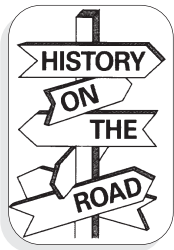


HISTORY ON THE ROAD

"WISCONSIN'S FLYING TREES": WISCONSIN PLYWOOD INDUSTRY'S CONTRIBUTION TO WORLD WAR II



That war brings technological advances on the battlefield is well documented. What has received little attention from historians and museums are the revolutionary changes that war can bring to the forest products industry thousands of miles from the battlefield. The traveling museum exhibit, "Wisconsin's Flying Trees: Wisconsin Plywood Industry's Contribution to WWII," examines the evolution of machinery, the wood manufacturing process, and aircraft construction that took place in Wisconsin during World War II. The exhibit, which will tour Wisconsin in 2006 before going on the road in 2007, illuminates the contributions of the numerous Wisconsin forest products companies and the men and women who worked for them during the war. Corporations, museums, and individuals throughout Wisconsin, the United States, Canada, England, and Germany have contributed to the fascinating story of the race for aerial superiority during World War II and Wisconsin's critical role in the Allied victory.

The story behind the victory begins in the depth of the Great Depression, which decimated not only the forest products industry, but also the fledgling aviation industry. Unfazed, John E. Parker, a former naval officer turned financier, had his New York-based investment firm of Auchincloss, Parker and Redpath re-evaluate the U.S. aircraft industry in 1937. Sensing opportunity, the firm decided to heavily invest in companies like Cessna, Bell, Boeing, Piper, and Northwest Airlines. Parker also formed the Northwestern Aeronautical Corporation that same year and established a relationship with Northwest Airlines that eventually led the new firm into the glider business.

Two years later, World War II began with Germany's invasion of Poland, which drew Great Britain into the war. Britain

desperately needed war matériel. The Lend-Lease Program, designed by President Franklin Roosevelt to help the cash-strapped Brits, created an immediate demand for ships and airplanes from American companies and contributed to the resurrection of the American industrial sector, especially the forest products industry. After the United States entered the war in 1941, Northwestern Aeronautical became the second largest builder of gliders for the Army. The firm, along with Steiny & Sons, Pratt-Read Company, Cessna Aircraft, and twelve other military glider manufacturers, turned to central Wisconsin plywood makers for supplies. Roddis Plywood and Veneer Company, as well as Lullaby/Oshkosh Pluswood/Northern Veneer Company, met that demand here

at home and also supplied Sir Geoffrey DeHavilland's firm, which built the famed "Mosquito," the fastest airplane manufactured during the war. The Roddis Plywood and Veneer Company boasted having supplied one-half of the wood products required by England and France for the war effort.

"Modern logging" got underway during the war, with the introduction of the two-man power saw, and big trucks and caterpillar tractors to move the logs. It also brought the end of logging camps and railroad logging. All this played out in Wisconsin's "Northwoods," from which came the yellow birch critical for ship and aircraft construction. Wisconsin plywood manufacturers not only controlled 60% of the plywood market in the U.S., but,

Did You Know? Wisconsin Plywood Manufacturers Played a Significant Role in World War II

Avro Anson
V C-FHOT
"Faithful Annie"

Avro Anson Specifications

The Avro Anson was flown by Coastal Command between 1936 and 1942 for air reconnaissance missions. "Faithful Annie" also provided air & sea rescues and became trainer for the Commonwealth Air Training Plan.

Over 11,000 Avro Ansons were produced during the war. Its wings were completely covered with veneered plywood. The main spar was laminated wood which became one continuous section from wing-tip to wing-tip.

- *The American Plywood Industry began WWII with 31 manufacturing plants. Six more would eventually be added with government incentives.
- *Plywood production was 1,782,000,000 feet at its peak in 1942.
- *On the U.S. Government "Priority rating," plywood was in the top rankings.

Roddis Plywood & Veneer Company produced "1,400,000 board feet of aircraft plywood per month" during its peak production for the WWII effort.

"ODE to an ANSON"

On the Crane may fly much faster,
Inside she may be neat,
But to use the draughty Anson
Is very hard to beat.

Her plywood may be warping,
Her windows glass may crack,
But when you start out in an Anson,
You know that you'll come back.

She may be a flying greenhouse,
With her windows all around,
But in that draughty Anson,
You're as safe as on the ground.

She may crank and she may shudder,
As she sends out a dive,
But if her pilot knows his stuff,
She'll bring him home alive.

Her landing gear is sturdy,
It will stand for quite a drop,
If you don't let her crash,
Turning her in, and let her flop.

Fifteen, twenty, twenty-five,
She doesn't care a jot,
All in all, our Anson
Will stand for quite a lot.

The wind may be her weathercock,
That's nothing to her care,
For when you fly an Anson,
You never feel a draft.

You can keep your cash and battle,
Your forward and your crank,
For the good old Anson,
Is worth our pilot's fate.

When she comes in to land a quarter,
All still, you'll find her there,
And the "Faithful Annie" will be
They don't need a lot of gear.

A pilot and some plywood,
Some bricks, and a lot of glue,
Make a lot of plywood Anson,
And very soon they're through.

They won't let her back out on the line,
Her engine's fast to crank,
Our Anson knows the way to take,
And she's ready to take off.

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Sample panel from the traveling exhibit, "Wisconsin's Flying Trees."

COURTESY OF SARA WITTER CONNOR.

