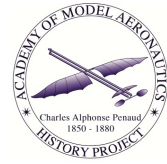




The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of CAPT. WILLIS C. BROWN

Started modeling between 1909 and 1911
AMA #1



Compiled, Transcribed & Edited by SS (11/2002); Reformatted & Updated by JS (06/2010, 07/2010, 12/2010, 01/2023, 2026)

Career:

- 1911: Formed the Independent Aero Club with friends
- First model was Bleriot's monoplane
- Organized the Roslindale (Massachusetts) Aero Club
- Served as director of training for the Jordan Marsh Company
- Worked to encourage young people to get involved with model aviation by doing things like hosting radio shows and providing schools with the necessary resources to start model airplane clubs
- 1935: Placed six in open class indoor HL stick at the Nationals
- Received a Bachelor of Arts in Education from Boston University; spent 40 years teaching industrial arts and vocational education
- Served as a specialist in aerospace education for the U.S. Office of Education in Washington, D.C.
- Author of various magazine articles
- 1930s: Leader of model aircraft activities in the Boston area; specialized in the design and flying of indoor models
- 1936: First president of the AMA; led the growth of the AMA as part of the National Aeronautics Association (NAA)
- 1935: Served on NAA's committee on model contests
- Mid-1930s: Served as director of the Jordan-Marsh Boston Travelers Junior Aviation League
- Early 1940s: Member of the AMA Youth Activities Committee
- Mid-1940s: Appointed chairman of the AMA Planning Committee
- 1959: Appointed AMA historian

Honors:

- 1955: Frank G. Brewer trophy for outstanding service in youth aviation education
- 1969: Model Aviation Hall of Fame (Academy of Model Aeronautics)
- 1979: Free Flight Hall of Fame (National Free Flight Society)

The following biography on Willis C. Brown came from the book The History of the Academy of Model Aeronautics: Including Part One and Part Two From the Beginning to the Year 1966, written by Willis C. Brown and Dick Black that was published first in 1966; the second part was published in 1967. This biography comes from Part One written by Willis C. Brown. It was completed by November 1965.

Willis C. Brown

President number one of the American Academy of Model Aeronautics appointed with other officers and committee members by the Council in July 1936 to serve until the first election in December. Elected to serve as president from January 1937 to December 1937.

(Formerly director of Jordan Marsh – Boston Traveler Junior Aviation League)

Phillips Zecchitella extracts the following with permission from Model Aircraft Yearbook, 1936.

“He became interested in the subject of model airplanes between the period of 1909 and 1911 at which time the Wright brothers were thrilling young America with glider and experimental plane flights. In 1911, he formed the Independent Aero Club with several cronies. What it was independent of nobody knew because it was the only club of its kinds within the knowledge of its charter members. He spent sleepless nights in developing a marvelous organization to embrace all the youth of the hometown. A hand printing press was purchased and printed fliers announcing the stupendous fact, i.e. formation of the Independent Aero Club. The populace did not seem much impressed and the club died a natural death. Its few members were nevertheless undaunted and continued model flying experiments.

“His first model was a copy of Bleriot’s monoplane with framework of chestnut strips glued together and wound with thread then covered with silk from an old umbrella and powered with several rubber strands knotted together. It presented formidable appearance but was particularly outstanding in complete lack of good flying qualities.

“Brown spent the next few years devoted to coating the proverbial bread with jam. He organized the Roslindale Aero Club in Roslindale, Massachusetts. At this time, Jordan Marsh and the newspaper Boston Traveler decided to co-sponsor a model flying organization to be known as Jordan Marsh – Boston Traveler Junior Aviation League (1929). The league bounced into a husky individual. The burden of details fell upon H. Russell Clement and himself. The league’s initial meeting was attended by 1,200 enthusiastic cherubs from Boston and the surrounding vicinity. The first capacity in the league was that of a chief instructor, which was later appointed to league director.

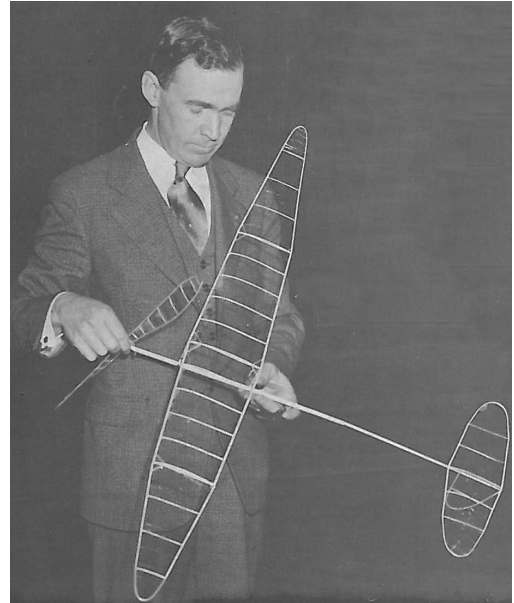
“Brown is a glider fan. The league successfully constructed Baker-McMillan secondary. Another development was the well-known Boston point system for model competition. It has been much copied by other organizations. The club has a weekly newssheet, Wing Overs, edited by mad genius Al Lewis.

“Personal statistics: Brown is now director of training for the Jordan Marsh Company. He manages to keep an eye on the League. His ambition has been to give youngsters interested in the model flying game an opportunity to express themselves and develop along lines which were denied him in his earlier day due to lack of some older interested party. He is a member of the NAA Model Airplane Committee and attends all national meets. I saw him at Saint Louis flying an indoor microfilm job. On every flight, the model would catch in the ceiling lights. There must

have been 100 ceiling lights in the Olympia Auditorium that day. Finally, the model got well into some time on a flight and it evaded lights. But, no soap – the motor stick snapped.”

Phil has a wonderful style of writing. It is too bad he decided to become a millionaire (?) manufacturer as president of his own company instead of a writer. Incidentally although on one flight a motor stick did snap on launching, the best flight was 14 minutes and 13 seconds placing Brown sixth in the open class indoor HL stick event at the 1935 Nationals and the plane landed in the balcony.

Brown got his B.A. in education from Boston University and devoted the greater part of 40 years to teaching, supervising, etc., in the field of industrial arts or vocational education. Because of his youth aviation experience, he served as a specialist for aerospace education for the U.S. Office of Education in Washington, D.C. When he retired in 1960, he was specialist for aerospace education. In 1955, he was awarded the Frank G. Brewer trophy for outstanding service in the field of youth aviation education. In retirement now at his home in Bethesda, Maryland, he serves as treasurer of two organizations and does some magazine writing as well as serving as historian for the Academy of Model Aeronautics.



“...Willis Brown, first AMA president and AMA historian, with indoor model which placed him 6th in 1935 Nationals at St. Louis. Flight time was 14 min., 13 sec.” – The History of the Academy of Model Aeronautics, p. 7

The following ran in the December 1955 issue of Model Aviation magazine.

First AMA President Receives Brewer Trophy Award

The 1955 Frank G. Brewer Trophy, America’s highest award in the field of youth aviation education and training was presented to Willis C. Brown at the annual Wright Day Dinner of the Aero Club of Washington on December 17. In first announcing the 1955 winner, National Aeronautic Association President Thomas G. Lanphier, Jr. cited Brown for “rendering services beyond the call of duty” in seeking through group action to interest more young people in some phase of aviation through classroom and experience type programs.

Willis C. Brown helped organize the AMA in 1934 and served as AMA’s first President. He currently is a member of an advisory committee to aid the AMA Headquarters staff in making decisions needed immediately– before the Executive Council could formally act. He authored a school textbook titled *Airplane Models and Aviation*, published in 1942.

Connected with the Office of Education in some aviation capacity since 1942, he served with distinction in developing aviation-supporting military training programs in public vocational

schools during World War II. In 1947, he transferred to the Secondary Education section as an aviation education specialist. In addition to effective work in this capacity, he has served as a Vice President of NAA and a key individual on its Air Youth Education Committee, is a member of the Civil Air Patrol's Education Advisory Committee, and was chairman of the 1954 Ad Hoc Committee on Aviation Education that formulated government policy for the Air Coordinating Committee. He currently is playing an important role in organizing the National Aviation Education Council into a membership-type organization directly associated with the National Aeronautic Association.

Mr. Brown is a native of Syracuse, New York. He attended Boston University and obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in education. His present residence is in Bethesda, Maryland.

The following ran in the April 1969 issue of American Aircraft Modeler magazine in the AMA News section. The article was about the beginning of the AMA

First President Reminisces

Arriving home from the 1936 National Championship meet in Detroit, with the Boston modeling delegation, I must have had sort of suppressed grin on my face as my wife met me with the query, "Well, what big job have you let yourself in for how?!" I had to admit that at the meeting following the Nats, the Provisional Council had named me as president among other officers of a new national organization to be known as the American Academy of Model Aeronautics.

"It won't take much time," I countered. All officers will serve only until the first annual meeting. Lt. H. W. Alden, our secretary-treasurer, has promised to attend to the day-by-day operation as he had been doing as chairman of the Model Airplane Committee of the National Aeronautic Assn.

The first annual meeting of the AAMA elected the same slate of officers named by the Provisional Council. Then the elected officers were confronted with four immediate problems that demanded solution. They were how to assure continuity for the Nats as well as the new Academy, how to improve our National Championships, how to carve our independent status from NAA while retaining their help, and how to put out a monthly publication without money in the treasury. The first three I solved by appointing committees to consider their problems and report back within the year. The fourth, dealing with the publication, was passed along to Al Lewis, the next president. Great credit goes to Al for keeping communications open between the leaders, the model airplane suppliers and the 400-500 contestants who would become the potential members for the Academy in the coming years.

The pioneer modelers I associated with prior to the formation of the Academy in 1936 are people whose names I shall always remember. Their influence and advice, both spoken and written, at that time must have had a profound effect on the direction and value of our Academy of Model Aeronautics of today.

-Willis C. Brown

The following ran in the October 1969 issue of American Aircraft Modeler magazine in the AMA News section. The article was about the beginning of the Model Aviation Hall of Fame. Willis Brown was one of the first inductees.

Willis C. Brown

His first model, built before World War I, was a copy of the famous Bleriot monoplane using a framework of chestnut wood strips glued together, tied with thread, and covered with silk from an old umbrella. He was a leader of model aircraft activities in the Boston area during the 1930s, specializing in the design and flying of indoor models.

He has devoted over 40 years to teaching and supervising in the field of industrial arts and vocational education. He was the first president of the AMA in 1936 and leader in the growth of AMA as a part of the family of the National Aeronautic Association.

In 1955, he was awarded the Frank G. Brewer trophy for outstanding service in the field of youth aviation education. When he retired from U.S. government service in 1960, he was a specialist for aerospace education. Prior to and since that time he has been the official historian of the AMA.

The following information on Willis C. Brown was collected from correspondence, newspaper clippings, newsletters and other documents preserved in his file in the National Model Aviation Museum's Archives.

Brown served as treasurer of the Vocational Educational Society of Boston according to letterhead dated 1929.

Another way Brown found to reach potential young modelers was through hosting a radio program. He hosted his first program on WLOE radio station at 5:15 p.m. on October 4, 1929. It was a question and answer service for the Junior Aviation League. Brown gave tips on successful building and after the first show answered questions submitted by youngsters.

Brown served as a contest director for local contests in his area sponsored by the Jordan-Traveler Junior Aviation League of Boston. This is demonstrated through a list of contest rules dated April 6, 1935 that gives Willis Brown as the contest director.

Before the AMA was formed officially in 1936, Brown worked with the National Aeronautics Association (NAA). William R. Enyart, NAA president, asked Brown to serve on the NAA's committee on model contests in a letter dated April 15, 1935.

Brown served as director of the Jordan-Marsh Boston Travelers Junior Aviation League in Boston, Massachusetts, according to an article that ran in the Boston Traveler newspaper on May 20, 1935.

Brown was asked to serve as field judge at the 1937 Nationals, according to a letter from Irwin S. Polk dated June 15, 1937.

Through his involvement with the Jordan-Traveler Junior Aviation League of Boston, Brown had a trophy named after him. The trophy was awarded to the adult who had the longest flight time in the indoor fuselage event, according to an article that ran in the Boston Traveler newspaper on June 2, 1938.

Albert Lewis appointed Brown as a member of the AMA Youth Activities Committee from 1941 to 1942, according to a letter sent to Brown from Lewis dated October 7, 1941.

According to a certificate dated June 28, 1946, AMA President Irwin Ohlsson appointed Brown as the chair of the AMA Planning Committee.

Brown was appointed AMA historian by Russ Nichols in 1959, according to a letter Brown sent to Frank Zaic on November 11, 1963.

Brown served as treasurer of the Washington (D.C.) Planetarium and space Center, according to a report dated January 22, 1964. According to the same report, he was also a member of the National Aviation Education Council at the same time.

As AMA historian, Brown worked with the AMA to collect all issues of *Model Aviation* magazine. According to a letter, he sent to John Worth on February 25, 1965, Brown went through all of the AMA's copies of *Model Aviation* and noted which issues were missing. He also made suggestions on how to encourage members to donate their old issues for the AMA's collection.

Throughout his time working in model aviation, Brown helped many schools establish model aviation programs. He supplied various resources and advice to the schools.

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