

Granville Airplane Company Oral History Collection

1978-1990

7 interviews, 17 tapes (0.25 linear feet)

Call no.: MS 911

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Between 1929 and 1934, the Granville Airplane Company manufactured their distinctive Gee Bee aircraft at the airport in Springfield, Mass., using a hangar converted from a former dance hall as their plant. Originally from New Hampshire, the five brothers drew upon their self-taught mechanical ingenuity in the years after the First World War to transform an automobile and aircraft repair business into aircraft design and production. The brothers flew their first craft in Boston in May 1929, a biplane they advertised as "the fastest and most maneuverable licensed airplane for its horsepower in the United States," moving operations to Springfield later that year. Although only about two dozen Bee Gees were ever manufactured, the planes gained a wide reputation for their innovative aerodynamic designs, raw power, and extraordinary success on the air racing circuit. Gee Bees claimed speed records and numerous prizes, including the coveted Thompson Trophy in 1932 won by pilot Jimmy Doolittle, but their reputation for instability in the air (partly a function of their power) and the impact of the Great Depression caused the company to cease operations in 1934.

Aviation historian Tom Nallen conducted a series of interviews with former employees of the Granville Airplane Co. beginning in the late 1970s, recording memories of the company and its workers, the Bee Gee planes, and their performance during the golden age of air racing.

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Background on Granville Airplane Company

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Springfield, Mass., using a hangar converted from a former dance hall as their plant. Originally from New Hampshire, the five brothers drew upon their self-taught mechanical ingenuity in the years after the First World War to transform an automobile and aircraft repair business into aircraft design and production. The brothers flew their first craft in Boston in May 1929, a biplane they advertised as "the fastest and most maneuverable licensed airplane for its horsepower in the United States," moving operations to Springfield later that year.

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Scope of collection

Aviation historian Tom Nallen conducted a series of interviews with former employees of the Granville Airplane Co. beginning in the late 1970s, recording memories of the company and its workers, the Bee Gee planes, and their performance during the golden age of air racing. The interviewees include Paul Roberts, an employee, and Robert Granville, the last surviving brother.

Collection inventory

Agnoli, Gordon B.: oral history with Thomas E. Nallen, Ron Harrison, and Dan Clinney	1978 Feb 25	1 cassette tape : 00:51:01	Tape 6
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Agnoli (1907-1996) was a painter for the Granville Airplane Co., hand-painting the insignia on the planes flown by Jimmy Doolittle and later founding and operating Agnoli Sign Co. of Springfield. Recollections of the Granville brothers, Jimmy Doolittle, painting the planes; workplace environment at Granville Airplane Co.

Granville, Robert: oral history with Thomas E. Nallen	1978 May 4	4 cassette tapes : 01:02:47	Tape 1
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Granville was the last surviving brother of the five owners of the Granville Airplane Company.

Hall, Robert L.: oral history with Thomas E. Nallen	1990 Jan. 31	1 cassette	Tape 5
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tape :
01:21:50

A 1927 graduate of the University of Michigan, Hall (ca.1906-1991) worked briefly with Fairchild Aircraft Co., before becoming chief engineer at Granville Aircraft: he was designer of the Gee Bee 'City of Springfield' racer. After Granville, Hall worked for Grumman Aircraft Engineering Corp., where he became a test pilot as well as one of the designers of the F4F Wildcat, the F6F Hellcat, the F8F Bearcat, and the F7F Tigercat. The interview includes Hall's impressions of his first test flight with a Gee Bee sixty years before; work with the Granvilles; Sportster model; Grumman Wildcat; impressions of the Granville brothers.

Miller, Howell W. 'Pete': oral history with Thomas E. Nallen 1978 Jan. 28 4 cassette tapes : 02:05:19 Tape 3

Pete Miller (1902-1995) was a pioneering aircraft designer who worked as chief engineer with Granville Aircraft Co. from 1932-1934. Among other projects, he helped design the Gee Bee R-1 flown by Jimmy Doolittle that broke the world speed record in 1932 (296 mph).

Miller, Howell W. 'Pete': oral history with Thomas E. Nallen 1978 Feb. 18 2 cassette tapes : 02:05:39 Tape 4

Pete Miller (1902-1995) was a pioneering aircraft designer who worked as chief engineer with Granville Aircraft Co. from 1932-1934. Among other projects, he helped design the Gee Bee R-1 flown by Jimmy Doolittle that broke the world speed record in 1932 (296 mph).

Miller, Howell W. 'Pete' and Bill Miller: oral history with Thomas E. Nallen 1978 Aug. 24 3 cassette tapes : 02:50:23 Tape 7

Pete Miller (1902-1995) was a pioneering aircraft designer who worked as chief engineer with Granville Aircraft Co. from 1932-1934; Bill Turner was a Navy pilot and Dean of Hastings College of Law in San Francisco and founder of Repeat Aircraft, a replica and restoration company in Rubidoux, Calif. that created models of numerous old planes, including the Gee Bee Model Z.

Roberts, Paul: oral history with Thomas E. Nallen 1980 Feb. 17 2 cassette tapes : 01:39:14 Tape 2

Roberts was an employee and son-in-law of Tom Granville.

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Language:

English

Provenance

Gift of Thomas E. Nallen, June 2016.

Processing Information

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Search terms

Subjects

- Airplanes--Design and construction
- Gee Bee (Racing plane)
- Springfield (Mass.)--History

Names

- Granville, Robert

- Nallen, Thomas E.
- Roberts, Paul

Genre terms

- Audiocassettes
- Oral histories
- Sound recordings

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