

Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome

Great family entertainment

By Dick Peiffer 7/15/2020

If you are an aviation history buff like me, you might add Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome, Rhinebeck, New York to your bucket list. During the summer weekends, they put on an excellent show that one might say it is like the classic 1965 British movie, “*Those Magnificent Men in their Flying Machines*” come to life. You will not see Stuart Whitman, Sarah Miles, Robert Morley, Terry Thomas or the other cast members but what you will see is a portrayal of early aviation that include some of the finest vintage airplanes in the western world.

The antique airshow includes a variety of original and reproduction World War I aircraft, supported by period vehicles and costumes. With a narrator, describing the aerial and ground show action and encouraging audience participation with loud, “YEAHs” for Trudy Truelove and Sir Percy Goodfellow and “BOOS” for the dastardly evil Black Baron. The show is great family entertainment.

Old Rhinebeck Airport, (NY94), is private use and requires prior permission to land. It has a north/south sod runway about 2200 X 75ft. Not exactly, level with trees on all sides. During the summer May – October, the airport closes Saturday and Sunday for airshows. The airport is closed at other times for ride operations and aerobatic practice. Nearby airports are readily available. Call ahead for rental cars at Dutchess Country (KPOU), Sky Acres Airport (44N) and Kingston-Ulster Airport (20N).

The Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome operation goes back to 1951, when Roosevelt Field, in Garden City, Long Island, New York, a WW I military flight training facility, closed for construction of a shopping mall. A number of vintage aircraft went up for sale. Right at the get-go, the Smithsonian acquired some relics, leaving half-dozen others for sale. Cole Palen a pilot and mechanic, who loved planes of that era, won a bid on the remaining airplanes. He laboriously transported the planes 200 miles to his home in upstate New York and stored them in unused chicken coops.

Then in 1959, Cole located a farm for sale near Rhinebeck, New York. He bought the property; partly with money, he received renting some of the planes for the movie “*Lafayette Escadrille*” starring Tab Hunter. He cleared a runway and built hangars to restore and display the airplanes. The following year he opened Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome to the public with Sunday airshows. Soon they expanded to Saturday and Sunday, May to October.

In 1967, Cole married Rita Weidner and she took over the management. More organized, their success grew and they became associated with several movies.

Cole Palen was meticulous in his restorations. Using original drawings and parts, his restorations are in various museums throughout the country.



A short list of those flying machines at Rhinebeck are an original Curtiss JN-4H “Jenny”, a Fokker D.VII, a Nieuport 10, a Thomas-Morse S-4B and a Sopwith Dolphin. The collection also includes a 1909 Blériot XI (pictured) with an original three-cylinder Anzani radial engine believed to be the second oldest airworthy aircraft in the world. A recently completed exact replica of the *Spirit of St. Louis* has joined the airworthy collection. Each airplane is fragile, requires TLC and meticulous maintenance. These old timers are light, with a narrow gear creating a challenge to fly and even more tricky to land.

Cole and Rita have Gone West but before they passed away, they saw that their Rhinebeck Aerodrome was preserved. It is now a non-profit 501(c) (3) foundation; maintained by a board of directors. Its stated mission is to obtain, restore, maintain and display Pioneer, World War I and Lindbergh era aircraft, vehicles, related equipment, documents, memorabilia and artifacts of historical significance while seeking to educate the public regarding the historical significance of its collection and the scientific and technological advancement that it represents.

On summer weekends, their mission is to provide great family aviation entertainment. Join them I think you will agree, it is a hoot.

A recent check revealed their 2020 airshows are on hold due to Covid with plans to begin again in 2021. However, the museum is open. Check the website. → [Old Rhinebeck Aerodrome](http://www.olderhinebeckaerodrome.com)

