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Correspondence of A. Roy Knabenshue, 1943-1953

Extracted on Mar-29-2024 09:47:38

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SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
NATIONAL AIR MUSEUM
WASHINGTON 25, D.C.

Mr. Roy Knabenshue
3700 Imperial Highway
Inglewood, California

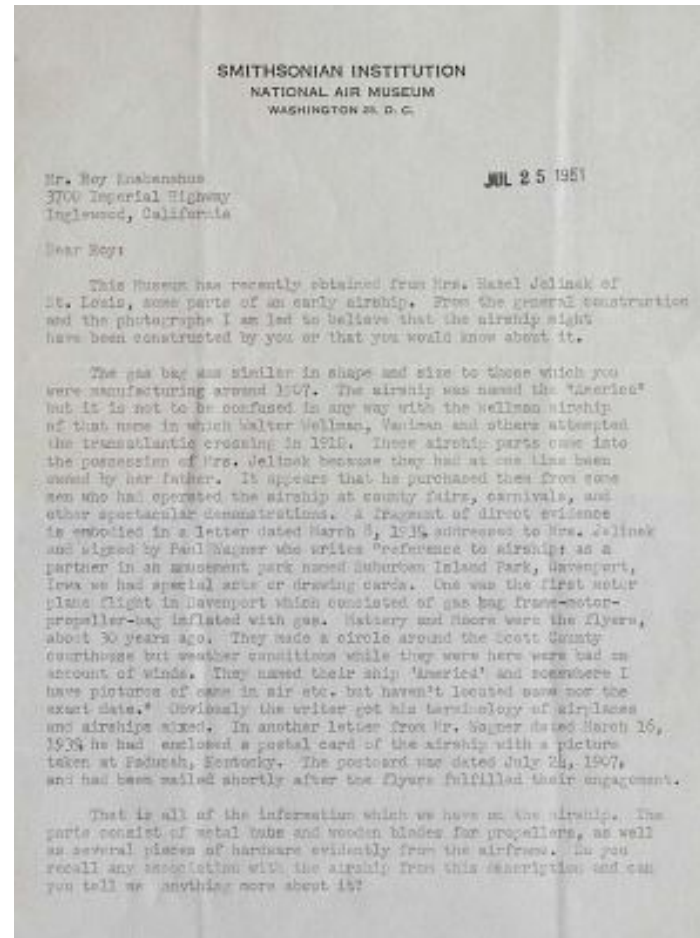
[[stamp]] JUL 25 1951 [[/stamp]]

Dear Roy:

This Museum has recently obtained from Mrs. Hazel Jelinek of St. Louis some parts of an early airship. From the general construction and the photographs I am led to believe that the airship might have been constructed by you or that you would know about it.

The gas bag was similar in shape and size to those which you were manufacturing around 1907. The airship was named the "America" but it is not to be confused in any way with the Wellman airship of that name in which Walter Wellman, Vaniman and others attempted the transatlantic crossing in 1910. These airship parts came into the possession of Mrs. Jelinek because they had at one time been owned by her father. It appears that he purchased them from some men who had operated the airship at county fairs, carnivals, and other spectacular demonstrations. A fragment of direct evidence is embodied in a letter dated March 8, 1939, addressed to Mrs. Jelinek and signed by Paul Wagner who writes "reference to airship: as a partner in an amusement park named Suburban Island Park, Davenport, Iowa we had special acts or drawing cards. One was the first motor plane flight in Davenport which consisted of gas bag frame-motor-propeller-bag inflated with gas. Mattery and Moore were the flyers, about 30 years ago. They made a circle around the Scott County courthouse but weather conditions while they were here were bad on account of winds. They named their ship 'America' and somewhere I have pictures of same in air etc. but haven't located same nor the exact date." Obviously the writer got his terminology of airplanes and airships mixed. In another letter from Mr. Wagner dated March 16, 1939, he had enclosed a postal card of the airship with a picture taken at Paducah, Kentucky. The postcard was dated July 24, 1907, and had been mailed shortly after the flyers fulfilled their engagement.

This is all of the information which we have on the airship. The parts consist of metal hubs and wooden blades for propellers, as well as several pieces of hardware evidently from the airframe. Do you recall any association with the airship from this description and can you tell me anything more about it?



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