



Mobil Oil blimp above Portland, ca. 1930.

Collections of Maine Historical Society/ MaineToday Media. MaineMemory.net #103890

Portland Press Herald photographers captured this image while flying alongside the Mobil Oil blimp. The photographers typically flew in monoplanes chartered through air services like the locally operated Portland Flying Service.

Photo Essay:

EYE IN THE SKY

Eye in the Sky: aerial photographs from the Portland Press Herald glass negative collection

In 1921, Guy Gannett, son of successful Maine publisher William H. Gannett, purchased two competing Portland newspapers, the *Herald* and the *Daily Press*, merging them under the *Portland Press Herald* title. He followed in 1925 with the purchase the *Portland Evening Express*, which allowed him to combine two passions: photography and aviation.

While photography was not a new medium, it was not until after the mid 1920s when newspapers began to widely feature photographs. Guy Gannett was an innovator in the field, highlighting local interest stories with heavy illustration. Further, technological advancements during World War I improved the ability to photograph from airplanes, and the modern aerial photograph was born.

Gannett harnessed the new technology to capture major events and scenes throughout Maine. Geographic features, natural disasters, and celebrations were all better documented through aerial photography and helped to sell newspapers. Today, the images allow us to glimpse at the past through one of the most significant media influences in Maine.

The following is an excerpt from *Eye in the Sky*, an online exhibition through the Maine Memory Network's web portal dedicated to the Maine Historical Society's *Portland Press Herald* glass negative collection. The collection, which includes over 19,000 glass negatives dating from 1911 to circa 1940, was recently digitized in full in with the support of an Institute of Museum and Library Services, Collections Stewardship Grant. The collection is magnificent testament to early 20th century Maine and considered one of the premier collections at MHS.

To view the exhibit in full, or to zoom into the images with detail, please visit online at:
www.mainememory.net/exhibits/eyeinthesky



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Wyman Lake, ca. 1930.

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Wyman Lake in Moscow, ME was created in 1929 when Central Maine Power dammed the Kennebec River between Pleasant Ridge Plantation and Moscow. It is one of Somerset County's beloved summer destinations, known for its clear water and great fishing.

The 13-mile long, man-made lake was named for Walter Scott Wyman, then president of Central Maine Power. During Wyman's tenure, CMP vastly expanded its hydroelectric ventures.



Boothbay Harbor looking south-west, ca. 1930.

Collections of Maine Historical Society/ MaineToday Media. MaineMemory.net #103885

This view of Boothbay Harbor highlights the working waterfront and the town's iconic footbridge. Erected in 1901, the footbridge was one of many turn-of-the-century initiatives to build upon the vitality of Boothbay Harbor's economy. It greatly reduced travel time between the east and west sides of the harbor. The working waterfront's success greatly influenced the decision to separate from the town of Boothbay in 1889 and continues to be one of the driving forces in Maine's maritime economy.



Aerial photographer with camera, ca. 1930.
Collections of Maine Historical Society/ MaineToday Media. MaineMemory.net #103888

The equipment used to capture aerial images included a large format camera, like the one pictured here. This camera was created by Fairchild Aviation Corporation, also known as Fairchild Aircraft Manufacturing Company. Their Pegasus logo and initials 'FA' can be seen on the side of the camera. Fairchild Aviation secured a government contract in 1935 to track soil erosion using aerial photography. The photographer is dressed the part, complete with an aviation jacket, helmet and goggles.

The condition of this glass negative demonstrates the fragility of the format. It also speaks to the complexity of capturing images on glass while in an airplane. Initially, Gannett's photographers used photographic plates as their medium of choice. Glass negatives, also known as glass plate negatives, as a medium was falling out-of-favor by the Guy Gannett-era. Plastic film was widely available, less fragile and less expensive by the 1920s, but Gannett photographers continued to shoot on glass. While less-portable, and more cumbersome, the photographic quality of the glass plate is superior, resulting in crisp, sharper images.



Merrymeeting Bay, ca. 1930.

Collections of Maine Historical Society/ MaineToday Media. MaineMemory.net #103883

The complex geographic features of Merrymeeting Bay lend to the beauty of this aerial photograph. Not technically a bay by definition (more like an inland delta or estuary), the origin of the name Merrymeeting is also quite complicated. During the 18th century, a series of names for the bay appear in English records, including Nassouac and Chisapek. The more prevalent Wabanaki name for the body of water appeared in Perepole's 1793 deposition, where he referred to the bay as Quabacook.

The English name Merrymeeting is said to reference the convergence of five rivers which create this unique landscape in the heart of Sagadahoc County. Other theories include references to colonial meeting places, joyous parties, or rendezvous points for surveying teams.



Fire on Hobson's Wharf, Portland, 1934.

Collections of Maine Historical Society/ MaineToday Media. MaineMemory.net #103739

On December 6, 1934, the New England Grain Company on Hobson's Wharf in Portland caught fire. The photographers from the *Portland Press Herald/Portland Evening Express* team quickly mobilized and flew high above the fire, capturing real time images of the disaster and the local response. Fire crews doused the fire from both land and sea, while spectators can be seen along the street, as well as in their own boats out in the harbor.



Portland soapbox derby, 1936.

Collections of Maine Historical Society/ MaineToday Media. MaineMemory.net #103892

On July 25, 1936, contestants competed in the Evening Express-Chevrolet Motor Company soap box derby on Park Avenue in Portland. Approximately 16,000 spectators attended the race.

Earle Hudson of Tolman Street, Westbrook, emerged as champion. He won a trip and entrance into the National Soap Box Derby in Akron, Ohio later that summer.

Many other prizes were given to winners in several categories, including: fastest time, best-looking car, best upholstery job, and the best braking system. Five heat winners were given 30-minute rides in the Gannett Publishing Company's speedy Stinson monoplane.