

Clifford W. Henderson  
National Air Races  
Collection  
1928-1939

O

*Guide to the Scholarly Resources*  
*Microfilm Edition*

From the holdings of the  
Western Reserve Historical Society,  
Cleveland, Ohio

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# Contents

Note to Reseachers, **1**

Introduction, **2**

Scope and Content, **7**

Roll Contents, **8**

Series I: National Air Races, 1928-1939, **8**

1928, **8**

1929, **8**

1930, **9**

1931, **10**

1932, **10**

1933, **11**

1934, **11**

1935, **12**

1936, **12**

1937, **13**

1938, **13**

1939, **14**

Series II: Other Air Races, **15**

Western Aircraft Show, 1929, Los Angeles, **15**

St. Louis International Aircraft Exposition, 1930, **15**

New York Air Show and Aircraft Salon, 1930, **16**

Omaha Air Races, 1931-1932, **16**

International Air Races, 1933, Chicago, **17**

Pan-American Air Races, 1934, New Orleans, **17**

Series III: Scrapbooks, **18**

Series IV: Certificates and Plaques, **20**

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# Introduction

Clifford William Henderson (1895-1984) was managing director of the National Air Races from 1928 until 1939. Known for his showmanship and promotional talent, he was called a “master of ballyhoo” and a “roman candle promoter.” A 1936 National Air Races press release gives Henderson’s “genius for organization . . . full credit for the development of this great international aviation sports classic,” including the original conceptions of the Bendix, Thompson, Shell, and Aerol trophies.

Henderson was born in the Quaker colony of Lenox, Iowa, the son of a druggist. He moved to California when he was fourteen as part of the first transcontinental trip by motor truck, riding as mascot from Colorado to San Francisco. From an early age he showed an inclination for promotion and organization, producing circuses and shows for his friends. When an air meet was held near Los Angeles in 1910, it inspired young Henderson to organize a model plane building contest. He later worked his way through high school and college with his own small dance band, graduating from the University of Southern California in 1917.

Henderson enlisted as an ambulance driver in World War I and transferred to the Air Corps just before the Armistice. After the war he bought an old “Jenny” plane from the government, flying solo after only four hours of instruction. In 1924 he managed his first air show, arranging the departure from and return to Santa Monica of the U.S. Army’s round-the-world tour. He then went on to manage local air races in Santa Monica and Los Angeles until he was hired to promote the 1928 National Air Races at Los Angeles. His work at this event brought him success and national prominence.

Henderson continued to organize other air races and expositions along with the National Air Races, including the Western Aircraft Show of 1929, the New York Aircraft Salon of 1930, and the Pan-American International Air Races of 1934. However, his consistent commitment was to the National Air Races, which he successfully staged annually from 1928 until the races were suspended after 1939 due to the outbreak of World War II in Europe.

In 1935, Henderson and his brother Phil (business manager of the National Air Races) built the Pan Pacific Civic Auditorium in Los Angeles. After resigning from the Air Races in 1939, they managed and promoted sporting and cultural events, expositions, and conventions there. During World War II, Henderson again volunteered for service in the Air Corps, rising to the rank of colonel and eventually becoming military commissioner at Dakar in North Africa. He received the Ordre de l'Etoile Noire du Benin from the government of French West Africa for his wartime service.

Following the war, Henderson founded the community of Palm Desert near Palm Springs, California, in 1946. He maintained his interest in aviation in later years and was made a member of the Aviation Hall of Fame in 1972. He was named an "elder statesman of aviation" by the National Aeronautic Association in 1976, and in the same year was presented with the Aerospace Trophy by the International Order of Characters. Henderson died at Rancho Mirage near Palm Desert on March 26, 1984, survived by his wife, the former actress Marian Marsh.

The National Air Races were a major public and sporting event and an aviation industry testing ground throughout the 1930s. Almost from the beginning of manned flight there were air races and exhibitions of skills, stunts, and equipment, but they were, until the late 1920s, loosely organized sporadic events. From 1920 until 1928 air meets were held in, among other places, Omaha, Detroit, St. Louis, Dayton, and Philadelphia.

In 1922 the National Aeronautic Association was established in Detroit and began to organize these various races and meets into a single body, which became the National Air Races. The 1928 Los Angeles meet began the great era of the National Air Races. It involved hundreds of airplanes, 500,000 spectators, and a ten-day program of races, exhibits, and stunts.

At this time in Cleveland the Municipal Airport had recently been completed. A group of Cleveland businessmen, seeking a vehicle to focus the eyes of the world on Cleveland as an aviation center, visited Los Angeles to attend the races. Impressed with the event, they arranged to bring the 1929 races to their city, under Henderson's management. Most of the races over the next ten years were held in Cleveland, the exceptions being 1933 and 1936 in Los Angeles and 1930 in Chicago.

During this period the policy and general control of the National Air Races were vested in a board of directors numbering 101. The Cleveland Chamber of Commerce and other civic organizations participated in promoting and backing the event. Any income from the nonprofit races was turned back into a fund for the advancement of aviation in Cleveland.



During their golden era (1928-1939) the National Air Races attracted the participation of such noted aviators as Charles Lindbergh, Amelia Earhart, Jimmie Doolittle, and Roscoe Turner in events such as the races for the Thompson, Bendix, and Greve trophies. The program regularly included cross-country races, short races, army and navy maneuvers, stunt flying, parachute jumping, gliders, dirigibles, balloons, and model planes.

The National Air Races were considered a “working laboratory” for the aviation industry, where new planes, equipment, engines, and fuels were tested before coming into general use. A few refinements tested in this way included controllable pitch propellers, streamlined landing wheel pants, retractable landing gear, landing flaps, high-octane fuels, and engine supercharging. Additionally, the races were also used to further public acceptance of and confidence in commercial air transportation, emphasizing the development of “safety, speed, economy, and comfort.”

After 1939, and for the duration of World War II, there were no National Air Races; it was not until 1946 that the races were resumed. The postwar races, however, were much different without Henderson’s management. They were also affected by changing times and technology, including jet, rocket, and supersonic aircraft. Ever faster speeds began to make closed-course races dangerous and, eventually, obsolete. This fact was underscored by a tragic crash in 1949 in Cleveland which caused public concern, thereby leading to changes in the format and location of the races. In 1950 the Bendix transcontinental dash from Los Angeles to Cleveland and the Thompson free-for-all pylon race were discontinued, marking the end of a colorful era in aviation history.

Today the Clifford Henderson Award for Achievement is awarded to honor those individuals for their outstanding contributions that further the development and advancement of aviation.

## Scope and Content

*The Clifford W. Henderson National Air Races Collection, 1928-1939* is a comprehensive body of documentary evidence reflecting the organization and implementation of the races, consisting of press releases, letters, programs, posters, tickets, buttons, and clippings. The collection is organized into four series: *National Air Races 1928-1939*; *Other Air Races*; *Scrapbooks*; and *Certificates and Plaques*. These sections are arranged chronologically by year of event, then hierarchically by document type, and then chronologically, where applicable or possible, within type.

Photographic and electrostatic copies of oversized materials (mostly posters) and buttons and badges are included in these standard sized files. Because of their size or composition, the originals are stored in oversized containers or elsewhere within the library. In the microfilm edition the oversized originals have been re-integrated into the correct folders.

This collection is useful for studying the National Air Races, either as a popular amusement or as an aviation industry activity concerned with research, development, and marketing. The collection contains an excellent sampling of the graphic design and illustration of the period in the form of posters, tickets, and programs. Press releases, letters, and administrative material provide information about the promotion and organization of large national events in the 1930s. Lists of exhibitors and contestants and race results are to be found here as well as biographical information on the fliers, including a large number of women aviators.

# Roll Contents

**Roll Cont. Folder**  
**No. No. No.**

## **Series I: National Air Races 1928-1939**

### **1928**

1	1	1	Bulletins and press releases
		2	Form letters, dated
		3	Form letters, undated
		4	Forms, blanks and agreements
		5	Miscellaneous administrative material
		6	Programs, maps and diagrams
		7	Flyers
		8	Posters and placards
		9	Tickets
		10	Stickers
		11	Buttons, ribbons and badges (10 items; photographs, objects stored separately)
		12	Miscellaneous printed material

### **1929**

	2	13	Bulletins and press releases
		14	Form letters, dated
		15	Form letters, undated
2		16	Forms, blanks and agreements
		17	Miscellaneous administrative material
		18	Maps, plans and diagrams
		19	Programs
		20	Flyer
		21	Posters and placards
		22	Tickets

**Roll Cont. Folder  
No. No. No.**

2 3 23 Stickers and proofs  
24 Buttons, ribbons, armbands, ID case  
and medal (23 items and duplicates;  
photographs, objects stored separately)  
25-  
26 Miscellaneous printed material

**1930**

27 Bulletins and press releases, dated  
28 Bulletins and press releases, undated  
29 Form letters, dated  
3 30 Form letters, undated  
31 Forms, blanks and agreements  
4 32 Miscellaneous administrative material  
33 Maps, plans and diagrams  
34 Programs  
35 Flyers  
36 Posters and placards  
37-  
38 Tickets  
39 Stickers  
40 Proofs  
41 Buttons, badges, cap and armbands  
(16 items and duplicates; photographs,  
objects stored separately)  
42-  
43 Miscellaneous printed material

<b>Roll No.</b>	<b>Cont. No.</b>	<b>Folder No.</b>	
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**1931**

3	5	44	Bulletins and press releases, dated
		45	Bulletins and press releases, undated
		46	Form letters, dated
4		47	Form letters, undated
		48	Forms, blanks and agreements
		49	Miscellaneous administrative material
		50	Maps, plans and diagrams
		51	Programs
		52	Flyers
		53	Posters and placards
		54	Tickets
		55	Stickers
		56	Buttons, armbands and badges (12 items and duplicates; photographs, objects stored separately)
	57	Miscellaneous printed material	

**1932**

6		58	Bulletins and press releases
		59	Form letters
		60	Forms, blanks and agreements
		61	Miscellaneous administrative material
		62	Maps, plans and diagrams
		63	Programs
		64	Flyers
		65	Posters and placards
		66	Tickets
		67	Stickers

**Roll Cont. Folder  
No. No. No.**

4 6 68 Buttons (6 items; photographs, objects stored separately)  
69 Proofs  
70 Miscellaneous printed material

5 7 71 Menus

**1933**

72 Bulletins and releases  
73 Form letters  
74 Forms, blanks and agreements  
75 Miscellaneous administrative material, International Air Races corporate records  
76 Programs  
77 Flyers  
78 Posters and placards  
79 Tickets  
80 Stickers  
81 Miscellaneous printed material

**1934**

8 82 Bulletins and press releases  
83 Form letters  
84 Forms, blanks, agreements  
85 Miscellaneous administrative material  
86 Programs

6 87 Flyers  
88 Posters and placards

**Roll Cont. Folder  
No. No. No.**

6 8 89 Tickets  
 90 Stickers, ribbon (1 ribbon; photograph,  
 object stored separately)  
 91 Proofs  
 92 Miscellaneous printed material

**1935**

93 Bulletins and press releases  
 94 Form letters  
 95 Forms, blanks, agreements

9 96 Miscellaneous administrative material  
 97 Programs  
 98 Flyers  
 99 Posters and placards  
 100 Tickets  
 101 Stickers  
 102 Buttons and badges (5 items and  
 duplicates; photographs, objects stored  
 separately)  
 103 Miscellaneous printed material

**1936**

104 Bulletins and press releases  
 105 Form letters  
 106 Forms, blanks, agreements  
 107 Miscellaneous administrative material  
 108 Programs  
 109 Flyers



**Roll Cont. Folder**  
**No. No. No.**

- 7 9 110 Posters and placards  
 111 Tickets  
 112 Stickers  
 113 Buttons, Ribbons and badges (8 items  
 and duplicates; photographs, objects  
 stored separately)  
 114 Miscellaneous printed material

**1937**

- 10 115 Bulletins and press releases  
 116 Form letters  
 117 Forms, blanks, agreements  
 118 Miscellaneous administrative material  
 119 Maps  
 120 Programs  
 121 Flyers  
 122 Posters and placards  
 123 Tickets  
 124 Stickers  
 125 Proofs  
 126 Buttons, ribbons, cap (11 items and  
 duplicates; photographs, objects stored  
 separately)  
 127 Miscellaneous printed material

**1938**

- 11 128 Bulletins, press releases  
 129 Form letters  
 130 Forms, blanks, agreements

**Roll Cont. Folder  
No. No. No.**

7 11 131 Miscellaneous administrative material  
132 Programs

8 133 Flyers  
134 Posters and placards, printed cloth flag  
135 Tickets  
136 Stickers, proofs  
137 Armbands and ribbons (15 items and  
duplicates; photographs, objects stored  
separately)  
138 Miscellaneous printed material

**1939**

12 139 Bulletins, releases  
140 Form letters  
141 Forms, blanks, agreements  
142 Miscellaneous administrative material  
143 Programs  
144 Flyers  
145 Posters and placards  
146 Tickets  
147 Stickers  
148 Proofs  
149 Buttons, badges and armbands  
(12 items and duplicates; photographs,  
objects stored separately)  
150 Miscellaneous printed material

**Roll Cont. Folder**  
**No. No. No.**

**Series II: Other Air Races**

**Western Aircraft Show, Los Angeles, 1929**

8	13	151	Bulletins, releases
		152	Form letters
		153	Forms, blanks, agreements
		154	Regulations
		155	Maps
		156	Programs
		157	Flyers
		158	Posters and placards, banner
		159	Stickers
		160	Proofs
		161	Miscellaneous printed material

**St. Louis International Aircraft Exposition, 1930**

		162	Bulletins and press releases
9		163	Speeches
		164	Form letters
		165	Agreements
		166	Miscellaneous administrative material, contracts, diagrams
		167	Programs
		168	Flyers
		169	Posters and placards
		170	Tickets
		171	Stickers

**Roll Cont. Folder  
No. No. No.**

9 13 172 Proofs  
173 Badges  
174 Miscellaneous printed material

**New York Air Show and Aircraft Salon, 1930**

14 175 Bulletins and releases  
176 Form letters  
177 Forms, blanks, agreements  
178 Miscellaneous administrative material  
179 Maps, plans, diagrams  
180 Programs  
181 Flyers  
182 Posters and placards, original art  
for poster  
183 Tickets  
184 Stickers  
185 Badges  
186 Miscellaneous printed material  
187 1931 National Air Show, Detroit,  
certificates

**Omaha Air Races, 1931-1932**

188 Bulletins, releases  
189 Form letter  
190 Forms, blanks, agreements  
191 Programs  
192 Flyers  
193 Posters and placards

**Roll Cont. Folder  
No. No. No.**

9 14 194 Tickets  
195 Stickers  
196 Buttons and badges  
197 Miscellaneous printed material

**International Air Races, Chicago, 1933**

198 Bulletins, releases  
199 Form letters

10 200 Forms, blanks, agreements  
201 Miscellaneous administrative material

15 202 Maps, plans, diagrams  
203 Programs  
204 Flyers  
205 Posters and placards  
206 Tickets  
207 Stickers  
208 Proofs  
209 Miscellaneous printed material

**Pan-American Air Races, New Orleans, 1934**

210 Bulletins, releases  
211 Form letters  
212 Forms, blanks, agreements  
213 Miscellaneous administrative material  
214 Maps, plans, diagrams

<b>Roll No.</b>	<b>Cont. No.</b>	<b>Folder No.</b>	
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10	15	215	Programs
		216	Flyers
		217	Posters and placards
		218	Tickets
		219	Stickers
		220	Miscellaneous printed material

[Oversized material in Containers 16-25 have been re-integrated into other folders within this collection.]

### **Series III: Scrapbooks**

26			Eight scrapbooks compiled by Annetta Sands: three from 1929 National Air Races; 1931 "Aviation History (Ocean Flights)"; 1931 National Air Races; 1932 National Air Races (includes autographs); 1934 National Air Races; 1935 National Air Races (includes photographs and autographs.)
11	27		Scrapbooks compiled by Annetta Sands: 1937 National Air Races; 1938-1939 National Air Races
		1	1934 National Air Races, miscellaneous clippings
		2	1935 National Air Races clippings
		3	1930s Thompson Trophy race clippings

<b>Roll No.</b>	<b>Cont. No.</b>	<b>Folder No.</b>	
11	27	4	Miscellaneous late 1930s National Air Races clippings
	28		76 loose scrapbook pages of 1929 National Air Races clippings
12	29		Scrapbook; "Press Clippings, 1929 National Air Races and Aeronautical Exposition, Aug. 24-Sept. 2, Cleveland," 118 pp.
	30		Scrapbook; Mostly 1931 National Air Races clippings; also 1930 Detroit Air Tour; 1930 National Air Races; 1931 Elmira Glider Contest; plus 13 loose pp. 1931 Omaha Air Races; 12 loose pp. 1932 Omaha Air Races
13	31		Scrapbooks; 1932 National Air Races press clippings, 66 pp.; 1930 National Air Races, 77 pp.; 1933 International Air Races, 40 pp.
	32		Scrapbook; "Press Notices, International Aircraft Exposition, Feb. 15-23, 1930, St. Louis," 80 pp.
14	33		Gordon Bennet International Balloon Races and Aerial Carnival, 1930: 2 scrapbooks, 87pp., 99pp.

<b>Roll No.</b>	<b>Cont. No.</b>	<b>Folder No.</b>
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14	34	Loose scrapbook pages, miscellaneous Henderson matters; Pan-Pacific Civic Auditorium, events from 1936-1943, 57pp.; 1942 Ice Capades, 11pp.; 1942 Silver Skates, 7pp.; 1934 Oakland Speedway, 25pp.; 1937 National Air Races, 5pp.; a complete edition of the Chicago Sunday Tribune of August 23, 1930
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**Series IV: Certificates and Plaques**

35		Charter member Palm Desert Hangar of Quiet Birdmen, 1965 Graduation from Ray Seeley School of Rotary Information, 1969 Certificate of Appreciation, United Way of Coachella Valley, 1967 Century Club, Boy Scouts of America, 1975 Appointment to Officers' Reserve Corps, U.S. Army, 1924 Appointment temporary colonel, U.S. Army, 1943 Outstanding Citizen Award, Southern California Aviation Council, 1971 Kappa Alpha Order, 100 years Proclamation recognizing WWII pilots, Monroe, Louisiana, 1976 Proclamation, Clifford W. Henderson week, Palm Desert, 1978
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**Roll Cont. Folder**  
**No. No. No.**

14 35 American Legion Merit Award, 1959  
 Ordre de l'Etoile Noire du Benin, 1943  
 Hump Pilots Association Certificate of  
 Appreciation  
 Hump Pilots Association Bicentennial  
 Observance, 1976  
 First Flight Society, 1977  
 Ambassador for "100,000 Pennsylvanians  
 for the Promotion of Economic  
 Growth"  
 Society of Experimental Test Pilots  
 OX5 Club or America Aviation Hall  
 Fame, 1972  
 Associate member, The Early Birds  
 Stratoliner Club (upper altitude  
 flight) 1940  
 Authorization to organize Bendix  
 Trophy Race, 1932  
 Authorization to organize Thompson  
 Trophy Race, 1932  
 Tribute from Jimmy Gillette on behalf  
 of National Air Races Staff  
 Tribute from Los Angeles Air Armada,  
 as Chairman, 1939 Golden Gate  
 International Exposition  
 Clifford Henderson Day, Palm Desert,  
 1983  
 Congressional Record, recognition as  
 founder of Palm Desert, 1982  
 Letter of Appreciation from Quiet  
 Birdmen Palm Desert Hangar  
 members

**Roll Cont. Folder**  
**No. No. No.**

**Plaques in Plaque Storage**

14	35	<p>Plaque, laminated with Henderson's CAA airman ratings, ID and business card</p> <p>Plaque, laminated with City of Los Angeles resolution honoring Henderson on his 80th birthday</p> <p>Plaque, laminated with photo of Henderson as Silver Wings Fraternity Distinguished Member of the Year 1978 Plaque, "In appreciation" from Aviation Breakfast Club, 1979</p> <p>Plaque, from Experimental Aircraft Association Golden Age National Air Races Day</p> <p>Plaque, from International Organization of Characters: 1976</p> <p>Aero-Space Trophy of the year</p> <p>Plaque, laminated invitation to Shadow Mountain Country Club party for Henderson</p> <p>Plaque, Palm Desert Rotary Club honors Henderson for 100% 25-year attendance, 1972</p> <p>Plaque, declaring Henderson honorary mayor of Palm Desert, 1967</p> <p>Plaque, Henderson honored as Elder Statesman of Aviation, 1976</p> <p>Plaque, YMCA Century Club for service to youth, 1966-1967</p> <p>Plaque, YMCA Patron of Youth, 1979</p>
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**Roll Cont. Folder**  
**No. No. No.**

14	35	<p>Plaque, membership in OX5 Club of America (aviation pioneers)</p> <p>Plaque, American Hall of Aviation History, International Hall of Aviation Personalities</p> <p>Plaque, life membership, the Hump Pilots' Association</p> <p>Plaque, YMCA Patron of Youth</p> <p>Plaque, ABC Sports 1968 Mexico Olympics</p> <p>Plaque, 1969 jet craft dedication "special contribution to aviation"</p> <p>Plaque, 1966 Transcontinental Air Race from Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce</p> <p>Plaque, 1979 U.S. Navy League, Palm Springs, "He gave the nation wings"</p> <p>Plaque, 1966 Transcontinental Air Race honorary chairman</p> <p>Plaque, 1972 University of Southern California Outstanding Service Award for promotion of aviation</p>
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