

# Barnstorming Bernie



Born September 2, 1899,  
in Bowie, Texas, to  
J. M. Harlan and Minnie  
Lee Harlan

# When I Met Bernie in 1969



Mrs. Arnold, outside A&H



**MONKEY BUSINESS** — Trudy, a spider monkey from Flour Bluff, was not to be outdone by Betsy, the fingerpainting chimpanzee from Baltimore. Yesterday, at the urging of her owners, Jim Coffman and Mrs. Bernie Arnold, she sat down to great things—in the tradition of her two to six-year-old human friends.

# Growing Up in Bowie

Bernie grew up with 5 siblings in this town that sits between the Red River and Ft. Worth.



Bernie loved all sports. Later, she loved driving cars and flying airplanes, not typical of the girls in Bowie, Texas, at the turn of the century.

1890s



Street Scene, Bowin, Tex.

1914



1920s



historictexas.net

1930s



# Sam Coffman, Bernie's First Husband

Born March 27, 1898

Marries Bernie in 1917

Takes up flying in 1918

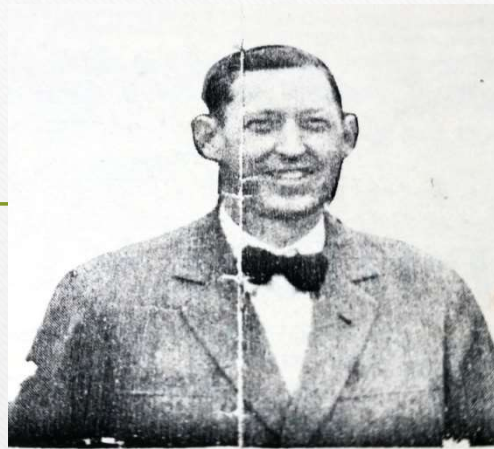
"The only place there is to be with nobody bothering you except maybe God is at 10,000 feet and all alone."  
~Sam Coffman, Sr.

Sam Coffman, on the left, piloted this orchestra to an elevation of 5,000 feet while they played "When You and I Were Young, Maggie."



# Bernie's Fly Boys

Sam, Sr. taught both boys to fly in their mid-teens, but they had been riding along with their parents since birth.



SAM H. COFFMAN

Jim survived a crash in his mother's arms when he was six months old. Sam, Sr. crashed the plane into the Trinity River bottoms outside of Ft. Worth.

Sam Coffman, Jr.  
Born March 12, 1919



Sam H. Coffman Jr. of Wich-



JIM J. COFFMAN

Jim Coffman  
Born August 23, 1920

# Sam, Sr., the “Aeronautical Engineer”

This was 1927; the term *aeronautical engineer* was not actually used until 1958.



This Coffman Monoplane, X569E, S/N 3 and later NC569E was the first produced after the factory moved to Oklahoma City. It was destroyed in a windstorm in 1933 (see text).

George Goodhead Collection

## Coffman OX-5 Monoplane

by George E. Goodhead  
(EAA 3603, A/C 5176)  
6326 E. 4th Street  
Tulsa, OK 74112

The first Coffman OX-5 Monoplane was designed, built and flown by Sam Coffman at the Clinton Airport, Clinton, Oklahoma in 1927. The following year Sam Coffman organized the Coffman Monoplane, Inc. company at the old Midland Truck Company plant located in southwest Oklahoma City, not far from the stockyards and packing plants. This was also near the location of the original Oklahoma City Municipal Airport at southwest 29th Street just west of May Avenue. William G. “Billy” Tipton was Chief Engineer and Shop Foreman at this time.

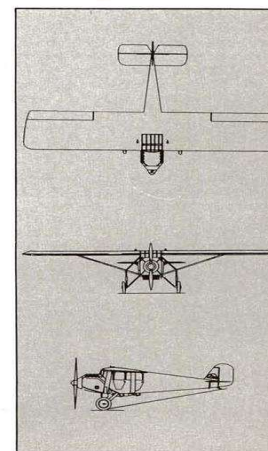
Information received from different sources indicates that from ten to twenty of these aircraft were built. The plane was a three-place cabin job, similar to the Curtiss Robin and similarly powered with the Curtiss OX-5 engine. It differed from the Robin in that two persons sat in the front seat and only one in the rear seat.

It is also believed to be one of the first planes built with an overhead control stick. The stick hung from the ceiling

between the pilot and passenger in the front seat and somewhat forward of them, making it possible for either to fly the plane. This arrangement reduced the number of sheaves in the aileron control system, without complicating the elevator controls. It also allowed easier access into the cabin for the front seat occupants.

The Coffman had the reputation of being way beyond her years in design and performance. She flew higher, faster and better than most of the smaller planes of her day. It was built and sold under C.A.A. Approval Memo No. 2-145 dated 11-1-29. It had a 37' wing span, 23' 6" overall length and a gross weight of 2,132 pounds. The stock colors were burnt orange and colonial blue with a rich straw color trim stripe. The cabin was entered through two doors on the left side. Both front and rear seats were upholstered in blue mohair, as well as the top and sides of the cabin.

Of those built, two can be accounted for today. Coffman OX-5 Monoplane, NC569E, S/N 3, when last flown was owned by Alva N. White of Lincoln, Nebraska. An interesting article, written by White entitled “A Night on the Prairie” appeared in the September, 1963 issue of *AIR FACTS* magazine. This article told of his experiences while flying the



12 MARCH 1987

# Bernie the Barnstorming Beauty



“First we’d fly over a small town and buzz it soundly so that all the people would be attracted. Then with all the town’s eyes on us, we’d land in a pasture nearby for the crowd to flock around. In order to make enough money to buy gasoline, we’d take up passengers. Ten dollars a ride at that time was nothing.”

~ Bernie Arnold

# Bernie Makes History

Sam Coffman taught her to fly in 1921. She made history on October 13, 1927, after 20 hours of flight instruction from Ross Arnold, chief pilot of the Ft. Worth Flying School.

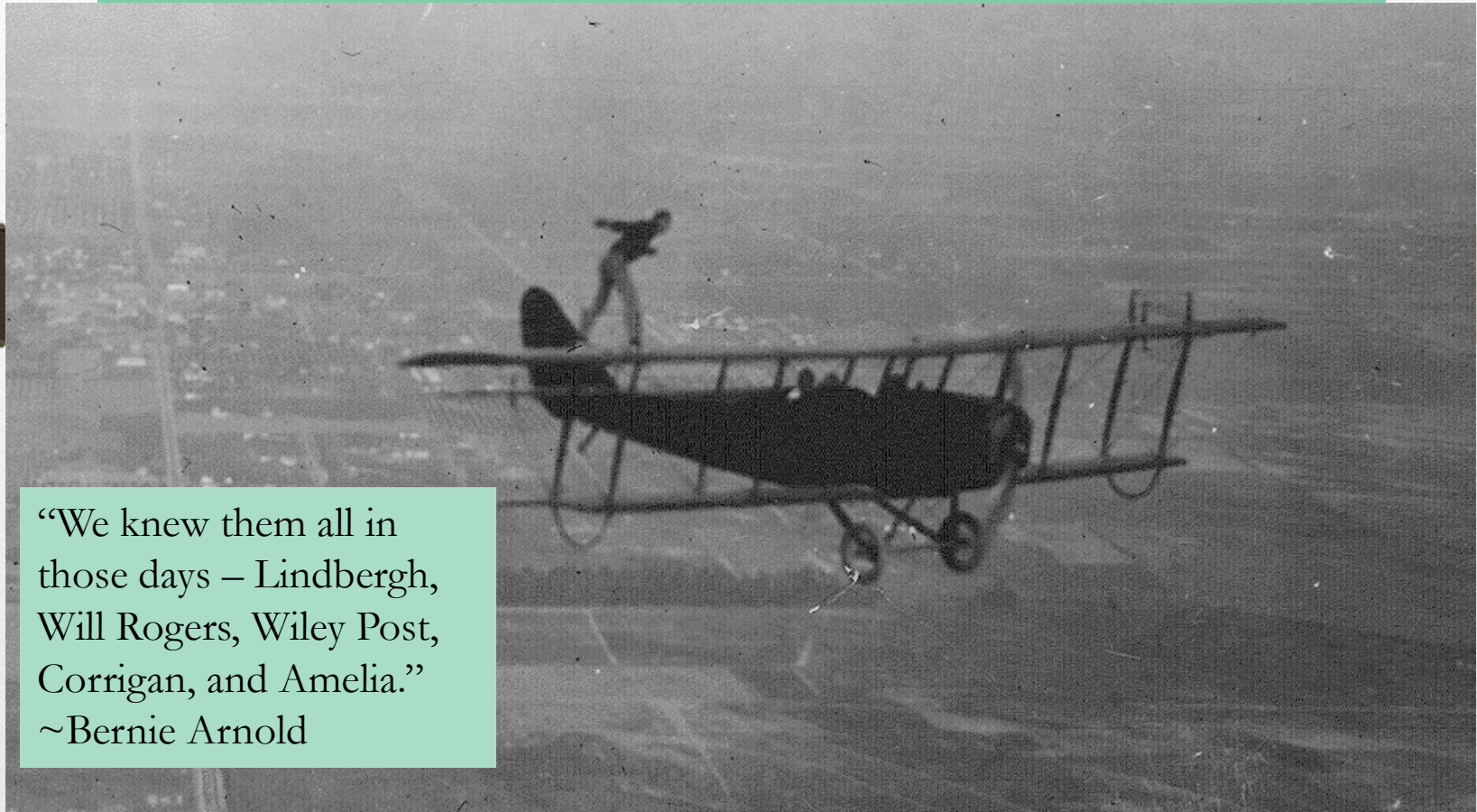
“Flying isn’t anything like most people imagine it to be. I was afraid the first time but haven’t been since. That was six years ago in Bowie. Two days later I was ready to go up again. Haven’t had much flying since then until the last two months. When I wasn’t flying, I was watching the planes and studying the landing methods and take-offs and all the things about flying.”

~Bernie Arnold, in response to making her solo flight out of Meacham Field.



Bernie loved the active, outdoor life and bought clothes accordingly, asking, “Will they do for outdoors, too?”

Ross Arnold wins Bernie's heart – and her hand.



“We knew them all in those days – Lindbergh, Will Rogers, Wiley Post, Corrigan, and Amelia.”  
~Bernie Arnold

## The Arnolds Fly Chicle' from Yucatan to Railroad Terminals in Mexico



The gum business ended after three months of operation in 1927 when the natives became unexpectedly hostile to them.

# Stunt Pilot Arnold Dies in 1929

July 13, 1929

AIR TRANSPORTATION

## Will Attempt Endurance Flight at Iowa Aero Exposition and Air Races

*Flight Sponsored By Register and Tribune and Yellow Cab Airways*

(Staff Correspondence)  
DES MOINES, IA.—Charles Gatschet and Ross Arnold, Des Moines pilots, will participate in an endurance flight at the Des Moines Municipal airport beginning July 14 and designed to conclude during the Second Annual Aircraft show to be held, here July 19 to 21.

Permission to hold the flight has been received by the Yellow Cab Airways, Inc., and the Register and Tribune, sponsors. A Ryan monoplane will attempt the endurance record, and James Barwick of the Hanford Airlines of Sioux City, and Amon Arnold, brother of Pilot Arnold, will operate the refueling plane.

The aircraft show has received official sanction of the Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce of the United States as a regional or class C airport show. Plans are being made to organize an aircraft distributor's section of the Aeronautical Chamber for this region.

This ship in which the flight is to be made has been specially constructed at the American Eagle Aircraft plant at Kansas City.

Arnold was an airmail pilot before entering the service of the Yellow Cab Airways, Inc. Gatschet holds both a mechanics' and transport license and is a pilot on the staff of the Register and Tribune.

Nine planes are now entered in the "On to Des Moines" race for which prizes totalling \$2,000 are offered, and 26 planes entered in the "All Iowa" race and other local events.

The exposition committee has arranged a program of aeronautical events, fireworks and special entertainment. On this committee are: John Adams, J. C. Davis, Jr., Alex Fitzhugh, Buck Freeman, James C. Hanrahan, Ray Harman, C. A. Leland Jr., E. C. Lindeen, George Olmsted, Albert Penn, Russell Reel, John D. Shuler.

## Will Stage Transportation Show at South Bend Airport

*Exhibits of Autos and Planes To Be Held in Conjunction With National Air Races*

(Staff Correspondence)  
SOUTH BEND, IND.—The Modern Transportation Show and National Air Races will be staged at the South Bend Municipal airport, Aug. 27-31 inclusive. The events being staged under the supervision of John B. Kuespert, assistant chief of police and supervisor of the Municipal airport.

All makes of automobiles and airplanes will be exhibited, it is said. There will be no admission charge and free parking space will be provided.

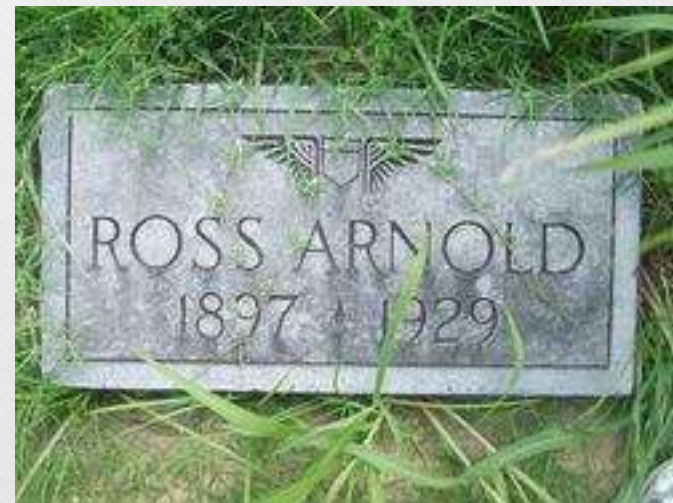
South Bend is the last control station of the National Air Races and the fliers will land at the Municipal airport for lunch and take off at 11:30 a. m. for Cleveland.

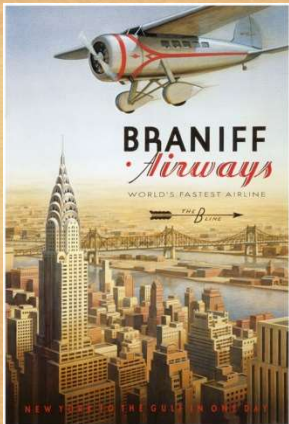
The tentative program for the local show follows:

National air races, airplane show including display of latest models and types of airplanes, automobile show, stunt flying, airplane races, parachute jumps, refueling tests, day and night passenger flights, airplane model show and contests and glider contests.

## Interstate Maintains Perfect Schedule on Air Mail Line

(Staff Correspondence)  
CHICAGO, ILL.—Interstate Airlines have been operating on 100 per cent schedule since May 12 in carrying mail between Chicago and Atlanta, according to Col. William G. Schauffer. From January 1 to May 12, the planes operated 97 per cent on schedule.





## Bernie Breaks into Commercial Air Travel 1929

### **Braniff**

#### **International**

1927: (Paul R) Braniff Air Lines, Oklahoma City OK, dba Oklahoma City to Tulsa Airways. 1929: Became subsidiary of Universal Aviation Corp. 1929: Acquired Central Airlines (Wichita KS). 1930: Became Braniff Airways. 1941: Relocated to Dallas TX.



### **Southwest**

### **Air**

### **Fast**

### **Express**

1928: Erle P Halliburton dba Southwest Air Fast Express (SAFE), Tulsa OK. 1931: Renamed Southern Air Express. Late 1931: Ended operations in the Depression.



### **Cromwell Air Lines**

1929: (Carl G) Cromwell-Hunt Aero Services dba Cromwell Airlines Inc, San Angelo TX. Focus on West TX oil companies, with service to Ft. Worth and Dallas. 1932: Ended ops.

### **American Airlines**

**(AA)** headquartered in Fort Worth, Texas, US, was founded in 1930 under the name American Airways Company by consolidating 82 smaller airlines through acquisitions and reorganizations. The airline was acquired by E. L. Cord in 1934 who renamed it American Airlines.

# Bernie and the Boys 1942



Both Sam (left) and Jim (right) started their tours in WWII at Sheppard Field .



Jim becomes a civilian pilot trainer at Randolph AFB, and Sam, Jr. is sent to AAF Pecos to train pilots, as well. Sam, Sr. trains over 450 pilots during the war.

# Lt. Sam H. Coffman, Jr. 1943



Sam left behind a wife and two daughters.

# Bernie Answers the Call of Duty

## 1944

“I think all women who are not in essential work and who have no dependents would be wise to do the same thing. The thing that sold me on the ATC was the idea of learning something that will assure post-war occupation. Really it’s an insurance policy.”

~ Bernie Arnold



Mrs. Bernie Arnold during World War II joined the Air Transport Command.

# Bernie Joins the ATC 1944



Bernie's younger brother, William T. Harlan, graduated from NAS-CC this same year.



# 1945 Love Field



Left: Bernie with son, Jim Coffman

Right: Bernie with Jim's wife, Inez Coffman

Bernie served 18 months with the ATC before finding her way to Corpus Christi with \$225 in her purse. Jim and Inez followed closely behind.



# Bernie “Barnstorms” into Business in 1946 A&H Sporting Goods on N. Water Street

Open 24/7

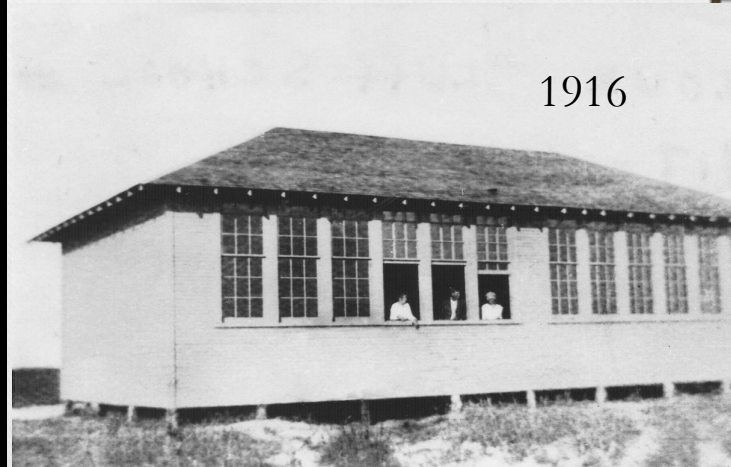


# Meanwhile in Flour Bluff...

- 1890s Ropes Boom brings families to Flour Bluff via Ward Island Road.
- 1892 First school is built
- 1893 First post office opens
- 1898 Ropes attempts to dig a pass across Mustang Island to the Gulf of Mexico for shipping.
- 1900 Truck farmers and ranchers dominate the peninsula. Ritters open a dairy. Grapes, onions, pineapples, cantaloupe, and even sea cotton were grown.
- 1908 Mud Bridge is built. Cline attracts fishermen and water fowl hunters to the area.
- 1916 New school building erected.



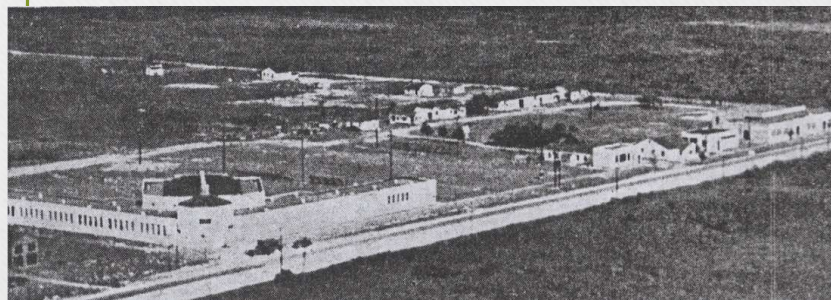
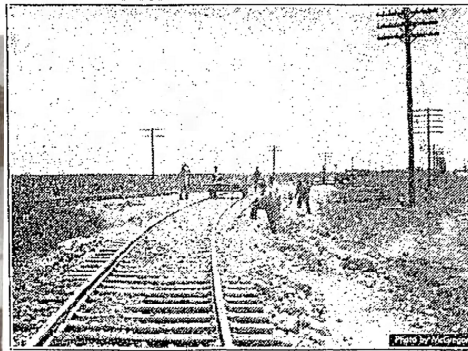
This photo was taken about 1910 showing Arthur Hugo Ritter (Ben's older brother) and his father George Hugo Ritter in a buggy in the front yard of the Laguna Shores Ritter homestead.



1916

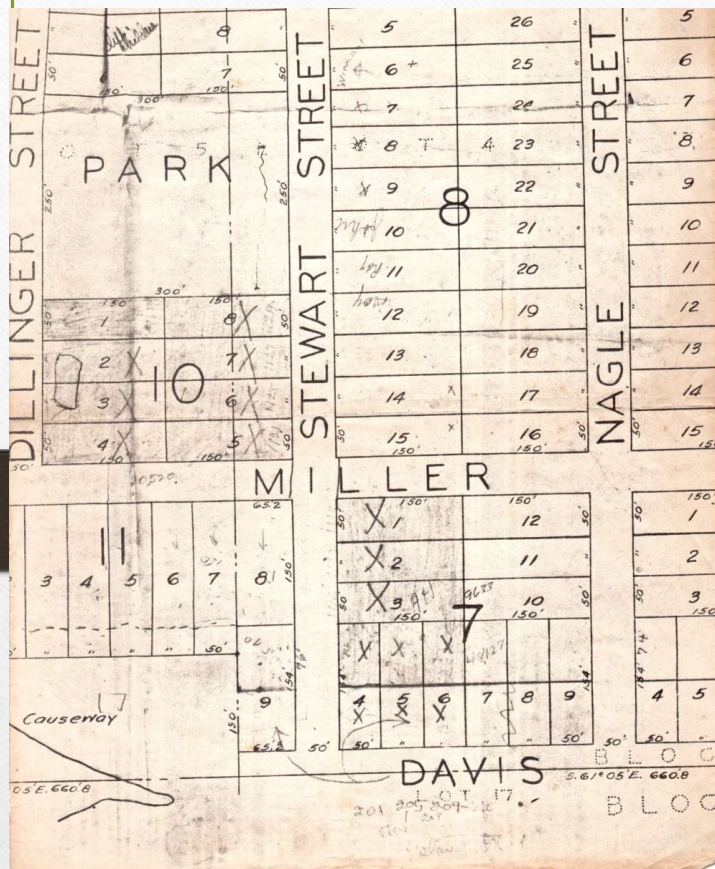


- 1927 Don Patricio Causeway is built from Hugo Ritter's lagoon beach across the Laguna Madre to Pat Dunn's ranch house at Packery. The wooden causeway was built on pilings by Col. Sam Robertson, a military engineer who bought the Dunn ranch. It opened on July 4, 1927, and cars could pass slowly across the lagoon for \$3 a carload. For the first time, the mainland was joined to the island and a steady stream of traffic crossed the causeway, 1,800 cars the first month and 2,500 the second. Flour Bluff and the island start to see growth – and lots of fishermen.
- 1927 Ritters open a bait stand on the causeway.
- 1927 H.H. Friar, local realtor, builds Remington Lodge at Flour Bluff Point.
- 1929 Great Depression hits, but Flour Bluff survives. Subdivisions are built. Hunting and fishing draw people in and help locals make a living.
- 1933 The worst of the 1933 storms on Sept. 5 smashed the Don Patricio Causeway. The salt water settled over the farm land making it too salty to grow crops.



- 1935 Oil is discovered in the central area of Flour Bluff. Oil camps bring more people and more businesses to the peninsula.
- 1938 Flour Bluff School No. 22 built.
- 1940 NAS is built. Flour Bluff population grows, bringing more businesses. Water line built by private company for NAS. Tex-Mex RR laid through FB and across the Oso.
- 1945 War ends and Flour Bluff growth continues.
- 1946 Flour Bluff Schools become independent school district under Sup't. E. J. Wranosky.
- 1947 FB property owners form a Water and Sanitation District.
- 1950 Nueces County Water Control and Improvement District No. 2 is created. John Orville Nicholson, owner of Nicholson grocery, is elected president. \$700,000 water bond passes. County constable's office opens because of all the "speeding and carousing out there," according to Sheriff John Harney.
- 1951 Water lines laid and meters installed by June. Residents pay out-of-city rates for a reliable water source moves to top of Flour Bluff's list of priorities.

# Bernie Buys in the Bluff in 1950



1940 Plat Map



2017 Google Map

Like all Flour Bluff property of the time, it had a well and a septic tank, something that created great worry in many FB citizens because of the extreme drought that would run from 1951 to 1956, briefly interrupted by 2 floods in 1952 and 1954.

## Bernie Prepares for Causeway Opening 1950



Each car was charged \$1.00 to cross the causeway. They had to wait on the swing bridge if a barge came down the Intracoastal Canal. Bernie's business was at the mouth of the causeway, just across from the toll booth.



# Bernie's Bluff Business Opens July 4, 1951



# Gateway to Padre Island



- 1951 Store opens
- 1952 Added plugs, ice, and gas (Robbery occurs.)
- 1953 Added beach and camping gear
- 1954 Offered free repair service and Coleman lanterns
- 1955 Jeep rentals, plumbing, electrical and general household goods added; boat barns built
- 1956 Provided outboard service, built an ice house, sold beachwear and Levi's

# Bernie Builds a “Town”



A & H Sporting Good Aces

CORPUS CHRISTI TIMES, Thurs, July 21, 1955



**FLOUR BLUFF BELTERS** — These four boys will represent the Recreation Council team in amateur boxing bouts tonight at the Moorhead. From right are David Evans, 134 pounder; Jim Curry, 130 pounds; Loren and Norman Chandler, 125 pounds.

- Help start FB-PI Business Association and served as treasurer for five years in the 1950s
- Served as secretary-treasurer for the Nueces County Rural Fire Prevention District No. 2 (Flour Bluff Volunteer Fire Department started unofficially in 1952, officially in 1958.)
- Helped with the 110 miles Padre Island Walkathon in 1954
- Sponsored a boxing club and had her own arena in 1955
- Sponsored the “Tall Tales of Texas Fishing” story contest
- Published first newspaper and first phone book in 1960s

# Flour Bluff, the Little Town That Almost Was

- Flour Bluff experienced steady growth from 1940 to 1956. (100 persons per year)
- Talks of incorporation begin in 1950.
- Goes to the Flour Bluff voters in 1953 and fails 209-120. (City of CC said they had no plans to annex FB, according to William Anderson, City Planning Engineer.)
- 288 of the 407 voters go to the polls again in 1956; and incorporation fails 156-124. This proposal was for a four-square-mile area bounded by Graham Road, Tex-Mex RR on Flour Bluff Drive, NAS, and Laguna Madre.
- In 1958, Flour Bluff tries again, this time for the area between NAS, the Oso, Waldron Field (including Tropic Isles), and the Laguna Madre. Many opposing the idea did not like municipal control of any kind. Some feared that Mayor Farrell Smith would make good on his threat to cut off the water. Others thought that Corpus Christi would do a better job. The move to incorporate failed again with a vote of 334 to 231. The mayor also said flatly that annexation of Flour Bluff was not being considered.
- 1961 the big war begins over a questionable election and an election judge. The votes were never canvassed.

# Bernie Takes on a Battle She Can't Win

- August 5, 1961
- Two elections, one for incorporation, the other for annexation, questionable outcomes
- “No taxation without representation” (1963-1966)  
Bernie refuses to pay taxes on land that could not legally be appraised by the City of Corpus Christi since the question of annexation was still in court.



JIM COFFMAN AND MRS. BERNIE COFFMAN  
... from open cockpit planes to fishing rods

# Big Sam Comes to Flour Bluff



Sam, Sr. is hit and killed while crossing  
Waldron Road in 1969.



# Bernie Retires and Moves to the Island

TWENTY CENTS

Aug. 17, 1984



**DIRECT HIT.** Mrs. Bernie Arnold smashed the champagne bottle on the first try, as she officially christened the Flour Bluff Volunteer Fire Department's new lime green fire truck, Bravo 5, at dedication services Saturday.

Mrs. Arnold was one of the original fire commissioners and held that position until just a few years ago. In the early years of the department, she took calls and dispatched volunteers from the A & H bait and tackle store. Her son, Jim, was the first fire chief.

Present commissioners, and the volunteers, agreed that the christening honors should be done by this "very special lady, who dedicated so many years of her life to the department."

"I've been everywhere and done everything. If I lay down and died right now, I could say I had lived my life."

~Bernie Arnold



Inez and Jim Coffman with Mrs. Bernie Arnold, at AARP event Wednesday.



AARP event at the Briscoe Wednesday. Mrs. Bernie Arnold recounts incidents in her action-packed life. At upper left is Paul Zappe, president of the local AARP.

# Barnstorming Bernie, Dead at 89

“Oh, what a woman! I knew her in her older years as the owner of A-H Sporting Goods and a commissioner for the Fire Department. She was a no-frills kind of lady. I had to fight with her to get every dollar for the volunteers, and she made sure we raised as much money as possible before she turned loose of one dollar that was tax money.”

~Joe Dees on Bernie Arnold

“She always smoked cigars and had animals in the store. She told me, ‘Eddie, if you tell everybody your business, you won’t have any business.’ ”

~Eddie Savoy





*The United States of America  
honors the memory of*

BERNIE L. ARNOLD

*This certificate is awarded by a grateful  
nation in recognition of devoted and  
selfless consecration to the service  
of our country in the Armed Forces  
of the United States.*

*George W. Bush*  
President of the United States



“My grandmother has more warmth, character, and wisdom than anyone else I know. I am fascinated at her depth, charisma, and down-to-earth view of life. I love to see her smile; it’s so sincere, and when you look deep into her eyes, you can’t help but notice them gleam, and that gleam comes from deep within her heart. I am 22 years old, and I have never met anyone else with a smile as devastating as hers. It destroys all my defenses and makes me feel warm and vulnerable.”

~David W. Michael, Bernie’s grandson