

Ferguson Has A History Museum

Ferguson, indeed, does have a Historical Society and a History Museum and we are moving forward with the help of our readers of the past many weeks. We encourage any reading this article to join in the conversation. Contact information is at the bottom of this article.

Could you imagine that a Ferguson man, president of a major arms firm, might be involved in espionage? How about a Ferguson man's connection with Star Wars? What about a Ferguson woman being a star in a famous soap opera? Did you know that Ferguson people were involved in early aircraft – even involved with Charles Lindbergh. A bicycle ride across Asia in 1892 – what does that have to do with Ferguson? All of these are true and will be explored in this article.

Samuel F. Pryor Sr. might possibly have been involved in a conspiracy to provide aide to Germany (pre-WWII) and even in a conspiracy to keep Franklin Roosevelt from being reelected. While not proven, it is possible. The Pryors had several addresses in Ferguson, Tiffin, Elizabeth and finally on Allen Place. Pryor's employment included executive positions in Simmons Hardware Company, St. Louis Car Wheel Company and the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Samuel Sr., in 1914, became President of Remington Arms and moved to Connecticut. His death in 1934 has led to intrigue concerning arms shipments to Germany. Whether Pryor was guilty of these accusations you will have to research for yourself. His son, Samuel F. Pryor Jr. grew up in Ferguson and became a well known executive in many firms and received the Award of Merit from President Harry Truman for building 56 secret airfields during WWII. Maybe not like father is the son.

Daniel T. O'Bannon grew up in Ferguson and graduated from McCluer High School. He was involved in the production of Star Wars (1977) as a computer automationist. But this is only part of his history. O'Bannon has also been a writer, editor, production designer and even a director of well known films (*Alien*, *Heavy Metal*, *Return of the Living Dead*, *Total Recall* and many more. In 1980 he received both the Hugo Award and the British Fantasy (sp) Award. In 1991 he received the Science Fiction Chronicle Award.

Soap operas have been a mainstay of broadcasting since the beginning of Radio. Even today, on TV we have *Young and Restless*, *General Hospital* and *Days of Our Lives* being some of the longest running and best known. One of the best known from the days of radio was *The Romance of Helen Trent*. This soap was broadcast by CBS from 1933 until 1960 (7,222 episodes). A Ferguson resident, Julie Stevens, played Helen for 16 years. This show had the premise: "to prove that romance could live on for a woman of 35 and even more". The show certainly appealed to the many housewives during the broadcast's history.

Ferguson has always been important in the history of aircraft – our proximity to the Old Kinloch Air Field and Lambert Field (St. Louis International Airport) has allowed Ferguson residents many opportunities. Ferguson resident, Bill Atwood, was one who guarded Charles Lindbergh's plane, Spirit of St. Louis". According to Atwood, "During the summers, we kids would spend half our time at Lambert Field. We got to know all the pilots real well. On his way from San

Diego to New York for the flight to Paris, he (Lindbergh) stopped in St. Louis and several of us stayed up all night in the hangar guarding his plane.” Bill became a flyer himself. In 1932 Bill moved to Hollywood to do stunt flying. He was one of the flyers buzzing around the Empire State Building in the original “King Kong” movie.

Bill wasn't the only aviator to come from Ferguson. Forest O'Brine, who along with Dale Jackson set two flying records in a Curtiss Robin (an airplane built by Curtiss-Robertson airplane Manufacturing Corp. – just west of Ferguson). In July 1929 the two flew for a total of 420 hours and 17 minutes. A second airplane brought food and fuel. Their record was broken, however, so in 1930 they took a Robin for a second flight and set a new world's record of 647 hours and 28 minutes. A crack in the engine block stopped the flight. O'Brine determined the engine problem by climbing out on a catwalk during the flight.

From the air we move to the ground – and the humble bicycle. In 1894, Ferguson resident, Thomas G. Allen Jr. along with Alton Illinois resident, William L. Sachtleben wrote a book about their 1892 bicycle trip – *Across Asia on a Bicycle*. Now this was 1892, a time when they did have “safety” bicycles which closely resembled our current bikes with a chain drive. However, these were not the 21-speed, all-terrain, shock absorbed bikes of today. It is hard to imagine a trip without the modern “Katy Trails” and bike paths that currently exist. The journey was from Constantinople, Turkey to Peking, China. This was a total of 6633 miles from April 3 to November 1892.

Perhaps some of you know of a Ferguson resident who has done some interesting or important things. Why not drop us an email with the details – or we can contact you for more information

If you have any suggestions, questions, or items to donate to the Ferguson Historical Society, please contact Jerry Benner at fjbenner@mindspring.com. You are also welcome to visit the History Museum later in summer (hopefully).

“The Ferguson Historical Society is dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of Ferguson Missouri. Membership is open to all sharing our interest.”