

THE JOURNEYS OF "OUR JENNY"

Ray McWhorter, from Burt, Iowa, joined the U.S. Army Air Service in 1918. He trained in a Curtiss JN4-D (the "Jenny") and then was sent to Europe. In 1919, the veteran airman came home, where he and his brother, also a veteran, formed the McWhorter Brothers Aero Co. They purchased a JN4-D from the Herring Motor Company for \$4650 and began barnstorming.

The brothers teamed up with another Jenny owner to create a air show act. One of the stunts they planned was to have a man on the wing of one Jenny use a rope ladder to transfer to the other plane. However, while practicing this stunt on August 11, 1921, both Jennys crashed, and Ray McWhorter was badly injured. He transported what was left of his Jenny to the family farm, where it sat for almost fifty years.

In 1970, Ray met fellow Iowan Dean Gilmore, an experienced pilot and airplane mechanic, who was interested in the damaged Jenny. McWhorter gave the Jenny to Gilmore, who immediately started gathering blueprints and replacement parts. He contacted Chet Peek, a biplane enthusiast who had a variety of parts for the Curtiss Standard J-1, a companion to the Jenny.

Gilmore worked on restoring the Jenny for twelve years before he unexpectedly died. Peek purchased the plane from the Gilmore family and continued the project. He transported the Jenny to his home in Oklahoma. He registered the plane with the FAA as a Curtiss-Peek Model JN4-D, N2525, serial no. 1917.

"Team Peek" consisted of Peek, his wife Marian, and Harold Maloy. The trio found a supply of Irish linen, the fabric used to cover the airframe and wings. Marian sewed the heavy linen panels together, and Peek and Maloy applied the U.S. Army red, white, and blue star insignia and stripes to the wings and rudder respectively. Next the team worked on the struts, rigging, adjustments, and, lastly, the OX-5 engine. Finally, the Jenny was restored, and on October 6, 1986, Peek took her up.

Despite local publicity and appearances in a number of air shows, Peek could not afford the plane's insurance, so he negotiated a new home for the Jenny. He loaned it to a museum in Wisconsin while he advertised its sale in a British aviation magazine. An Englishman, Victor Norman, bought the Jenny and had it crated and shipped to England.

Once there, the Jenny was registered as G-ECAB and stored at Rendcomb, Gloucestershire, a former Royal Flying Corps base. The plane was repainted in the old McWhorter Brothers Aero Co. colors and became the first Jenny to call Britain home since 1919.

In 2004 the Jenny returned to America when she was sold to Joe Ferraro in Indiana. When Ferraro found that Peek's registration, N2525, was no longer available, he reserved N2525S.

Robert Seabury, a Wichita Falls pilot and history enthusiast, had been trying to find a fitting way to preserve the history of Call Field, the WW I aviation training base in Wichita Falls. As Seabury recalls, "I had read about Joe Ferraro's Jenny and thought it could be the centerpiece of a museum to commemorate Call Field."

Seabury approached the Wichita Falls city council and 4B Tax Board about acquiring the Jenny. Funding was allocated and a hangar was provided at the entrance to Kickapoo Airport. In June 2007 the Jenny arrived in Wichita Falls. It was reassembled and repainted, this time in Call Field's olive drab with the same army red, white, and blue applied by Peek. The final touch was painting the designated trainer number 46 on the fuselage, which was a number used at Call Field. In September 2008, the Museum of North Texas History became the Jenny's owner.

Perhaps the most important thing about the Jenny is her significance to Wichita Falls. Seabury summed it up: "Others could have bought the Jenny, but it wouldn't have the meaning for them it has for us because, as we say, our skies were full of Curtiss Jennys from 1917 to 1919." Today, more than 90 years later, the skies over Wichita Falls are still filled with airplanes training young pilots to fly.... but now with today's remarkable jet aircraft from Sheppard Air Force Base..

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