



HAROLD NEUMANN PROJECT

Harold Neumann "Aviation Pioneer" Exhibit Geneseo Historical Museum



Melanie Rice

205 S. State St.
Geneseo, IL 61254
309-944-3043
geneseohistory.com

Mon: Closed
Tues - Fri 10am-12pm and 1pm-3pm
Sat & Sun: Closed

Melanie Rice began her role as the Director and Curator of the Geneseo Historical Museum on June 1, 2024, succeeding Angie Snook, who retired from the position. Before joining the museum, Melanie worked as a school social worker in the Geneseo School District for 33 years. Her connection to the museum dates back to the early 1990s when she served on the Museum Board. A lifelong history enthusiast, she fondly recalls traveling with her family as a child and visiting museums wherever they went. Melanie is excited to continue the museum's mission of educating visitors about local history.

If you are an aviation pioneer enthusiast, but are unable to visit the exhibit during museum hours, please let us know and we will try to accommodate your visit with a private tour. For research purposes, the exhibit can be reserved. Please call to do so.

The Harold Neumann Project is very fortunate to have the support of the Geneseo Historical Museum's Board. We have enjoyed another exciting year of being a part of the museum. Thank you!

Harold Neumann Project Board Welcomes Amanda Neumann as our Social Media Coordinator!

Paula Neumann Chapa - Chair

Sharon Neumann - Treasurer

Angie Snook - Curator, Harold Neumann Exhibit

Carolyn Strole - Secretary

Les Strole - Historian

BRAD CAMPBELL

STORYTELLER AND WINNER OF MULTIPLE MOTH STORY SLAM COMPETITIONS.

Several years ago, I became interested in the Golden Age of Air Racing – the aeronautical period that started in the late 1920's with the advent of the National Air Races. It was fascinating to read about larger than life pilots like Roscoe Turner, Jimmy Doolittle, Doug Davis, Jimmy Wedell and Harold Neumann; to learn about the builders who advanced aviation with their innovative designs – the Granville brothers with their unconventional Gee Bee series of racers, the Mystery Ship, whose construction was overseen by Walter Beech, and Bennie Howard with his DGA-designated creations (which stood for Damn Good Airplane) that included Pete, Ike, Mike, and Mister Mulligan.

When I began to contemplate starting a book project about that era, I was thrilled to learn that there was an actual place I could go to find out more about two of my favorite air racing heroes: pilot Harold Neumann and pilot/designer Bennie Howard. The Aviation Pioneer Exhibit at the Geneseo Historical Museum in Geneseo, Illinois, is everything an aviation nerd like me could want. It's a repository of memorabilia, photographs, air race posters, exhibits, trophies and research materials about the life and career of Harold Neumann, along with lots of great information about Neumann's mentor, Bennie Howard. While I'd learned a fair amount about Neumann over the years, I wasn't prepared for just how fascinating a character he was. Prior to my first visit to Geneseo, I purchased "From Corn Plow to Cockpit", his personal memoir as told to Charles A. Fordyce. Not only was it a great read, but Neumann's autobiography also convinced me that Harold should be a central character in the story I wanted to write about the Gold Age of Air Racing.



The memoir also served as the perfect preparation for my visit to the Aviation Pioneer Exhibit, which took place in October of 2022. The first thing that catches your eye is the huge replica of Mister Mulligan hanging from the ceiling. It was also thrilling to see original front page newspaper stories and newsreels about Harold's astonishing 1935 Thompson Trophy win in Howard's Mister Mulligan. To see Neumann's family photos of his life on the farm and to put my hands on the three-foot tall replica of the Eiffel Tower that was given to Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley by Harold after he completed the first nonstop TWA flight from Paris to Chicago in 1958, making O'Hare Airport an International Airport.

Paula Chapa, chairperson of the Harold Neumann Project, expertly guided me through personal correspondence between Harold and Bennie Howard. In short, Harold's remarkable career as a barnstormer, sky writer, air racing pilot and airline captain came vividly to life that day.

In September of 2024 I returned to Geneseo for the unveiling of the mural dedicated to Harold Neumann during the town's 18th annual Trains, Planes and Automobiles Festival. The occasion gave me the opportunity to visit the Aviation Pioneer exhibit a second time, and the experience was just as fascinating as the first. In fact, in some ways it was better. I took my time perusing the many personal artifacts and photos in the display cases, gaining more insight into Neumann's early life as an Illinois farm boy.

CAPTAIN HAROLD NEUMANN

Written on October 19, 2024 - Posted in Captain's Log Historical By Jim "Jet" Thompson

I traveled to Geneseo, Illinois on Saturday, September 21, 2024, to represent the TWA Museum at the dedication of the TWA Captain Harold Neumann Mural in downtown Geneseo.

This mural represents Captain Neumann's flying career with biplanes and air show performances and his career as an air racer. Neumann flew "Ike & Mike," twin racing planes, in the early 1930's. He also flew "Mr. Mulligan" the passenger racing plane. All three aircraft were owned by Benny Howard, a former TAT pilot.

Captain Neumann's career with TWA spanned from 1936 to 1966 and he flew many aircraft from the Douglas DC-1 to the Boeing 707. It's possible he even flew the Ford Tri-Motor but, that's not yet confirmed.

He was hired in October 1936 when Transcontinental & Western Air brought five retired Ford Tri-Motors to fly cargo. However, that venture only lasted a few months as they lost a bunch of money doing that. He then went on to fly the DC-2, DC-3, Boeing 307, all models of the Lockheed Constellation ("Connie"), and finally the Boeing 707.

On a side note, another interesting fact for those who knew the late TWA Capt. Don Peters, he later owned the racing plane "Mike" after it had been retired from air racing. Don purchased it as his first airplane. By chance, he came across it at the Plain City, Ohio airport. He and two other friends bought it before he went into the military. When he returned from his military service, he learned his two friends had sold it. Don and I came across the aircraft in 2019, in a hangar at the airport in Wadsworth, Ohio. It was hanging from the rafters, just the frame, along with "Ike!" The current owner plans on restoring at least one of them.

Back to Mr. Neumann.....

On one occasion, Captain Neumann made an emergency landing in a TWA L-049 Constellation. Just after departing Amarillo, Texas, and while circling back to the airport, he lost an engine. As he made his approach, he had to fly UNDER a powerline and the number four engine's props snagged the powerline causing him to land short of the runway into the mud. The passengers trudged through a muddy cornfield to get back to the terminal.

Later, Captain Neumann would fly the inaugural TWA Constellation flight from Paris-Orly (ORY) to Chicago O'Hare (ORD) in 1958, officially making Chicago O'Hare an International Airport. He brought home a 3-foot-tall metal replica of the Eiffel Tower from the Mayor of Paris to Richard J. Daley, the Mayor of Chicago.

Two years later he flew the first TWA passengers over the North Pole in a Lockheed L-1649A Constellation on the London Heathrow-San Francisco-Los Angeles route, a total of 23 hours and 55 minutes block time.

I wore a collection of lapel pins representing the aircraft Neumann flew for TWA. I would have included my Boeing 307 pin, but I didn't learn until that day he had also flown that aircraft and I didn't have it with me.

I hope I represented the TWA Museum honorably. Everyone seemed to appreciate what I had to say about Captain Neumann and the history of Transcontinental Air Transport and Trans World Airlines.

The event attendees also wanted to hear some stories about the illustrious Howard Hughes, so I told them stories my father had told me, as well as others I'd read about in a book and some stories from a number of TWA retirees from the Overhaul bases at FFX & Kansas City from over the years. Everyone greatly enjoyed the stories. I really appreciated being asked to represent the TWA Museum at this event; it was an honor.

I set up a table at the event to display artifacts from his career with TWA. I didn't realize until that day that the TWA Ambassador plaque came out after Neumann retired.



A photo showing the miniature Eiffel Tower Captain Neumann brought back.



My lapel pins of the planes that Capt. Neumann flew.



The Ribbon Cutting featured the Chamber of Commerce, City Mural Committee and the Harold Neumann Project Board.



Jim "Jet" Thompson

WHAT HAS THE PROJECT BEEN UP TO?

Visited Col.
John
Morrissey &
Family

A Trip to
Kansas
City

Picked up from TWA
Museum a
Replica of
Mr. Mulligan on loan to
the Harold Neumann
Exhibit



Visited
Vintage
EAA 16's
Hangar



Donation of the Original Skin of
"Little Mulligan" by Phil & Deann Riter.

Hand Painted & Stickers



Donated Original Little Mulligan Skin



Replaced Skin...So Bright & White



This is 1/2 of the skin from Harold's "Little Mulligan". It was donated to the Geneseo Historical Museum, Harold Neumann, "Aviation Pioneer" Exhibit by Phil & Deann Riter. It has been hanging on the wall in their hangar at the Defiance County Airport in Indiana. Phil was on the project team that refurbished Little Mulligan and upon his passing, his wife Deann wanted our exhibit to have it. What a wonderful piece of Harold's history! Thank you so much Deann Riter for thinking of us with this wonderful gift. Now we are looking for the other half of the original skin. Anyone have any idea if it exists? We would love to have both skins to display! Thank you to Aldermen Keith Kennett who graciously offered to drive to pick it up. We are so thankful to Keith and the Geneseo Historical Museum for their generosity and for backing the Harold Neumann Project.

Kent Johnson and Kyle Ganson donated their time to pick up the wing and tail skin for "Little Mulligan" from the EAA Aviation Museum in Oshkosh, WI. Thank you to Emelia Anderson, Collections Curator and Chris Henry, Museum Manager for the personal tour. And look who we found all shiny and white! Skins will be on loan and displayed at the Geneseo Historical Museum in the Harold Neumann Exhibit.

We will be working with the EAA Aviation Museum to have Little Mulligan updated with painting "Harold's Little Mulligan" on the Cowl and Harold's name on the doors. If anyone has any information on the stickers that are pictured above on the fuselage, we would like to replace them as well.





Traveled to Lincoln Nebraska for the celebration of life for Pat Neumann (Harold's Daughter-in-law), where her family donated to the exhibit several items including this painting. It is signed "Sweet" and was painted in the early 1930's with a declared value of \$2500 according to the Oakland Museum of California where it was restored in 2006. Was this done by Bill Sweet? The Oakland Museum did not know the first name of the painter.

Also donated is Harold's original pilots license signed by Orville Wright along with his racing cap. These items are displayed in a very large shadow box with other original items from Harold's years in aviation. We are hoping to have it in time for "Trains, Planes and Automobiles" in September for everyone to see.

**Patricia Ann (Mueting) Neumann
1943-2025**



We continue to give classroom tours with scavenger hunts in the museum exhibit. The kiddos love the fact that Harold was afraid of heights and climbed the windmill and walked the ridge of the barn to get over his fear and that Harold's motto was "Never give up". Harold would be proud about educating our youth.

**The Harold Neumann Project is available to speak at your event/meeting.
Please call Paula Chapa for more information at 309-945-5591.**



Mrs. Clause flew in on Mr. Mulligan to collect letters to Santa from all the kiddos. It was a fun afternoon of treats and hearing all the kids Christmas wishes.



"Trains, Planes & Automobiles" 2024 proved to be another successful year. Kids built planes, raced planes, played aviation games and we had great speakers. The dedication of the Harold Neumann mural was a wonderful addition to the day. Thank you to the Geneseo Chamber and the Chamber Mural Project for selecting Harold Neumann to be a part of the mural history in Geneseo.



Like us on Facebook
Harold Neumann "Aviation Pioneer"



Save the date - September 4th - 6th, 2025 - Trains, Planes & Automobiles.



The Harold Neumann Project would like to pay tribute to our founding board member, Fred Magerkurth. Fred's Father, Leland Magerkurth & Harold were 1st cousins. Thank you for the opportunity to work with you and feel your passion for all that Harold did in aviation and how important it is to make sure our community is aware of the contributions this farm boy from Geneseo made toward aviation.

A true aviation pioneer.

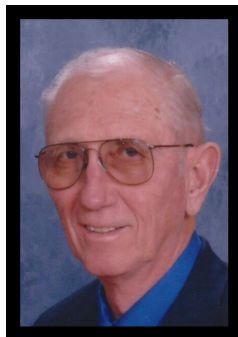
John Fredric (Fred) Magerkurth

1935-2025

John Fredric (Fred) Leland Magerkurth, 89, of Geneseo, IL, passed away peacefully at Hillcrest Home, Geneseo, on June 7, 2025. In his memory, memorials may be given to St. John's Lutheran Church, Geneseo, IL, or gifts given to the Harold Neumann Project. Condolences can be left at www.vandemorefuneralhome.com

The son of Leland J. and Margaret V. S. (Schwennsen) Magerkurth, Fred was born October 6, 1935, at Hammond-Henry Hospital in Geneseo, IL. He grew up on a farm in Edford Township and attended Hickory Grove School. In 1953, he graduated from Geneseo High School, where he ran cross country and track and was later inducted into the Geneseo High School Athletic Hall of Fame as a member of the 1952 cross country team, which placed fourth in the state that year. As a youth and young man, he worked for several farmers, later engaging in farming on his own. For twelve years, Fred worked as a carrier for the U. S. Postal Service before starting his career in 1969 with the Illinois State Police, where he served as a state trooper and pilot for ten years before retiring in 1991. After his retirement, he worked for almost 30 years with the Mariman Auction Company. Fred also served eight years in the United States Navy Reserve. On June 24, 1962, Fred married Sheila Ann Baird at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Rock Island, IL. They lived in Geneseo until 1965, when they moved to a small farm acreage in Munson Township, where they enjoyed raising their four children.

Fred was a lifelong member of St. John's Lutheran Church, Geneseo, where he was baptized into Christ on November 24, 1935, and confirmed in his faith on June 5, 1949. He served on various boards and committees over the years and, along with Bob Daniels, was a staple in St. John's senior choir. Fred enjoyed working on the farm, flying, and shooting with the District 7 Illinois State Police pistol team and winning numerous trophies, annual family fishing vacations in Minnesota and Canada with friends and their children, special vacations to Alaska, to Hawaii, where he visited the USS Arizona Memorial and the USS Missouri, and a visit to Normandy, France. He also enjoyed working with "the Mariman Auction crew" and attending his grandchildren's activities. In recent years, he was instrumental in the establishment of the Harold Neumann Project – an effort to share the life history and accomplishments of this aviation pioneer from Geneseo.



*You Will Be
Missed.*