



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of MERRILL C. HAMBURG

1896 – October 1, 1960



Written by MHH (01/1989); Reformatted (05/2010)

Merrill C. Hamburg's son, Merrill H. Hamburg, wrote the following letter to Hurst Bowers, at the time Curator of the National Model Aviation Museum, in 1989. Merrill C. was inducted into the Model Aviation Hall of Fame in 1976.

January 12, 1989

Hurst G. Bowers
Academy of Model Aeronautics
1810 Samuel Morse Drive
Reston, Virginia 22090

Dear Mr. Bowers,

First, I would like to apologize for my tardiness in responding to your letter requesting information concerning my father, Merrill C. Hamburg. My comments and/or opinions regarding father would have to be judged to be biased from a son's viewpoint, but I firmly believed that immediate family members are in a better position to fairly and honestly evaluate what makes your father tick than a friend or outsider could ever possibly observe or conceive.

Father was born in Trout Creek, Ontario, Canada in 1896 in a very primitive and humble environment. At that time, the "bush" was just outside the backdoor of their house. Father's recollection of his childhood was one of hardship of a poor family living in a very hostile and harsh area of Canada, with wildlife of all species abundant and close at hand. At an early age, his mother was left alone to care for her small children. She eventually married a man named Herman Hamburg and immigrated to the USA, [settling] in Cheboygan, Michigan. Thus, our surname was changed from Carr to Hamburg when father was adopted by his new stepfather.

Father attended high school in Cheboygan and graduated in 1916. It was in high school that father met my mother, Florence Greenless. His family, including two sisters and three brothers, remained on the borderline with respect to worldly means and finances. I believe much of father's drive to achieve an education and to aggressively pursue many diverse and new areas of interest stemmed from those early days when it was difficult to do without so many things, and to feel the frustration of not being able to do anything about it.

He worked extremely hard to get his formal education, since he had to work to make it possible. He received a Bachelor of Science degree and a Master of Arts degree from Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, while working days and attending school nights. He also

attended the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, and during this time, he started and ran a small restaurant and rented out rooms to students in a house he rented to earn his way. I have enclosed a biographical data sheet that primarily covers father's professional work, and does not speak to his numerous and diverse interests. Some of these are listed below.

- Conducted two 16-week series of Merrill's Workshop on WWJ TV in Detroit, Michigan, a 30-minute how to do it television woodworking show that he wrote and conducted live, using hand and power tools to make diverse projects from furniture to an ice shanty.
- Established and built the Timbers Boys Camp on Mullet Lake in Northern Michigan, which he ran as owner and director for 13 years. Boys from eight to eighteen years attended from 4 to 8 weeks each summer. Activities included swimming, sailing, woodworking shop, tennis, horseback riding, power boating, rifle range, handicrafts, outdoor sports, and canoe fishing trips to Canada.
- During WWII, he worked to set up a program in the public vocational school woodshops to build accurate solid scale models of currently employed aircraft in an assembly line-type of construction, which were used by the government in training of both civilian and military aircraft spotters.
- Organized and conducted model yacht building programs in the Detroit public school system and conducted race events with students on Belle Isle in Detroit, Michigan.
- Organized and enlisted the support of the Chrysler Corporation's Plymouth Dealers in the PAL [Plymouth Aero League] Program to sponsor model airplane contests locally and nationally. He organized and ran these contests for a number of years.
- Was instrumental in organizing and running local and national early model airplane contests. He took the winners of the first national contest to meet the president in Washington, D.C., and then on a tour of Europe as their prize.
- Participated in a small corporation that developed and marketed model airplane kits, building supplies, and building blocks for sale to model builders.
- Organized and founded the Twin Creek Hunting Club in 1954 in Northern Michigan. Was instrumental in the supervision and direction of construction of all camp facilities.
- He organized and set up a program so the qualified students could take flying lessons at the Detroit City Airport. He also received his pilot's license at this time.
- As a boy, father was not permitted to own a dog. As a result, our house always had one or two dogs in residence. Father became interested in training and breeding of field trail dogs and was active in this area for a number of years.
- He was also an ardent hunter and enjoyed fly and lake fishing.

- He developed an interest in honeybees, and for a number of years, I helped him to tend five or six beehives that he kept in the farm areas north of Detroit.
- As listed in the enclosed biographical data, he was an excellent writer and had many articles and books to his credit.
- He designed and built a number of boats over the years, including a 12-foot rowing and sailing pram, an outboard racing hydroplane, and a snipe class sailboat. He didn't just build these boats, he enjoyed using them.
- The building of a major addition to his basement woodworking shop, including a first floor glassed-in porch, cut stone fireplace and grill, and a second floor addition to the attic storage area were projects he took on and completed late in life.

As you can see, his interests and talents were extremely diverse. He had the courage to do the unknown or difficult tasks. Each new project was a challenge that he prepared for by researching all available data and reading materials on the subject. He then aggressively took on the task with no thought of not being successful.

I am sorry to say that a great deal of historical information and photographs regarding father's activities in the early days of model airplanes was lost when my mother passed away. Since I was born in 1924, I was too young to understand, appreciate, or observe the role he played during those early years in aeronautics.

Father was a strong believer in education and the opportunities that it can provide for those who put forth the effort to educate themselves. He took into our home one of the winners of the first national model airplane contest and helped him get through his University studies during trying economic times. This young man later went on to become chief engineer with a west coast aircraft manufacturer, and I believe is currently retired and living in Spain.

Father was a strong willed person, and had a natural ability to understand, teach, and inspire young people. This talent was, I believe, enhanced by his formal education, his teaching experiences, as well as the numerous and diverse activities in his life that more often than not centered on young people. He played a major role in influencing many young people over the years. It was extremely gratifying to father to receive letters from former model airplane builders and contest participants, former students or young people he had helped over the years, thanking him for his encouragement and help and relating details of their success in life. I am sure those friendships and notes he received provided him with a great deal of comfort that he had contributed something to their lives to make them more worthwhile and meaningful.

In reflection, I would have to conclude that my father's major and most important contributions are not the amazing diverse and challenging areas of interest and work he successfully undertook and completed, but rather the positive impact he had on so many young people in the formative years of their lives. He did not build tall buildings, bridges, or establish a great financial empire;

rather he helped guide, assist, council, and inspire and if you will, by example, shape, develop, and encourage young people to aggressively and honorably pursue their life's ambitions.

I hope these rather disjointed comments will help you to better understand what made my father tick, and appreciate how lucky I was to have him as a father.

Sincerely yours,
(Signed) Merrill H. Hamburg

Biographical Data

Name: Merrill C. Hamburg

Title: Supervisor of Vocational Education

Department: Vocational Education

Birthplace: Trout Creek, Canada

Educational Background:

- Cheboygan High School, Cheboygan, Michigan, June 1916 (Graduated)
- University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, September 1929 to June 1942
- Wayne State University

Degrees:

- Bachelor of Science, Wayne State University, 1927
- Master of Arts, Wayne State University, 1942

Professional Work Experience:

- September 1923-June 1929, Detroit Board of Education, Teacher
- September 1931- 1942, Detroit Board of Education, Teacher
- 1942 to present, Detroit Board of Education, Supervisor of Vocational Education
- 1943-1957, Wayne State University, Assistant Professor

Affiliations, Professional:

- Engineering Society of Detroit
- Mu Sigma Pi
- American Vocational Association
- American Industrial Arts Association
- American Council of Industrial Arts Supervisors
- Michigan Industrial Education Society
- State Curriculum Committee on Trade and Industrial Education
- Epsilon Pi Tau
- Detroit Education Association
- National Education Association

Affiliations, Service:

- Kiwanis Club of Northwest Detroit

Publications, Books:

- *Beginning to Fly* – Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1929
- *The American Student Flyer* (co-author), Pitman Publishing Company, 1942
- *Riding on Air* (co-author), Pitman Publishing Company, 1944
- *Demonstrations and Laboratory Exercises in the Science of Aeronautics*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1944

Publications, Magazines and Newspaper Articles:

- Series of ten monthly articles on “Aviation” per year, in the *American Boy and Youth Camp* magazine - - 1927-1931. These were later syndicated to fifty-five daily newspapers.
- Wrote a series of weekly articles on “How to Make” for the *Detroit News* - - 1931-1942. These were syndicated to thirty other newspapers.
- Wrote six articles for *Popular Science* magazine - - 1931.
- Served five years on Editorial Staff of the *American Boy Youth Camp* magazine.
- Have helped to write many Courses of Study and other releases during the past sixteen years at the Division of Instruction.

(July 14, 1960)

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