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## NEWS RELEASE

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### *She Flies with Her Own Wings: Oregon's Golden Age of Aviation* Opens March 7 at the Oregon Historical Society

**Portland, OR — March 5, 2025 —** Soar through the history of aviation in the Oregon Historical Society's newest exhibition, [\*She Flies with Her Own Wings: Oregon's Golden Age of Aviation\*](#). Opening Friday, March 7 in downtown Portland, visitors will discover how the wonder of flight sparked innovation, inspired new aviators, and connected communities during a transformative period in American history.



*Designed by Les Long, the "Wimpy" Longster was one of the first successful low wing homebuilt designs. The plane is on loan to OHS from the Oregon Aviation Historical Society & Museum.*

While the 1930s in the United States was a decade shaped by economic depression, it was also a time of opportunity and advancement, especially in the world of aviation. New technology led to the creation of faster, more efficient, and affordable aircraft, testing the limits of what was possible. Flight schools sprang up in the region and commercial passenger service lifted off, presenting fresh career opportunities in the industry.

Oregon has a long history of aviation. Milton Wright, the father of aviation pioneers Wilbur

Wright and Orville Wright, was a missionary in Sublimity, Oregon, from 1857 to 1859. Many years later, William C. Crawford and John C. Burkhart constructed a plane using the Wright brothers' drawings. Their plane was one of the first to fly in Oregon, taking off from Albany in 1910.

In 1921, Oregon Governor Ben Olcott signed into law the first governmental agency in the United States with authority to regulate aircraft and pilots — the Oregon State Board of Aeronautics. While Oregon was not the first state to regulate aviation, it was the first to do so with a division of government specifically designated for aeronautics and aircraft.

Within the exhibition, visitors will discover how aviation inspired hope and promise during a period of uncertainty, connecting communities quite literally through the building of new airports and the popularity and excitement of airshows. Featuring video interviews, flight suits, and even a restored plane, *She Flies with Her Own Wings* also profiles noted aviators from the era, including:

**Hazel Ying Lee**, who in 1933 traveled to China for volunteer service in the Chinese Air Force yet was not allowed to fly for the military because she was a woman. In 1938 she returned to the U.S. and joined the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) program during the WWII, one of only two Chinese American WASPs.



Oregon had a robust community of woman pilots in the 1930s. Many were students at the Rankin School of Flying and participated in local airshows, regional air tours, and high-profile air races.



*Tex Rankin, Steve Carney, Dorothy Hester, and an unidentified man with a plane. OHS Research Library, Oregon Journal Negative Collection, Org. Lot 1368, box 371, 0371N5896.*

**Dorothy Hester**, who held the women’s world record for consecutive outside loops from 1930 to 1989, as well as several other aerobatic records. Hester performed in traveling airshows across Oregon and was a regular performer in Portland’s Rose Festival Airshow, and in 1930 went on a national tour becoming the first woman to be a featured performer at the National Air Races in Cleveland, Ohio.

**John Gilbert “Tex” Rankin**, who for 16 years operated one of the most notable flight schools in the country. The Rankin School of Flying was one of the first to provide standardized curriculum that would be used nationally by pilots, navigators, and mechanics.

**Leah Hing**, a Portland-born Chinese American woman pilot who was a frequent participant in local airshows and flying events. Hing was trained in aircraft instrument repair and during WWII volunteered for the Civil Air Patrol.

*She Flies with Her Own Wings* is on view at the Oregon Historical Society from March 7 through November 30, 2025. The Oregon Historical Society's museum is open daily in downtown Portland, from 10am to 5pm Monday through Saturday and 12pm to 5pm on Sunday. Admission is free every day for youth 17 and under, OHS members, and residents of Multnomah County.

Learn more and plan your visit by accessing our [free digital museum guide](#).

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### **About the Oregon Historical Society**

For more than 125 years, the Oregon Historical Society has served as the state's collective memory, preserving a vast collection of objects, photographs, maps, manuscript materials, books, films, and oral histories. Our research library, museum, digital platforms, educational programming, and historical journal make Oregon's history open and accessible to all. We exist because history is powerful, and because a history as deep and complex as Oregon's cannot be contained within a single story or point of view.