

Significant Women in Aviation

Jacqueline Cochran



Jacqueline "Jackie" Cochran, was a girl from modest beginnings. Orphaned as a small child, Jackie decided to make a name for herself in the aviation industry. And she did.

During her flying years, Jackie broke every speed, altitude and distance record for women. In 1962 alone, she established over 30 speed records in her Lockheed Jetstar. She later flew 1,429 miles per hour in a Lockheed F-104G Starfighter.

Jackie served the United States in the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron (WAFs), which would later become the WASPs, the Women's Airforce Service Pilots. Jackie was later named Director of the WASPs.

Bessie Coleman



In 1921, Bessie Coleman, or "Brave Bessie" as she was known, became the first licensed African-American woman pilot. Bessie had difficulty acquiring her license in America due to her gender and race, so she studied French and obtained her license there. Bessie returned as the first female, African-American pilot and soon became a popular attraction on the air show circuit.

Eileen Collins



A lieutenant colonel in the United States Air Force, Eileen Collins is the first woman ever selected as a space shuttle pilot. In 1999, Eileen will be the first woman to command a space shuttle. She was a T-38 instructor pilot and a C-141 aircraft commander in the Air Force. Eileen has flown more than 5,000 hours, in over 30 different types of aircraft

Linda Finch



Fifty years after Amelia's disappearance, Linda Finch re-created and completed Amelia's around-the-world expedition in a Pratt & Whitney airplane. Using Amelia's flight plan, Linda completed her World Flight on May 28, 1997, after flying the final leg of her journey -- 2,000 miles from Hawaii to Oakland, California.

Ruth Nichols



A founding member of the Ninety-Nines, Ruth was a well-versed aviator, with experience flying dirigibles, gliders, autogiros, seaplanes, amphibians, and four-engine aircraft. At one time she held three different world records. Nichols was seriously injured when she wrecked her plane in New Brunswick, attempting to solo the Atlantic Ocean.

Ruth helped form Aviation Country Clubs across the nation, and later founded a humanitarian air service to be used in the event of civilian disaster or war, named the Relief Wings. She turned the service over to the Civil Air Patrol after the onset of World War II.

Harriet Quimby



In 1911, Harriet Quimby became America's first licensed woman pilot when she obtained a license from the Moisant School. She soon traveled to France where she obtained a Bleriot monoplane and flew home across the English Channel.

Sally Ride



Sally was the first American woman in space. After completing a BS degree in physics, a BA in English, an MS in physics and a PhD in physics from Stanford University, Sally was selected for astronaut training in 1978. She served as a support crew member for the second and third space shuttle flights, both aboard the shuttle Challenger.

Sally served on the Presidential Commission investigating the Challenger accident, and was then assigned to NASA headquarters where she served as assistant to the NASA Administrator for long-range planning. She helped create NASA's Office of Exploration and produced a report on the future of the space program entitled "Leadership and America's Future in Space."

Sally is one of the most celebrated women in modern aviation, having received numerous awards and honors. She has authored several books, including a children's book, and is currently a physicist and faculty member at the University of California. Sally is a member of the Ninety-Nines.

Louise Thaden



Louise Thaden, an integral part of the Ninety-Nines' founding, convinced Walter Beech she should help him gain recognition for his airplanes. So in the early 1930s with the permission of Beech, Louise began setting records in Beech aircraft. She promptly gained an altitude record, and an endurance record, followed by a speed record in the Beech Travel Air.

In 1936, the all-male Bendix Trophy Race was opened to women. Louise and friend Blanche Noyes flew to a first place finish in the Staggerwing Beech. That same year, Louise was awarded the Harmon Trophy as the world's most outstanding flyer. Her book, *High, Wide and Frightened*, is an aviation treasure.

Fay Gillis Wells



Fay Gillis Wells, one of four Ninety-Nines to sign the invitation letter to women pilots, became the first female member of the Caterpillar Club, open only to those who have bailed out of an airplane to save their lives. In later years, Fay served as White House correspondent for Storer Broadcasting. She was one of three women to accompany President Richard Nixon on his historic visit to China.

Her continued involvement in the Ninety-Nines has produced such projects as SEE THE USA "World Friendship Through Flying" and the International Forest of Friendship, the Ninety-Nines' project for America's bicentennial celebration located in Atchison, Kansas. The International Forest of Friendship continues as an annual celebration.