



The AMA History Project Presents: History of the AIRPLANE MODEL LEAGUE OF AMERICA (AMLA) 1920s-1930s



Written and reformatted by JS (04/2012)

The following is an extended version of the article published in the May 2012 issue of Model Aviation magazine, in the In the Air section under "History Preserved."

The Airplane Model League of America (AMLA)

What do we know about the AMLA? Well, I'll tell you this - it's not much. Here, from a variety of sources - from online references to magazine articles to collections in the Museum's Archives - is what has been gleaned about this very large group that seemed to disappear as quickly as it emerged.

According to a 1929 *Aero Digest* article, AMLA was "conceived and organized" in September of 1927 by Griffith Ogden Ellis, then-editor of *The American Boy* magazine. Swiftly building a following of eager child modelers, membership was at 200,000 in the first year.

In a letter from Mitchell Charnley of *The American Boy*'s Editorial Department, sent to Mr. Frederick Neely, General Manager of the NAA, dated May 29, 1929, "During the eighteen months since the League was organized by THE AMERICAN BOY, under National Aeronautic Association auspices, to further youthful interest in and knowledge of aviation, it has enrolled more than 300,000 members; it has distributed millions of plans for building scientific flying models; it has answered 400,000 letters from enthusiastic young model builder. It is conducting the national contests for the second time this year, and for the second time sending the winners to Europe, as well as offering more than 300 prizes in cash, medals, cups, trophies, scholarships and other awards. It has the cooperation and backing of Commander [Richard] Byrd, William B. Stout, Clarence Chamberlin, William P. MacCracken and other leading figures in 1929 aviation."

By 1930, it was approximated membership hit a half-million youth.

Merrill C. Hamburg, Secretary of the AMLA and Airplane Model Editor of *The American Boy*, wrote the *AMLA Manual for Model Plane Builders*. Sold to members for a nickel, the *Manual* explained the tools and materials used by a modeler, how to construct models by carving and shaping balsa wood, a diagram of model parts of indoor tractor

models and outdoor twin pushers, the various types of models available (flying sticks and scale models), and what AMLA offered to help in the modeling process. Parts sold by 1929 included a Baby R.O.G. kit for 65 cents and an Outdoor Twin Pusher for \$3.00.

The First National Airplane Model League of America Contest, which was sanctioned by the NAA, had 300 flyers. Local contests were used to determine who would go to the national contest. The Indoor and Outdoor winners received trips to Europe, sponsored by *The American Boy*. The Scale winner received a trip to the National Air Races in California, paid for by *Aero Digest*. By the second year of the competition, *all* first places in the categories were sent to exhibit their planes in Paris and travel through Europe. We consider these contests to be the beginnings of today's Nats.

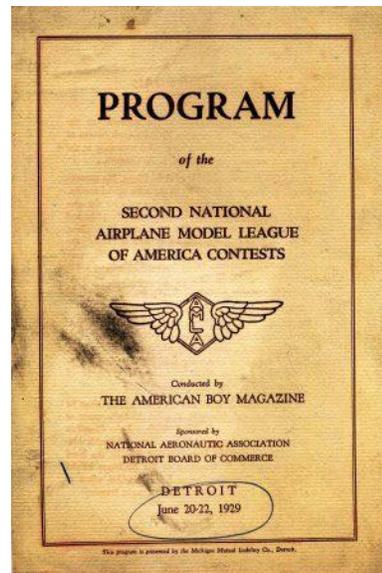
By the third Airplane Model League of America National Championships, in 1930, co-sponsorship (instead of just sanctioning) by NAA was needed to help cover rising costs. Joseph Eherhardt, age 16, was the highest point winner. His Indoor Hydro had a time of 162.5 seconds, earning him first place in that category, and in Commercial Senior he came in second with a flight of 143 seconds. He also won first place in the exhibition model contest with his Ford Tri-motor. A banquet for the contest was "given by Mr. Edsel Ford at the Ford Airport." (3rd National AMLA Contest Program, 1930)

In 1931, the fourth contest was called a variety of things in print: the "Fourth National Contest of the Airplane Model League of America," "National AMLA Contest," "Fourth National Airplane Model Tournament," and "Official National Aeronautic Association Championship Meet." (Entry papers, 1931) It was conducted by AMLA and sponsored by George D. Wanner and Company, held in Dayton, Ohio. In 1932, the AMLA Nats were sponsored by Bamberger & Company department stores and held in Atlantic City. However, by 1933, Charles Hampson Grand arranged for the Nats to be in New York and co-sponsored by *Model Airplane News*. They were now run by the NAA.

Somewhere after 1932, the AMLA waned and disappeared. It was the depression, money was tight, and other model airplane groups existed, but we still do

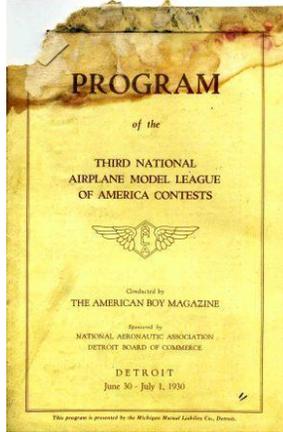


Booklet, *The A.M.L.A. Manual for Model Plane Builders*, c. 1928 [Source: #0071 Bertram Pond Collection, National Model Aviation Museum Archives]



Program, *Second National Airplane Model League of America Contests, Detroit, June 20-22, 1929* [Source: #0071 Bertram Pond Collection, National Model Aviation Museum Archives]

not know what served as its final demise. As you can see, we are in need of filling in some blanks. If you have papers concerning the AMLA you would like to donate, or have a story to tell, please let the Museum know.



Program, Third National Airplane Model League of America Contests, Detroit, June 30-July 1, 1930 [Source: #0071 Bertram Pond Collection, National Model Aviation Museum Archives]



AMLA meet contest winners at the White House with the President: (from left) Ehrhardt, Lamb, President Hoover, Hamburg (AMLA Secretary), Feinberg, Klazura, Haas (The American Boy staff) [Source: The American Boy – Youth's Companion magazine, September 1931, #0001 AMA Collection, National Model Aviation Museum Archives]

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