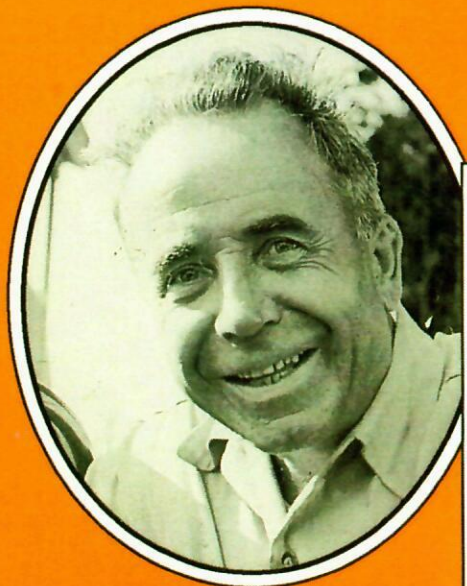


Mon Rêve

"My Dream"



*The Story of
Wilfred J. Berube
and his
Airport at Chatham
on Cape Cod*

By Bob Whittier



Proudly posing on the floats of his new Aeromarine-Klemm seaplane is Wilfred Berube, in knickers, and a pilot friend, Richard Stoddard, in coveralls. Summer of 1929. Location is one of Chatham's salt water inlets.

A flight to the airport at Chatham, Mass., far out on Cape Cod can be one of the most enjoyable experiences in any flyer's life.

As one's plane cruises eastward over the Cape, the scenery below becomes ever more attractive, and the flavor of the great ocean becomes steadily more noticeable. Chatham itself with its pine woods and attractive homes clustered around salt water inlets is a scenic jewel.

Peering over the nose of your plane, your first glimpse of Chatham Airport some miles ahead will be the original hangar, which you might at first mistake for an unusually large quonset hut because of its high-arched roof. A friendly, relaxed atmosphere characterizes both the airport and the town itself. Whether you stay at Chatham for only a few hours or for several days, you're sure to enjoy it and remember it fondly.

Most pilots who visit this airport learn but little about its unique history. This is regrettable, for it's a long and interesting one. Actually it's the story of the life and labors of one man and his dream - Wilfred J. Berube. The name is of French origin and is pronounced *Berubee*.

Today new airports are being established not much faster than are new buggy whip

factories. When occasionally a new one does come into existence, it's the result of the efforts of many people working together in government or corporate organizations to bring the original proposal to fruition. If you should ask, "Who built this airport?", someone will point to a bronze plaque listing the names of the many politicians, officials, engineers and contractors involved in its creation.

But Chatham Airport? Ah! It is one of the few airfields now in existence whose origin can be traced to the initiative and energy of just one man-Wilfred Berube. He called the place *Mon Reve*, which is French for "My Dream." It's pronounced Mon Rev just as in reverie. Wilfred was one of 13 children born to Joseph and Emma Berube in the little town of St. Alexandre in Quebec, about 30 miles southeast of Montreal. He entered this world in March of 1885, and in 1900 the family moved to Lawrence, Mass. to seek employment in that city's large cotton mills.

Today many of the people who knew Wilfred are no longer with us, and those still living are hazy about details of his early life. Some say he had no education at all and could neither read nor write, but others feel he must have had some schooling because

they knew him to be an avid reader and well-informed on many subjects. Probably he had enough to at least learn how to read, and used this skill for self-improvement.

When he arrived in Lawrence at the age of 15 he knew no English, but picked it up well enough to get along quite satisfactorily in the United States. Some trace of Montreal French accent was detectable in his speech all through his long, varied and productive life.

Whatever his formal education might have amounted to, in Lawrence he developed into a good carpenter and used his manual aptitude to also become an excellent mechanic. These abilities led to his being hired by the big Lewis Mills which were owned by a Mr. Bradford Lewis. Lewis' daughter married Joseph Shattuck, a young Lawrence banker.

Between about 1900 and 1910 members of the Lewis and Shattuck families built summer homes in the Mill Pond section of Chatham. The railroad from Boston to Wareham was gradually extended to towns an increasing distance out on Cape Cod and by 1887 had reached quaint and remote Chatham. This opened the town to development as an upper-class summer resort.

But a summertime rail trip from Lawrence



This photo of Berube appeared on his 1928 student pilot license and shows him as a dignified gentleman of 43 years.

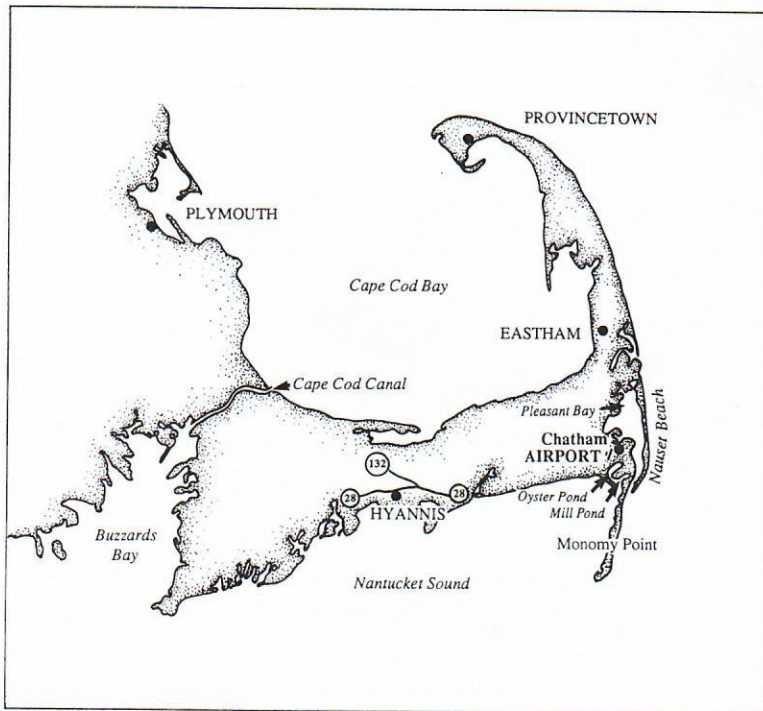
to Chatham via Boston must in those days have been a hot, grimy and wearying one, so we can visualize the progressive young Mr. Shattuck becoming interested in the automobiles which were beginning to appear in the first decade of the 20th century.

In those days there were no service stations, so people who could afford cars liked to hire as chauffeurs men who could not only drive but who were mechanics and able to service and repair cars. Presumably Wilfred came to Shattuck's attention for these reasons and was offered employment as a chauffeur.

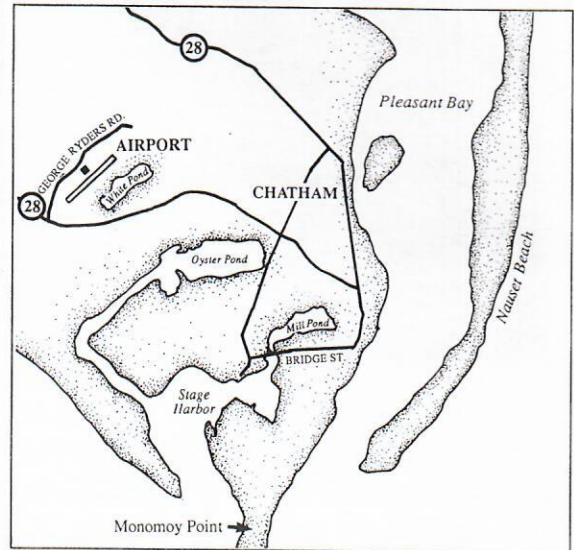
Old records are conflicting but it appears that around 1910 Shattuck completed his summer home in Chatham and very much wanted his 88-year-old father to see it. So Wilfred was asked to drive the old gentleman, accompanied by a nurse, from Lawrence to Chatham. In those long-ago days most country roads were of gravel and they were marked poorly if at all. This motor trip must have been quite an adventure for all three participants, and is how Wilfred came to visit Chatham for the first time and fall in love with the town.

The Shattucks moved to Springfield, Mass., and later to New York City as the husband's career progressed and became more lucrative. Wilfred moved with them and when a quite impressive Shattuck home was built in suburban Rye, Wilfred went there too and soon built a modest bungalow with a large garage behind it.

While driving himself to Chatham during a heavy rainstorm in August of 1918, Shattuck lost control of his car, which rolled over on top of him and snuffed out his life. Wilfred remained in the employ of Shattuck's widow and family as chauffeur, carpenter and general handyman and altogether was in their employ for some 40 years. They came to regard him as very much a well-loved



These maps of Cape Cod and the town of Chatham show places mentioned in this account of Wilfred J. Berube's long aviation career. Storms have substantially altered the Chatham shoreline since his time.



member of the family.

On the fourth of November in 1918 Wilfred took leave of this job to enlist in the U.S. Army Signal Corps. By the time he arrived at their aviation mechanic school at Carlstrom Field in Arcadia, Fla., World War One was over. The fact that he was accepted into the U.S. military indicates that by 1918 he had become a United States citizen.

Upon graduating from the Carlstrom school he was posted to nearby Dorr Field where he worked on Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny" training planes and their water-cooled, 90 h.p. Curtiss OX-5 engines. Pilots in those days often took mechanics up for rides, either to reward them for good work or to make sure repair work had been done conscientiously. Presumably Wilfred got his first taste of the thrill of flying in this manner.

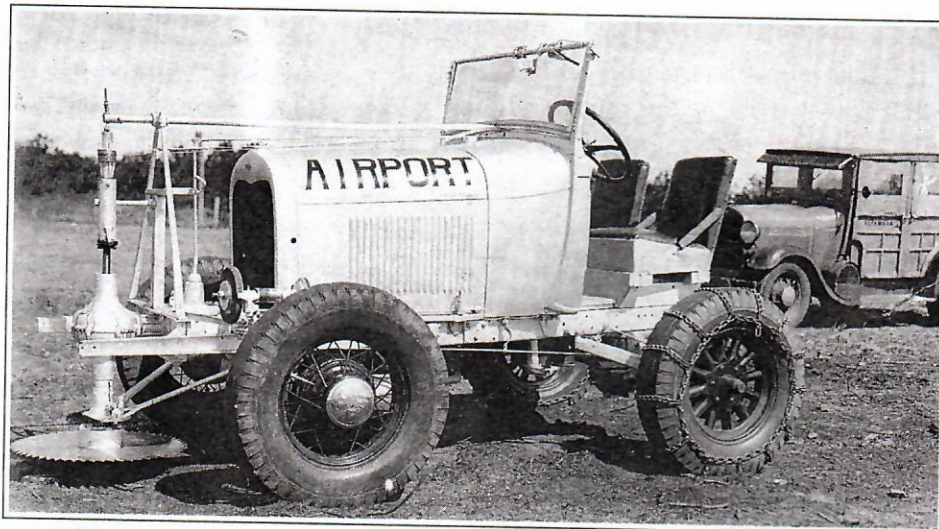
He was discharged in February of 1919 and went back to work for the Shattucks. In his free time at Rye he was much involved in the automobile business. He had a machine shop in his garage and also did some

race car driving on the board tracks that were popular in the 1920s. One at which he raced was at Rockingham Park in New Hampshire.

In the mid-1920s a local pilot began flying a war surplus Jenny out of a cornfield in Armonk, about a dozen miles north of Rye. No doubt Wilfred heard about this and drove up to investigate. By 1928 a busy airport operation was going on there, attracting pilots and planes from miles around. As an aside, this airfield had a long and active life until obliterated in the late 1960s by the construction of a highway known as Route 22.

Visiting the Armonk flying field must have rekindled in Wilfred the keen interest in airplanes and flying he had developed while in the Army. So in June of 1928 he obtained a student pilot license and learned to fly there with Barrett Airways, Inc. A small photo on this license shows a dignified and serious man of 43 years.

By the summer of 1929 he had accumulated the 50 flying hours required to obtain a



Wilfred and a friend built the fast-acting tree feller above to speed up clearing of the airfield tract. The Model A Ford station wagon in background was a familiar sight at Chatham Airport for many years. At right, Wilfred poses with the 17-ton roller he made from an old steel tank.

private pilot license, and bought his first airplane. Area headquarters for the Bureau of Air Commerce, predecessor of the FAA, was located at the old Roosevelt Field at Mineola on Long Island, about 25 miles south of Armonk. It is likely that he flew down there for his license test.

And that is also probably where he first saw an example of the type of airplane he was soon to buy, an Aeromarine-Klemm AKL-26A two-seat, open-cockpit, low-wing monoplane. It was of all-wood construction and had a cantilever wing. These planes were manufactured in modest numbers by the Aeromarine-Klemm Corp. at Keyport, N.J., which company had a vast aircraft manufacturing plant there during World War One. Since Keyport was only 40 miles southwest of Roosevelt Field, these planes were common sights there.

The Klemm design was developed in Germany around 1925 and was powered by a little two cylinder Mercedes aircooled engine of a mere 20 horsepower. To carry two people usefully on this meagre power the plane was built very light and given gener-

ous wing area. The crankshaft turned at 3000 r.p.m. and drove the large propeller at 1000 r.p.m. through a reduction gear. The prop's size gave it a good grip on the air and the ship could take off in under 100 feet acceptably well.

The Klemm became quite popular in Europe. In late 1929 and with a brand new private pilot license in his pocket, 22-year-old Baron von Koenig-Warthausen set off to fly one around the world.

Of course the Klemm and its pilot had to cross the oceans aboard ships, but over a period of 15 months the reliable little Klemm carried him over 20,000 miles of aerial adventures in primitive lands and over deserts, swamps, jungles and mountains.

The Aeromarine people saw this plane's potential as an economical training and sport aircraft for the American market, so in 1928 obtained a license from Klemm to manufacture it here. Early examples were powered with diminutive nine-cylinder Salmson engines made in France and producing 40 horsepower. That many cylinders in an engine of such modest power made it



run very smoothly so as not to excessively shake the structures of very light aircraft. But these engines were expensive and hard to get in the U.S.

So as soon as it was in production, Aeromarine switched to the 65 h.p., five cylinder LeBlond radial engine built in Cincinnati. The Klemm's structure was strengthened as necessary to handle the added weight and power. This type of engine powered Wilfred's new plane, which had an advertised cruising speed of 85 m.p.h. It bore registration number NC 816E.

The fuselage, center section and vertical fin were black, while the outer wing panels, stabilizer, elevator and rudder were orange. Registration numbers on the wings and rudder were black. The orange was a light shade variously called Galatea Orange and Fokker Orange in aircraft supply catalogs of those days. The Aeromarine logo appeared on each side of the fuselage just aft of the firewall. The engine's cowling was unpainted aluminum, later painted black.

Wilfred's Klemm was originally fitted with seaplane floats and was flown up to Chatham from the factory by another pilot. Newspaper clippings and photos in

Wilfred's old scrapbook indicate that it was operated extensively in the summer of 1929 from salt water inlets called Mill Pond and Oyster Pond. The words CHATHAM AIR SERVICE appeared on the fuselage sides in fairly large letters, such that this wording stretched from the rear cockpit to the stabilizer leading edge.

The Shattuck summer houses were near Bridge St. and at that time Wilfred lived in a small house off that road called Silverleaf Avenue. During the summer of 1929 some barnstorming pilots did passenger-hopping from a clearing off George Ryder Road in West Chatham. Of course Wilfred went over there to say hello and watch the activity.

Newspaper stories describe this clearing as being either 400, 650 or 900 feet long. It would have been adequate for experienced pilots to get into and out of in the light, slow planes of that time providing approaches were acceptably clear.

Watching this activity got Wilfred to thinking about this piece of land. The more he looked it over, the more he felt it had possibilities. So he took all of his money (so the story goes) out of the bank and bought the 72 acre tract. One account, however, has

it that Mrs. Shattuck helped on the purchase. Although not a pilot herself, she greatly enjoyed riding along as passenger when Wilfred went flying in the Klemm.

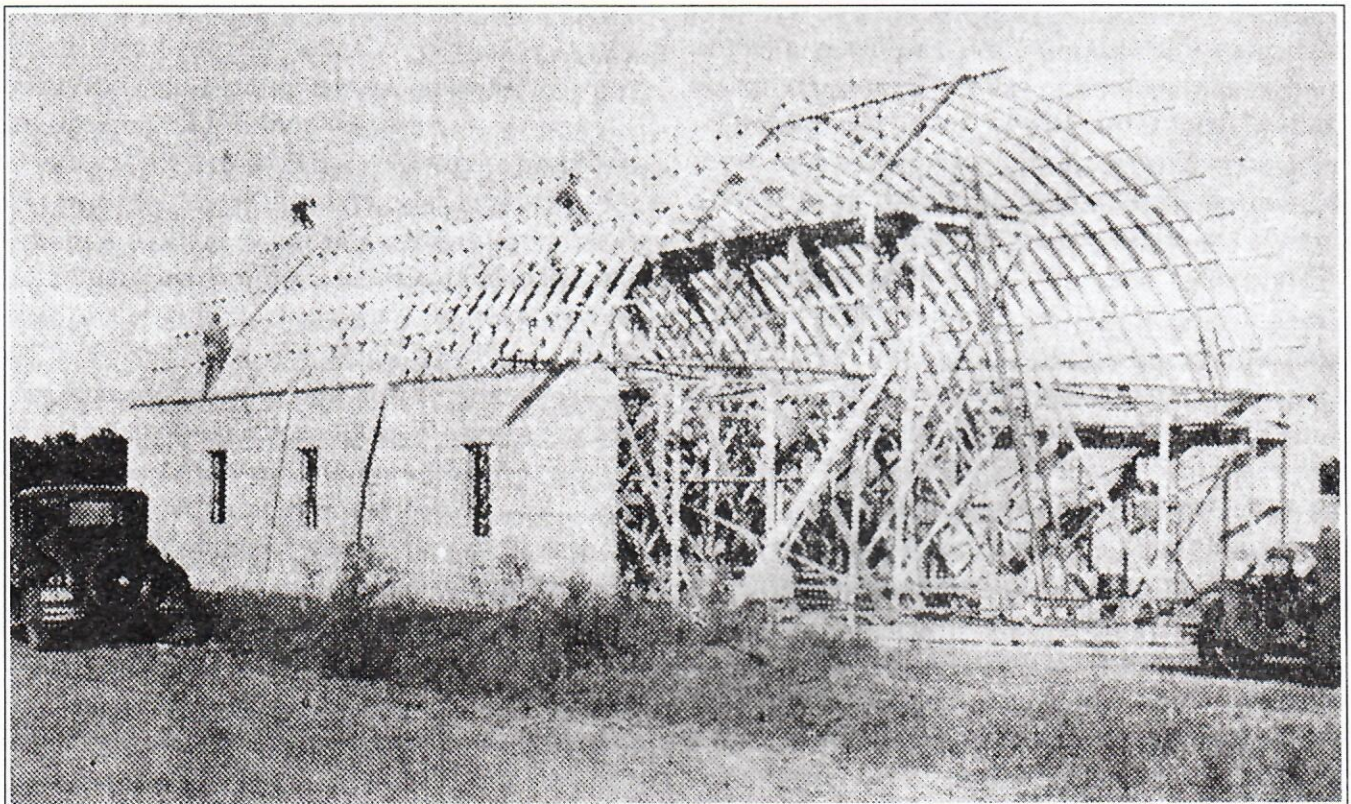
The shortness and roughness of the field posed little problem for this plane, because when mounted on its wheeled landing gear it sported very fat, low-pressure "airwheel" tires of a generous 20-inch diameter. With a wing span of 42 feet and area of 194 sq. ft., and using the thick, high-lift Gottingen 387 modified airfoil, the plane had generous lift.

And, because the broad wing on the Klemm rode close to the ground, it benefited appreciably from what is called "ground effect," the squeezing of air between wing and ground during takeoffs and landings. Like most other small planes of 1929, the ship had no wheel brakes. Its metal-shod

tailskid acted as a primitive but useful brake when dragging over any unpaved surface.

This short-field and soft-ground capability soon enough encouraged Wilfred to try a landing on the long and in those days almost deserted sand spit called Nauset Beach, which separates Chatham's Pleasant Bay from the open Atlantic. He obviously found it feasible and safe to do so with the Klemm, and was soon ferrying delighted members of the Shattuck family and their friends three miles from his airfield to this beach for memorable picnics.

Early in the 1930s Wilfred began the great task of converting his rough, short landing strip into an airfield of acceptable size and smoothness. Between then and 1937 he accomplished an incredible amount of work, single-handedly transforming many acres of



Outside help was needed to raise the roof arches for Wilfred's hangar..



The broad-winged, fat-tired, tailskid-equipped Aeromarine-Klemm was an ideal plane for landing on Cape Cod's many sandy beaches.

scrub pine into open land.

That was before bulldozers were commonplace. The usual way for people in ordinary circumstances to clear land was to chop the trees down and then laboriously coax the stumps out of the ground as best they could with hand tools.

Bit by bit he lengthened his runway. But the more he worked the more he thought, "There must be a better way!"

So in 1935 he put his mechanical talent to work and, with the help of a local mechanic and friend named George Goodspeed, built a machine that both amazed and amused Chathamites. They started with a 1929 Model A Ford chassis. First they shortened the frame and then installed four large wheels and tires salvaged from light trucks. Although the finished product resembled a comic strip jalopy, it was in fact a serviceable home-made tractor.

To the front of it they then attached, in a vertical position, half of a junked car's rear axle assembly. A shaft took power from the

front end of the crankshaft and fed it into the differential gears of this axle. The power then went down the single remaining axle shaft to ground level. To this shaft's lower end was attached a large circular saw blade. The blade thus rode in a horizontal plane just above ground level. There was apparently a means for raising and lowering it slightly.

Wilfred would start this contraption's engine and aim toward a tree. Then he set the saw blade to spinning and drove right at the tree. The whirling blade bit into the tree just above ground level and in a moment there was one less tree.

He felled so many with this rig that he piled up more cordwood than he could possibly use himself - about 500 cords of it! He was one of those rare men who have a genuine concern for the welfare of other people, so on the following very cold winter he invited townspeople to help themselves to this fuel.

By cutting trees off very close to the



Over the years Wilfred introduced hundreds of people to the pleasure of flying. Here he poses in 1938 with a group of Chatham friends.

ground he created a surface that the Klemm's big, soft tires could roll over easily. As time passed the stumps rotted and he plowed the field to break up their remnants.

That brought on the problem of how to smooth the plowed land so that grass seed could be sown. Somewhere Wilfred found a 1000 gallon steel tank. He cut the ends off and then cut the resulting long cylinder into three sections so that his finished roller would make sharp turns easily. Each section was set on end and a length of large-diameter pipe positioned vertically in its center. Concrete was poured into them and when it had cured the three rollers which resulted were threaded onto a common axle. A tow frame was made of heavy scrap iron so the trio of rollers could be hitched to a tractor. The resulting roller weighed an estimated 16 to 17 tons and did an effective smoothing job.

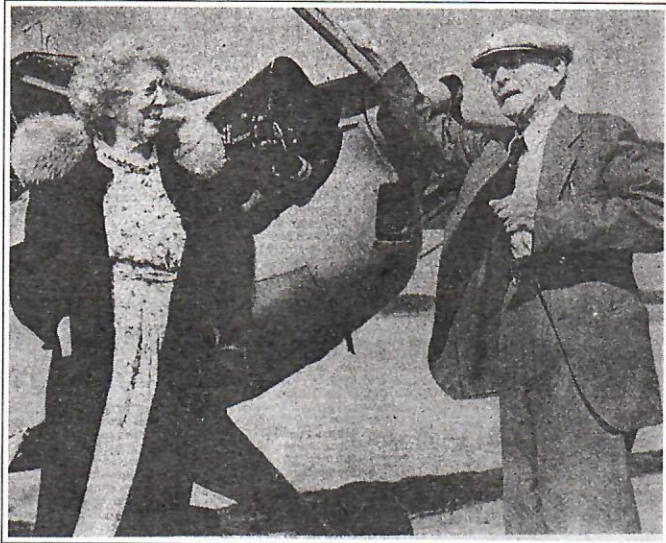
So that he could work on his airfield at night after finishing his duties with the Shattucks, he rigged his tractor with lights.

Because there were no power lines near the field at that time, he cobbled up a 7000-watt generator for the airport.

He eventually had an airfield on which aircraft could take off and land in their choice of three different runways, depending on the wind.

By the mid-1930s word of this field in the very attractive Cape Cod town of Chatham began to spread to airports in other parts of Massachusetts and even to other states. Private planes from the "mainland" began to drop in for visits with increasing frequency.

Wilfred Berube had enormous faith in and enthusiasm for the future of aviation, and saw his field as a way to coax affluent sportsmen to Chatham. Anything that could bring paying customers to the town during the long and very lean off-seasons would help everyone living there. An avid hunter and fisherman himself, Wilfred had learned where to go to find almost any kind of quarry along Nauset Beach, in the woods, in Pleasant Bay and out on a sand spit called Monomoy Point which stretches into the sea



Mr. and Mrs. Danforth Steele, aged 91 and 88 at the time, exchange delighted comments just after landing from their first-ever airplane ride in 1941, with Wilfred as pilot. Plane is a three-seat, 75 h.p. Piper Cruiser.

to the south of Chatham.

He wanted his airport to be ready for these visitors and for the future of aviation - and perhaps even begin to make a little money from his years of toil. So late in 1936 he began work on a 50 by 65 foot hangar able to shelter not only his own plane but four or five others.

The side and back walls went up straightforwardly enough with concrete blocks.

Then Wilfred went to work on the roof. Because of the hangar's exposed location and the Cape's occasional high winds, he wanted a strong roof and one that would not catch the wind. So he laid out a building form, and then bending and firmly nailing together seven layers of strapping lumber for each arch, he laminated together the 30-odd arches needed.

Because each of these was much too heavy for one man to lift into position, he had to call in outside help for this part of the job. Since being completed in the spring of 1937 this hangar has withstood the many fierce



Four-year-old Edric Thompson, Jr., is about to enjoy a ride in one of Wilfred's Piper PA-11s in 1952. At the controls is his father, Edric, Sr.

storms that have buffeted it. Today it is used as a maintenance shop. It has also become a Chatham landmark.

Somewhere he acquired a steel tower that had originally supported a windmill of the type used to pump water for farms. Erected at his airport, it held aloft a wind sock, visible from a distance and clear enough of ground turbulence to be a reliable indicator of wind direction for the benefit of pilots of planes sensitive to crosswinds.

When his gasoline supplier would not let him have one of their gasoline trucks because they felt there was not enough year-round business at Chatham to justify its not inconsiderable cost to them, Wilfred went to work and cobbled up his own gas truck.

Just to the southeast of the airport there's a body of clear fresh water called White Pond. It's about 2500 feet long and like the airport's present paved runway, its long axis is oriented in line with the prevailing southwest wind. In Wilfred's eyes it thus constituted an ideal haven for the kind of small



Surrounded by admiring youngsters, Wilfred signs autographs before flying the air mail from Chatham to Hyannis in May of 1938. Boy Scout at right is Warren Sampson, who later became a member of the Chatham Airport Commission.

seaplanes that have so many uses on Cape Cod.

So once again he went to work and cleared a wide pathway through the pines from the airport clearing down to the water's edge. He built a large dolly on which seaplanes could be hauled back and forth from the hangar to the pond. The hangar soon became the outer Cape's headquarters for hoisting small planes to change back and forth from wheeled to float landing gears.

And he also found time to build himself a cozy house in the woods between the airfield and pond. So you can understand why he came to call the place *Mon Reve*. For years a rustic sign with lettering formed from old ship's rope and spelling out that name hung over the fence gate at the entrance to the hangar area. Very few pilots

indeed have achieved the dream of living in a pleasant and interesting town, in a house of their own located between their very own airport and seaplane base. So although Wilfred Berube was not a rich man in the monetary sense, he was a very rich one indeed in terms of the things that make life worthwhile.

By 1937, pioneer Cape Cod aviator Wilfred J. Berube had accumulated 1000 flying hours in his beloved Aeromarine-Klemm monoplane. The ship was undoubtedly the best-known airplane in outer Cape Cod skies.

He learned from experience the technique of landing on ocean beaches, and passed his knowledge along to other pilots. Beach landings require an understanding of how natural forces combine to determine the width, slope, profile and texture of a beach, how to deal with the combination of beach slope and a crosswind, how to tell good beach surfaces from poor ones from aloft, and how to use stick, rudder and throttle to ease a plane onto and off of soft sand.

Early in his beach-landing career he came to realize that it's easy to spot schools of striped bass pursuing smaller fish in the water just to seaward of the breaking surf. Their dark topsides silhouette them against the sandy bottom. He and his Chatham outdoorsman friends got the idea of carrying surf casting rods in the Klemm and landing wherever they spotted a school of feeding stripers.

They'd land on the beach, hop out as soon as the plane stopped rolling, dash to the water's edge and start casting plugs out beyond the surf. It worked very well and during the rest of the 1930s the Klemm

alighted on many an outer Cape Cod beach.

During World War Two the government banned all private flying in a 50-mile-wide strip along all U.S. coastlines. So Wilfred, now too old for military service, spent four years on the ground. But this does not mean that he was inactive. He found ways in which to make himself useful to his adopted country. He did carpentry work at Cape military installations, served in the auxiliary police, and did some commercial fishing to help the tight food supply situation of the wartime years.

In the course of such fishing he had his narrowest escape from accidental death. One day in October of 1944 he was out alone in his boat, trolling for stripers at a distance of some 2000 feet offshore. He had four lines over the side and at one point there were fish on all of them. So he left the steering wheel to go aft and haul them aboard. The unattended boat swung broadside to the waves and capsized.

Wilfred was knocked unconscious and when he came to, found himself trapped in an air pocket inside the overturned boat. All he could do was wait, pray and hope. Fortunately the boat drifted onto the beach and with his bare hands he dug his way through the sand and managed to get out into clear air, bleeding badly from two nasty cuts on his head.

Clam diggers working nearby spotted him, hustled him into their small boat, and took him across the bay to the mainland and a doctor. A newspaper story about this adventure observed that he had flown airplanes for 1500 hours without suffering a scratch.

It could take a long time to reach good fishing spots along Cape beaches by trudging through the soft sand. The twice-daily



Wilfred shakes hands with Chatham postmaster Paul Karr before flying the mail to Hyannis during the 1938 Air Mail Week celebrations. Note the plane's large and soft tires, ideal for landing on sandy beaches.

rise and fall of the tide often made getting to the outer beaches difficult or awkward. Berube was thus one of the pioneers in converting old cars into simple but serviceable beach buggies.

After World War Two he created for his little airport quite a good business airlifting surf casters out to the beaches. For \$3 a fisherman could have himself flown out to the beach of his choice either by Wilfred or one of the young pilots he began to employ. For another three he could be picked up at any agreed-upon time and taken back to the airport and his parked car.

But we get ahead of ourselves.

During the 1930s Wilfred often flew his employer, Mrs. Shattuck, from Chatham to New York and back. The distance was a little over 200 miles and at the Klemm's



Many Cape Cod youths learned about airplanes and flying at Chatham Airport. Here Warren Sampson helps a Cub to park. About 1940.



Closed down during World War Two, Chatham Airport quickly came to life again when it ended. Here Wilfred accepts delivery of a new Piper Cub.

cruising speed in the 80 m.p.h. range, these low-level flights took over two fascinating hours of watching beautiful shoreline scenery drift past below. The plane carried only basic flight instruments and no radio, as was usual in those days. Wilfred became very competent indeed at finding his way around by landmarks.

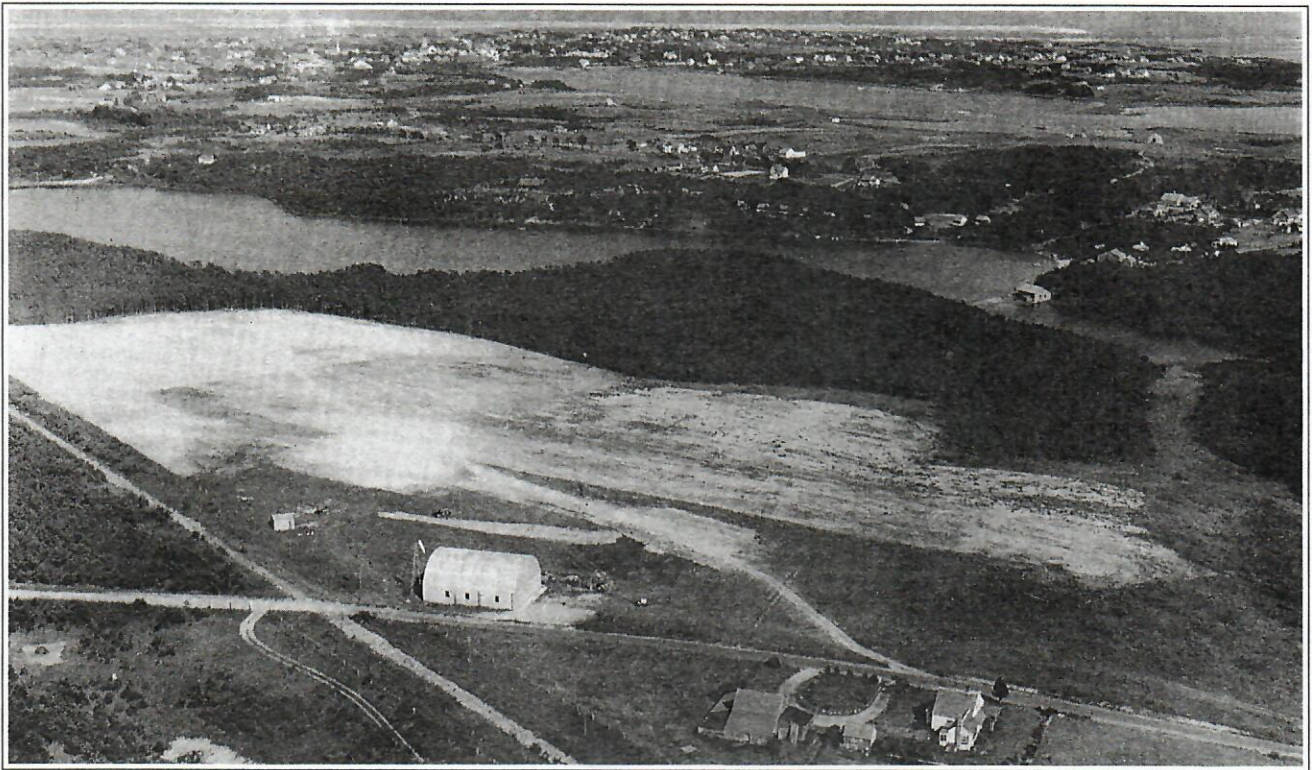
He became a keen student of meteorology in general and Cape Cod's fluky weather in particular. The Cape is a narrow arm of land, cold in the winter and sun-heated in the summer. All around it is ocean water that varies in temperature with the season, tides, currents, wind direction and location. All of this can at times stir up a witch's brew of warm, cold and moisture-laden air

masses.

When conditions are right, the area is subject to the coming and going of low and hard-to-predict fog banks. Wilfred got to know these visibility-blotterers so uncannily well that he could sense just how long he could leave a surf caster out on the beach before fog would strand the chap out there for a long, lonely and chilly night.

In the course of his long flying career he had his share of forced landings but never a bad accident. His great skill at landing on beaches prepared him superbly well for making emergency landings.

Once he was returning to Chatham from a visit to Provincetown and the Klemm's engine suddenly quit over North Eastham.



Chatham Airport as it appeared around 1940. Wilfred's house was in the woods between the airfield and White Pond, visible just beyond the wooded area. Water in distant background is Oyster Pond, a salt inlet. Pathway off the right end of the runway was used to move seaplanes on a wheeled dolly between hangar and pond. Buildings on near side of the road are not part of the airport.

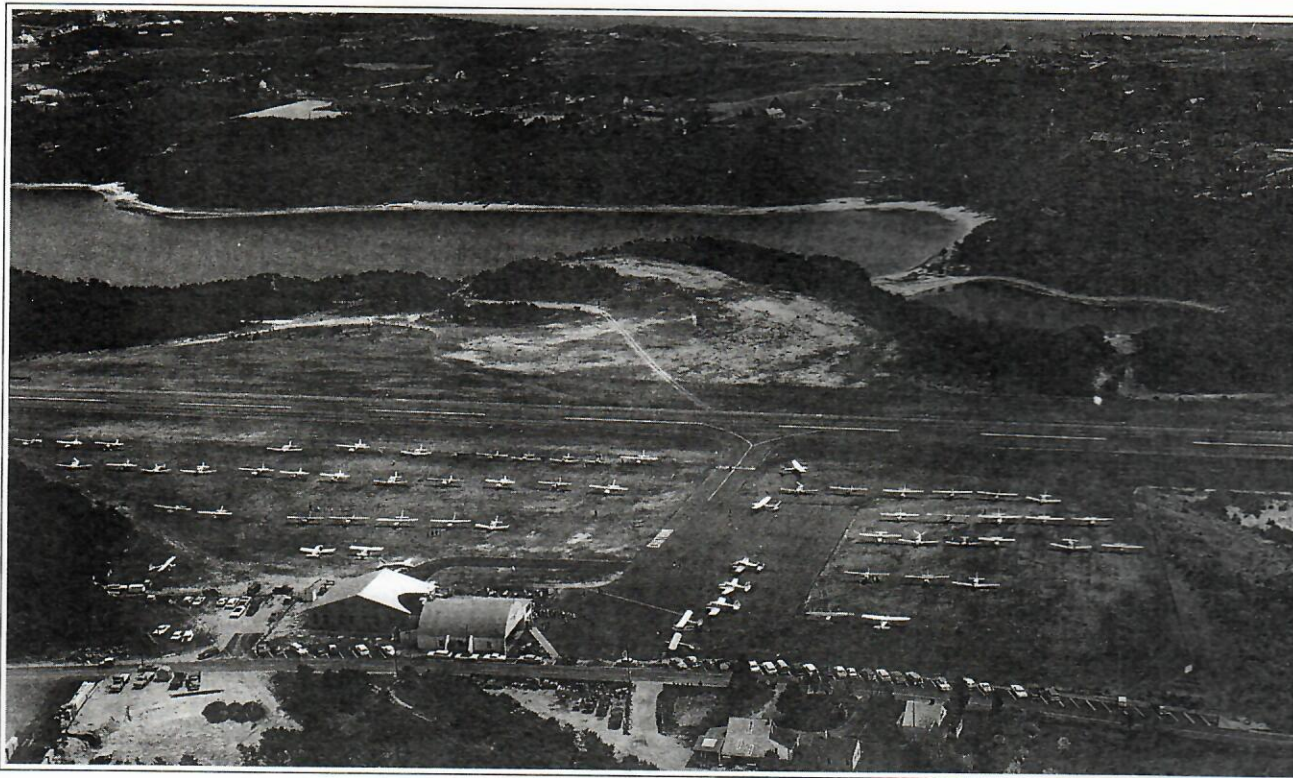
He set down safely on a short field. He soon found and cleared out a fuel line blockage that had caused the engine to stop. He had with him as passenger a Chatham lady named Mary Chisholm, whom he later married. Unwilling to put her at risk while taking off from the field, he arranged for her to be taken to Chatham by car. Then he eased the Klemm into the air and flew safely back to Chatham.

Another time, he was flying from Hyannis to New York with his friend George Goodspeed as passenger. Presumably because he did not want to fly over the broad southerly end of Buzzards Bay, he took a course that went northwest to the Cape Cod Canal, from where it would be a safer flight

down the bay's western shoreline to Rhode Island and New York.

Approaching the Sandwich end of the canal, the LeBlond engine developed a bad oil leak. So Wilfred skillfully put the ship down on a strip of sand on the north side of the canal within sight of the Coast Guard station. Of course, that station's lookout saw the plane go down and spread the alarm. Local newspapers got very excited and sent reporters rushing to the scene. But Wilfred just matter-of-factly fixed the leak, made a bumpy and at one point hesitating takeoff run along that rather soft stretch of sand, and continued on to New York.

He was one of those worthy flyers whose enthusiasm for flight and aviation was so



The late Chatham photographer Dick Kelsey took this almost identical view of the airport as part of the celebration of Wilfred's 80th birthday in 1965. The paved runway and maintenance hangar can be seen. Since this picture was taken more hangars have been constructed. The field is now officially known as Chatham Municipal Airport and the paved runway is 3000 feet long.

deep and genuine that he grasped every opportunity to sell it to the public. In 1938 the postal authorities in Washington decided to promote public interest in the air mail service, hoping to increase payloads aboard the country's growing number of fast and reliable Douglas and Boeing airliners.

So they designated the week of May 15 to 21 as National Air Mail Week, in commemoration of the first official air mail flight from New York to Washington in 1918. Elaborate and nationwide plans were made for bags of cacheted air mail to be delivered to many small airports by post offices in nearby towns. Then volunteer pilots would use their own planes to carry these bags to major airports for nationwide

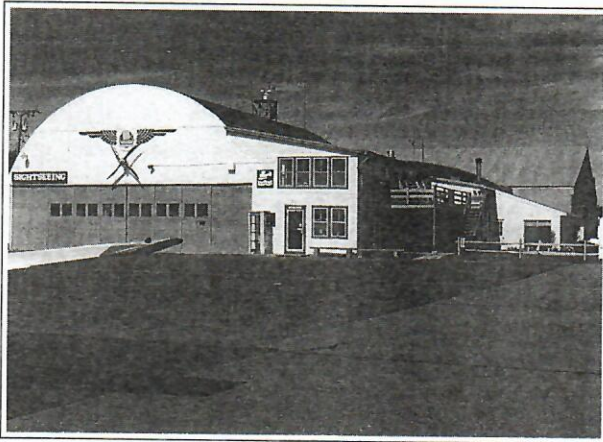
distribution aboard airliners.

Of course, a black and orange Aeromarine-Klemm from Chatham took part in this program. On May 19 a large crowd gathered at Wilfred's airport. Local dignitaries made speeches, a band played, and the Boy Scouts and veterans' organizations handled crowd control. Then the Klemm's LeBlond engine was fired up, Wilfred taxied out onto the runway, and took off for Hyannis.

Upon landing there, the mail he carried was transferred to a Mayflower Airlines Stinson Trimotor which had come up from Nantucket and flown to Boston with a stop at Provincetown to pick up more mail. So the air mail service - and hundreds of local airports - gained a huge amount of very



Wilfred's hangar and shanty office as they appeared around 1947.



The hangar in 1991. Many additions have been made with the passage of time to keep abreast of changing needs.

good and beneficial publicity.

A photo taken that day shows a helmeted and goggled Wilfred leaning against the Klemm's fuselage, surrounded by admiring Boy Scouts as he signed his autograph for one of them. He was a hero to youngsters of the outer Cape and over the years many of them learned about airplanes and flying at his field.

Around 1940 he sold his beloved but aging Klemm and began to use J-3 Piper Cubs and a three-seater, J-5 Cub Cruiser at his increasingly active field. A while after he sold it, the Klemm was demolished in a bad

crash. For years afterward a memento tacked up inside Wilfred's hangar was a piece of orange and black airplane fabric bearing the registration number, NC 816E, from the plane's rudder.

It should be noted that his hangar was usually full of old airplane, engine, auto, boat and machine parts hoarded by the industrious and thrifty Wilfred. Visiting pilots loved to explore it - it was almost a mechanical museum.

Interest in pilot training grew rapidly in the United States as Europe slid into the morass of World War Two. So in 1941 outer Cape aviation enthusiasts formed the Chatham Flying Club to make flight training available to ordinary people at an affordable price.

Wilfred took hundreds of people up for their first airplane rides, both in his Klemm and later in various Piper aircraft. A first flight over Chatham's delightful scenery was bound to be an impressive and favorable introduction to air travel. His first-flight passengers ranged all the way from youngsters to people in their 80s and 90s. And he never charged for these rides.

In July of 1941 he used his Cub Cruiser to take aloft Mr. and Mrs. Danforth Steele, aged 91 and 88 respectively. Upon landing, Mrs. Steele chattered excitedly about how very thrilled she was when Wilfred circled over the house where she had lived for 86 long years. Today we become so preoccupied with the technical aspects of aircraft that we often completely overlook the rich human values that can be associated with flying.

Soon after World War Two ended, Wilfred's Chatham Flying Service took delivery of its first postwar plane, a shiny

new J-3 Cub flown down to Chatham from Norwood by Ralph Beasley of Wiggins Airways, the area's Piper distributor. More Cubs were quickly acquired and young war veterans from outer Cape towns came to the field to learn to fly under the G.I. Bill of Rights education provisions. A 108 h.p. Piper Super Cruiser was added to the fleet and its brisker performance than the 75. h.p. prewar Cruiser made it a good plane for sightseeing and short charter flights. Around 1950 the J-3 Cubs were replaced with 90 h.p. PA-II Cubs of similar design.

Private pilots from inland points began to fly their Cubs and Aeroncas to Chatham to learn how to do beach landings so that they could go striper-hunting themselves.

Wilfred was much concerned about the often sensational and inaccurate way news reporters cover aviation's inevitable accidents. While being interviewed in 1950 he remarked, "If a car blows a tire and goes off the road, it's treated as a minor happening.

But if a plane blows a tire on the runway, it's treated as a big news story. Why?"

Then he added, "Just think - every single minute today an airplane makes a safe landing somewhere, and every day many planes cross vast continents and oceans. And then people get excited over a blown tire!"

The reporter was clearly impressed by Wilfred's sincerity and concern and included these remarks in his story.

Despite his scanty formal education, he had a well-developed sense for good public relations. One day in 1946 he asked one of the young pilots then working for him to take the editor of the local weekly newspaper for a ride over town in one of the field's new Cubs. The following beneficial publicity resulted:

"Your editor had a ride over Chatham in a Piper Cub the other day, and it was one of the most enjoyable adventures he ever experienced. Somehow your reporter experienced a sense of security and a certain serenity



Wilfred developed great skill at landing small planes on the soft sand of Cape Cod's outer beaches. Here he discusses pickup time with a surf caster he has just flown out to Nauset Beach, a striped bass hotspot.



Flying low along outer Cape Cod beaches, pilots could readily spot the dark shapes of striped bass silhouetted against the light yellow sand of the bottom just offshore. Tracks on sand in this picture were made by beach buggies.

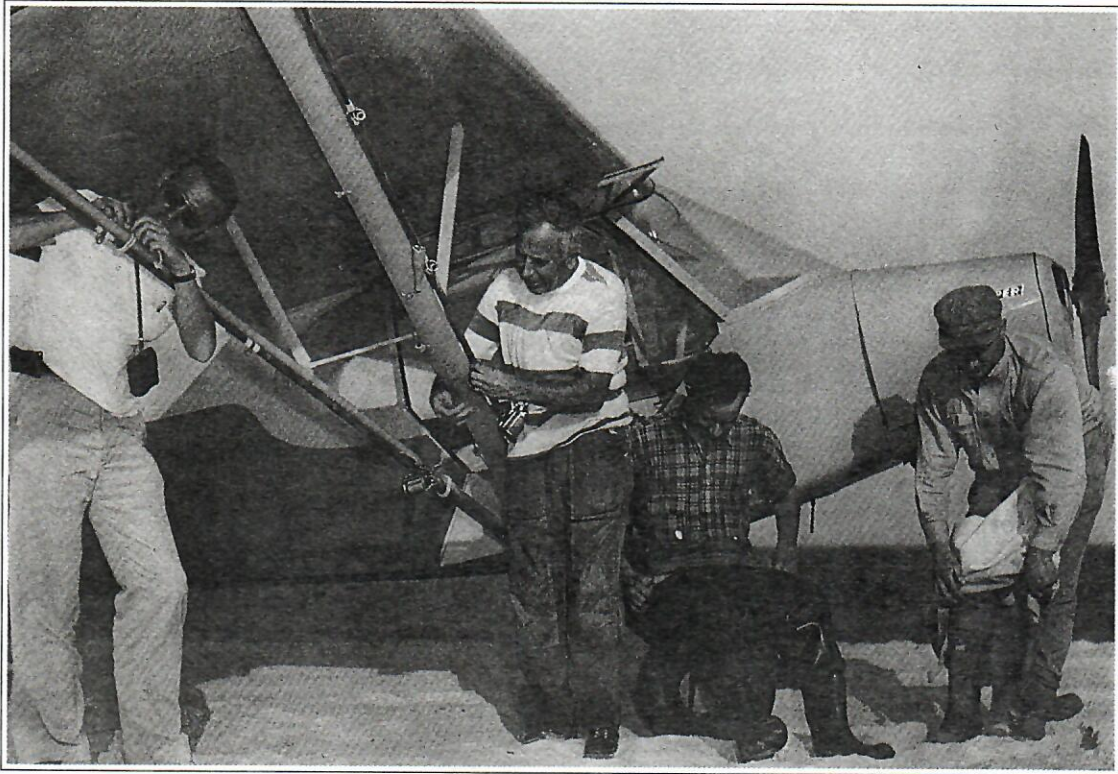
that isn't noticed in a heavier, higher-powered ship. The takeoff was quick and barely noticeable. Soon the whole sweep of Chatham and its shorelines were below us. Toy-town houses and tiny moored boats drifted past below us. We cruised over patches of green pines, the lacework of small ponds and inlets, and the frozen pattern of the cranberry bogs - all making a picture of beautiful contentment. Upon returning to earth your editor knew he had really been LIVING!"

In 1949 Wilfred observed his 64th birthday, still busy cleaning, painting, mowing

and maintaining equipment at his airport. But he realized that the time had come to do something about his airport's future. Accordingly he offered to sell it to the Town of Chatham for one dollar.

That was typical of his generosity. The town fathers agreed to take over the airport but insisted that it would be only fair to give Wilfred somewhat more than one buck.

Between then and 1951, with the aid of state and federal funds, a paved and lighted runway was built and other improvements made. In that year the field was formally dedicated as the Chatham Municipal Air-



Long surf casting rods were transported from the airport to the beaches by simply lashing them to wing struts, as Wilfred, center, is doing here. Their drag had negligible effect on a small plane's flight.

port. Today the paved runway is 3000 feet long, has clear approaches, and can accommodate large and fast aircraft. Wilfred was granted the right to operate his flying service for as long as he wished, and this he did until 1961 when he finally decided that the time had come for him to retire.

The new runway made the airport better suited to the heavier, faster, nose wheel type aircraft that were becoming increasingly common. Airport operators began to sell off their light, tailwheel equipped Cubs and Aeroncas. Then Nauset Beach became part of the new Cape Cod National Seashore. So the practice of landing on Chatham beaches faded from the scene.

Over the years since Wilfred's retirement, different companies have operated the airport. New shop facilities and hangars have

been added, and the field has catered more and more to the executive class of aircraft. However, because of its distance from the airliner-dominated skies around Boston, it still appeals to owners of small antique, classic and homebuilt planes. The busy summer season brings in many visitors from distant states, but in the off-season the place retains the relaxed atmosphere of Wilfred's time.

Since it was built in the 1930s Wilfred's arch-roofed hangar has been the happy scene of innumerable hangar dances and the field has hosted air shows, airport days, clam chowder fly-ins for aviation organizations and other events. The Civil Air Patrol has made use of the field, as have ambulance planes. Aircraft operated out of Chatham have taken part in many searches for miss-



Wilfred and his young friend Warren Sampson display a good catch of stripers.

ing boats and aircraft - a very important thing for a community as strongly oriented to the sea as is Chatham. Planes engaged in important wildlife conservation work have also used the field.

Wilfred loved not only Chatham but his adopted country as well. During the 1950s the "cold war" with the Soviet Union was at its height and Washington was quite concerned about the possibility of a sneak air or missile attack. The Air Force accordingly erected a radar station in shoal water some distance off Chatham. It was called Texas Tower No. 2, from its resemblance to the steel oil-drilling platforms used off the coast of Texas.

Helicopters shuttled personnel and supplies to it from Otis AFB in Falmouth at the western end of the Cape. Wilfred observed them going back and forth over Chatham and his airman's mind quickly sized up the situation. He contacted the commanding officer and offered the use of Chatham

Airport to these choppers.

By substantially shortening these flights, use of his field cut the flying time of each trip by 20 minutes, saved much fuel, and increased each flight's payload by 600 pounds. This went on from late 1955 to mid-1960 and all this time Wilfred was happy to provide coffee, refreshments and occasional assistance to the aircrews.

As a result of this, in 1961 the commander of Otis presented Wilfred with a special citation in recognition of valuable service to the Air Force. A copy of Wilfred's thank-you note found in his scrapbook tells us something more about his character:

"It has been a pleasure to meet and know the pilots and other personnel that pass through this airport. When I close my eyes at night, I do so secure in my belief that these fine young men who are so skilled and devoted to their duties will protect the American way of life for us and all other free peoples of the world. It has been a



Owners of light aircraft from off the Cape flew to Chatham to learn the technique of landing on beaches. Then they joined the fun.

privilege and an honor to know the men of the Air Force.”

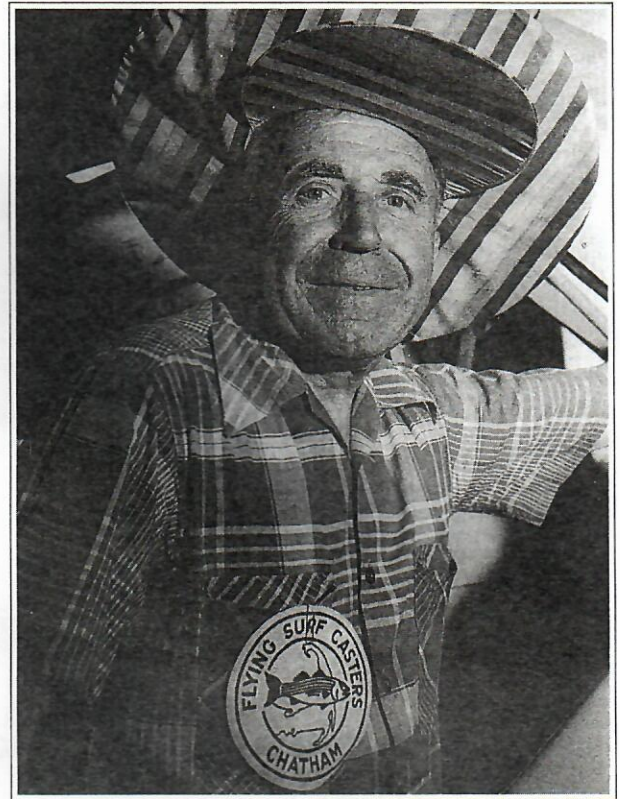
Another example of his regard for his fellow man is the fact that for years he kept courtesy cars at the airport for use by people who flew in to Chatham and needed to get around on the ground. He never said anything such as, “This will cost you so-and-so many bucks, bud!” Instead, he attached contribution cups to the dashboards of these cars and left it to the borrowers to do the right thing in regard to helping with the cost of making the vehicles available. These cars were not new or fancy, but they were well maintained and quite able to get visitors around town.

Always alert for ways to promote flying, he had promotional slogans such as “Time Flies - Why Don’t You?” painted on his ever-busy pickup truck. And also, “We Fly You High - We Fly You Low - We Fly You Everywhere - You Want to Go!”

During his Chatham years he made the acquaintance of hundreds if not thousands of people, both locals and visitors to the airport. He took active part in the town’s social and civic life. He was what people call “A pillar of the community.”

Everyone still living who knew him can tell anecdotes about him. He was certainly a hard worker, but when the work was done he knew how to relax and enjoy life. He often made hunting and fishing trips with Chatham buddies to remote parts of the Cape’s woodlands and shoreline. He had a great sense of humor and could be the life of a party through his talent for telling jokes and funny stories. And he was not above playing an occasional practical joke.

He was of average height and build. His 1928 student pilot license gives his height at that time as 5 feet 8 1/2 inches and weight 158 pounds. Like most of us, he put on a little girth with the passage of years. Some



Wilfred was a skilled mechanic and could service anything from a tractor to an airplane. But when the work was done, he knew how to relax.

people thought they saw a slight stoop to his shoulders and attributed this to a lifetime of manual labor.

But he never thought of work as being drudgery. While being interviewed by a reporter when he was 66 years old he commented, "A man doesn't get old until he stops working. I have worked hard all my life and intend to keep on working - it's the only way!"

Also in that interview he said, "I'd rather work around an airport, airplanes and aviators just for the fun of it than get a million dollars a year for doing something I did not like!"

His head and face were a little on the large side and he had a shock of bushy, often wind-tousled hair. He had heavy and promi-

nent eyebrows and a broad mouth that could easily break into a broader smile. As time passed, his face took on the lines and tanning typical of the faces of those who have spent many years in the great out-of-doors.

On first meeting him, some people might have thought they detected a trace of diffidence in his manner and attributed this to his years of service to a well-to-do family. But as they got to know him, they realized that this initial appraisal was wrong. Wilfred just simply was not what is called a "stuffed shirt."

His manner was soft-spoken and friendly in a relaxed sort of way. There was not the slightest trace of brashness or arrogance in him. Whenever he possibly could, he made it a point to walk out to the flight line to

greet and offer assistance to the occupants of planes arriving at his airport. New arrivals soon felt comfortable with him and welcome in Chatham.

A clothes horse he was not. In the off-season one would find him dressed in work pants, a mackinaw and hunter's plaid cap. In the summer he usually wore the chino slacks and shirts so popular among airport people of his time. On summer weekends, however, he'd get into the spirit of things by donning a brightly-colored shirt of Hawaiian pattern.

He married twice. His first wife was Lena Croteau, who sadly passed away early in their marriage. Later in Chatham he married Mary Chisholm. Neither union was blessed

with children. But Wilfred loved youngsters and welcomed them to his airport. When he sensed they were drifting toward mischief or trouble, he resolved the situation effectively with a few soft-spoken words.

After his passing, admirers established the Wilfred J. Berube Aeronautic Scholarship Fund in his memory. Annual awards have helped many Cape Cod young people to further their educations.

Following a period of declining health, he took leave of this world in April of 1966, a short time after passing his 81st birthday. Just a week before his passing he was very greatly pleased to receive a letter of commendation from then Gov. John A. Volpe

The high-roofed hangar at Chatham Airport was ideal for hoisting small planes to change back and forth from wheeled to float undercarriages. At left is Ted Weinz, one of the several young pilots who worked for Wilfred over the years. At center, Dick Jordan, owner of this Cub. Wilfred at the right.





and we quote from it:

"It was your foresight, your energy and your dedication that brought into being the strategically located airport at Chatham. Your fellow citizens are mindful of the fact that you literally cleared the ground for this airport which has brought pleasure and security to countless citizens of the Commonwealth and visitors to Cape Cod.

"Even today your feat would be worthy of note, but considering that your efforts started 30 years ago, we are all the more impressed with the vision you exhibited at that time.

"It must be a source of real comfort and satisfaction to you to know that your efforts have been recognized not only by your neighbors on the Cape but also by the increasing number of people who depend on aviation and upon an abundance of well located and adequately equipped airports."

Wilfred was laid to rest in Sacred Heart

Cemetery in Andover, just across the town line from Lawrence where he first encountered the American way of life. Outside the hangar he built at Chatham there is a boulder on which is mounted a bronze plaque honoring his memory.

Cape Cod has changed tremendously since Wilfred first visited it way back in 1910. There are many more year-round residents, both active and retired. As is the case with so many other airports today, there are people who would like to see Chatham Municipal Airport closed.

If this airport ceased to exist, aviation on Cape Cod would rue its loss for generations to come.

Those who enjoy flying today would do well indeed to learn a lesson from Wilfred Berube's awareness of the profound importance of promoting interest in and a sympathetic understanding of general aviation among the media and the public.