

# The



# Antique Airfield Runway



*News from the Antique Airplane Association  
& the Air Power Museum*



## Leon Basler Reunited with First Airplane He Flew



Leon Basler (AAA M-16297) has been piloting since the age of 14. His interest in flying has paved the way for a multitude of opportunities and jobs over the years, from his service in the Air Force to work as a corporate pilot. Throughout his career he has owned several planes, most of which have come and gone. But these days only one particular plane remains in his possession – a 1946 Aeronca Champ 7AC. And it just so happens the plane he owns today is the very plane he first flew in as a teenager.

Leon was raised in historical Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, a small town 60 miles south of St. Louis and located along the west bank of the Mississippi River. Having a fascination with flying as far back as he can remember, Leon lived only a couple of miles away from a neighboring farm that contained an airstrip and hangar. "I loved chasing after planes as a kid," Leon said. "It didn't matter what I was doing – whenever a plane flew overhead I stopped whatever I was in the middle of, jumped on my bike, and followed it to the airstrip."

Leon's curiosity led to a friendship, both personal and professional, with the operator of the farm, a man in his 30s named Louis Sexauer. Louis, who was known by others as Louie, soon took Leon under his wing and began teaching him the mechanics of flight and the various functions of the plane.

Where most kids his age were learning to drive cars, Leon was substituting his bike for planes and learning to fly with Louie at the helm, serving as Leon's instructor and taking him up in the air in his 1946 Aeronca Champ. Instruction from Sexauer was conducted in an informal and non-conventional fashion. Leon learned how to become a pilot by receiving flight lessons whenever Sexauer was able to fit it into his schedule.

"I got over to the airstrip as often as I could," Leon said. "Some days Louie was too busy working on the farm to take me up, other days we only had enough time to fly for a few minutes. And then there were days where we were able to complete a full hour in the air."

In exchange for the lessons, Leon helped with work around Louie's farm, which included haying, maintaining the airstrip and washing and polishing Louie's 1946 Aeronca Champ.

The instruction continued into Leon's senior year of high school. When Leon became competent enough for solo flight, Louie and Leon flew to the Sparta Regional Airport in Illinois, located just across the Mississippi River. Louie spoke to a flight examiner, and told him he had been working with Leon. He assured the examiner that Leon's skill level met the standards required to receive a solo endorsement. Based on Louie's guarantee, the examiner gave Leon a pre-solo and flight examination to demonstrate his abilities and knowledge, which he passed.

All because of Louie's generosity and friendship, Leon was able to receive his certification at such a young age. "Louie was very courteous and giving with his time.

He never asked for anything in return, he was just happy to pass along his knowledge and love for flight with someone who shared the same passion," Leon said.

After high school Leon enlisted in the Air Force. He remained in touch with Louie and learned years later that he sold the plane Leon first learned to fly in. It was the early 1970s, a time where Leon was just beginning his career as a pilot.

More than three decades later, Leon began to wonder about the current state of the plane, and whether it was still operational. In the early 2000s, Leon was transitioning to a move to Bismarck, North Dakota, and decided to find out who owned the plane, more than thirty years after last flying it.

"I always wondered where the plane was," Leon said. "I wanted to find out who had it. So I was able to track down the tail number through the FAA Registry, and learned it was sold to a pilot who lived in Farmington, Missouri, about 20 miles west of Ste. Genevieve."

The owner of the plane was Mick Coleman. Leon phoned him and learned Mick had restored it in the late 1970s. Leon asked if he was willing to sell the plane, but Mick resisted, telling Leon the plane wasn't one he was willing to part with it.

The calls continued off and on for several years. One call got Leon in touch with Mick's brother, and during the conversation Leon brought up the possibility of selling the plane. Mick's brother said Mick probably wouldn't sell, but he took Leon's information and told Leon he would pass it along to his brother.

Not long after that call, Leon received a call from Mick, asking if he was still interested in buying the aircraft. Before agreeing, Leon wanted to see what condition the plane was in. So he arranged for a friend who lived in Missouri to travel to Farmington in order to see it firsthand.

Leon learned from his friend that while the plane had been restored, one critical element had been neglected – the plane was no longer in one piece. He decided to take a chance and see it for himself. With a borrowed trailer from Kent Pietsch, Leon traveled from North Dakota to Missouri, all the while unsettled about the overall condition of the aircraft that had been stored away and virtually left alone for more than three decades.



But when he showed up and laid his eyes on the plane for the first time in more than three decades, he was surprised by what he saw. "I couldn't believe how good its overall condition was after sitting over that period of time. Other than a little dust, it was reasonably well represented for the amount of time it sat," Leon said.



Leon purchased the plane and brought it to its new home in North Dakota. For the next year he worked to reassemble the plane with the professional assistance of Gary Johnson and the crew of Pietsch Aircraft and Restoration in Minot.

And now, the plane that Leon learned to fly in nearly fifty years earlier is back in his hands. These days, every time Leon steps into his plane, it recalls those early days of life in Missouri, chasing planes on his bike and eventually following his dream of becoming a pilot.

"Each flight brings back the memories of learning to fly as a young kid and the lifelong relationship with the person that made it happen, Louie Sexauer," Leon said.



(Story by Brian L. Gray)



## Shayln's Solo X-Country

September 16, 2014 was a beautiful day for flying in this area and Shayln Applegate arrived from Applegate Airport, Queen City, MO, on her first solo cross-country, flying the family Cub.



Shayln is a 3rd generation of Applegate's to become a pilot, along with her older sister Taryn Pemberton.



Shayln comments; "Brent Taylor signing my log-book yesterday after my touchdown at Antique Airfield. That was a photo nobody had to ask me to "say cheese!" for.... I was already smiling so much!"



Since September, Shaylyn has finished all the requirements for and has obtained her Private Pilot's certificate. "Congratulations" !!