

AMONG THE STARS

BOLTON'S HAROLD BIXBY & THE CENTURY OF AVIATION

By Anthony F. Hall

If you happen to be sitting on a dock or a lawn on Lake George in the hours before dawn and see the lights of an airplane flashing among the stars, in all likelihood it is one on its way to the North Pole, which it will cross before setting down somewhere in Asia.

Such flights are now common. But in the 1930s, Asia was accessible to Americans only by sea.

A man who gazed at those same skies from these same shores, however, was one of the first to imagine that routine, transpolar air travel was possible. More than any other single individual, he opened Asia to air traffic.

That man was Harold M. Bixby, a resident of St. Louis, Bolton Landing, Captiva Island and, for several years in the 1930s, Shanghai, China.

His grandson, Benjamin Barrett of Bolton Landing and Great Barrington, MA, has just completed the first biography of Harold M. Bixby, one of seven children of W.K. Bixby, the St. Louis businessman who built a summer home at Bolton Landing's Mohican Point in 1902.

The book, titled "The Spirit Behind the Spirit of St. Louis," will be available for purchase at Trees later this summer.

The title, of course, alludes to the chapter in Harold Bixby's life for which he is best known: underwriting Charles Lindbergh's 1927 transatlantic flight and, indeed, for giving the world's most famous airplane its name.

"Harold Bixby was known for avoiding the limelight," Ben Barrett said in a recent interview. "Although I was too young to have known him well before he died, everyone I've spoken to says he was known for his modesty and self-effacing manner. He probably would not have wanted a biography of him written."

But as Barrett makes clear, Bixby is, without question, worthy of a biography.

As Charles Lindbergh himself said, "Bixby was one of two men who took the financial arrangements for the 'Spirit of St. Louis' project off my shoulders at a time when it was of vital importance for me to concentrate on the construction of the plane and plans for the flight to Paris."

In a 1969 letter to a historian, Lindbergh wrote, "Harold Bixby was one of the great men I have known, in ability and in character... He foresaw a future in aviation and took an active part in its development."

Harold Bixby had a long-standing interest in aviation, starting, at the very latest, during World War I, and preoccupying him throughout the 1920s, when he became a balloonist and one of the first men in the nation to keep a private plane for business travel – the forerunner of today's corporate jet.

So it is not surprising that when he learned of Lindbergh's ambition to make a solo flight across the Atlantic, he offered his support. As president of the St. Louis Chamber of Commerce and vice president of the State National Bank of St. Louis, he was perfectly positioned to do so. According to Ben Barrett, Bixby



Clockwise: Harold M. Bixby; Mohican Point in the 1930s; Charles Lindbergh and the Spirit of St. Louis.

was motivated by more than a love of aviation.

"He hoped to make St. Louis the nation's aviation hub. It didn't work out that way. Chicago assumed that role," he says.

Bixby's support for Lindbergh did not end when the Spirit of St. Louis landed in France.

It included creating and then mailing two million post cards to people across the globe who had sent Lindbergh congratulatory notes, collecting and creating an exhibition of all the medals bestowed upon him and accompanying him on what was, to all intents and purposes, the national celebrity circuit.

As Reeve Lindbergh, Charles Lindbergh's daughter, notes, "After

my father's flight to Paris in 1927, the two men became close, lifetime friends. Their first letters address each other as 'Mr. Bixby' and 'Mr. Lindbergh.' Soon, 'Bix' and 'Slim' are engaging in a thoughtful, deeply informative and frequently humorous exchange that would last for decades."

Many of those letters are published for the first time in "The Spirit Behind the Spirit of St. Louis." Indeed, the book is composed primarily of documents – letters, photos, memos, newspaper clippings, even flight logs.

"It was important to me to preserve these primary resources," said Barrett. "It was a crime to have all this material and to not make it

THE SPIRIT BEHIND THE Spirit of St. Louis

Harold M. Bixby

A LIFETIME IN AVIATION: FROM BALLOONS THROUGH THE PAN AMERICAN AIRWAYS YEARS



BENJAMIN C. BARRETT



available, especially to students and historians of aviation."

For historians of aviation, Bixby's role in the global expansion of commercial air travel is perhaps his most noteworthy achievement.

In 1932, Lindbergh introduced Bixby to Juan Trippe, the president of Pan American Airways, who immediately dispatched him to China to secure rights for trans-Pacific air service.

"The Chinese were suspicious of westerners who wanted to do business there. Harold Bixby dispelled much of that by moving my grandmother, my mother and my aunts to Shanghai in 1934," said Barrett.

A few years later, in 1938, the

family fled China, steps ahead of the invading Japanese.

"Envision gathering all family members and running for the docks, after a 50-calibre machine gun bullet lands on the floor of the living room. My mother recounted holding the still-warm bullet as they fled. At the dock, 350 people were crammed into a tender and motored out to the SS Jefferson, whose captain initially refused to allow them to board. Then, in the middle of a typhoon, they were taken aboard in what has been said to be the most dangerous transfer at sea ever witnessed," writes Barrett.

Needless to say, the remainder of Bixby's career as a Pan Am

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Land Conservancy Holds 7th Annual LG Hike-A-Thon

By Mirror Staff

The Lake George Land Conservancy's annual Hike-A-Thon, always held July 5, acquired a new feature this year: an "After Party" at the Charles R. Wood Park in Lake George Village.

According to Sarah Hoffman, the Conservancy's communications manager, approximately 250 hikers and guests attended the event, which included craft beer, merchandise for purchase, desserts and music.

Nearly 550 people took part in this year's hikes and paddles at one of 19 different sites, each of which is photographed from above by Carl Heilman II, circling in a helicopter owned and operated by Bruce Mowery.

First held in 2013 to celebrate the

Lake George Land Conservancy's 25th anniversary, the Hike-A-Thon has been found to be an effective tool for showcasing the parks and preserves protected by the organization as free public resources.

"We're not a hiking club, but as a result of our land conservation efforts, we are one of the largest land owners in the watershed, and manage miles of trails that are open to the public. We want to encourage people to get out and enjoy the trails and get a first-hand appreciation for the land that protects the lake," said Hoffman.

"A healthy forest, complete with wetlands, vernal pools, and diverse vegetation, is the most effective tool available to protect Lake George," said Hoffman. "Recreational trails on protected land provide access



Up Yonda Farm in Bolton Landing is now one of 19 sites included in the Lake George Land Conservancy's Hike-A-Thon.

to the public to explore these lands and build an appreciation for its protection.

Since 2017, the Hike-A-Thon has included Partner Sites at YMCA Camp Chingachgook, Up Yonda

Farm Environmental Education Center in Bolton and the Silver Bay YMCA, among other places.

"We're happy to highlight these partners' good stewardship practices and the conservation of their own

lands," said Hoffman.

At next year's Hike-A-Thon, hikers and paddlers will have their choice of 20 sites. Early registration will be encouraged.

Lake George's Swap Shop Now Open for Business

By Thom Randall

SPECIAL TO THE LAKE GEORGE MIRROR

For residents of the town of Lake George, visits to the town transfer station have a new dimension — treasure hunting.

At the July 8 meeting of the Town Board, buildings and grounds superintendent Jim Martino and Board member Marisa Muratori noted that the town's new reuse center located at the town transfer station was now in operation. Also known as the "Take It or Leave It Shed," the venue is a popular stop-off for people who want to give away unneeded new or gently-used household goods, furniture, toys, small home appliances, sporting goods and tools — or adopt the items. Muratori said that people were presently using the reuse shed appropriately.

Muratori — known for her embrace of environmental

awareness and social responsibility — advocated establishing a self-serve "free store" at the town transfer station earlier this year. The concept was endorsed by the Lake George town board at their May 13 meeting.

Muratori located a quaint shingle-roof shed — complete with flower boxes and decorative doors — that she had moved to the transfer station where people can drop off quality items of value that they no longer need, for others to adopt and take home.

Muratori said this "Free Store" is similar to the Chester Reuse Center, for decades a popular destination in northern Warren County. This indoor facility, operated by the town of Chester next to its transfer station and recycling center, has for many years hosted all sorts of gently used or new household goods, furniture, toys, small and large home appliances, sporting goods, and

some tools. Most all the items are sorted and arranged on shelves, and clothing — both for children and adults — is neatly hung on racks.

"I love the idea of communities promoting reuse of material goods," she said, noting that there's a growing awareness in society of the excess items that people collect — and a new enthusiasm of giving away items for reuse by others.

"A lot of people have things they might have received as a present — and they've never even taken them out of their original boxes," she said. "And many people are too busy to take the time to sell the items on Craigslist."

She said that giving things away to others is now trending with the millennial generation.

"If you don't use something, someone else might enjoy it, and giving it to someone else gives you a good feeling — rather than just chucking it into the garbage."

BOLTON'S HAROLD BIXBY & THE CENTURY OF AVIATION

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executive, based in New York and living in the leafy suburb of Bronxville, were less physically and emotionally challenging.

Summers were spent in Bolton Landing, where some of his grandchildren now live and where

many more reunite every year, at Mohican Point and at Topside, the farm he purchased at the top of Mohican Hill.

By the early 1950s, Harold and Debby Bixby were spending winters in Captiva, Florida, where Harold became a prominent conservationist. He died in 1965 at the age of 75.

Barrett said he spent years

compiling the contents of the book, contextualizing the documents and writing the narrative.

He hopes Lake George-area residents — and not just those interested in aviation — will find it enjoyable.

"He was a local character who did some amazing things," said Barrett.



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