

LEGACIES

by Mary S. Gilbert



In 1998, Carolyn Peat, daughter of pioneering aviator D. Barr Peat, walked into the History Center to peruse the archives of some of her late father's contemporaries. She ended up purchasing a floor tile to honor him.

Prompted by a notice promoting the tile program, she spoke with the attendant at the front desk to learn more about the particulars.

"He convinced me to buy a \$1,000 tile to go in the lobby. I wanted to document my father's place in the history of Western Pennsylvania and his significance in aviation."

D. Barr Peat's accomplishments had earned him the Glenn Hammond Curtiss

After D. Barr Peat helped start Bettis Field, he moved to Stow, Ohio, where he likewise founded and briefly operated Issoudun Airfield, named for a famed WWI flying school in France. He's seen here with Blanche Noyes (left, wife of pilot Dewey Noyes) and his wife Flora Forbes Peat, who was also a pilot.

Achievement Award, presented to him at a reunion of the OX5 Club, named after an engine used in early airplanes.

"It was always nagging at me to write the 250-word tribute," Carolyn says, "but I didn't know how to organize the information I had researched. Then the OX5 Aviation Pioneers notified me that they were writing a history book. They invited me to write a 250-word vignette about my father, who was one of their founding members. They provided a format to follow, and I used the same words for both."

When D. Barr Peat's hometown of Dravosburg celebrated its centennial, Carolyn told one of the officials about the tile.

"He said he was glad that my dad was enshrined in the History Center and that he deserved it," she repeated. "I'm pleased with the tile's presence and exposure."

Her tribute:

D. BARR PEAT started Bettis Field (Pittsburgh-McKeesport Aerodrome) in a cow pasture with a rail fence on the farm of Harry C. Neel, which was across the road from his family's farm on the hill above Dravosburg, Pennsylvania.

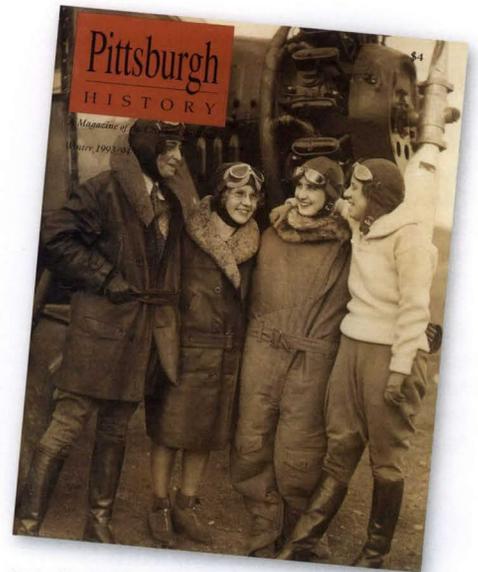
The U. S. air mail was carried from the west coast along the same route as the train through Chicago, Cleveland, and New York to Washington, D.C. A "barnstormer" pilot suggested to Barr Peat that they pick up the air mail at the Cleveland air field and fly it to Washington, D.C., which would decrease the en route time for the mail from the west.

Barr Peat got Representative M. Clyde

Kelly, Republican congressman from Pennsylvania's 33rd district, centering on McKeesport, and chairman of the House Post Office Committee to write the Air Mail Act of 1925, which is the foundation for the domestic commercial airline industry in the United States. The Kelly Act authorized the Postmaster General to contract with any individual, firm, or corporation for the transportation of air mail by aircraft (as amended the next year) transmission of mail by aircraft at fixed rates per pound, including equipment. The first Contract Air Mail route #11 flew into Bettis Field from Cleveland on a rainy April 21, 1927.

The Glenn Hammond Curtiss Achievement Award for outstanding "lifelong contribution and pioneering in the field of aviation" and for "his dogged determination in development of an air mail route" was presented to D. Barr Peat on May 19, 1962, in Bedford, Pennsylvania at a reunion of the OX5 Club of Pennsylvania.

He was born in Dravosburg, Pennsylvania, on September 23, 1896. He was a survey engineer and real estate



Carlyn Peat was able to help identify the women on our Winter 1993-94 cover: Martha Burge, Katherine Rogers, Stella Sullivan, and Helen Stinner Ball at Bettis Airport, 1930.

developer. He married a school teacher, Flora M. Forbes of McKeesport on September 25, 1929. They had three children – David, Carolyn and Forbes and seven grandchildren – Debra, Scot, David, Richard, Robert, Darcy and Brian. He died on May 2, 1972.

The Senator John Heinz Pittsburgh Regional History Center offers opportunities to pay tribute to individuals, families, or organizations through the Buy A Tile Campaign. Handsome tiles made of stainless steel, aluminum, or iron are engraved and placed in the floor of the Great Hall and the entrance to the Smithsonian wing. Tiles bear the name of an individual, family, or organization and can include an occupation, avocation, or other descriptor. Tributes of up to 250 words can also accompany the tile. 🌟



Charles Lindbergh readies his *Spirit of St. Louis* for takeoff from Bettis Field on August 4, 1927. D. Barr Peat, at left in a black suit, started bringing airplanes onto the hilltop in the background in 1918, now the site of NARCO-Harbison-Walker. Bettis Field, superseded by Allegheny County Airport, was converted to an atomic laboratory during WWII.

For information on purchasing a tile or other type of commemorative opportunity at the History Center, please call Niccole Cook-Atwell at (412) 454-6405. To learn more about the advantages of planned gifts and the History Center's Heritage Society for planned giving donors, please contact Rob DeOrio, Director of Development & Planned Giving, at (412) 454-6325.