

Kanestio Historical Society Times

23 Main St - P.O. Box 35 - Canistota, NY 14823
(607) 698-2086 Wed - Fri 1-3 PM Monthly Meetings - 3rd Tuesday 7:00 PM
www.kanestiohistoricalsociety.com

2020 Vol. 4 - Fall kanestiohs@gmail.com Gail Davis, Editor

“COAST TO COAST IN 12 CRASHES”

Canistota's Role in Cal Rodgers Flight of the Vin Fiz

Submitted by John Babbitt



The Vin Fiz was an early Wright Brothers Model EX Pusher Biplane. Our story begins with the Wright Brothers, Wilbur and Orville, who on December 17, 1903 made the first controlled flight of a heavier-than-air aircraft in Kitty Hawk, NC. Much of their early experimentation with aircraft was done in secrecy. But by 1911 the publisher William Randolph Hearst offered a

\$50,000 prize to the first aviator to fly coast to coast, in either direction, in less than 30 days.

Calbraith Perry Rodgers, grandnephew of naval hero Oliver Hazard Perry and a risk-taking sort of sportsman, had taken about 90 minutes of instruction from Orville Wright in June 1911 before soloing. Rodgers became the first private citizen to buy a Wright airplane, a Wright Model B modified called the Model EX. The plane's 35

horsepower engine allowed a speed of 50 miles per hour (80 km/hr) at 1000 feet.

Since the airplane would need a considerable support crew, Rodgers persuaded J. Ogden Armour, of meatpacking fame, to sponsor him, and named the plane after Armour's new grape soft drink Vin Fiz becoming America's first flying billboard. Cost to Armour \$150,000 who arranged to have a special, three-car train filled with a spare airplane, spare parts, fuel, two mechanics, Rodgers' wife Mabel, his mother, and friend Charlie Wiggin. One car was a Palmer-Singer touring coach for accommodations, and a baggage car was outfitted as a repair shop. The train also was emblazoned with "Vin Fiz" on its sides, and would sometimes follow, sometimes lead in the journey, since Rodgers' planned route used railroad tracks as his principal guide – the old-time flyer's famous "iron compass."

The plane, frail by today's standards, was state-of-the-art in 1911 – a linen-covered, spruce-framed biplane with a 35hp water-cooled motor chain-driving two eight-foot pusher propellers. Rodgers would face a roughly 4,000-mile flight perched out in front, flying without instruments or navigational aids or maps, certainly with no heater or other creature comforts, at a breathtaking (and time-consuming) 45 to 55 miles per hour. A bucket seat, an unlit cigar, and a wide nation to conquer... and not a single airport or guiding beacon ahead.

In addition to the Vin Fiz endorsement, Mabel Rodgers used the flight to promote an airmail service, and sold special 25-cent postage stamps for items to be carried on the airplane. They were semi-official - the Post Office tolerated them, but insisted that mail carry regular stamps as well. The stamps were large, inscribed "RODGERS AERIAL POST" and "VIN FIZ FLYER," with a picture of the airplane in the center. On board were 263 pieces of mail.

At 4:25 PM on the afternoon of September 17, 1911, dressed in a business suit and tie sheltered under layers of sweaters and a sheepskin vest, his epic journey began at Sheepshead Bay, near New York City. Close to 2000 spectators paid \$1.50 to witness the takeoff since there were bets that he wouldn't make it past the Hudson River.

The Vin Fiz carried no directional instruments, navigating by following railroad tracks. His first leg that day ended at Middletown NY, a 104-mile

trip taking nearly two hours. The takeoff the second day was made in a strong wind. As the Vin Fiz lifted off, a wing struck a tree, and Cal crashed into a chicken coop. The only parts undamaged were the radiator and one of the gas tanks. Cal suffered a scalp cut. The mechanics went to work at once, and after two days, the Vin Fiz was again ready to fly.

September 22 he circled Stow Park in Binghamton and flew on to Elmira where he landed for the night. Reaching Cameron the next morning word flashed to the Canisteo Times. As he approached Canisteo on Saturday the 23rd, the aircraft developed trouble and Rodgers was forced to land on the Flint Farm between Canisteo and Hornell instead of the Hornell Fairgrounds where almost 4000 spectators had gathered.

News of his rough landing spread like wildfire among the communities by telegraph, horseback and even noon whistles. The first person to greet Rodgers here was Theodore Cobb, owner of the Up-to-Date Advertising Company. Scores of school kids raced to the site for autographs. Margaret Harring's father Mortimer Haring, a Canisteo Pharmacist, captured Rodgers' emergency landing on glass plate images.

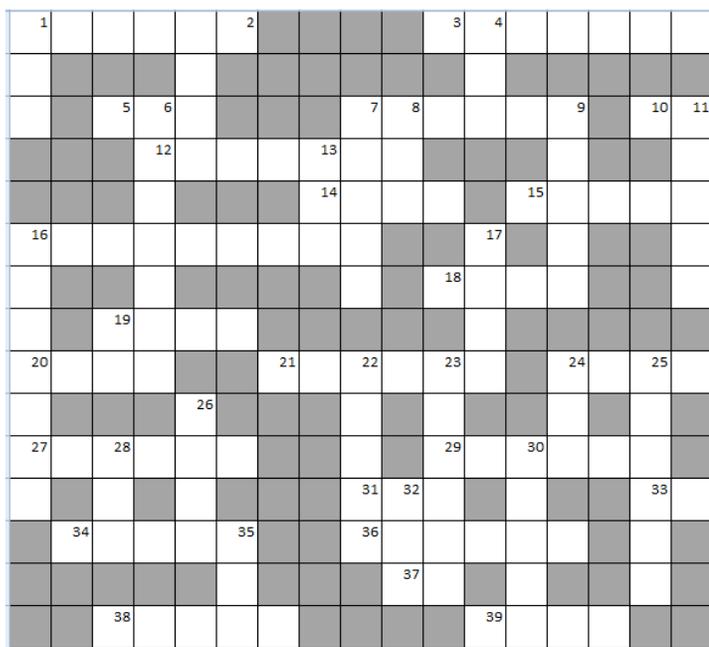


Mechanics traveling in the railroad car took the Hornell-Canisteo Electric Railway into Canisteo looking for help. The VIN FIZ was hitched to a team of horses and towed to ALFRED SLAWSON'S CARRIAGE and BLACKSMITH SHOP at the corner of Maple and Sixth Streets in CANISTEO. Twelve employees worked through the night to get the VIN FIZ ready for a next day flight. While waiting for repairs Cal spent the night at the Sherwood Hotel in Hornell.

continued on page 4

1950's Canisteo Crossword Puzzle

submitted by Lyle Barron



Across:

1. Town road named after a politician
3. Neighborhood store at the end of Union St. in the 50's
5. The highest card in a poker hand
7. Owner of dairy farm where Canisteo elementary & sports fields are now
10. Two letter approval
12. Canisteo street; also a name for a grove of fruit trees
14. Sommers _____
15. Creek flowing into Bennett's Creek
16. Construction company that built Purdy Creek Bridge
18. Last name of owner of liquor store in 40's and 50's; rhymes with a candied breath freshener.
19. In track & field events, Roger Bannister was the first to break the 4 minute _____.
20. So be it
21. Staffy and his father _____ owned Totten's Grocery
24. Owner of PK's restaurant; (short for one who denied Christ)
27. Their gas well (just over the bridge on the west side of Bennett's Creek road "came in" in the night hours.
29. Jacob's _____.
31. Informal humorous term for old men.
33. Knock out.
34. Aromatic spice with a bold licorice flavor.
36. Canisteo town team umpire; Liquid for basic life (plural)
37. not "they" but _____
38. The southernmost thru street from Greenwood St. (Upper most)
39. As soon as possible

DOWN

1. First name (s) of pharmacist at Beaver's in the 50's & 60's
2. Down Depot street and _____ the river
4. Lubricant
6. Popular swimming hole in the 50's (summer activity bus transported kids to and from)
7. Prior name of Tony's Corner Store (also long necked bird)
8. The good kind of cholesterol
9. Name of owner of sporting goods store before it was Cleveland's
11. Last name of low flying local pilot in the early 50's
13. Expression when you catch someone by surprise.
16. Maple Street hatchery
17. The Jackson _____
19. A saying: "_____ myself and I
22. to give permission
23. To erase from your contact list
24. Paper glued together for writing notes
25. The path from the movie theater to Russell Street (a large bird)
26. Corner grocery store in the 50's where Big Papa's is now
28. 1st name of Canisteo DVM
30. 1st name of one of the daughters of the town team baseball umpire
32. The New Testament is known as God's grace whereas the Old Testament is _____.
35. When we are hungry we want to _____.

Comments From our Readers

We have missed visiting with our members during the shelter in place days so are always pleased when we get your emails and comments. We would love to hear from more of our readers and be able to share your thoughts with other members.

Dana Aultman writes : *This issue really touched a note with me. I also remember the Turkey Path and the theater. I remember having to go outside to go to the bathroom. I did just that while watching "Creature from the Black Lagoon" around 1954 or so. The movie was riveting, but I really, really had to go. On returning to the dark theater, my eyes were not adjusted to the dark and as I was walking down the aisle, the creature sprang up from the swamp and everyone screamed. It scared me so much I just leaped out into the dark and hit my head on the side of a seat and drew blood. It's funny as hell now, but it wasn't back then.*

Vin Fiz continued from page 2

The next morning Cal was off to Akron, Ohio, While in route Cal was blown off course by strong winds, and he lost sight of the railroad. Dark was rapidly approaching, and Cal had never flown in the dark. The plane had no lights, and the countryside had no city lights. Cal managed to keep flying in the dark, then the moon appeared and he attempted a landing. He touched down safely in a pasture crowded with cows. Afraid that the cows would do as much damage as the sightseers, Cal spent the night chasing them away from the Vin Fiz.

The next day, Cal left Ohio running into lightning storms and barely keeping the Vin Fiz flying. On landing in Indiana, he hit a fence and broke both props, one wing and the landing gear. The mechanics were able to repair the plane again, but by this time, it was becoming obvious that Cal would never make it to the Pacific by the deadline. Cal did not admit defeat, but continued on, arriving in Chicago on October 8. By this time, Cal had flown 1,199 miles in 21 hours and 53 minutes.

Next Cal arrived in Missouri, but the 30-day time limit on the prize money had expired. But Cal was not disappointed, for he knew that he could still fulfill his dream of being the first aviator to cross the US by air. Cal next headed southwest for Texas and the last half of his big adventure. By now, however, the Vin Fiz was wearing out, in spite of the mechanical care it was given, and it took two weeks for Cal to make it across Texas.

After crossing the California border and only 178 miles from his destination, the Vin Fiz blew a cylinder. Hot steel splinters were driven into Cal's right arm, and hot oil was splashed in his face. He managed to maintain control and landed in the California desert. Doctors removed the steel splinters and the mechanics repaired the engine. The next day, both pilot and airplane were ready to fly. To reach a suitable take-off site, Cal and the mechanics had to push and carry the Vin Fiz four miles over the desert.

On November 5, 1911 more than 20,000 persons jammed into Tournament Park in Pasadena, California, waiting for Cal to arrive. The Vin Fiz responded and climbed once more into the sky. Then the engine failed and the worn-out machine plunged 100 feet to the ground. In the crash, Cal broke both legs and his collarbone, along with

several ribs. But still he would not give up, Cal didn't feel his journey was complete until he reached the ocean. A month later, Cal again tried and this time his dream was fulfilled. On December 10, 1911, the Vin Fiz landed on the beach off Long Beach, CA. He taxied down and let the salty waves of the Pacific wash over the wheels of the little plane that had first crossed the US. The crowd gathered on the beach and applauded the man who walked on crutches with his legs in casts. He had realized his dream.

Cal's actual flying time was 82 hours and two minutes. Bad weather, frequent accidents, and nightfall were the challenges of the flight, with an average flying speed of 51 mph. Cal had fallen out of the aircraft 15 times during his crashes and all that remained of the original Vin Fiz was the vertical rudder and the engine drip pan.

The next spring, April 3, 1912 Cal took off from Long Beach, CA for an exhibition flight. His aircraft hit a flock of sea gulls and he plunged out of control into the Pacific. His neck was broken, and Cal died a few minutes later just a few hundred feet from where the Vin Fiz had made aviation history.

The abrupt visit of Cal Rodgers to the Canisteo Valley on September 23, 1911, made a huge impact on its citizens.

Accomplished Canistean

Christine Thomas recently brought me an article from *The Alfred Sun* 25 years ago column about a former Canisteo graduate, class of 1946, who had made a name for himself in the field of agriculture.

" Dr. Robert Plaisted is one of this country's top potato breeders, working at Cornell University. In the past 39 years of Dr. Plaisted's plant breeding career, he has developed and named eight varieties. He is continually crossing different potato plants to come up with that perfect potato...Kanona and Pike are two of his newest ones. He is always looking for that delicious and perfect looking table potato. The Russet Bake King, Rosa, Genesee, Elba, Allegany, NY 84 and NY 101 are some of his creations...In February, the New York Foundation Potato Growers had their annual meeting at which Dr. Plaisted announced that he finally felt comfortable in naming this new clone. Dr. Plaisted named the NY E55-44 potato clone " Andover". Andover is a good town and now has a great potato named after it!"

Bonnie Feeney Mider: *I really love reading this! I went to the theater around 1956 and thought it was Carnegie Hall. Keep up the excellent work!*

Eleanor Silliman, Retired County Historian: *Aren't you glad that as County Historian I gave the Canisteo News to Fulton History. As well as the Bath newspapers, some Corning and Hornell.*

Editor's Note: I wasn't sure how the copies of The Canisteo Times got to Fulton History. We certainly are grateful to Eleanor for her efforts on our behalf.

Thanks to Kevin and Fran Tucker for a their generous donation to help make up for the income lost from our lack of fund raisers.

Thanks to Martha and Steve Thompson for their donations and kind words of appreciation for the newsletter.

Casey Crandall posted on face book: *I love the new newsletter about the movie theater history - great job and kudos! I did go there as I could walk as a kid living at 78 Greenwood St. - two whole blocks!*

Effects of Covid on KHS

As most of you know, due to the Covid Pandemic, KHS had to cancel our monthly programs and all our fundraising projects. As a result our bank account has suffered. Luckily we had set aside an emergency cushion which will carry us through the year but our Income and Expense Statement is currently showing an \$1,600 loss and we have the winter months with high heat bills ahead of us. In order to maintain a constant temperature to preserve the numerous paper and textile collections we cannot turn down the heat to conserve. This time of year would normally be our big fund raising efforts with our Election Day Pie Sale, Christmas Cookie and Yesterday's Treasures Sales but we don't see how we can safely hold these events this year. We know there are many organizations and charities that need help right now but if you can, please consider making a donation to the Historical Society.

Annual Meeting- Our annual meeting and election of officers would normally be held in November along with our Harvest Dinner. We have decided to postpone the election of officers until such time as we feel it safe with the current officers continuing in their positions.

Answers to Crossword

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January 22, 1941 - "Canisteo Times"

Pet Pigeon Follows Children to School; Tags Mail Carrier - "It followed them to school one day, that was against the rule; it made the children laugh and play to see a pigeon at school."

Such is the story of a pet pigeon owned by children of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Gillis of Jackson Street. The bird follows the children to school, flying a short ways overhead. When the children reach the schoolhouse the pigeon perches on the cement block outside and makes several attempts to enter the building.

The bird then flies back to the Gillis home where, after a time, joins Howard Wentworth, local mail carrier, in making stops at each home. The pigeon is widely known in the South end of the Village.

Printing courtesy Citizens Northern Bank

Kanestio Historical Society
23 Main St., P.O. Box 35
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The Back Page

This newsletter is

written in tribute to Virginia Dickey whose dream was a Historical Society to preserve and display local history for future generations.

Application for Membership

Do you know someone who would like to receive our newsletter - perhaps an old classmate or out of town relative? For the low cost of \$10 (annual dues) you receive 4 issues per year of our newsletter.

Name: _____

Mailing Address:

E-mail Address:

Phone: _____

Dues: \$10.00 Individual ** \$15.00 Family**
\$150.00 Life

Make check payable to:
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P.O. Box 35
Canistota, NY 14823

Donations gratefully accepted toward operating expenses.

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