

An historic event in Williamsburg County worth remembering

By Eleanor Winn Foxworth
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It was 38 years ago, during the summer of 1970. The place was the James Hugh McIntosh country home near the Millwood section of Williamsburg County, South Carolina.

The event? The Flying Farmers of South Carolina were arriving in their Cessnas, Skylanes and Piper Clippers. Crowds watched as the planes nosed easily down the landing strip. All but one, the wheels of this plane touched down, then churned in the swampy muck. As the pilot killed the engine, opened the door of his cabin and stepped out, he was greeted by gales of laughter. Then James Hugh McIntosh, the host and president of the Flying Farmers of South Carolina, ran out to greet the friend and present him with a gift appropriate for the occasion—a bouncing ball.

McIntosh commented: "This might help you get your plane out of that swamp!"

This event was extra-special in Williamsburg County, according to McIntosh's sister-in-law, Virginia Ann (known as V.A.) McIntosh. She was married to the late Clarence McIntosh.

So many area Flying Farmers were involved, she said. They included Willie Munn, Florrie and "Mic" Mixon, Roy (Leroy) and Betty Lou Epps, Maxey and Ellen Hicks, E. W. and Ann Prosser, LeGrand and Lib Welch, At McIntosh and Addie McIntosh McKenzie, who with her son Clay McKenzie, now owns the property of her late father, James Hugh McIntosh, where the event was held. Addie's late mother, Mary Lois McIntosh was the National Flying Farmers' Queen.

V.A. says: "My husband, Clarence (now deceased) thought it was important for me to learn to fly since he would take our family on plane rides and wanted to make certain that if anything happened to him, I could fly the family home safely. Ralph Strong taught me to fly."

She added that her cousin, R. M. ("Bobby") Weatherly of Timmonsville, was a leader in the Flying Farmers of South Carolina organization.

Now, let's recall that special event some 38 years ago at the McIntosh farm near the Millwood Community of Williamsburg County.

The Flying Farmers of South Carolina

The group who gathered were the South Carolina Flying Farmers, 152 members-with their children and parents-who come from all parts of the Low Country and from as far upstate as Cheraw and

Chesterfield, a fun-loving bunch who enjoy their all-day fly-ins with barbecue dinners and animated conversation. A stranger in their midst would assume these folks didn't have a care in the world, as the ring of laughter sounded again and again.

President McIntosh had barbecued four giant hogs over hickory logs in a shed in the yard. Visitors entered the structure to take a peek at the vinegared, red-peppered meat, the aroma of which wafted into the yard. Old-fashioned (no-mix) cakes-20 of them-chocolate, coconut, pound, pineapple, German chocolate-just about every variety imaginable, constituted another culinary attraction.

While members and their guests-about 300-partook of the delectable food spread picnic-style on a huge trailer flat, they swapped stories about flying.

Mrs. E.W. Prosser (Ann) who had been on a solo flight to a breakfast, took off, and rose into the air, only to hear a flapping noise outside the plane. As the noise continued, she became anxious. Finally she looked down in her lap and noticed she'd forgotten to fasten her seatbelt; the belt was flapping out the window.

Flyers winging along the same route had tried to contact her, to tell her the trouble. But she had forgotten to turn on her unicom-the communications system used between planes.

Another flyer, Mrs. J. Banks Scarborough, of Timmonsville, explained one of the qualifications for club membership. Members join as couples and either the husband or wife must be a licensed pilot. She added that to become members, a couple must derive at least 51 percent of their income from farming or must have that much in capital investments in agriculture.

Being the farm-oriented organization it is, the men encourage their wives to learn to fly. Included among the lady pilots are Mrs. Leroy Epps (Betty Lou), of Greeleyville, and Mrs. Maxey Hicks (Ellen) of New Zion. However, even though their husbands are excellent pilots, some wives are still afraid to learn. Yet those ladies agree: "We wouldn't miss a gathering for anything!"

Teenagers also have a part in the organization. They have their own sub-chapter called Teenagers of Flying Farmers. Addie McIntosh is president.

The South Carolina Flying Farmers are a part of the parent organization called International Flying Farmers, which includes (in 1970) 9,000 members. Of this number over 5,000 own their own planes and some 4,000 have land-

ing strips, some of which are on their own land.

During the day's program, members discussed the upcoming gathering of the International Flying Farmers to be held in Ames, Iowa.

The South Carolina Flying Farmers will send delegates. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Sherrill of Cheraw told of their trips to international gatherings in Kansas City and Hamilton, Ontario. There they met representatives from Flying Farmers from 42 states and six provinces of Canada. Mrs. Sherrill, queen of the South Carolina group, competed in the international beauty queen competition.

One may ask: "Why is this such an important group to the residents of the state of South Carolina?"

According to 1968 figures, South Carolina farmland encompasses 8.6 million acres. Cash incomes in 1967 from crops were over \$281 million.

Thus, the farming phase of the state's economy is tremendous-even though South Carolina has become urbanized and industrialized.

The Flying Farmers are not Rip Van Winkles who have slept through the migration of laborers to the city and industry. Instead, they have kept abreast of the progressive methods of farming with the aid of planes. At international gatherings, representatives talk with folks from other parts of the country and world about farming by air. When they come home, they share this knowledge.

R. M. Weatherly, of Timmonsville, himself an agricultural aviator, pointed out the value of planes in farming. "Primarily our work involves insect control. We apply some fertilizer by air. We also apply herbicides-toxic chemicals to kill weeds. Incidentally, the chemical industry is helping farmers in many ways-one is through developing new herbicides. We control pest plants, such as grasses and weeds. We use selective sprays. For instance, we can spray over the top of cotton and not hurt the cotton, in controlling pest plants. We plant seeds from the air-oats, rye. We plant into a growing crop such as soybeans or corn. The leaf fall covers the ground so you can get a second crop without tearing up the land. This is one of the few cases of farming in which you are working all the time."

"How did such a group get started in South Carolina?" M.B. ("Dusty") Huggins, Jr., of Timmonsville, a seasoned crop duster, who had been an aerial observer for the State Law Enforcement Division since the

1950s, in 1968 encouraged 20 men and women in Florence County to organize the Flying Farmers of South Carolina. This tall, full-of-fun veteran flyer was so enthusiastic about the benefits of using aircraft as a functional farming tool that during the first year of the organization the membership skyrocketed. By the second meeting there were 100 members.

Members began to learn about farming with small, one-pilot planes. They learned to fly at low altitudes over growing crops so they could distribute insecticides or other chemicals to increase crop production.

They learned to maintain good control at slow speeds and low altitudes, and to maneuver a plane safely. They learned how to land and take off from small-unprepared fields.

The courage and stamina of the Flying Farmers is apparent as Frank Sherrill's replay to the question: "What is the most exciting thing that has happened to you in your work?"

Without pausing to think, the smiling flyer seated on the ground with his back to a century-old live oak, replied: "It happened on August 17, 1960, at 7:32 a.m. I know because my watch was busted. I ran into some power lines and lost my leg. Yes, that's the most exciting thing that's happened to this Flying Farmer," he said as he got up and walked easily to his Cessna, with no indication that he was wearing an artificial limb.

As President James Hugh McIntosh talked with the group about future plans, he counseled them to encourage more upstate farmers to realize the value of

using planes in farming. "Of course, you fellas know it's easier to fly in the Low Country since we have long stretches of level land. But a good pilot can plant, seed and poison his crops even in the hilly Piedmont.

These folks will continue to have fly-ins where they have fun and discuss methods of farming by air. And they'll continue to pick brains of guest speakers who are farming specialists, as well as to communicate with other Flying Farmers who attend their meetings.

The Flying Farmers organization offers rural pilots the opportunity to meet periodically to discuss among themselves, and with experts in the fields of agriculture and aviation, their common goal of

better farming practices through the use of airplanes and have a good time doing it.

End of the Flying Farmers 38 Years Ago

Today, there has been no update on Flying Farmers of South Carolina found on the Internet. But today in this area we have number of pilots who crop-dust and do the types of other work ordinarily done by those Flying Farmers of yesteryear.

Some of these flyers include Henry Haddock, Guy McClary and others.

For them Williamsburg County farmers, and others are appreciative of their efforts. They provide a needed service in the farming of rural lands.



PICTURED ABOVE ARE Joyce Barnes, and James Hugh and Mary Lois McIntosh.



PICTURED ABOVE IS a fish pond and cabin near the landing strip, owned by James Hugh and Mary Lois McIntosh. Friends gathered here to visit and eat. Although the cabin and hangers have been moved, the fish pond is still in existence.



Virginia Ann and Clarence McIntosh



ABOVE IS A photograph of one of the planes used by some of the flying farmers.

All photos provided