

AVIATION WALL OF HONOR



Sigurd O. "Sig" Wilson

Sigurd O. Wilson was born on October 28, 1904 in Marquette, Michigan to Fritz and Hilma Wilson, immigrants from Sweden. The family operated a grocery store and Sig worked there for his room and board and the little extra spending money he could save for the flying lessons he was later to take at the Foster Airways Aviation School in downstate Lansing. The instruction was called the Rankin Course, essentially the same as regular Army training adapted to commercial purpose. He soloed in 1930 and his license was signed by Orville Wright.

Most planes at that time had single engines and because they had no instruments they were flown only during the day.

Sig's first plane was a Barbing NB-3, which was "a single engine low wing, three place", meaning there was room for the pilot and two passengers. Wilson allowed the Clover Farm Stores to paint their name on the side of his plane for twenty-five dollars.

"We'd fly over town, wake 'em up and get them to come out to the airport to see what was going on," he said. A crowd invariably gathered. Sig would then offer a seat in the plane for 99 cents. Upon receiving a dollar, he would always give a brand new penny back. His wife,

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Helen, recalls many times people would remark how much they would like to go up but didn't have the dollar. He might end up taking them for a ride for nothing.

Those were tough depression times and being a pilot didn't cover all the expenses of flying, so Sig would be back at the grocery store again to help pay the bills. But they were exciting times as well. Barnstorming or an air acrobatic show was always a winner assuming everything went as planned. Flying upside down, making loop the loops, and wing walking made for a terrific event. Clem Sohn of East Lansing performed a delayed parachute jump. With an open bag of flour creating a trail, he would wait until he was just a few hundred feet from the ground before pulling the ripcord. Unfortunately he was killed doing that stunt.

The American Legion featured races in their show in Menominee. Planes would fly a triangular route and return to the starting point. Sig made a couple of second place finishes in the race competition and, although he performed a variety of stunts as well, he never "pancaked" a landing, meaning his plane never flipped over. "It was his plane," Helen said. "He was very careful." The worst thing that ever happened to him during his flying days was getting whacked by the propeller. "I've had a stiff leg ever since," he said.

In 1939, he flew part of the first Upper Peninsula airmail route. "That was the beginning of airmail here," he said. "Now that postmark is special and I never even saved one!"

When World War II began, trained pilots were urgently needed and Wilson began teaching an aviation course at Northern Michigan School of Education. C.B. Hedgecock, Northern's athletic coach, was in charge of the ground school and Roy McCullum, a science teacher, was also an instructor. Wilson continued teaching at Northern until 1944. Because they wanted students to be turned out faster, a move was made to Escanaba for better flying weather.