

EDNA GARDNER WHYTE COLLECTION

MS -006

International Women's Air and Space Museum
Burke Lakefront Airport
1501 North Marginal Road
Cleveland, Ohio

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Edna Gardner Whyte Collection

INTRODUCTION

The Edna Gardner Whyte Collection was accessioned August 8, 1992. The collection fills 31 folders in 2 Hollinger boxes; it comes from two sources that were inadvertently comingled in the early stages of processing. Some of the material comes from the estate of Edna Gardner Whyte, and the rest was donated by her biographer, Ann Cooper. It is unclear how much of what was found in Ann Cooper's files was given to her by Edna Gardner Whyte herself, however, both sets of papers included similar items, such as original and photocopies of newspaper clippings, photocopies of some of Whyte's business papers, original photographs, and programs and score sheets from air derbies. The bulk of the material, which dates from the early 1930s through Whyte's death in February of 1992, consists of photocopies of press clippings about Ms. Whyte.

For more materials relating to Edna Gardner Whyte, see the IWASM artifacts collection, accessions numbers 1992.25.1-1992.25.32B, 1992.25.33. See also the Ruth Nichols and Virginia Thomas Collections, and *Rising Above It*, E.G. Whyte's autobiography, co-written with Ann Cooper, in the IWASM library. Texas Women's University in Denton, Texas has a collection of clippings and magazine articles related to E.G. Whyte, and, as of March 1999 was processing a much larger, more comprehensive collection of E.G. Whyte materials.

There are no restrictions on the use of this material

Edna Gardner Whyte Collection

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Edna Gardner Whyte was born November 3, 1902 and died February 15, 1991. She was the oldest of three children. At the age of seven, she lost her father in a railroad accident and the family was left destitute. Unable to care for all of her children alone, Edna's mother sent young Edna to her late husband's sister's home. By the time she graduated from high school in 1921, Edna had rejoined her mother in West Salem, Wisconsin. She studied nursing after high school and used her wages from her subsequent nursing jobs to take her first flying lessons in 1926. By 1928, she had acquired a student license.

In the 1930s, Edna served as a Navy nurse and was a part-time flight instructor. She opened her first flight school in New Orleans just before World War II. During the War, Edna trained war pilots at Meacham Field in Fort Worth, Texas and then served in the Army Nurse Corps in the Philippines. After the war, Edna trained veterans to fly for the Veterans' Administration. She also served as a Red Cross nurse during a polio outbreak in 1949-50. In the early 1970s, she opened the Aero-Valley Flight School, where she continued to instruct novice flyers until she was grounded by poor health in 1988. During her lifetime, Edna Gardner Whyte flew over 300 Air Races and Derbies. She was a member and one-time president of the 99s; and although she never achieved her dream of becoming a commercial or military pilot, she won several awards for service in the field of aviation.

The details of Edna's personal life are unclear from this material. At least once source contends that she was widowed in her second marriage, elsewhere it is noted that she was divorced twice. Likewise, one series of newsclippings from the 1950s features her daughter, while another contends that she was childless.

Edna Gardner Whyte Collection

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The primary interest of the Edna Gardner Whyte collection lies in its thorough, but probably incomplete set of articles and newsclippings about Edna. They trace her long career as a “flying nurse”, a derby pilot, and finally a “flying grandmother” flight instructor. The early clippings suggest the rough-and-ready glamour that surrounded pilots in general, and women pilots in particular, in the early 1930s. Later articles continue to focus on Edna’s gender, but also marvel frequently at the quantity of students Edna taught to fly, and the thousands of flight hours she had logged by middle age. Even in the 1970s and 1980s, it is considered remarkable that she owns and operates her own airport. Press coverage increases as Edna enters her eighties, still flying and teaching. There are no clippings from the 1940s in this collection.

The rest of the Edna Gardner Whyte collection is less cohesive. Personal correspondence, Series 2, contains originals and photocopies of correspondence concerning a variety of subjects. Most interesting is a 1934 letter to the National Aeronautics Association concerning Edna’s withdrawal of an appeal regarding an unidentified incident at the All Women’s Transcontinental Air Race. Other letters appeal for sponsorship for air races. From the 1970s onward the correspondence deals with miscellaneous business matters of Aero Valley Airport, various awards presented to Edna, and her relationship with IWASM, plus a hodgepodge of other topics. Series 6 contains snapshots and reprints and photocopies of photographs of Edna (see also IWASM photograph #s 408-416). Most are undated, although an attempt has been made to arrange them chronologically. A set of late color snapshots depict the grounds and buildings of her airport in Denton, Texas. Series 7 contains a photocopy of a newspaper clipping about the WASPS/WAFS which appeared in the Air Force Times, April 26, 1976. The verso of the second page contains signatures of 14 WASPS/WAFS and their classes. This is possibly a unique item. Series 8, correspondence between Edna’s biographer, Ann Cooper and various peers of Edna, document some Cooper’s efforts to get contemporary appraisals of Edna’s personal history and career. This material is largely unilluminating, however, as most of the respondents, except for Guerd Brocksom, are not personal friends or partners of Edna. Series 9 contains miscellaneous original items and photocopies: including some clippings about other women pilots, a photocopy of the women pilots directory issued by the Department of Commerce Aeronautics Branch in November 1931, photocopies of some Aero Valley airport papers—contracts, drawings; also included are some flight instruction materials, 2 poems in tribute to Edna, and a WW II ration book of Robert Enman, presumably from the files of Ann Cooper (nee Enman). Series 10 contains a typewritten manuscript “Rags to Patches”, an autobiography of Edna’s brother, Donovan D. Gardner. The manuscript contains insights into Edna’s

early history and the hardscrabble existence led by working class people in the 1930s. Series 11, the most complete set of documents in the collection, contains newsclippings and articles- photocopies and originals- about Edna from 1930 through 1992, chronologically arranged.

Edna Gardner Whyte Collection

SERIES DESCRIPTION

The papers from this collection occupy 31 file folders in 2 Hollinger boxes and are organized into 11 series:

BOX 1

Series

1. Biography, List of Awards
1 folder
2. Personal Correspondence, 1934-1991, and undated
1 folder,
3. Logbook 2, (photocopy), 1930-1936
Section of Logbook 3, (photocopy)
2 folders
4. Air Races and Derbies – fliers, score sheets, programs
1 folder
5. Awards Ceremonies, speaking engagements – programs,
copies of certificates
1 folder
6. Photos and snapshots-- mostly reprints and photocopies--
undated (see also IWASM #s 408-416)
1 folder
7. Photocopy of newspaper clipping re: WASPS/WAFS with
signatures on verso
1 folder
8. Ann Cooper correspondence re: Edna Gardner Whyte
Ann Cooper correspondence with Guerd Brocksom
2 folders
9. Miscellaneous documents – clippings unrelated to E.G.
Whyte, various copies of receipts and business documents,
flight training documents
1 folder
10. Manuscript – “Rags to Patches”, autobiography of E.G.
Whyte’s brother, Donovan D. Gardner
1 folder

cont’d.

Edna Gardner Whyte Collection

SERIES DESCRIPTION, cont'd.

BOX 2

Series

11. 20 folders, Clippings pertaining to E.G. Whyte, chronologically arranged where possible:

Folder 1 of 20, clippings- 1930-1939
Folder 2 of 20, clippings- 1951-1959
Folder 3 of 20, clippings- 1960-1964
Folder 4 of 20, clippings- 1965-1969
Folder 5 of 20, clippings- 1970-1974
Folder 6 of 20, clippings- 1975-1979
Folder 7 of 20, clippings- 1980
Folder 8 of 20, clippings- 1981
Folder 9 of 20, clippings- 1982
Folder 10 of 20, clippings- 1983
Folder 11 of 20, clippings- 1984
Folder 12 of 20, clippings- 1985
Folder 13 of 20, clippings- 1986
Folder 14 of 20, clippings- 1987
Folder 15 of 20, clippings- 1988
Folder 16 of 20, clippings- 1989
Folder 17 of 20, clippings- 1990
Folder 18 of 20, clippings- 1991
Folder 19 of 20, clippings- 1992
Folder 20 of 20, clippings- undated