



E-Newsletter | February 2014

Aviation Pioneers

During the months of November and December, many Americans traveled to see their family and friends - in both the U.S. and around the world. Although that travel may have been full of its own difficulties and delays, we are fortunate today to have the opportunity to fly almost anywhere in the world. We do this conveniently and in a relatively short time (you may know that the Mayflower took two months to get to America!). Two women who were aviation pioneers helped make flying possible for all of us. This month we feature Bessie Coleman and Amelia Earhart.



Bessie Coleman

In 1921, aviatrix and civil rights advocate Bessie Coleman became the first U.S. woman and first African-American to win an international pilot's license. The tenth of thirteen children, she set out at age 23 to make something of her life. She became a beautician in Chicago until at age 27, she decided that she would become a flier. Unable to find anyone in the U.S. who would teach her to fly, she enrolled in aviation school in France and received her pilot's license in 1921. Upon returning to the U.S., she embarked on a career in entertainment, as a pilot.



Amelia Earhart

Coleman broke gender barriers and racial barriers through her exhibition flying and the publicity that she generated. She dreamed of an aviation school for black pilots; regretfully this did not happen until after her accidental death in 1926. Her honors include the First Flight Society memorializing her in 1989. She has also been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame and featured on a U.S. postage stamp.

Like Coleman, 1921 was also a significant year for Amelia Earhart. That was the year that she made her first solo flight; she was also able to put together enough money to buy her own plane. She named that first plane "Canary" and used it to set her first record for women - by flying at 14,000 feet.

Earhart's first love was airplanes; her second love was cultivating the public imagination. In 1928, she became the first woman to fly across the Atlantic Ocean, as part of a team. In 1932, Earhart was the first woman to fly solo nonstop across the Atlantic Ocean. These were just some of her firsts. And she was aware of the dangers as she said:

Please know that I am aware of the hazards. I want to do it because I want to do it. Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be a challenge to others.

In 1937, she and her navigator took off from Miami on an around-the-world course. They were lost on a leg over the Pacific Ocean from New Guinea to Howland Island. Earhart, like Coleman, has been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame and featured on a U.S. postage stamp.

We express our gratitude to these two pioneers who helped all of us to safely fly to our treasured destinations.

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Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America
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