

MS-646: Ivan R. Gates Collection

Collection Number: MS-646

Title: Ivan R. Gates Collection

Dates: 1924-1930

Creator: Gates, Ivan Rhuele, 1890-1932

Summary/Abstract:

Ivan R. Gates was an Early Bird of Aviation, receiving his pilot's license in 1911, and is credited with starting the first flying school on the west coast in California. The collection documents Gates' aviation business enterprises, including the Gates Flying Circus, Gates Flying Service, and the New York-based Gates Aircraft Corporation, which manufactured the Gates Belgian RSV convertible monoplane/biplane. Gates' wife Hazel was also a pilot. The majority of the collection is contained within 4 scrapbooks (3 of photographs and 1 of newspaper clippings), along with some loose photographs and documents.

Quantity/Physical Description: 1.5 linear feet (including 4 scrapbooks)

Language(s): English

Repository:

Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University, Dayton, OH 45435-0001, (937) 775-2092

Restrictions on Access: There are no restrictions on accessing material in this collection.

Restrictions on Use:

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Preferred Citation:

[Description of item, Date, Box #, Folder #], MS-646, Ivan R. Gates Collection, Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio

Acquisition:

The collection was purchased from Cowan's Auctions in Cincinnati by Special Collections and Archives, Wright State University Libraries, in November 2018.

Other Finding Aid:

The finding aid is available on the Special Collections & Archives, Wright State University Libraries web site at <https://www.libraries.wright.edu/special/collectionguides/files/ms646.pdf>. It is also available in the OhioLINK Finding Aid Repository at <http://ead.ohiolink.edu/xtf-ead/>.

Related Material:

Clyde Edward Pangborn Papers, 1918-1959. Holland and Terrell Libraries, Washington State University. <http://ntserver1.wsulibs.wsu.edu/masc/finders/cg112.htm> ,
<https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv54721#caID>

Processed by:

Finding aid written according to DACS standards by Lisa Rickey, November 2019.

Arrangement:

The collection is arranged by format.

Biographical/Historical Note:

Ivan Rhuele Gates was born January 15, 1890, in Rockford, Michigan (a little north of Grand Rapids), son of Aaron Gates and Anna (Bell) Gates. At the age of 19 he moved to Los Angeles and became an automobile salesman. Shortly thereafter, he became interested in aviation and moved to San Francisco to open an automobile brokerage house.

By 1911, Gates had purchased a bi-plane and received one of the earliest pilot's licenses. A serious automobile accident grounded him for a time, but he met French pilot and mechanic Didier Masson. Masson refused to fly the bi-plane Gates had acquired, so "Van" set out to design and build his own plane. The focus became stability and soundness to satisfy Masson. These characteristics became central in later Gates designs. Ultimately, Gates planes would carry a million passengers with the loss of only one life, and that through pilot error, not aircraft failure.

Gates toured back East in one of his own planes in 1912. He started his first air works in San Francisco in 1913 and established the first flying school on the west coast, at Richmond, California, shortly thereafter. All the while he was still in the automobile business to raise enough money to continue in aviation and engaged in auto racing, both staging races and participating in them. In November 1916, he married Clemonce A. Thompson, in San Francisco.

When World War I broke out, Gates joined the armed forces, with an interest in the Army Air Corps, but before he could finish training and get to Europe, the armistice was in place. While waiting for a place in the Air Corps, he staged a number of Air meets, using the profits to supply sweaters, helmets, gloves to military pilots.

Gates formed the Gates Flying Circus, along with partner Clyde Pangborn, to show off the early pilots and daredevils of the air. Along with these demonstrations were often air meets / races. In the process, he helped to develop many airports around the country, so the planes could land somewhere other than a cornfield. This also helped the nation see the potential of commercial aviation. In October 1922, he married his second wife Hazel G. Wilson, in Denver, Colorado. By 1929, Hazel had learned to pilot an airplane as well.

In 1927, Gates saw that the days of the Flying Circus were over, so with Charles Day, he founded Gates-Day Aviation Company. They started by updating the Army's aircraft trainer, then went on to design and build dozens of advanced aircraft. At the end of 1928, the name was

changed to the New Standard Aircraft Company. Gates sold his interest in the company and started the Gates Aircraft Corporation and Gates Flying Service, both in New York City. The Gates Aircraft Corporation seems to have been most notable for producing the Belgian RSV, a convertible monoplane/biplane used by the Belgian air force. Also in the late 1920s, Gates operated a flying school at Holmes Airport in Jackson Heights (Queens Borough), New York.

The onset of the Great Depression seriously damaged Gates' aviation businesses, which went bankrupt in 1931. Gates tried operating an art exhibition space, but that venture met with little success. Despondent over his declining business situation, and after a fight (one of many, by some reports) with his wife on Thanksgiving Day, November 24, 1932, he told her he was going to jump out of the window of their 6th floor Manhattan apartment, then proceeded to do just that. Gates was cremated and (by his own request) his ashes scattered to the wind from an airplane over Holmes Airport by fellow flyers Clyde Pangborn and Swanes Taylor.

(The majority of the above biographical sketch was supplied by Cowan's Auctions.)

Scope and Content Note:

Scrapbooks 1-3 contain photographs, all dating from approximately 1929 to 1930. Scrapbooks 1 and 2 contain photographs depicting: Ivan and his wife Hazel wearing pilot garb and posing and sitting in or standing near their aircraft; aircraft painted with "Gates Flying Service"; the Gates Aircraft Belgian RSV convertible monoplane or biplane; and Gates with unidentified individuals. The pages of this scrapbook have been encapsulated due to the extreme brittleness of the pages. Scrapbook 3 contains photographs depicting: Gates Aircraft factory building and workers (pages 31, 38, 42, and 44); the Gates convertible plane (pages 24, 35, and 36); and the Holmes Airport (page 48).

Scrapbook 4 contains newspaper clippings from publications across the United States concerning the Gates Aircraft Corporation, Gates Belgian RSV convertible plane, and various aviation photos that were contributed to the publishers by Gates. Other topics of the clippings include articles about members of the former Gates Flying Circus, as well as women in aviation, including pilots such as his wife Hazel (see folder of loose clippings) and Elinor Smith Freeport (page 15) and the "flying stenographer" Edna Schroeder (pages 19, 25, 26). All newspaper clippings, both in Scrapbook 4 and the folder of loose clippings, date from 1927 to 1929.

Loose photographs in the collection include images of Ivan Gates, Gates Flying Circus, Gates Used Cars, Gates Flying Service, and various pilots and aircraft, including the Gates Belgian RSV. Of particular note are a handful of aerial photographs showing New Orleans, Louisiana, during Mardi Gras in 1924. All loose photographs appear to date to the 1920s, though most are undated.

Documents in the collection include exhibition catalogs and marketing materials for the Gates Flying Circus (circa 1924-1925); Ivan Gates' industrial pilot's licenses (1929-1933); Gates' personal notes on a cross-country flight in 1928; programs and menus for aviation events (1929);

two articles about Gates (1930); and a price sheet (undated) for New England and Western Airlines for which Gates was director of the Flying Services Division.

Subject Terms

Persons/Families

Gates, Ivan Rhuele, 1890-1932
Gates, Hazel G. Wilson
Babcock, George
Pangborn, Clyde Edward, approximately 1893-1958

Organizations/Corporate Names

Gates Aircraft Corporation
Gates Flying Circus
Gates Flying Service
Holmes Airport (Jackson Heights, New York)
New Standard Aircraft Company

Subjects (General)

Aeronautics -- California -- San Francisco -- History -- 20th century
Aeronautics -- History -- 20th century
Aircraft industry -- United States -- New York -- History
Airports -- New York -- Jackson Heights
Air shows
Gates R.S.V. monoplane
Gates R.S.V. biplane
Stunt flying
Women air pilots
Air pilots -- United States

Places

San Francisco (California)
New York City (New York)

Material Types

Photographs
Programs
Scrapbooks

Collection Inventory

Box	File	Description	Date
1	1	Scrapbook 1: Photographs	Circa 1929-1930
1	2	Scrapbook 2: Photographs	Circa 1929-1930
1	3	Folder of loose Photographs from Scrapbook 1 or 2	Circa 1929-1930
2	1	Scrapbook 3: Photographs	Circa 1929-1930
2	2	Scrapbook 4: Newspaper Clippings	1929
2	3	Folder of loose pages of clippings from Scrapbook 4	1927-1929
3	1	Photos: Ivan Gates	Undated
3	2	Photos: Gates Flying Circus: George Babcock, wing-walking and stunts	1926
3	3	Photos: Gates Flying Circus: miscellaneous	Undated
3	4	Photos: Gates Used Cars	Undated
3	5	Photos: Gates Flying Service	Undated
3	6	Photos: miscellaneous pilots and aircraft	Undated
3	7	Photos: miscellaneous unidentified people and events	Undated
3	8	Photos: Belgian RSV airplane	Undated
3	9	Photos: Aerial views of New Orleans, Louisiana, during Mardi Gras	1924
3	10	Catalogue and Description of Exhibitions and Pilots, Gates Flying Circus	Circa 1924
3	11	Advertisement for Gates Flying Circus: "Greetings! From the Trans-Continental Gates Flying Circus of San Francisco, California," in <i>Aviation</i> magazine	1925 Oct. 5
3	12	Ivan Gates' personal notes on cross-country flying	1928 Sept.
3	13	Program and Menu for Progress Dinner of United Business Interests to the Aviation Industry, under the Auspices of the National Exchange Club, Hotel Commodore, NY	1929 Jan. 29
3	14	Menu for Luncheon given by Charles V. Bob to commemorate the 2 nd Anniversary of Clarence D. Chamberlin's Atlantic Flight, New York to Germany, June 4,5,6 th , 1927	1929 June 4
3	15	Ivan Gates' Industrial Pilot's License (includes photo)	1929-1933
3	16	Article "Ivan R. Gates: Aircraft Manufacturer, Operator, and Pilot," by L.M. Hunt, in <i>Air Transportation</i> magazine	1930 Apr. 5
3	17	Biography "Ivan R. Gates: Designer, Manufacturer, and Operator of Aircraft," by Edward Churchill	Circa 1930
3	18	Menu for gathering of the Early Birds: An	1929 Feb. 7

<u>Box</u>	<u>File</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Date</u>
		Association of Aerial Pioneers who Piloted during the First 13 Years of Flight: A Standing Tribute to the Wright Brothers, the Early Birds of All, Hotel St. Regis, NY	
3	19	Price sheet for Trips, New England and Western Airlines, Inc. (Ivan R. Gates, Director, Flying Services Division)	Undated