

Finding Aid to the Vernon Roberts Collection of Papers

Roberts, Vernon, 1896-1953

Vernon Roberts Collection of Papers, 1921-1953

.2 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 1514

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OVERVIEW

Links: Finding Aid to the Vernon Roberts Photograph Collection.

Access: The collection is open under the rules and regulations of the Institute.

Provenance: Donated by Kenneth Roberts, Moline, Ill., 1996 (Acc. 2456).

Property rights: The Institute for Regional Studies owns the property rights to this collection.

Copyrights: Copyrights to this collection are not held by the Institute for Regional Studies.

Citation: [Identification of item]. Vernon Roberts Collection of Papers, MS 1514, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

BIOGRAPHY

Vernon L. (Vern) Roberts was born January 29, 1896 to Lee A. and Grace Roberts on the family farm near Fargo, N.D. After graduating from Fargo High School he enlisted in 1917 in the Army Air Corps and took his flight training at Kelly and Brooks fields in Texas. During World War I he was a pilot instructor, serving until April 1919. He returned to Fargo and worked for his grandfather Charles A. Roberts, a contractor. But he wanted to return to flying and he joined with Earl Reineke, founder of WDAY, to purchase an airplane and do barnstorming with a Curtis JN-4D 'Jenny' airplane. They later formed

Reineke Aircraft Company. The company went out of business in 1922 when their plane crashed at Carrington, N.D., although Roberts escaped with only minor injuries.

Mr. Roberts married Henrietta Wilke of Wimbledon, N.D. on Oct. 17, 1922. They settled at Bemidji, Minn. where they purchased a mercantile business. But a year later Roberts was back barnstorming. After crashing two more airplanes they returned to Fargo where he resumed flying from his parent's farm, then called Roberts Field in what is now southwest Fargo. Roberts became involved with others in the early aviation industry in Fargo and flew the first air mail from St. Paul, Minn. to Fargo and on to Winnipeg, Manitoba. In 1927 he flew for the Fargo Aero Club and was involved in air races between 1928 and 1933.

Mr. and Mrs. Roberts moved to Moline, Illinois where he was a test pilot for Mono Aircraft Corp., became manager of the Moline Airport and general manager for Moline Air Service for eleven years. At the time of his death he and his son Kenneth operated Moline Engine Service. He died April 20, 1953. Henrietta Roberts died July 23, 1993 at Moline.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The Vernon Roberts collection of papers consists of photocopies of various documents and two scrapbooks that were the property of Mr. Roberts. They were copied through the temporary loan of the items by his son Kenneth Roberts in 1996.

“Early Aviation Events Taking place in Vicinity of Fargo, N.D.” was written by Vernon Roberts shortly before his death and portions were reprinted in an article published by the Fargo Forum newspaper several weeks after his death on April 30, 1953. It is a typed, thirteen leaf document beginning with his discharge from the United States Army in 1919. It recounts his barnstorming days, and the first air mail flown to and from Fargo.

There is a small file of newspaper clippings relating to Roberts' flying career, including article of he with Charles Lindbergh. There is a copy of his business card while in Fargo, his membership card in the Fargo Aeronautics Club, and the original 'Annual Sporting License' of 1927, apparently issued by the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale.

The two scrapbooks are photocopies, copied in their entirety. The first scrapbook covers from circa 1921 to 1930, capturing the excitement of the early aviators and air flight in general in the United States. The primary contents are newspaper clippings related to Roberts' flying career. They include items related to the first air mail to Winnipeg, Manitoba. There also are quite a number of advertising broadsides for flying shows. In addition there are a number of photographs and letters. There are 129 photocopy leaves in the scrapbook

The second scrapbook ('B') covers primarily the year 1930. It too contains primarily newspaper clippings, but also flyers for barnstorming. There are quite a number of articles related to air races, including events in which Roberts participated. There are 68 photocopy leaves in this scrapbook.

SEPARATIONS RECORD

Copy photographic prints were made of five photographs found in the original scrapbooks, and filed as Photograph Collection 459 in the Institute photograph collection.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

| Box/Folder | Contents |
|-------------------|--|
| 1/1 | Finding aid, and Biographical material |
| 1/2 | “Early Aviation Events Taking Place in Vicinity of Fargo, N.D.,” by Vern Roberts, 1953 |
| 1/3 | Letters, clippings and ‘sporting license,’ 1920s |
| 1/4 | Scrapbook A, ca. 1921-1930 |
| 1/5 | Scrapbook B, ca. 1930 |