

Windsor Historical Society

WINDSOR WALK

A Historical Journey to the Past for the Future

Jan/Feb/Mar 2011

Windsor's Fred Wiseman Delivers First Airmail

While living in Windsor, this self-taught aviator built an airplane on a local ranch and flew into record books.



Ready to Fly. Although the above photo identifies Fred Wiseman as a Santa Rosa aviator, census records reveal he was living in Windsor when he built his first airplane, the first in California, and delivered the world's first airmail. (photo courtesy Healdsburg Museum)

by Stephen Lehmann

Space Museum, Fred Wiseman built the first airplane in California. According to the National Postal Museum, Fred Wiseman flew the first airmail flight in the United States. And according to numerous other sources, Fred Wiseman flew the first airmail flight in the world!

What none of these sources tell us is that Fred Wiseman was living in Windsor

1) when he built his first airplane, 2) when he made his first flight and 3) when he made the first airmail delivery.

When digging into Windsor history, researchers soon discover that during bygone eras, many events that occurred in Windsor and within its sphere of influence were not credited to the community but described in the press as being "just south of Healdsburg" or "just north of Santa Rosa." In Fred Wiseman's case, his flights were reported as occurring "just north of Fulton" and "just

west of Mark West." The fact is, those flights were in Windsor. The 1910 census counted Fred Wiseman and his aviator mechanic partner, a Frenchman named Jean [John] W. Peters, as residents of East Windsor on May 7, 1910, and Wiseman flew his biplane in the area where Standard Structures is located today!

On Friday, May 6, 1910 the *Press Democrat* reported that the Wiseman – Peters airship had been brought into Santa Rosa the proceeding night to be put on

Continued on page 6, Wiseman

Windsor Historical Society Board Members

Stephen A. Lehmann, President (H) 838-6152; helmstaedt@aol.com

Barbara F. Ray, Vice President and Newletter Editor 836-0101; ldyray61@aol.com

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> Hembree House Museum 9225 Foxwood Dr. Windsor, California



Biplane Valentine, circa 1910

Mission Statement

The mission of the Windsor Historical Society is to found, maintain and operate a community historical museum and association in order to collect, store and display historical artifacts, to develop a fund of information and knowledge of the history and culture of the Windsor area.

President's Message



WHS Is Flying High

It's a busy time of the year for the Historical Society. We installed the engraved bricks at the Hembree House over Christmas. I think they look great. We are still waiting on a few bricks but we have over 50 lining the walkway into the Hembree House. This is a great way to support the society and to remember a family or friend.

We are also busy with plans for our Second Annual Polenta Dinner. The dinner is Saturday, February, 26th and is our major fundraiser of the year. We'll have lots of raffle prizes and great silent auction items as well as a wonderful Polenta dinner complete with antipasti, wine, and dessert! I hope you will join us for this delicious and fun event.

The new exhibit at the museum features photos and information of the historic "aero plane" built and flown by Fred Wiseman in 1910 and 1911. Fred Wiseman and his aviator partner, John Peters, lived in Windsor while they built the very first airplane in California and taught themselves to fly it on the Laughlin Ranch near present day Standard Structures. We will be celebrating the 100th anniversary of

Wiseman's record-setting flight on February 17th & 18th, the dates he flew the world's first airmail delivery from Petaluma to Santa Rosa. This feat is recognized by the Smithsonian Institution, and the Wiseman airplane is on display at the National Postal Museum of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. Our gift shop has souvenir post cards and T-shirts that commemorate the historic event.

We will host a reception on the anniversary of Fred Wiseman's flight on Friday, February 18th from 1:00 to 3:30 at the Hembree House, serving sandwiches and cookies and something to drink in honor of a group of celebrants who, earlier that day, will have walked the path of Fred Wiseman's flight. Please join us.

On a practical note, the Cunningham House will get a new roof this spring. We are in the process of working with a contractor and the Town of Windsor for installation of a steel roof, which will make the historic structure weather tight and allow us to continue with stabilization plans.

Busy, Busy, Busy!

See you around the museum.

Steve



WHS Member News

A Letter to the Editor

Jim DuVander's Column

Barbara,

Thank you so much for the edition of *Windsor Walk*. I really enjoyed reading it and mostly the article by Jim DuVander. We purchased our first TV when I was fourteen. Before that, we lived in Fort Bragg which was too far out to get reception. Radio was our only home entertainment.

As I recall, Jim and I attended the Methodist Church in Windsor. We were in the Youth Group and the Choir. I remember him having a very good voice.

When I enlisted in the service in 1959 I remember only a few buildings in Windsor. Pohley's Market where I worked on weekends for \$1.00 an hour, another grocery store across the street, the bank, Windsor Inn and a gas station.

Thanks again and please let Jim know that I remember him.

Sincerely,

Craig "Duke" Faylor Canton, Georgia

Editor's Note: Craig may have been the original Duke of Windsor. Because he was from Windsor, friends at Healdsburg High School nicknamed him "Duke."



Sheet Music for a 1910 Song Hit

Thank You!

Many thanks to Jack A. Scott, for donating to WHS four editions of *The Geyser*, Geyserville Union High School's yearbook, for the years 1928-1931. In addition to containing photos and information on some of our relatives and friends, the book also had a few references to Windsor that made them all the more interesting.

Condolences

We extend our deepest sympathies to the bereaved family of . . .

Georgette Gebelein, who was a WHS life member.

We shall miss this dear friend who was a valued member of the Windsor community.



Geyserville Gab

Wikiup Near Windsor, 1930

Agriculture: An afternoon was well spent at the Wikiup Rancho near Windsor, where most of the high schools of the county were represented. The talks were given by men who knew the breed of cattle. Every one seemed interested in examining the fine Ayrshires. All enjoyed the milk that was set out for lunch.

The Geyser, 1929-1930 Geyserville Union High School

Intriguing Tidbit

1929. Bruno [Solari] returned from Windsor after a week's absence. Wonder what the great attraction was down there!

The Geyser, 1928-1929 Geysersville Union High School

Museum Hours

Windsor's Hembree House Museum is open every Friday, Saturday and Sunday (except holidays) from 9:30 to 4:30. It's a great way to experience Windsor's past.

Hembree House Museum 9225 Foxwood Dr. Windsor, California



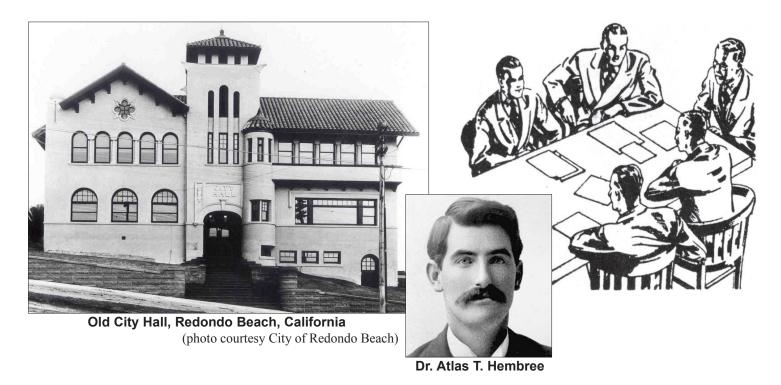
Geyserville Gab

Geyserville Senior Class Play in Windsor, February 1930

"Apple Blossom Time" was presented by the Senior Class in the [Geyserville] High School auditorium on the evening of December 15 [1929]. The audience was in an uproar from start to finish, assuring us of its huge success. ... The play was such a success that it was given again on February 1 [1930] at the Windsor Hall. The play was given under the auspices of the Windsor Grange. A dance followed the play and a large crowd attended which made our play a big success for the second time.

The Geyser, 1929-1930 Geyserville Union High School

A Page from the Life of Dr. Atlas Hembree - 1914



Dr. Atlas T. Hembree Wins City Council Election

Redondo Beach, California, April 20th, 1914

In April 1914 Dr. Atlas T. Hembree was elected to serve as a trustee on the Redondo Beach City Council. Six candidates from the four precincts within the city sought a trustee seat, and a total of 1,542 votes were cast. Dr. Hembree received 726 votes, more than any other candidate, to serve a four-year term.

Source: Minutes of the Redondo Beach City Council, April 20, 1914.

Sonoma County Democrat

County Affairs - 1861

March 14, 1861

Off for Texas – Mr. Lindsey Carson and company, consisting of about thirty persons, five wagons, and a number of horses and mules, passed through Santa Rosa last Monday afternoon, on the road to Texas. Mr. Carson is a brother of the famed "Kit" Carson, and came to California at a very early period, before the organization of the State Government. He has been a resident of Sonoma county since its organization, and his departure from our midst will be deeply regretted by many warm friends. Mr. Robert Carson, another brother, who

accompanied Col. Fremont in his exploration, goes in the party. Mr. Joseph Gordon and family and Mr. John S Roberson recently of Petaluma, and at one time representative of Sonoma county in the State Legislature, with his family, and Mr. B. H. Drum, and family, will form part of the company. We regret exceedingly the departure of these gentlemen from our county, and can only hope that their bright anticipations may be full realized. The following is a correct list of the names of all the persons composing the company: Lindsey Carson, Maria L. Carson, Matilda A. Carson, Betty H. Carson, Mary E. Carson, Virginia E. Carson, Lucilla Carson, Ida Carson, Robt. Carson, John S. Williams, Joseph Gordon, Thos. S. Gordon, Marion

-Submitted by Steve Lehmann



Memories of Windsor in the 1950s

Lessons Learned from Baseball and Bicycles

By Jim DuVander

At first I felt surprise at seeing it. Then anger and rage overcame me as he passed by going the opposite direction. That scoundrel! He took it! He was one of the big kids. I was helpless. I could do nothing.

Every spring at school, we had THE sports event of the year. It was time again and I was excited. This would be the first year I would get to participate.

I was 10 and we'd been playing baseball in my fourth-grade class each day during PE for 8 or 10 weeks. I loved the game, though I did have trouble catching. Playing shortstop, I'd gotten whacked a couple of times, hard. Once early in the season, I broke my finger, or sprained it badly. So I was afraid of the ball, and therefore often missed it. I'm sure this frustrated my teammates, but it didn't dampen my enthusiasm for the game. Baseball had only been introduced to us the year before in third grade. This year it was an everyday event, important to me.

I rode my bike to school as I always did on the big day. It was a good bike, a serviceable bike, not a great bike, but it was MY bike. I had put it together from parts that I'd gotten from Charlie Owens' junk yard near Second Street. I'd kept it repaired and working. It was ordinary in every way except that I had found a large amber reflector that I had mounted on the handle bars. I loved this ornament and I loved my bike. It gave me freedom to move about with that wind-in-the-face, fresh-air feeling of moving through space.

It was Friday afternoon. The dads and moms had begun to arrive, and at the appointed time, we all went to the field where the baseball diamond was set up. The boys gathered around the team captain, and he started to choose ONE team. Somehow I had missed this part. We were usually two teams, playing against each other. But today, it was just the boys playing the dads. This was going to be fun! Unfortunately, there were more than nine of us, and when the team captain chose

the nine boys who were to play, I was not one of them. This didn't feel very good, but since nothing was said to me about not playing, I figured I would probably play later in the game.

I watched enthusiastically as the game unfolded with the spirited participation of the dads and my teammates. My dad was at first base, his favorite position, and he seemed to be really enjoying it. In fact, I couldn't see that he even knew that I wasn't playing. I stayed close to the sidelines, with the girls and moms, nervously wandering from one side to the other, anticipating the moment when I would be called into the game. As the dads were up for their last at-bat, it dawned on me that I wasn't going to play. This really hurt, but I didn't cry. Big boys don't cry, I had been told, and I certainly didn't want to cry in front of Dad. I had to pretend that not playing wasn't important to me, that it was a fun game for me too, even on the sidelines. Dad said nothing to me. I'm not sure he even realized that I hadn't played. We walked off the field straight to the car, right past my bike in the rack. I felt so devastated I didn't even think about the bike. I just wanted to go home.

On Monday I walked to school and when I arrived, some kid yelled out that my bike was stripped. At the bike rack I found only a carcass of my beloved vehicle. Nothing of value remained — no wheels, no handlebars, no reflector, no pedals, and no seat.

I felt less than human. Anyone who has had a cherished possession stolen knows the feeling. That someone would do this to me made me feel so bad. I decided to tell the principal, convinced he would know what to do. He was a scary man to face, but this was important, so I sobbed out the story of my loss to him through bitter tears. This loss was as bad as not playing in the baseball game, maybe worse.

A day or two later I was called to the principal's office, a heart stopper in itself.

There sat Ralph Sanborn, the constable from Healdsburg. He listened to my story and said he'd see what he could do to find out who did this.

Meanwhile I had borrowed my big sister's bike to have some temporary wheels. I was riding down Windsor River Road when what should I see but one of the big Windsor boys riding toward me with my reflector on his handle bars. He waved and, almost too cheerfully, called out my name, as if to mock my loss. All the pain of the week before flooded over me and I was filled with rage. He was the thief!

I went home and told my Mom about seeing the culprit who had butchered my bike. One of my parents must have called Mr. Sanborn, because he came for an evening visit shortly after. He said, "I've visited the family. They're in a hard time and in no position to replace your bike. Tell you what I'll do. My son doesn't ride his bike any more. It's in my garage. It probably needs a tire or tube and some TLC. But I'll bring it to you to fix up and use. I think it will be a good one for you."

True to his word, Mr. Sandborn brought the bike to our house. It was a red-and-black Schwinn in need of a few repairs, which I gladly tackled. Mr. Sanborn was right; it was a good bike for me. It had a front spring shock absorber that was perfect for smoothing the bumps in the rough ground we kids rode on. It had a heavy duty frame and balloon tires and lasted me the rest of my growing up years. It was an excellent bike. I was proud of it and I enjoyed riding it.

I don't know whether I ever thanked Mr. Sanborn for this bike. But I do know that I have been grateful for the people in my life like him, men and women who solve human problems right in their own neighborhoods. Mr. Sandborn saw into the hearts of people and used compassion rather than strict law to dispense justice.



Continued from page 1, Wiseman

display at the corner of Fourth and Mendocino streets. The article also states that it took three wagons to haul the airship into town and that it would be reassembled and ready to fly on Sunday, May 8. This was to be the first public flight of the airship.

Who Was Fred Wiseman?

Joseph Frederich Wiseman was born on the family ranch near Melita Station on the outskirts of Santa Rosa, November 10, 1875 to William Alexander and America Charlotte Wiseman. According to the 1937 *History of Sonoma County*, when the first railroad train came west in 1876, the family of William Alexander Wiseman was aboard.

From Bicycles to Flying Machines

Fred, as Joseph Frederich was known, grew up with a keen interest in mechanics. He raced bicycles, motorcycles and automobiles so it seemed in his nature that he would be drawn to the brand new frontier of manned flight. After viewing the

Wright brothers' airplane in Dayton, Ohio in June 1909, Fred was determined to build and fly his own airplane. He returned to California and four months later, in October of 1909, he and his friend and racing partner, John Peters, began constructing an airplane after their regular hours working at Leavitt and Company, an automobile distributor in San Francisco.

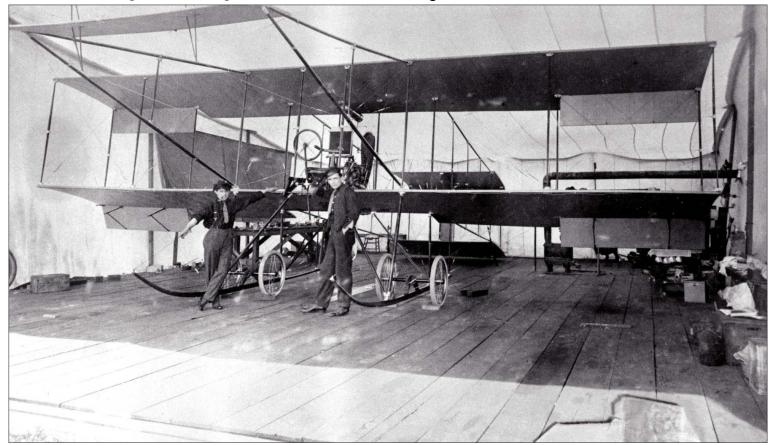
In January of 1910 both Wiseman and Peters quit their jobs in San Francisco, moved to Windsor, and rented a pasture from Grant Laughlin. It was located at the current site of Standard Structures Inc., and it was here that what would later be known as the Wiseman-Peters biplane was completed, tested, refined, tested again and again, and finally flown.

Taking Flight

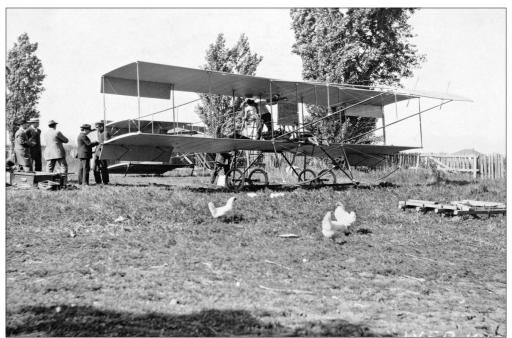
Early tests showed that the plane was underpowered and would not turn. This allowed only straight, short flights, landing, turning the plane around and repeating the exercise. A new, more powerful engine was added and more testing was done.



Los Angeles Aviation Meet. In January 1910, prior to building the first airplane in California, Fred Wiseman attended the Los Angeles Aviation Meet, advertised as the first in America. Approximately 254,000 spectators attended the ten day event.



Wiseman-Peters Biplane on Laughlin Ranch, 1910. Shown above, left to right, Fred Wiseman and John (Jean) Peters stand beside the airplane they constructed within a tented barn on Grant Laughlin's ranch in Windsor. (photo courtesty NASM)



Biplane Prep. At an unidentified location, Fred Wiseman and his aviation partner, John Peters, are almost ready for a test flight. (photo courtesy NASM)

Sunday morning, May 8, in front of a huge crowd that had assembled to see the airship fly, Fred Wiseman, because of high winds, could only drive the airship up and down the length of the Santa Rosa fair grounds race track. The crowd was

undoubtedly disappointed, but Wiseman promised he would someday fly over Santa Rosa, or at least give a free exhibition for everyone.

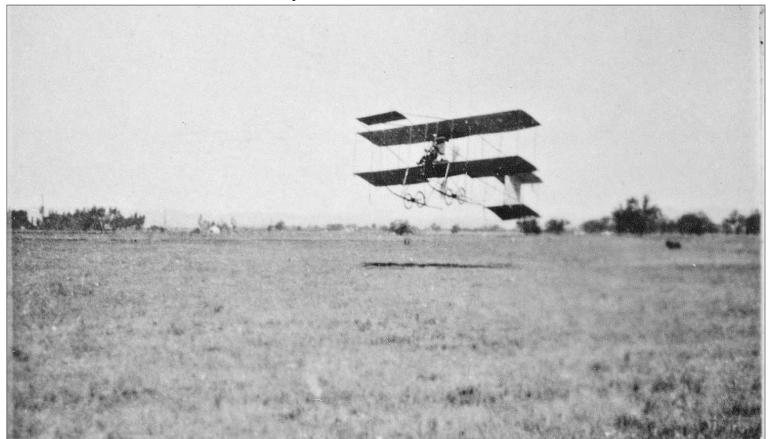
The following Sunday, May 15, complete disaster was avoided after the

tent that housed the airship caught fire. The tent, together with tools, air charts, some engine parts and the special cloth used to cover the wings were destroyed. According to the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* the flames burned through strands of rope holding the machine to the outside poles of the tent and a strong wind blew the airship out of the reach of the flames.

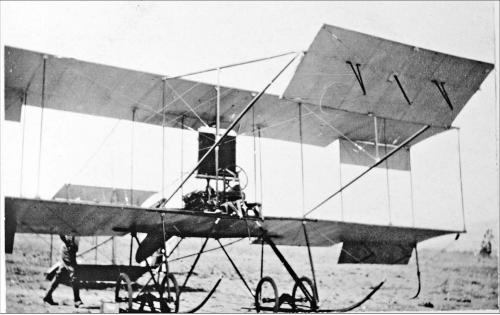
Finally, on the following Sunday, May 22, Wiseman enjoyed a successful launch from the Laughlin ranch. The flight reportedly covered one quarter of a mile and the new, more powerful engine enabled the airship to quickly leave the ground. According to the *Press Democrat*, "There is no question in the world but what the Wiseman-Peters biplane can fly."

FRED WISEMAN CORDIALLY INVITES THE PUBLIC TO SEE HIM IN FLIGHT NEXT MONDAY MORNING

Continued on page 8, Wiseman



First Flights, 1910, Windsor, California. This is the earliest know photograph of Fred Wiseman piloting his self-made biplane. The event was captured on film in Windsor at Grant Laughlin's ranch. (photo courtesy National Air and Space Museum, NASM)



Plane Flap Up, 1910. In the photo above, taken on the Laughlin Ranch, the ailerons on this early aircraft are on the top and bottom wings and are rectangular. (photo courtesy NASM)

Living up to his promise that he would give a free exhibition to make up for the Santa Rosa flight cancelled by high winds, Fred invited the public to view his next exhibition at the Laughlin ranch on Monday, May 30. That was a holiday, Decoration Day (now known as Memorial Day), and it is possible that a passenger train was secured to run to Mark West for the unique exhibition.

The Press Democrat's directions to the location of Fred Wiseman's flight exhibition confirm the Windsor site.

WISEMAN TO FLY ON THE MORROW

"Autoists and people in vehicles must not enter Laughlin ranch at the Mark West depot but must drive up further and come down the Shiloh road which is right along the big pasture field from which the flights will take place.

People will not be allowed in the field but will be able to see everything from the road on either side and from the railroad track."

-The Press Democrat, 1910

It is important to note that Grant

Laughlin's ranch covered some 1200 acres, including areas of Mark West and Windsor. After analyzing historic maps and other documents, it is certain that the "big pasture" described above is in Windsor, the present location of Standard Structures.

The May 30 flight, although it was short, was the first successful flight before a large crowd, and Decoration Day celebrants cheered heartily.

During the next six months Wiseman and Peters continued to improve their flying skills and make improvements to their airplane. Eventually, the airplane was moved to Petaluma's Kenilworth Park, and it was in February of 1911 that plans were made for a triumphant return, by air, to Wiseman's hometown, Santa Rosa.

First Airmail Delivery

Although Fred Wiseman's flight from Petaluma to Santa Rosa that February did not turn out precisely as he had envisioned, it would be the most significant flight of his career, and perhaps the most significant event of his life. Did he have any idea he would be setting a historic record that would still be celebrated one hundred years later? Not on your tintype!

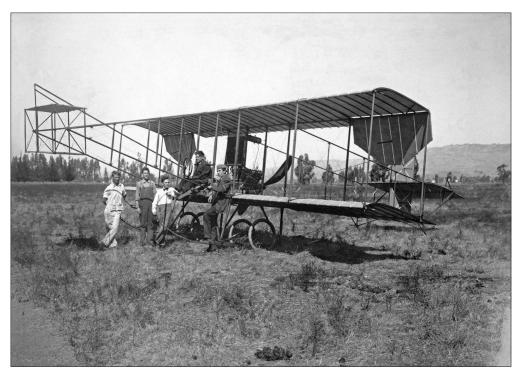
The first flight challenge the intrepid aviator faced was stormy weather, which delayed the takeoff by several days. On February 17, when his 44-foot long aircraft finally rose above Petaluma's Kenilworth Park and headed north, Wiseman probably breathed a sigh of relief. However, it was smooth sailing for only four-and-a-half miles, at which point magneto trouble developed, resulting in a forced landing in the Denman Flat area. The biplane's wheels dug into the muddy field and the craft was damaged.

Repairs were made the following day, February 18, and Wiseman once again navigated toward Santa Rosa, cruising 100-200 feet above Sonoma County's lush, green farmland. Then, unexpectedly, a loose brace wire caught in the airship's propeller, and Wiseman was again forced to land, this time at the Enz Dairy near Petaluma Road. It was the end of his 15-mile flight with a flight time of just under 20 minutes.

Although Fred Wiseman did not reach his goal, the Santa Rosa fairgrounds, he was so close that the airmail flight was deemed a success. Among other items, he had transported two letters to Santa Rosa Postmaster



Fred Wiseman and His Wife, Alice, ca. 1911.



Elephant Ears. Shown above is the second version of the Wiseman-Peters airplane with "elephant ears" ailerons. Fred Wiseman sits in the pilot's seat while four unidentified pose with him. (photo courtesy NASM)

H.L. Tripp from Petaluma Postmaster John Emmett Olmsted, who wrote about the significance of the event. When those letters were delivered, Fred Wiseman flew into record books as the pilot who carried the first airmail sanctioned by a U.S. postal authority.

Beyond the Flight Record

Fred Wiseman continued to entertain audiences with his aerial exploits throughout 1911, barnstorming throughout California and elsewhere. That year *Aeronautics* magazine, in reporting West Coast news, described Fred Wiseman as "... the best known of local flying men, [who] served his apprenticeship at Petaluma and Santa Rosa."

Given such accolades, it must have surprised many when Fred Wiseman retired from flying in 1912, commenting that he saw "no future in it." He was not referring to the future of aviation, but to the inherent physical dangers of flying those early, fragile machines. Barnstorming, racing, and attempting risky stunts were popular attractions,

and many daredevil aviators were killed in air crashes.

During his later years, Fred Wiseman occasionally returned to the Windsor area to visit his friend Raford Peterson and fly with Mr. Peterson at his ranch, which was known as the Wohler Ranch.

In 1913 Fred Wiseman accepted a position as an automotive engineer with

Standard Oil. He worked there into his sixties, retiring in 1938.

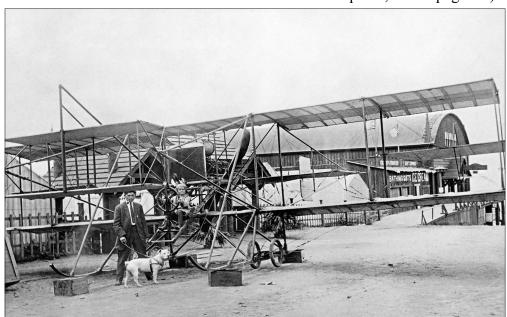
At the time of his death on October 4, 1961, just one month before his 86th birthday, Fred Wiseman was living in Berkeley, California with his wife, Alice. His only daughter, Frederika, predeceased him. In addition to his wife, he was survived by his sister, Juanita Wymore, of Santa Rosa.

Wiseman's Historic Biplane

When Fred Wiseman retired in 1912, he sold his airplane to another pilot, Weldon B. Cooke, who was killed in a Colorado airplane crash in 1914. Weldon's brother, Robert, took possession of the plane, and in 1933 he loaned it for display at the Oakland Airport. In 1948, after the aircraft had been severely damaged in an airport mishap, the Smithsonian Institution acquired, dismantled and shipped it to Washington, D.C. Between 1983-1985, the Wiseman-Cooke aircraft was restored and is now on permanent display at the National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C.

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(For more photos of Fred Wiseman's biplane, turn to page 10.)



Pismo Beach. In July 1911, Fred Wisemen demonstrated his flying skills in Pismo Beach, California. (photo courtesy NASM)



Wiseman Reunites with His Flying Machine, 1947. Above, against a backdrop of more modern aircraft, Fred Wiseman poses in Oakland, California with the biplane he built in 1910. (photo courtesy NASM, from a 1947 San Francisco Chronicle story)

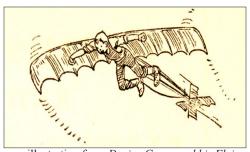


illustration from *Darius Green and his Flying Machine* by J.T. Trowbridge, published in 1910,
(Barbara F. Ray collection)

Vision of Future Flight, ca. 1870

Darius was clearly of the opinion, That the air is also man's dominion, And that, with paddle or fin or pinion, We soon or late Shall navigate

The azure as now we sail the sea.

-John T. Trowbridge (1827-1916)
poem written circa 1870





Restored At Last, circa 1984. Richard Horrigan and an unidentified woman pose in front of the restored Wiseman-Cooke Biplane at the Paul E. Garber Facility, National Postal Museum, Washington, D.C. (photo courtesy NASM)

Join the Windsor Historical Society

Please Join Us!



"Look out below! I'm headed to the Fred Wiseman centennial celebration on February 18." (see details below)



Open House Feb. 18, 1-3:30, Hembree House.

Please join us for sandwiches and cookies in honor of Fred Wiseman's airmail flight 100 years ago. (see more details in the President's Message, pg. 2)

Hurry! Don't Miss Out! Get Your Tickets Today for the WHS Polenta Feed

Saturday, Feb. 26, 6:30 PM, Dinner at 7:00

Windsor Community Center 901 Adele Dr.

\$25, limited seating (so hurry!)

Complete dinner including wine and dessert.

Silent Auction, Lots of Raffle Prizes, Oh Boy!

For tickets, write to the Windsor Historical Society, POB 1544, Windsor, CA 95492

For more information, call 707-838-6152 or 707-838-7433

How to Join WHS

Please join Windsor Historical Society to help preserve our unique local history and operate the museum. Simply select from the following list of memberships and mail your check to:

Windsor Historical Society P.O. Box 1544, Windsor, CA 95492

• Life Member	\$300.00
 Family Membership 	\$ 25.00
• Family of Seniors (60+)	\$ 20.00
• Individual	\$ 20.00
• Individual Senior (60+)	\$ 15.00

Mark Your Calendars! February 26, 2011



WHS's 2nd Annual Polenta Dinner
A meal so good you'll

A meal so good you'll be tempted to lick your plate!



WE NEED YOU!
Volunteer Opportunities

Don't forget to volunteer! There are a variety of areas in which you can help. For more information and to volunteer, call Jan Lehmann, 838-6152. We really do need you!



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P.O. Box 1544
Windsor, CA 95492

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