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Captain Michael Gitt Papers - The Airline Pilot (ALPA Newsletter), 1949-1964

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said that the fare should be double that for the rental of a car. Fansler interested some of the merchants and also the St. Petersburg Board of Trade. The latter agency agreed, for public-city purposes to meet whatever sum was \$1,200 and the contract between the city and Benoist was duly signed.

Auction Off Tickets

Before the first flight started on the morning of January 1, 1914, tickets were auctioned off for the morning and afternoon trips, the proceeds to go to a community welfare project. The late A. C. Pheil, ex-mayor of St. Petersburg, won the morning flight with a bid of \$400 and the late Noel E. Mitchell, the realtor who placed the first green sidewalk bench in the city, won the afternoon ticket with a bid of \$175.

The morning flight took 23 minutes to Tampa and 20 minutes returning. The line was officially opened and, with only a few days cancelled out by reason of weather, ran on schedule during the three-month contract. Jan-nus' brother, Roger, acted as a second pilot.

A few days after the line started operations a Tampa port inspector, a Government official, decreed that the plane should be equipped and licensed according to the Steamboat Inspection Bureau of the Department of Commerce.

[[image - photograph]]

Prior to the take-off of the first scheduled passenger flight, F. C. Bannister auctions off the ticket for the lone seat.

[[image - photograph]]

The Benoist airboat takes off at St. Petersburg for the start of scheduled air passenger service. The date is January 1, 1914. Two roundtrips daily between St. Petersburg and Tampa were initially scheduled and the Line remained in operation for 3 months whiteout incident.

In compliance, the airboat carried a fire extinguisher, life preservers and a whistle.

Benoist favored federal rather than state jurisdiction over airplanes because he foresaw the day when planes would be crossing state lines as easily as automobiles and he feared that the states might set up conflicting regulations.

From Tampa cut flowers were a popular freight item since St. Petersburg, then a community of only 12,000, lacked a florist shop. The first parcel of express freight carried, on January 2, was a St. Petersburg Times photograph of the start of the first flight the previous day. There was no engraving plant in St. Petersburg either, and when the plate came back by air from Tampa this photograph was reproduced around the world.

No Gov't Mail Contract

The Times also contracted to have papers delivered by air to Tampa. Mail was carried, but not on government contract. The then Mayor of St. Petersburg J. G. Bradshaw, on January 22 was quoted in the papers:

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DECEMBER, 1913



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"The St. Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line hopes and expects to go through the entire season here without accident or injury to passengers, baggage, or express and to maintain its schedule between here and Tampa. The Benoist company has so far maintained its timeliness schedule more regularly than our trains—and has had far less engine trouble."

On March 28, only a few days before the expiration of the contract, Benoist said:

"We have not made much money but I believe we have proved that the airplane can be successfully used as a regular means of transportation and commercial carrier...."

After April 1 there was talk that other business concerns might form a new line, but nothing came of this. At the start of World War I, Jenson went to Canada to work over for the Royal Air Force. Later he joined Boeing and one day failed to return from a flight over the Black Sea.

From 1913 to '53

The first scheduled air line carried one passenger. By way of contrast, here are some facts known 1913 statistics:

Last year the world's scheduled air lines carried 45 million passengers.

Today there are 30 air lines in more than 60 countries.

The world's air line fleet now includes 1,000 aircraft.

From 1914 to 1932, approximately 1,000 new transport aircraft were delivered, about 900 of which were built in U. S.

In 1953, every day more than 121,000 persons fly more than 62 million miles on the world's air lines.

PAGE 5

"The St. Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line hopes and expects to go through the entire season here without accident or injury to passengers, luggage, or express and to maintain its schedule between here and Tampa. the Benoist company has so far maintained it twice-daily schedule more regularly than our trains-and has had far less engine trouble."

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From 1913 to '53

The first schedule air line carried on passenger. By way of contrast, here are some little known 1953 statistics:

Last year the world's scheduled air lines carried 45 million passengers.

Today there are 70 air lines in more than 40 countries.

From 1946 to 1952, approximately 1,000 new transport aircraft were delivered, about 900 of which were built in U.S.

In 1953, every day more than 123,000 persons fly more than 67 million miles on the world's air lines.

December, 1953

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