

Silver Wings History

Silver Wings was incorporated in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania by Russ Brinkley in 1958, to unite pilots that had soloed a powered aircraft at least 25 years before they were eligible to join.

Russ was a pilot, flight instructor, radio and TV announcer and a noted "Air Show" announcer in the Pennsylvania and New York area. He had been one of the early organizers of the OX5 group of pilots in western Pennsylvania. He started Silver Wings to recognize a younger group of pilots since the OX5 group was formed by pilots that had flown early OX5 engine powered airplanes. These were aircraft that had their heyday prior to WWII.

The idea for Silver Wings was spawned on an August 1958 flight from California to Pennsylvania in an early Lockheed Constellation. The 5 pilots that formed the nucleus of the organization were Russ Brinkley, Walt Harvey, a flight examiner and control tower operator, Edwin Lyons of Zahn's Airport, New York City, John Hickey of Ashland Illinois and Harry Davis of TWA.

These original 5 Charter Members drew up the purpose of Silver Wings to:

- A. Reunite and band together for strictly social, non-profit and nonpolitical purposes, creating harmony and a spirit of camaraderie among members.
- B. Perpetuate the memory of, and recognize contributions to aviation made by members.
- C. Encourage and promote interest in and the advancement of Aviation, including, through organized youth challenge programs.
- D. Prevent pecuniary gain or profit, incidental or otherwise, to members.

On September 1, 1958 a radio/TV artist drew up the original membership certificates, made up a good supply of membership blanks and the design of the first (yellow) plastic member cards. The news of the organization was released to the aviation press and the first to tell the story was the publisher of Cross Country News, the late and well known Mrs. Tony Page.

By September 20th the first draft of the proposed Charter was in hand and it was time to send out another batch of applications to members of the Early Birds and the Quiet Birdmen. The majority of the applications came from pilots Russ had been acquainted with prior to WWII. As things were gathering steam Russ felt it was time to have their first dinner get-together. He consulted Harrisburg's largest hotel banquet room and learned that an attractive menu would be available for only \$3.50 plus tip.

By the end of October, all of the art work was ready for approval and the plastic cards were adopted - now a collector's item. It was found that to emboss the cards, expensive equipment would be required. Russ purchased a small label maker and wrote the members name and number on a plastic tape and placed this on each plastic card.

In later years these cards caused problems as the card said "Life Member". The intention of the words "Life Member" was meant to indicate the person was a Life Member if he continued to pay his dues. Dues at the time were \$5.00 per year. There was "no way" the \$5.00 dues, paid once, could support a newsletter the remainder of the members life. We still have members that surface with the Yellow Plastic card and want to be reinstated as a paid up "Life Member".

The dinner was on the anniversary of the Wright brothers first flight in a powered, heavier than air, aircraft, December 17th and their speaker was none other than that great air racer and showman, Col. Roscoe Turner. The Harrisburg newspapers gave Silver Wings a plug to swell the attendance for the first official dinner - a stag affair. When Russ finally got around to opening a bank account, it was for the sum of \$521.00.

On December 22, 1958, only a few days after the first dinner, Silver Wings legal representative, General William Bailey, announced that Judge William H. Neely, a WWI pilot had issued the Silver Wings Charter.

The Silver Wings lapel emblem was designed by Cedric Galloway of Burbank California. The Quadrant which encloses the "SW" between the wings represents one-quarter, which, in time, stands for 25 years-minimum

requirement since solo.

Some members may have in their files, Feb 1974 Vol. I No. 1, the first bimonthly issue of "Slipstream", a name Russ copied from the first aviation magazine he wrote for in 1924. Prior to "Slipstream" the name of the newsletter was "Quadrant", a small 4 page affair.

In the 1980's several Silver Wings Chapters were formed, the first, Lehigh Chapter was formed by members in the Pennsylvania area. It was followed by the Maryland Chapter formed by members in the Baltimore area. Russ did not offer much support for Chapters, so new Chapters were formed by much work by people interested in a Chapter and following the National bylaws to have a working group. San Diego, Colorado and Georgia went through much "red tape" to get their Chapters recognized.

A group of members in the Cincinnati area decided to form the Ohio Chapter and contacted Russ for instructions. As mentioned, Russ was becoming worried that chapters might want to "take over" the Silver Wings organization. He wanted to have a list of 100, yes, 100 members to form a chapter. Using membership directories, newsletters etc. they found 100 active Ohio members. Thus the Ohio Chapter came into being. National now requires 10 active members to form a new Chapter.

In the mid 1980's Russ advised Don Fairbanks that he had been elected to the Board and the position of Vice President. Silver Wings had a Board of 15 current members, many of whom were well known in the industry. Russ was President and Captain E. B. Jeppesen, of the Jeppesen Instrument Charts Company, was Chairman of the Board. Other members of the Board, past and present were: Barry Goldwater and Arthur Godfrey since 1974, and Bernie Geier, Irene Wirschafter and Evelyn Bryan Johnson to name a few of the ones elected in the late 80's to early 90's.

President George H. W. Bush became member #10000 in July 1998. Russ received a nice letter from the President relating how proud he was to be a Silver Wing member.

1990 Russ asked Don Fairbanks to come up to Harrisburg, PA. and help him with the membership as he was getting behind. About the same time Don Charles and Kathy (the editor of the Slipstream) and Millie Albertson a long time friend of Russ, also contacted Fairbanks and advised him that Russ was having physical problem and he should see what could be done. The Fairbanks took a week off and went to Harrisburg.

Don and Kathy Charles met the Fairbanks and took them to Russ's apartment, a small one room affair. Russ had a procedure on his eyes and was in a wheel chair and seemed to be aware of what was happening. At times he seemed a little vague. They were all under the impression it was the medication.

Unopened mail was all over the apartment, piles in the corners, on top of tables, the refrigerator, in the window sills and on the floor. After a discussion with Russ, it was decided that there was so much to do and so much time would be involved, that Russ agreed with the Charles's and Fairbanks's that it would be more practical to transport it all to Cincinnati where they could devote more time to getting it organized. Russ did not use a computer, he used 3 x 5 handwritten cards to record dues and addresses.

The membership records were filed in metal boxes and a small ledger book.

The envelopes were picked up and loaded into 4 large garbage bags for transport to the Fairbanks place of business. The local bank was contacted and arrangements were made to deposit the checks and to conduct other banking business. A local "meals on wheels" group was contacted to look after Russ's well being as he was in need of assistance.

After arriving in Cincinnati, over \$15,000 was deposited in the Silver Wings Harrisburg account with the \$5.00/\$10.00 checks and the membership was brought up to currency. The Board members were contacted and advised of current events.

The Board decided that a Board meeting was necessary and Captain Jeppesen said he would chair it in Denver, CO., October 14-16 1991. Twelve of the Fifteen Board members attended. The Board decided, since Russ was in poor health, that new Officers should be elected and Russ made President Emeritus.

Newly elected Officers were Bernie Geier, *President*, Kay Brick, *Vice President*, Tom Wood, *Treasurer* and Don Fairbanks, *Secretary*. The new bylaws were approved on October 16, 1991. The Slipstream Supplement Octo-

ber 1991 was sent to all current members to advise them of current events and who the new officers were and how to contact them for information. The January 1992 Slipstream Supplement had an election ballot for candidates to serve on the Board of Directors and fill the positions of those that chose not to run.

Russ Brinkley passed away January 9, 1992 at home of a massive heart attack. Russ took his first flying lesson at 14 and had logged more than 12,000 flight hours. He was 85.

"My Silver Wings" by Russ Brinkley 1990

My Silver Wings are precious
They mean the World to me
They represent my way of life
"From bonds of earth-be free"
My Love for aviation,
Exceeds my love for gold;
What a happy combination
when one is growing old.
My desk is stacked with your requests
And the long time record rings,
That the most decisions of the past
Have favored Silver Wings.
For years my jackets bore the crests
Of lodges, clubs and things
But from now to final showdown
And hereafter - SILVER WINGS!

In 1992 Andy Hamilton became our first "foreign" Board Member, he is a Canadian, Andy is busy getting the Canadian members to create an active Chapter north of the border.

In 1993 began there were 10 active chapters from coast to coast.

In 1994 Al Selby, a Board member and Treasurer, from the Baltimore area, designed a new lapel pin for members that had soloed at least 50 years ago. It is a beautiful design. Using the original pin design he added a silver wreath and gold star above the wings. It has become a very popular item.

Art Schwedler, Silver Wings Book Program Director, completed the initial program of donating aviation books to libraries in the USA and Canada. 131 sets of books went to those that requested a shelf for their area. The book titles include: Stick and Rudder, Fly Without Fear, The Joy of Flying, Know Your Airplane, Becoming a Professional Pilot, The Art of Flying, Choosing Your Homebuilt, Queen Bees, Tex Johnson, Women of the Air, Pioneers of Aviation and On Silver Wings. This was one of Russ's greatest desires, to get more aviation books into small town libraries.

Since the mid 70's, Russ would have a gathering of members from all over to have a dinner somewhere in the country. When Chapters began to form in the early 80's, a Chapter would advise National that it would host a reunion/convention in its area, and it became an annual event. Every year since, the reunions have become bigger and better. Each Chapter tries to have the best places to visit and/or attend. It is now an event that many members reserve a place for on their calendars as early as possible.

In 1998 the Fraternity had a "Silver Wings" Club House erected at the SunN-Fun convention site. It is located on Club House Row along with the OX5, QB and 99's buildings. It is a great place to sit and talk and meet other Silver Wingers from all over the world. The Gulf Coast Chapter has taken on the task of keeping it comfortable and presentable. Every year many members renew their National memberships with the Gulf Coast Chapter workers.

At this time (2006) Silver Wings has grown to 19 Chapters and several thousand active members. Several states have more than one chapter. Our goal is to have at least one Chapter in every state. Since we are International, with members from Canada, England, India and Australia, perhaps we will some day have International Chapters.