



The AMA History Project Presents: Autobiography of ARTHUR (ART) H. CHRISTENSEN



Modeler since 1934 Born November 19, 1928
AMA# 200

Written & Submitted by AHC (02/1998); Transcribed & Edited by SS (12/2002); Updated by JS (12/2005, 07/2014)

Career:

- Helped organize The Flying Eight Balls club; served as secretary and treasurer
- Started flying in competitions in 1946 and has won indoor paper plus microfilm and outdoor events
- Always placed first in the Pan Am events
- A finalist in Wakefield competition
- Made it to the semi-finals in FAI indoor competition with a flight of over 21 minutes
- Features of his designs are in National Free Flight Society publications.
- His Tri-Flite Radio Controlled sailplane was published in the April 1996 issue of Model Aviation magazine
- Has written for the Bong Eagles newsletter and American Modeler magazine
- Served as president of the Chicago Aeronuts from 1959 to 1961 and has been a member longer than anyone else
- As president of the Chicago Aeronuts he increased membership and found an indoor flying site for the club
- Started the practice of model clubs holding raffles and auctions to make money
- Drew illustrations for a Wakefield brochure
- Restored Gerry Ritz's 1959 World Nordic Champion and donated it to the National Model Aviation Museum
- Built Wally Simmers Jabberwock and Gollywock and also donated them to the National Model Aviation Museum
- Leader Member since April 1960 and Contest Director since February 1986
- Contest directed five Midwest state championships and two Bong Eagles Annual Summer Meets
- Worked as a draftsman and designer for Comet Models from 1946 to 1948
- Worked as a model maker for Sparky Industries from 1948 to 1950
- Presently (1998) working with Midwest Products Company to reestablish the hobby with the Chicago Park District and the Chicago Sun-Times
- Has taught Delta Dart construction in his area schools

On my 10th birthday, I received a gift of 10 cents that I used to buy a Fokker D7 for a starter in a hobby that has been going strong for 62 years. I struggled with the airplane construction and covering, but I did complete the airplane and brought it to school seeking some praise for my work! (Didn't get too much.) But I continued building Comet 10-cent kits and, in time, my workmanship did improve. By a stroke of luck, I met a group of other modelers who had the

building bug. I was invited to join the club they had just started with the very unglamorous name – The Flying Eight Balls!

As a group, we could build nice airplanes but getting them to fly was another story – until we met Mr. Irvin Sweet of Fort Pierce, Florida. Irv conducted weekly meetings for the group with an emphasis on aircraft design and adjustment. By now, we were high school freshman and eager to compete in Free Flight contests. Irv stressed original designs (kits were not desirable).

We had a capable person in our president, Dave Steinberg, leading the way. He went on to become a decorated B-24 pilot in World War II. Dave is now recognized as a top engineer in the U.S. and lectures at major aircraft and industrial companies all over the world. He has written four textbooks used in colleges and the electro-mechanical industries. Good company for all members of The Flying Eight Balls. I was secretary and treasurer.

My first engine was a Forester 29 that I used in my original design gas model. I enjoyed the success of designing this airplane but lost it on a balmy thermal Sunday before the advent of dethermalizers! (Picture enclosed at the end. I was 16 years of age – note the AMA logo.)

I have flown in competition since 1946 and have won in indoor paper (easy B) plus microfilm (F.A.I.) and outdoor events, being especially strong in rubber classifications. In addition, I have never placed lower than first in Pan Am events both PAA Load and Pan Am five-ounce categories. I was a finalist in Wakefield competition but lost my only model the day before the finals. (Joe Elgin won over D. Rushing and went to Europe.) All of the statements are available for documentation. I also made it to the semi-finals in FAI indoor competition with a flight of over 21 minutes.

I have had my designs featured in National Free Flight Society (NFFS) publications plus my original Tri-Flite Radio Controlled (RC) sailplane was published in Model Aviation magazine in April 1996. In addition, I have written technical tips for the Bong Eagles newsletter and American Modeler magazine (*copies of these articles can be found in his file in the National Model Aviation Museum Archives*). But I still have time to continue building. I have 28 airplanes in my inventory that includes competition caliber rubber and gas models along with original design radio control sail planes and power RC! I just finished a six-foot RC Comet (Goldberg) Clipper and am now working on a new Gollywock for Old-Timer events (Carl Goldberg was a fellow Chicago Aeronut).

I helped organize The Flying Eight Balls Club, was president of the Chicago Aeronuts for three years (1959 through 1961) and a club member for 44 years (the longest of any Aeronut). When I was elected president, the club membership had dropped to 15 Aeronuts as most of the outstanding members had drifted away from competitive flying. First on my agenda was the program of attracting new members. This was accomplished by writing feature articles in American Modeler magazine. These articles were written with the sole purpose of recruiting model builders who we could add to the club roster. In one article, I drew building tips for indoor enthusiasts (*copies of these articles can be found in his file in the National Model Aviation Museum Archives*).

At this time, I realized our need for a decent indoor flying site. The Madison Street Armory was the best location in the Chicagoland area so I began calling on the colonel in charge. After a few

calls, I was able to convince him our indoor models wouldn't do any damage to military hardware! We kept this site, rent free, for approximately 10 years.

We restored the membership to 40 people and were lucky to have Pete Sotich become a solid member. I appointed Pete as our contest director. His work was noticed by the AMA and he was later elected to the AMA president's job! We also had Bob Watson (two-time national Free Flight champion) and Sid Miller become part of the club. Jim Richmond, the famous indoor flyer, also became a new member and put the Madison Street Armory to good use (Jim became world champion).

Another problem that faced the Chicago Aeronuts was a treasury that hadn't any money. As an outside sales engineer, I was able to solicit manufacturers, distributors, and hobby shops for merchandise to be used in club raffles and auctions. Our treasury during my time as president grew to over \$3,000. The popular raffles are still part of contests held by the Bong Eagles, the I.M.A.L., and the Chicago Aeronuts. The present balance in the Aeronuts treasury is the result of my singular effort in obtaining very saleable merchandise including engines, kits, balsa, covering material, and other various types of modeling equipment. I'm pleased to say I started this popular practice of raffles and auctions.

While in the Aeronuts, I also drew the illustrations for a Wakefield brochure that helped raise money for our Wakefield team expenses. It was then I became a good friend of Gerry Ritz, 1959 World Nordic Champion. I also drew the plans for Gerry's Nordic Glider that appeared in the March 1960 issue in Model Airplane News magazine. Thirty-five years later, and after Gerry's untimely death, I was approached by the Aeronuts to reconstruct Gerry's airplane. The bugs and time had done more than a little damage after 35 years, but today I'm proud to say the original glider is on display at Muncie, Indiana at the National Model Aviation Museum. In addition, I also built Wally Simmers Jabberwock and Gollywock that are also displayed at the museum in Muncie.

I have been a Leader Member since April 1960 and Contest Director since February 1986. I have been the contest director for five Midwestern state championships and twice the contest director for the Bong Eagles Annual Summer Meet. The Aeronuts meet is a regional event and the Bong Eagles is a local meet.

My work experience in the hobby industry includes two years as a draftsman and designer, Comet models (1946 to 1948) and model maker for Sparky Industries owned by Frank Nekimken (1948 to 1950).

At the present time, I am a volunteer working with Midwest Products Company in trying to reestablish the hobby with the massive Chicago Park District and the Chicago Sun-Times. For many years (1940 through the 1950s), the Sun-Times published a daily article and co-sponsored contests with the Park District including the 1940-1941 Nationals. In fact, some of the signs in the museum refer to these national meets. I have contacted Nancy Cortez of special programs for the Park District and she is very enthused in starting a program with the Chicago Park District Crafts Department. I'm busy developing a contact with the writers for the Sun-Times with the thought in mind of writing of the many success stories regarding former members of the Sun-Times Air Cadets (we didn't have drugs or Nintendo for temptations). Maybe we can steer some of the youngsters in the direction of model aircraft! Mike Stokes of the AMA has given me the

addresses of Neil Armstrong and Burt Rutan. I'm seeking a testimonial stating how model airplanes helped direct them in their careers. When I approach the Sun-Times, I will have a solid idea on an article titled "Where Are Our Former Air Cadet Members Now?"

Just recently, I conducted Delta Dart construction classes with the Arlington Heights Park District and Northwest Suburbs Cub Scout Troops. Frank Garcher, president of Midwest Products, supplied a few hundred kits free of charge. I also worked with the Arlington Heights School District 25 in preparing their students for the National Science School Competition. Frank Garcher supplied the kits for this as well.

As our Free Flight contest site has become more restricted, my recent focus has been on RC. Original designs include both sailplane and power. I also built a few kits just to become acquainted with flying, but building an original dating back to our education in 1941 still has the most appeal.

Looking back after all these year, I feel fortunate in finding the old Eight Ball Club, the Chicago Aeronuts, and Mr. Irv Sweet. Who else has a hobby that could sustain a person's interest for 62 years?

*Respectfully submitted,
Art Christensen
February 4, 1998*

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