

WHO WAS AMELIA MARY EARHART?
(July 24, 1897 - July 2, 1937)

by Guy Weddington McCreary

Amelia Earhart was the first woman in aviation to capture the public's imagination by her romantic approach to flying. She was daringly venturesome; a tall, lanky girl with smiling gray eyes and tousled blond hair. She was charming and modest, yet with an exciting buoyancy. She dressed in informal garb and was a model for the newly emancipated woman of her day, a Republican with avowed abstinence from alcohol and tobacco.

Born in 1897, she was the elder of two daughters of Amy Otis and Edwin Stanton Earhart. Born to a prominent pioneer family in Atchison, Kansas, Amelia grew up leading a vigorous outdoor life. She became interested in books and music while attending public schools. In 1916, she graduated from Chicago's Hyde Park High School.

Following graduation, she used an inheritance to finance her enrollment in the fashionable Ogontz Boarding School. In 1917, in her desire to serve the war effort, she became a nurse at Spadina Military Hospital.

From 1918 to 1928, she was searching for a career, attending Columbia University and the University of Southern California. During this time, she took her first airplane ride at the Burbank Airport. Intrigued by flying, she worked tirelessly to earn money for flying lessons. In 1921, she took lessons from Neta Snook, a pioneer woman pilot, and solo'd in June of 1921 at the age of 25. By selling her valuables and using income from a telephone job, she raised enough money to buy her first plane and joined the local barnstorming, stunt flying circuit in Southern California, where she set an unofficial women's altitude record of 14,000 feet. From 1924 to 1928, Amelia continued to study, taught at the University of Massachusetts, and tried social work, before finally dedicating her life to aviation.

On June 17, 1928, she flew from Newfoundland to Wales in 28 hours and 38 minutes. Overnight she became the "Lady Lindy" of aviation. (Lindy, a nickname for Charles Lindbergh, who was the first person to fly the Atlantic solo to Paris, France in 1927.) This achievement was followed by a ticker tape parade down Fifth Avenue in the city of New York. She became the aviation editor of *Cosmopolitan Magazine*; vice president of National Airways; the author of a book, "20 Hr's 40 Min"; participated in the first women's air derby; and set a women's speed record over a closed course. (She came to North Hollywood in 1928.) She was active in Zonta International and a founding member and the first president of the Ninety-Nines, an international organization of licensed women pilots.

In 1931, Amelia married George Palmer Putnam, a publisher and promoter, and they moved to the Toluca Lake area of North Hollywood. They had no children.

Also in 1931, Amelia set an altitude record for rotor-equipped aircraft at 18,415 feet. In 1932, she piloted a Lockheed Vega monoplane from Newfoundland to Ireland, 2,026 miles through storms and fog in 14 hours and 56 minutes. She was the first woman to fly the Atlantic alone and the first person to fly the Atlantic more than once. This feat won her the Distinguished Flying Cross from the United States Congress, the Cross of the French Legion of Honor, the Hessian International Trophy and a gold medal from the National Geographic Society, which was presented by President Hoover.

Her book "For The Fun Of It", was about her flying experiences and interest in aviation. In 1935, she made the first solo flight over the Pacific Ocean from Honolulu, Hawaii to the American mainland. Then on May 8th of the same year she flew from Mexico City to Newark, New Jersey. On July 2, 1937, she left Miami, Florida with navigator Fred Noonan on an around-the-world flight.

During the second phase of the flight, she left New Guinea for Howland Island and was never seen again. She was 40 years old. Speculation about her disappearance persists to this day.

In her honor, the U.S. issued a commemorative stamp bearing her likeness in 1963. In 1971, the community of North Hollywood honored their famous citizen with a seven-foot statue sculpted by Ernest Shelton. The North Hollywood library was renamed the Amelia Earhart Regional Library in honor of the "Golden Girl of Aviation" as part of the City of Los Angeles' Bicentennial Celebration, on April 21, 1981.



Guy Weddington McCreary, as president of the North Hollywood Jaycees in 1970, led the community effort to create the statue as a commemorative tribute to Amelia Earhart. Mr. McCreary, a well-respected and active civic leader in the North Hollywood community, is a member of the original pioneer family who bought property in 1890 on the site where the town later developed.