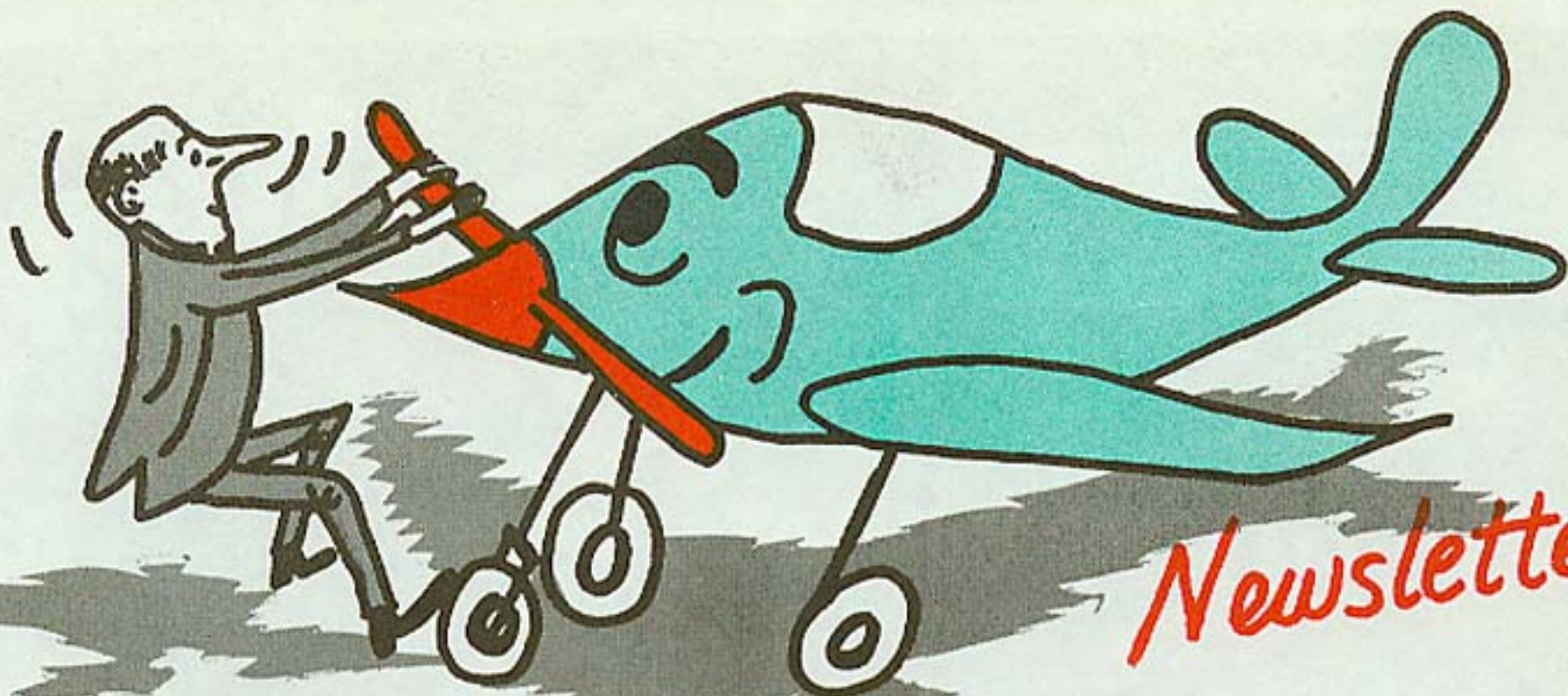


N.A.P.P.



Newsletter

VOLUME XII

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NO. 5

GENTLEMEN!

MAN YOUR PENS AND CHECKBOOKS. BILL BEVINGTON, OUR CONVENTION HOST, TELLS ME THAT PLANS ARE ALL SET FOR JULY AND ALL HE NEEDS IS CONVENTIONEERS. SO WHILE YOU'RE DREAMING ABOUT BEING "UP THERE" ON A NICE SPRING DAY, GET YOUR RESERVATION CHECK TO BILL. AS THEY SAY ON MADISON AVENUE --

"DO IT NOW --- BEFORE YOUR FORGET!!!"

Rick

CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS...

Wednesday, July 16

LIFE AT LITTLE AIRPORTS

Tullahoma Tennessee

The fifth annual Fly-in Happening and Chili Supper—and what's it all about?
A closed-cockpit biplane that Walter Beech built: the Staggerwing.

by Gordon Baxter

The airplanes are parked out in rows on the bluegrass meadow, in stark relief, gaunt in the long shadows and gold of the Indian summer twilight. The Townies come out to mingle softly with the families who have landed here. They walk carefully among these grand old planes, not letting their kids touch a thing. It is the fifth annual Tullahoma, Tennessee Fly-in Happening and Chili Supper that has drawn these wonderful, weird, old airplanes, along with the crazies who fly them.

There is music in the air. A Mustang and a Hellcat laze overhead wing n' wing, singing alto and soprano. A distant Fleet biplane hangs against a cloud bank, the popping of its old Kinner radial drifting across the field. Flagmen on the ground direct a queenly Fairchild 24 to her roost; she trundles wide-legged, her long, in-line snout lifted, sniffing.

Suddenly there is the sound of full-barreled thunder rolling across the field. Razor-thin biplane wings flash overhead at better than 175 knots, and every head turns. What antique this? A Beechcraft, baby. A Staggerwing Beech. People stopped and looked upwards when the first Staggerwing flashed over in 1932, and they still do today.

The Staggerwing turns final, gear and flaps down, doing 90, and all the pilots in the crowd grow still to help him land it. There is a collective letting out of breath as he tames the roll-out. A Staggerwing has come in, and the homing of the Staggerwings is what today is all about.

Tullahoma is the home of the Staggerwing Club and the site of the Staggerwing Museum Foundation, Inc. Here, in this gentle hollow about 70 miles south of Nashville, is the greatest collection of vintage Beechcraft in the world. On the waxed floor of this modern steel and glass museum hangar sit Walter Beech's giant steps: the open-cockpit Travel Air biplane, one of each of the production models of the Staggerwing 17 and the shiny new Twin Beech 18. Out along the flight line are hangar rows of vintage aircraft slowly coming back to life and a treasure of parts and know-how to restore any basket case Staggerwing back to Wichita newness. And you can't tell the mechanics from the millionaires.

When they dedicated the Walter Beech museum, the

people of Tullahoma had Chuck Moore of Beechcraft come down from Wichita and bring a bucket of soil from Beech Field to transplant there so that a bit of Staggerwing country will always be a place where Walter Beech himself once trod.

In this compound is also a rustic log cabin called the Louise Thaden Library and Office Building, named in honor of a little slip of a lady, now in her 70s, who dedicated this place to the preservation and documentation of the vivid history of the Beechcraft Model 17. The story of "Our First Lady," as they call her, is on the wall; how she zanged her Staggerwing from coast to coast in 1936 and won the Bendix trophy right out from under all the hard, hairy noses of those hot, unlimited pilots is no small part of that history.

All of this nostalgia, the preservation of Staggerwings and other fine old airplanes is loosely tied together under the name Tullahoma Bunch, and they wear little yellow banana-shaped name tags. Banana . . . bunch.

Its home is the Parish Aerodrome, (3,000 E-W; 1,600 N-S) and the turf belongs to John Parish and his wife, Charlotte.

Just beyond the crossing of the runways, back in the shade trees, the Parishes entertain the Bunch in what is called "The Barn," just a 'lil' ole thing they put together out of hand-hewn barn timbers dating back to Davy Crockett. The main structure has glass walls on three sides around the stone fireplace and bar, so that you can see what it is made of and to let the evening light play in through the riot of color in the autumn leaves. An inside balcony leads back to the private guest rooms for those who stay over while their Staggerwing is being restored.

Owning a Staggerwing is not mandatory to be a part of this casual elegance. Original oils of other antique aircraft are hung here, too, but if you own a Staggerwing, your own silver flagon, properly engraved, will be placed discretely with the rest.

Although the Tullahoma Bunch is pretty well centered around the Parish Aerodrome, John and Charlotte assume a modest and retiring role. "I just like to share my hobby with my friends," says John, whose smiling

LIFE AT LITTLE AIRPORTS

face is unlined.

Parish's grandfather was a maker of buggy whips, a man who got the message when the first Model T Ford rattled into town. The Parishes still operate the tannery, but they are switch hitters. If you buy a baseball from Sears, it was made in Tullahoma, Tennessee by a really good Staggerwing pilot, John Parish.

Mrs. Parish is the epitome of today's Southern gentlewoman. Under different circumstances, you might have found her dressed to ride to the hounds on a frosty morn, but her thoroughbred steed is a minted Stearman biplane, stabled with hubby's Staggerwing.

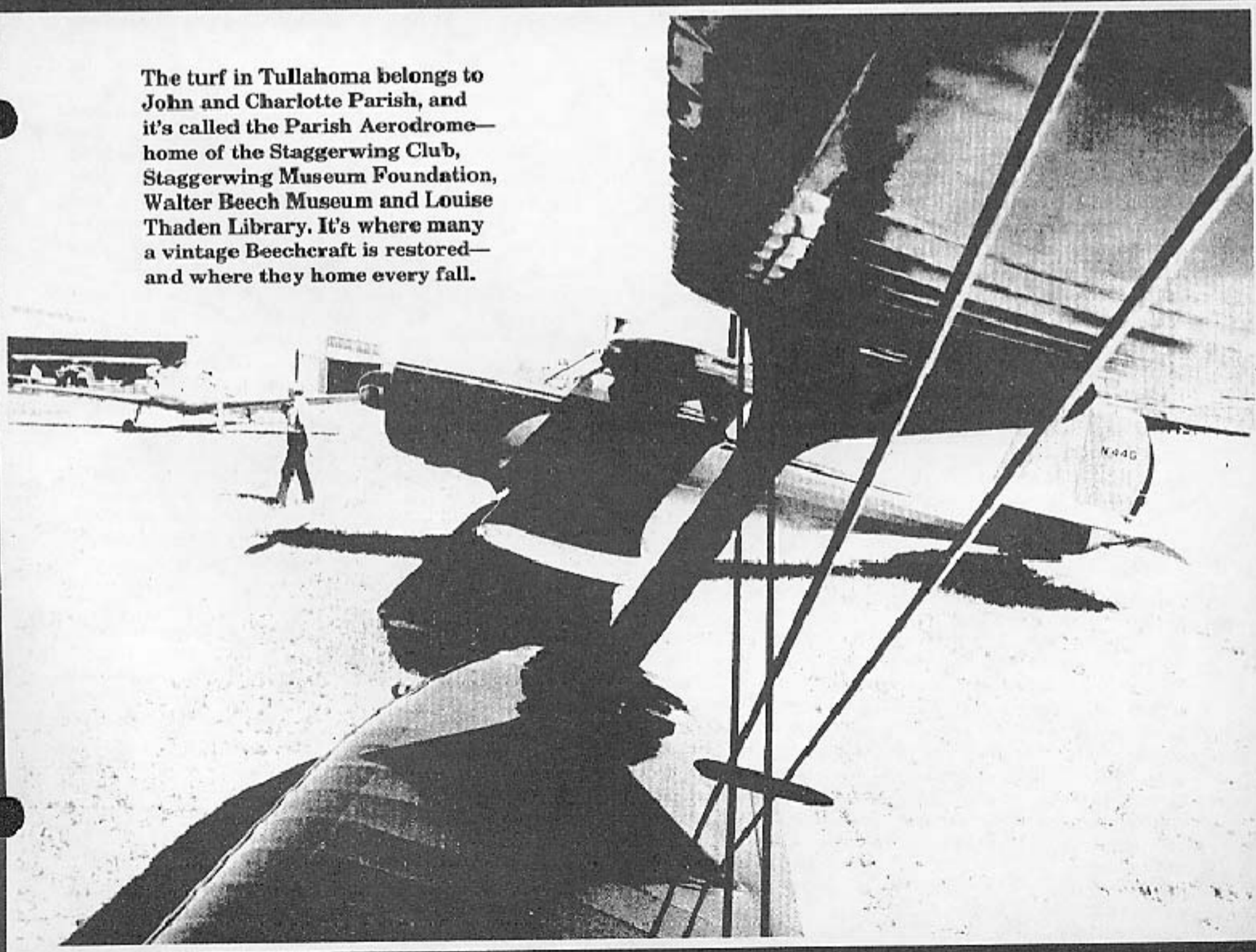
Why Tullahoma for all this Beech lore? Well, all the makings are there. The town is down in the Oak Ridge atomic and Huntsville rocket part of the new South. It is the bedroom community for the Arnold Engineering and Development Center, a place of great secret doings around a wind tunnel that will put you into outer space

and at supersonic speeds without ever leaving the ground. Most folks in Tullahoma work "out at the base," or, in other aerospace-related light industry in town. There are probably more brains per capita in Tullahoma than in any non-city in America. The egghead imports have adopted the gentle way of life of the Old Families, producing a delightful blend of culture.

With spare time and spare money, many of these people have turned to playing with old airplanes. Even Carlton Murphy, owner of the local motel, has the bare bones of the Bede 4 he's building sitting out by the patio pool. He says he moved to Tullahoma because he made a study of trends. But oddly enough, Murphy's motel has no bar and sells only cheap cigars, and the town of Tullahoma has no serious airport. The little fox farm that Parish runs is an appendix grown onto the south end of a big World War II bomber base where grass grows up through miles of concrete runways. The big airport died long ago,

(continued on page 109)

The turf in Tullahoma belongs to John and Charlotte Parish, and it's called the Parish Aerodrome—home of the Staggerwing Club, Staggerwing Museum Foundation, Walter Beech Museum and Louise Thaden Library. It's where many a vintage Beechcraft is restored—and where they home every fall.



when the last B-24s and cadets faded off into the wild blue yonder.

Today the echoing and slowly rotting shells of the old barracks and hangars are occupied in one corner by the fleeting figure of Wayland Tyner. He rents a few, teaches a few, pumps a little gas and turns on the lights when he can afford it. Wayland is a young guy, a serious pro of a pilot, but he has never been able to get anything better than a 30-day lease on his operation, ". . . and I ain't putting anything in here I couldn't truck out overnight."

There is a hassle about the airport. The Feds say Tullahoma ought to have a big airport, but Tullahoma isn't the county seat, Manchester is. And Manchester says, "By gawd, if the airport ain't gonna be in Manchester, then there ain't gonna be no airport." And so it goes. Tennessee is famous for such ironheadedness. Ten miles away, in Lynchburg, the main industry is making Jack Daniel's whiskey, but they voted the county dry. "We can make it, we can smell it, but we can't drink it, and we can't sell it," grins the man with the brown paper bag.

It is in such surroundings that the Staggerwing Beech has been assured its place in posterity, along with all of its lore and minutia. To some, the Staggerwing is ugly, but collectors have a fascination with the ugly, with extremes so grotesque that they are eventually beheld as beautiful. The Staggerwing Beech looks like a Boston Screwtail Bulldog—all jaws and no behind. Form follows function right down to the final squeeze.

The Staggerwing may have been the apogee of biplane design. With it, young Walter Beech most surely did depart from his open-cockpit friends. The Staggerwing was his Model 17. His next leap, the all-metal, low-wing Twin Beech Model 18, carried him into modern air-

craft design. With the Staggerwing, Beech set out to get the businessman interested in aviation as a business tool by keeping him warm and dry in a machine that was utterly reliable and that went very fast. It's surprising how much of that original concept is still Beechcraft today.

If you had been a rich Tulsa oilman in 1934, you could have purchased a Staggerwing, loaded it down with your geologist, banker, lawyer, all your leases, suitcases and pistol and been out to the oil fields while your competition was still waiting for the train. And had you encountered a squadron of the Army Air Corps' fastest single-seat Curtiss Hawks along the way, you could have blasted right by them, giving them a goggled glimpse of you in your coat and tie. The Beech Staggerwing was thought of as a very hot airplane then. It still is. A special charisma grew up around the Staggerwing pilot—you just knew he was good.

Today's Staggerwing pilots still ride on that—and most of them need it. A fictional composite member of the clan is a middling successful contractor who flew P-51s for a few blazing months in skies yellow with Messerschmitts. Then the party was over, and nothing that exciting ever happened to him again, though he seeks it yet. Today, at 50, he keeps the tiger in him alive with an immaculately restored Staggerwing, drinks his bourbon on the rocks and flocks with his kind. He's nobody's fool; he sees himself for what he is and can laugh about it, but he's still got those gunsight eyes.

Glen McNabb is one of them. He's also a serious FBO over at Jasper, Tennessee, as well as the curator of the museum at Tullahoma. He invited me to come fly with him in his cherry-red mint Staggerwing.

We were off in a flurry of blown grass and rudder wagging. The 450 P&W, about 30 inches ahead of our knees, was roaring like the hammers of hell. It all settled down to a dull bellow when the wheels came up, filled in the basement and absorbed some of the heat and noise.

H.H. "Red" Holloway eased up on our wing in his yellow Staggerwing. Red is a big sand and gravel man in Baton Rouge and chairman of the Museum Foundation. Parish joined us in his Twin Beech 18, which was all agleam with aluminum polish, and then pulled away like a silver torpedo; his slot was taken by Dick Perry, who flies for United. Outside my window were Staggerwings framed in Staggerwings, lightning flashing off their round engine cowlings. I wish you could have been there.

The formation tailed out, and McNabb made that great gesture of magnanimity that only a Beech pilot can make—he lofted the yoke over to my side. Beech has had that throw-over arrangement since they first put the pilot indoors.

I laid loving and reverent hands upon the yoke of that big, red biplane and sat there awhile to sense all that it was wanting me to know. Then I eased into a few shallow coordination-turn exercises and quickly learned that

this airplane was made for pilots with feet: It expected to be flown. Nothing happened to change my pet theory that an airplane will do what it looks like it will do. Control was light, but there was not an ounce of slack. I looked around that big, deep cabin, with its armchair seats, oval-shaped door pulls and wide, wooden, window sills with crank-up handles. A man could have gotten right out of his Pierce Arrow and into this Beechcraft and never felt the difference. After a few steep turns and some shallow dives, I felt the airplane fairly drumming with integrity and speed, and I was tingling and grinning and wondering what my creditors would say if I told them, "Not this month boys; I have just invested in my personal well-being by buying a 30-year-old wooden airplane for \$20,000."

There was no question about who was going to do the landing. I heaved the yoke back over to the lean-jawed McNabb and watched him prepare for the event. Everything on this old beast seems to have a vernier screw adjustment that comes out somewhere in the cabin in the form of lovely, old-fashioned plumbing. McNabb was selecting tanks, prop, flaps, oil cooler; he was also dumping ashes, shaking grates, blowing flues, and I never saw a happier man. He let the gear down with the sound of falling chains, like that of an old freighter coming to rest in the bay.

As the big-headed airplane roared over the fence at 90, McNabb assumed the stance of a wary but graceful lion tamer, just before they open the chutes. He was about to begin the Staggerwing tango. The machine touched lightly and began to roll. Then, ever so imperceptibly, it heaved up on one wheel of its wicked little gear. McNabb was waiting and eased it down. The Beech tried again, half-heartedly, from the other side, but found everyone wide awake; it seemed to sigh and give up and then rolled tamely toward the parking area. I uncurled my toes in my shoes and glanced at McNabb, but his expression indicated that nothing had happened worth mentioning.

It is not always thus. At an earlier happening, a Staggerwing rolled over onto its back out in the high grass, its little bulldog belly and feet pointing to the sky. Terrible and vile language was coming from inside the upside-down cabin. A rescuer stepped forward to grasp the door handle, and a voice bellowed from within, "Don't step in that god-damn wing!" So, if you find an upside-down Staggerwing at your airport, let them walk away from it. They want it that way.

Tullahoma Happening V came to a gentle closing inside John Parish's hangar. Club officials Dub Yarbrough, Jim Gorman and Marsh Seymour herded all of us inside. The ladies took the linens off the homemade cakes, and the chili and beer began to flow.

You can put Tullahoma down as the silliest manifestation of the American hobbyist, or you can see it as the finest layer of the fine grain of the basic American character. I think the Tullahoma Bunch leave the world a slightly better place than they found it. ♣

CONVENTION EXTRA — — GAMA Safe Pilot Sweepstakes II

Thursday, July 17

The opportunity to win a new \$40,000 general aviation airplane and other valuable prizes is being offered to the nation's pilots who voluntarily attend FAA Safety Seminars being held throughout the United States. The year-long national Safe Pilot Sweepstakes II, April 1, 1975 through March 31, 1976, is sponsored by the General Aviation Manufacturers Association in direct support of the Federal Aviation Administration's Accident Prevention Program.

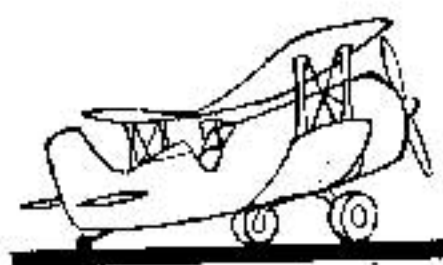
In addition to the Sweepstakes Grand Prize of a new \$40,000 airplane manufactured by a GAMA member company, other industry prizes include two one thousand dollar certificates from the National Business Aircraft Association to be used for pilot proficiency, advance ratings, or to obtain a pilot certificate. Also, two Vacation Bonus Prizes being offered by the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association include a fourteen-day Rhine Discovery Tour for two and a trip for two to AOPA's 1976 Plantation Party in San Antonio, Texas.

"The Intent of the Sweepstakes," said Edward W. Stimpson, GAMA president, "is to promote pilot proficiency and to encourage pilots and those who would like to be pilots to attend the free FAA seminars."

The FAA programs concentrate on common causes of general aviation accidents, review proper flying techniques, and provide reminders of basic skills used to avoid fundamental flying mistakes which account for the bulk of general aviation accidents. The FAA General Aviation Accident Prevention Program began in 1971 after investigations of general aviation accidents established that more than 80% were attributed to pilot error.

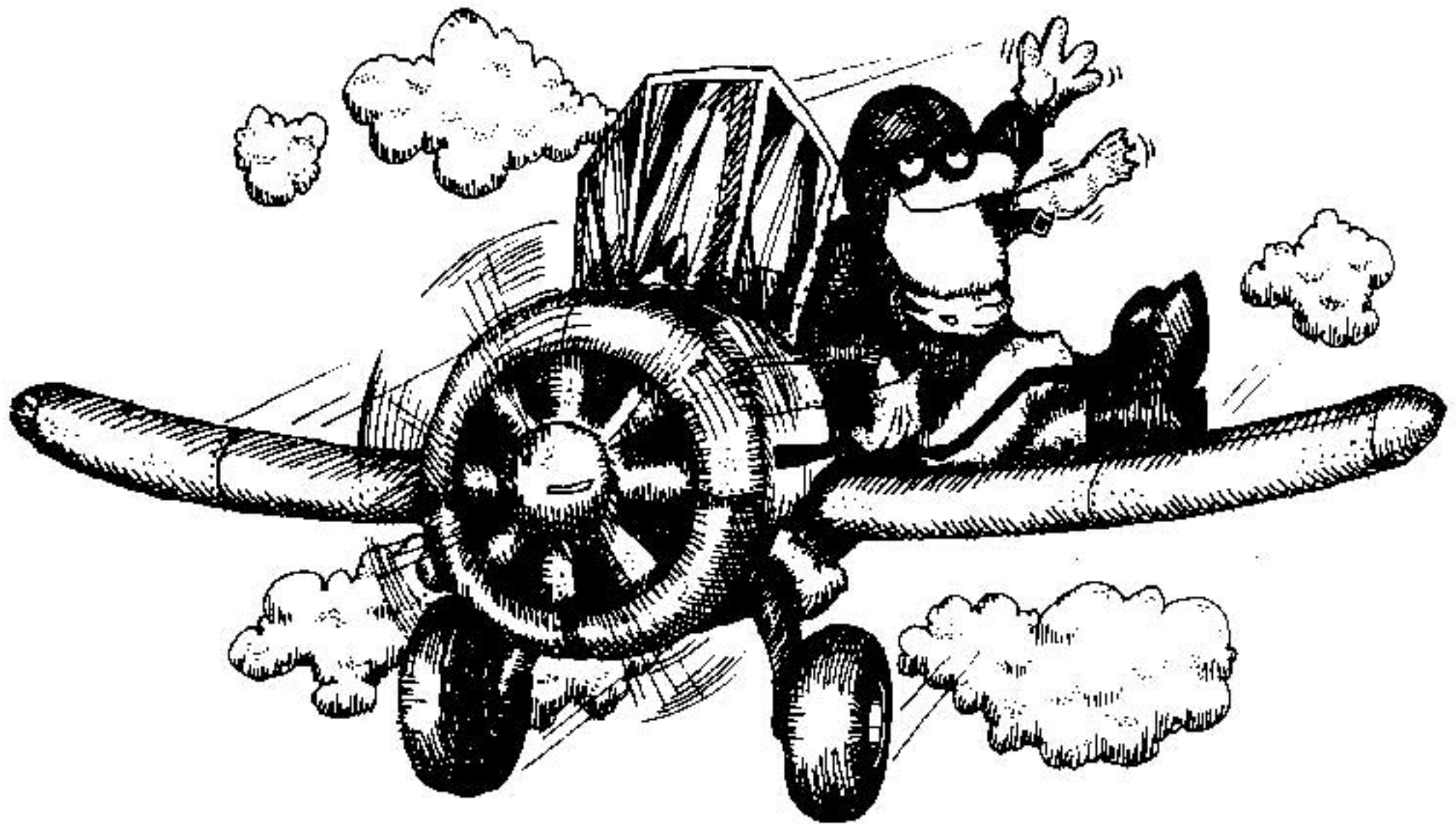
The program, which is entirely voluntary, consists of discussions ranging from "Cross Wind Take Offs and Landings" to "How To Get A Good Weather Briefing." An FAA Accident Prevention Specialist handles the program at each of 85 General Aviation District Offices located at airports throughout the country.

CENTRAL REGION



Ev and John Hemann will host the Central Region's Spring Meeting on Monday, May 12. Plans are to meet at St. John's Rectory on Monday-- or earlier if that suits you better. Contact John at 1701 Mulberry Street, Waterloo, Iowa, 50703, as to ETA. Phone: 319-233-5241.

GET ON THE WING --



COME TO NASHVILLE!

MAKE YOUR CONVENTION

RESERVATIONS NOW!

Rev. Bill Bevington
Church of the Holy Rosary
190 Graylynn Drive
Nashville, Tennessee 37214
Phone 615-889-4065

I will arrive _____ (date & time)

I will depart _____ (date & time)

Need hotel accomodations yes no

Reserve Grand Ole Opry ticket - July 18 yes no

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car