

# Dorotha Canfield Was An Early Flier

Dakota View

[I believe this is a Williston, North Dakota paper.]

Thursday, February 27, 1986

“Nostalgia” column

by Bill Shemorry

Even though Shemorry misspelled Dorotha’s name, this is a wonderful article! It chronicles Dorotha’s childhood, meeting Ed, her flight career, and her death in 1936. Unfortunately, it contains some very sad information about the crash that killed her. According to someone Shemorry interviewed, Dorotha was alive and attempting to speak for a few seconds after the crash. But, there is no indication that she was still alive when Ed reached her side.

The photocopy we have of it is on LARGE paper. So, you’ll have to either page back and forth between its first and second pages, or PRINT them and hold the second page (page 3 of this PDF) below the article’s first page.

DOROTHA

# Dorothea Canfield was an early flier

Dorothea Virginia Canfield was a pretty, talented young woman who in the mid 1930s was well known in Williston.

She was the wife of Edwin A. Canfield, the first professional aviator to settle here, and the mother of their two children, Dennis and Carol. Active in a number of community organizations, she was well liked by her friends and neighbors.

But much more than this, in those days when women were pretty much supposed to remain home and see that things around the house were taken care of, Dorothea had become, of all things, an aviatrix.

But she was not just an ordinary flyer. As the second Williston woman to earn a transport pilot's license, she was admired and looked up to by both men and women.

Dorothea Virginia Jackson was the only daughter of Homer and Virginia Jackson of Newburg, Mo., where she was born June 2, 1909. When she was only 6, her father died. Several years later her mother married a North Dakotan, J.O. Busse and the family moved to Fargo.

She completed her grade school education in Fargo, then moved to Ray to live with Mr. and Mrs. H.E. Foley. Mrs. Foley, her aunt, arranged for her to attend Williston High School. She graduated in the class of 1926, then attended Carlton College in Northfield, Minn., for three years.

It was a most thrilling experience to dash through the clouds like a bird, cutting hours and days from the time it took to travel the same distance on the ground.

By this time Canfield had already established himself at Williston's first airport on East Broadway, where his open cockpit TravelAir biplane almost daily soared into the sky on charter trips or taking students up to receive flying instruction. Ed was not making it big, but in addition to the charter and instruction flights, he added to his income by hunting coyotes from the air.

## Dorothea Determined To Be A Flyer

From the beginning Dorothea made up her mind to become a flyer. No matter that flying was an activity reserved almost 100 percent for men. Her husband agreed that she should learn. As her instructor-mentor, he was the very best.

It was about six weeks following their marriage that an incident occurred which further increased her desire to fly — the granting of a limited commercial pilot's license to Edna Coulter, the daughter of a Williston pioneer family. Miss Coulter had moved to California where she received her flight instruction and in addition broke a record by soloing in 4½ hours. Her picture and a news story were carried in the Oct. 31 issue of the Williston Herald. Her example was one worthy of

beaming with pride, the new father, with the permission of his wife, bundled the baby up and took him for a 15-minute flight over Williston.

## Youngest Passenger

Canfield later boasted that his son was the youngest passenger to fly. There had been a previous occasion when the stork had visited an airplane flying over New York City, but Ed said that Dennis was the youngest PASSENGER, and that was something!

The baby had been accompanied by three nurses, Julia Renne, Viola Harren and Martha Heath, who admitted it was all very thrilling. They flew over and around the city and got a good view of the Missouri River and the bluffs on either side.

But baby Canfield was not impressed. He slept through the entire flight.

## Earned Transport License In 1934

Some months later, Dorothea continued her flying, piling up needed air time. She skipped the in-between license, that of limited commercial pilot, and in 1934 in Minot tackled the rigid examination for transport pilot. It was with a great deal of personal satisfaction that she flew home from this, bringing with her the certificate that showed she had been granted the right to instruct students in the art of flying and to transport passengers for

**nostalgia**  
**bill shemorry**



In addition to some financial help received from ranchers, for each coyote brought in, a \$5 bounty was paid, plus up to \$15 for pelts in prime.

In the early 1930s the Canfields were able to bag an average of two coyotes per day. However there were days when the total was considerably more. Their best day was 20, their biggest winter kill 48 and the all-time total, 2,867. These were the ones they were able to pick up. Much of the hunting was in country too rough to land in, so the coyotes were just left there.

During summers, it was still necessary to work the

county fairs and other celebrations. The Canfields put together an air show, complete with stunt flying, parachutists and other thrills.

## Coyote Kill

Perhaps most popular was their "coyote Kill" which was a highlight of every air show they put on. Four colored balloons would be positioned on the ground just in front of the grandstand. Dorothea would bring the plane roaring in at a low altitude, and as they passed by, Ed would lean out of the cockpit, take infallible aim. In rapid succession his rifle would

See Dorothea, page 4

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### Cut Dashing Figure

It was during her college days that she met the young, handsome airplane pilot, Ed Canfield. Ed had been one of the early barnstormers who traveled from city to city, stunting and taking up passengers during celebrations. Wearing doeskin helmet with goggles pushed up on his forehead and dressed in brown leather jacket, military-style jodhpurs and cavalry boots, he cut quite a dashing figure.

Ed himself was charmed by this pretty young college girl. One might say she stole his heart. She, in turn, was entranced by this rugged young man with his flashing, good-natured smile.

Ed and Dorothea "fell" for each other, hard. After a brief courtship in which his airplane played an important part, they were married in Fargo. The date was Sept. 10, 1929. They went on a brief honeymoon during which they saw the sights by air.

Dorothea enjoyed the trip.

Williston Herald. Her example was one worthy of being followed.

### Soloed May 6, 1930

It was not long until Dorothea soloed. On May 6, 1930, the Herald reported that she had received her initial private pilot's license.

With this achievement she became part of a small but most select group: the licensed air pilots of North Dakota. Late in 1929 a news story had revealed that there were 14 licensed pilots in North Dakota, half of them in Williston and vicinity. These included her husband, Algot Lind, Harry Baker, Claude Redshaw, Lloyd Westby, Peter Moe and Walt Strom.

She then set about to acquire the air time and experience needed for a higher license. However, this had to be delayed for a time, for in the spring of 1931 she joyfully informed her husband that their first child was on its way.

On Nov. 4, their son Dennis was born. Two days later,

in the art of flying and to transport passengers for hire.

The year 1934 was special to Dorothea in another way: It was the year her daughter was born.

Following this, she went to work in earnest, piling up an enviable record of safe flying, completing many miles of perilous solo cross-country, carrying express and also passengers without a single mishap.

### Low-level Sorties

It was also at this time the Canfields began flying low-level sorties: she at the controls and he with his trusty rifle, mounted on a special swivel, swooping down to rid the prairies of coyotes and wolves. They used a small Kari-Keen high-wing monoplane, the "Coyote Special," in their hunting.

This was an era in North Dakota aviation when the pickings, so to speak, were pretty lean. The income from hunting varmints was needed to keep things going.

# Dorothea

continued from page 3

bark four times and the bullets would puncture the balloons. A miss was a rare occurrence.

It was on July 18, 1936, that the "Flying Canfields" brought their planes to Noonan to put on a show at the annual Old Settlers Picnic. As was their custom, prior to the show they took passengers up for an overview of the city.

One of those wanting to fly was Noonan resident, Albert Lee. He was well known to the Canfields, having taken a number of flying lessons previously. He was the owner of an airplane and although he had not yet earned his private license had considerable experience. According to newspaper reports of the time, he also had a reputation of being a careless pilot.

Lee purchased 15 minutes of instruction time. Purely by chance, it became the task of Dorothea to fly with him. They climbed into the Kari-Keen, cranked the engine and took off. The 15 minutes went

by without incident and the plane circled, preparing to land.

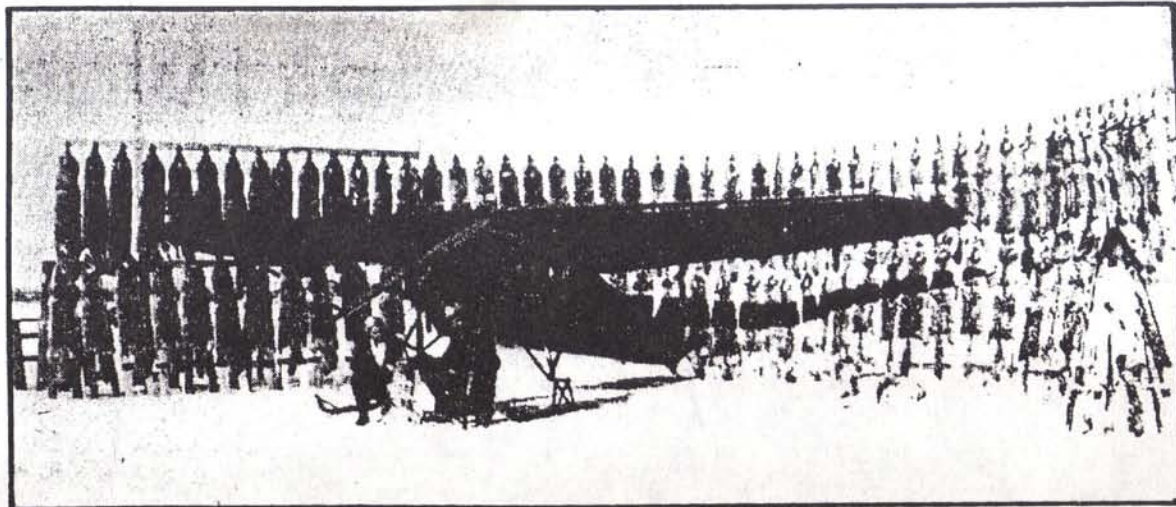
### Canfield Watched The Plane Come In

Canfield, standing on the field, watched them come in. He noticed that Lee was at the controls and saw they were apparently about to overshoot the field. The plane went through some "strange maneuvers" attempting to set down, then as if realizing he was not in the right position to land, the pilot gunned the motor and gathered altitude, apparently to circle the field for another landing.

Canfield and two companions watched for a minute, then his attention was diverted to preparations to ready his other plane for flight.

### They're Going To Crash!

A moment later, someone cried, "They're going to crash!" Then, in an instant the sound of the impact came



Dorothea and Ed Canfield are pictured with their Kari-Keen "Coyote Special." At the time this photo was taken, they had just brought in their 1,000th coyote. In this same airplane in 1936, Mrs. Canfield crashed.

as the plane with its two passengers struck to the ground. Neither Canfield or his other two companions had seen the ship as it hit.

The crash was seen by Mr. and Mrs. Roy Gibson of Wheeler, Mont., who was visiting the home of Mrs. Gibson, just a half block from where the plane came down. Mrs. Gibson later said her attention was attracted by

the roar of the motor as it flew low. They rushed to the wreckage.

"Lee was undoubtedly killed instantly," Gibson said later, "The lady was trying to talk. I tried to get her out but could not do it alone."

Canfield had jumped into a car and arrived at the crash site a few minutes later. Only with a hack-saw were he and others able to take his wife

from the wreckage. They brought her to the Noonan hospital where Dr. J. Allen Smith had been summoned.

"Death must have been almost instantly," the doctor said.

An examination of the wreckage revealed that the plane's ignition switch was still turned on and the throttle wide open. This appeared to

See Dorothea page 5



# Dorothea continued from page 4

prove that the plane had actually been flown at full speed into the ground.

## Attempted To Regain Controls

"Dorothea was attempting to regain the controls," Canfield theorized, "but Lee insisted on handling the ship himself."

Aeronautics Inspector Lester J. Orcott, who flew in from Fargo to inspect the wreck, agreed with Canfield. "There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that pilot Lee had possession of the controls and would not release them ..."

Funerals services were held in the Congregational Church in Williston. Her body was carried to its last resting place in Riverview Cemetery by eight of her contemporaries, aviators who flew in from all over the northwest. They were Lester G. Orcutt, Fargo; Harold Price, Grenora; Thor Thorstenson, Plentywood; Raymond Swenson,

Williston; C.O. Kvale, Decorah, Iowa; and Paul Nalewaja, Browerville, Minn.

The tragedy shook Can-

'She was one of the best pilots — man or woman — that I have ever known!'

— Lester Orcott

field, but he was able to pull himself together and continue his flying career. After

some time he left Williston, later moved into "big-time" aviation as an aerial surveyor and mapper. He married Mae Hanson, who had been a teacher in Williston schools and was a friend of the family. They made their home in Grand Junction, Colo., where in 1983, at the age of 90 he passed away of natural causes.

Dorothea Virginia Canfield is affectionately remembered by friends who still reside in Williston. She was Williston's first aviatrix and as Aeronautics Inspector Orcott eulogized:

"... She was one of the best pilots — man or woman — that I have ever known!"

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