoline that brought profit to the company. He had many famous friends in the flying business, and was always in the news. He exploited his flying career as an "ace pilot" with countless promotional ventures.

The Post Cereal Company in Battle Creek, Michigan hired Frank as a spokesman to promote the cereals they were targeting for sell to children. To further their goals, Frank was featured in newspaper comic strips and children's adventure books. These shameless marketing ploys billed him as "Captain Frank Hawks" or "Meteor Man." Two fan clubs were started, "Air Hawks" and "Sky Patrol." When Frank would fly to the Post Cereal Company in Battle Creek, Michigan, he would stop in Dowagiac to refuel and get his plane serviced.

Frank Hawks became friends with humorist Will Rogers, when they were involved in a "fund raiser for the Red Cross to assist Oklahoma drought victims in 1931." Rogers realized that Frank had a natural acting ability, and included Frank in his "folksy act." Frank gradually became involved in the

entertainment industry. He was featured in a radio series called the "Hawk's Trails," had the starring role in (the movie) "Klondike" (1932), and became a leading actor in a film serial, "The Mysterious Pilot" (1937). Frank wrote a second book "Once To Every Pilot" in 1937. He wrote numerous articles and "promotional stories," also, promoting aviation.

In 1937, Frank Hawks was 40 years old, his flying career was very successful, and he was being urged by Edith (his second wife) to retire from the dangerous flying of experimental aircraft and stunt flying, that she feared would take his life. He announced his retirement and took a job offered to him by "the Gwinn Aircar Company, taking on the title of vice president in charge of sales. He toured the U.S., giving flying demonstrations in the new safety aircraft, the Gwinn Aircar."

On August 23, 1938, Frank was 41 years old. He had "shuttled to East Aurora, New York to show off his "polliwog" (Gwinn Aircar airplane) to a prospect" (buyer), sportsman J. Hazard Campbell." There were telephone wires at the end of the polo field where he had landed, and where he had to take-off, which were partially obscured by trees. When the pair lifted off the ground for the test ride, the plane cleared a fence, made it through the trees on either side, but then a wheel snagged the telephone wire, and it flipped. The fiery crash ended the life of both aviators. Years before that accident, Frank had told friends, "I expect to die in an airplane."

Flying was so firmly engrained into the minds of the Michigan Hawks family, it would never leave, and was passed to several generations following Frank's time in history. The death of a family legend was not taken lightly. The irony, of course, was that Frank was killed flying a slow, supposedly safe, small airplane. Frank Hawks' life of flying was later called "The Golden Era of Air Racing." Many of his Southwestern Michigan cousins carried on the family tradition and became private pilots. One such female relative even became a commercial flight instructor. Frank Hawks planted the seeds that grew into a local family obsession and hobby. Despite the many places he traveled, Cass and Berrien County, Michigan remembered Frank as one of their own local heroes. The Dowagiac Heddon's Museum still exhibits Frank's picture and local history. The Chicago Museum of Science and Industry, to this very day, display Franks Texaco #13, NR1313 airplane. It is suspended from the ceiling over his exhibit.

In conclusion, Frank Monroe Hawks, local cousin and once the employee of Heddon's Aviation Company in Dowagiac, Michigan, was a famous pioneer airplane pilot when flying was still in its infancy. He was a promoter of airplane flying as an advanced form of transportation, an eager force for technological improvement, and urged others to enjoy it as a sport. He became involved in daring races, airplane exhibitions, and promotional ventures. He was a barnstormer, aviation speed racer, and experimental plane flier. Frank was a writer, radio personality, movie actor, and hero to children and role model to adults. His local artifacts and history are kept at Heddon's. Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry still exhibit his plane, and tell the public his story.. There was a rather famous promotional saying which followed Frank when he was shuttling merchandise to customers for Heddon's stating "DON'T SEND IT BY MAIL, SEND IT BY HAWKS." Frank was, indeed, a local flying legend, and has earned his place in Cass and Berrien County, Michigan history of flight.

#1 - Special Thanks To: Don and Joan Lyons of the JAMES HEDDON'S COMPANY, HEDDON AIRCRAFT CO. DIV. MUSEUM, DOWAGIAC, MICHIGAN for the museum tour and information about Frank Hawks.

#2 - Special Thanks To: THE "SCIENCE & INDUSTRY MUSEUM," CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, FRANK HAWKS EXHIBIT.

Author's Notes #1: It should be noted that "The Heddon's Company of Dowagiac, Michigan," where Frank Hawks briefly worked as an airplane pilot was a privately owned business that made fishing tackle and "feathered flies" bait for sport fisherman in the early 1900s. They created a Heddon Aircraft Company Division hoping to cash in on the lucrative flying interest that was sweeping the country. In total, they bought five airplanes, hired 3 pilots (one of which was Frank Hawks), 3 mechanics, a salesman, an aerial photographer specialist and even a janitor.

Author's Note #2: Heddon's aircraft sub-division was a lucrative and exciting business that flourished making its money with "the sales of airplanes," "scheduled general freight delivery throughout Michigan and Indiana," and the servicing and repair of airplanes." The company did "aerial photography" (local governments started using aerial pictures to determine land taxes). Heddon's profited with fair exhibitions, promotional flights (planes would carry banners aloft advertising products), hired pleasure rides, and the delivery of Heddon's products.

Author's Note #3: The Dowagiac Airport played a major role in local Cass County airplane history. Although it was created after Heddon's corn field landing strip was in existence, In order to fly anywhere out of, or into Southwestern Michigan, one had to stop and refuel in lower Michigan. Dowagiac was one of only a few options at this time in Southwestern Michigan with a smooth enough landing & take-off field (which later officially became the Dowagiac Airport). Every time Frank Hawks stopped in Dowagiac to travel between Battle Creek, Ohio, and California, or visit local Hawks family, Heddons would call the newspaper and radio stations (no television in this era) for the publicity.

## RESEARCH

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- Hawks Family Interviews with "Snooky" Aubrey Hawks & his sons
- Cecil & Betty Page memories of flying, and family history
- "History of Cass County," The Lewis Publishing Co., Chicago, IL
- Land Title Records of Cass County, MI
- Cass & Berrien Co., MI History & Genealogical Society records
- Barbara Hawks Elliot, Betty Gene Hawks Page Budd & J.W. Page Watson family records
- Heddon's Company Museum records, pictures and artifacts
- Science & Industry Museum, Frank Hawks Airplane Exhibit, Chicago, IL
- Wikipedia on-Line, Frank Hawks article
- Books - "Speed" (1931, autobiography) & "Once To Every Pilot" (1937) by Frank Hawks
- Frank Hawks' Obituary," Lima News, Lima Ohio, 8/24/1938
- Book - "Dowagiac's Cardinal Charlie Remembers . . ." by Charles D. Gill
- Mardee Ward (descendent of Frank Hawks), info & pictures
- Picture courtesy of Betty Gene Hawks Budd
- Author's Local History/Family Lore/Legends Of The Past/Genealogy Files

