

McCormick's Mansion Ruins "Villa Turicum" by Michael A. Schmitt

As a teenager in the middle to late seventies I had friends living at Fort Sheridan Illinois. The fort is located between Highwood and Lake Forest Illinois. The fort had two beaches and a boat rental place. My friends and I would rent canoes from the North beach. One of our canoe outings went north along Lake Michigan's shoreline. After a short distance we came upon some ruins. It was unlike anything we've ever seen before or since.

The view from the water was of an old swimming pool crumbling and falling into Lake Michigan. The waves from the lake were lapping on the pool's foundation. Looking up from the pool area was a large cliff and a tunnel.

Someone had pushed a car off the cliff and it landed wheels down into the lake. The car had no visible fenders so it was hard to identify what kind it was. But it looked like it was from the fifties. The car was deep enough into the water so that the wave action would move the carburetor butterfly with every wave. It was very Eerie.

We beached the canoe and walked up some stairs to the swimming pool deck. The pool had gargoyles that had broken in half and fallen into the sand filled pool. On the old pool deck we saw curved stair cases on either side of a tunnel that had led to an elevator shaft.

The tunnel was arched and at least twenty feet high. The cement floor of the tunnel was all broken up, and the plaster ceiling supports had fallen. We had to crouch down as we walked to the back of the tunnel. It was tough walking on the broken slabs of cement while in a crouch. The deeper we walked into the tunnel the colder it became. The elevator shaft had been filled in with dirt and stones. We looked up towards daylight we saw the thick elevator cables and an icicle with water dripping from it!

The popular folklore about the mansion was that it had been haunted. It was an 80-degree day how could it be an icicle? It must be a ghostly presents! After glancing at each other, a hasty retreat seemed a good idea!

We left the tunnel and followed the staircase up. It was a very elaborate staircase that curved up from the left or right side of the pool. The stairs had two landings with cement benches. Each landing had a waterfall formed from a water trough that ran thru the center of the stair case. The trough was very ornate with fishes cast into it.

Upon reaching the top we found a cement foundation. Old trees surrounded the area. Wind was heard high in the trees in but the area around the ruins was very still.

We walked around the grounds and found a few fountains and old stone figures. Stone garden trails with iron edges still keeping the stone in place. We came upon a long but narrow raised cement pool that had about four-foot of green alga covering the surface. I poked it with a stick to find the depth and had a thought (this would be a great place to hide a body) I dropped the stick and quit probing the bottom.

We also found a building still standing at the end of the garden trail. It was a teahouse that was open on two sides and had a tile roof. Midway down the front of the building was an inscription in Latin.



The stone trail led right into the house. The building had a lower level with hoops installed in the cement walls. We were sure it was a crypt, but I suppose it could have acted as a stable.



The view on the cliff looking down on the beach was beautiful but very dangerous. It was extremely high and the edges were crumbly.

The car in the water was a puzzle. No roads existed and things were so overgrown it would have been some task to get a car back there. That car must have been there a long time.

After our exploring we wanted to find out as much as we could. The word on the street was it was called McCormick's Mansion. The place was supposed to be haunted due to a fire that had killed a several workers. It was also said that devil worshipers were using the teahouse building for sacrifices. It was said to be an evil place and we were told to stay away from it.

As I think back to a carefree time in my life when my friends and I explored and pondered upon the ruins we could tell something great had transpired here. What happened? And who were they? I was amazed to find a large connection to aviation and other interests.

All items can be found easily on the Internet by doing a search for "Villa Turicum" or McCormick's Mansion Lake Forest Illinois. This area is now posted no parking by order of Lake Forest police. www.villaturicum.com

The short answers are:

Who was McCormick? Harold F. McCormick was one of two sons of Cyrus McCormick the inventor of the cotton gin and founder of International Harvester.

Who did McCormick marry? Edith Rockefeller daughter of John D. Rockefeller (standard oil fame)

What were the words written across the tea garden building? In Latin "Here there is sweetness and quiet"

And what is the link to Aviation?

Harold F McCormick was an early financial backer of many early aviation enterprises when aviation was in its infancy.

In 1893 alongside the Chicago World's fair Harold attended "The International Conference on Aerial navigation". Also attending were Octave Chanute, Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison. Thomas Edison predicted manned flight within ten years.

He backed and financially supported the "1911/1912 International Aviation meet" which was held at Grant Park in Chicago. Of which most of the early Aviation pioneers attended including the Wright Brothers and Glenn H. Curtiss.



HAROLD FOWLER MCCORMICK - 1911
— Courtesy of the International Aviation Museum



OCTAVE CHANUTE
1832 - 1910
— Courtesy of the International Aviation Museum



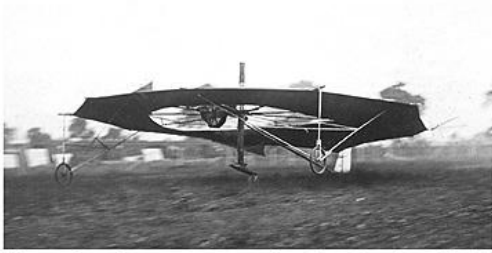
CHARLES "POP" DICKINSON
CICERO FLYING FIELD - 1912
NOTE: CICERO FLYING FIELD PHOTO
— Courtesy of the International Aviation Museum

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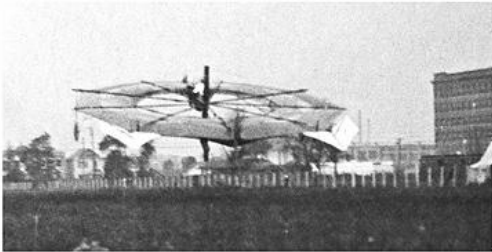
Harold owned the land for Chicago's first airport "Cicero flying field" from 1891-1916. Present day location near Hawthorn race track. Cicero field officially opened July 4th 1911 with 5000 people attending.

Harold hired a young engineer (Chance Vought) to work for him and help him with his aviation endeavors. Chance later became president of his own company Chance Vought who designed and built the famous WWII Corsair Navy fighter. Chance (Chauncey) Vought is now in the Aviation hall of fame.

The McCormick-Romme Umbrellaplane (with help from Chance Vought) was on display at the 1911 International aviation meet in Chicago.



McCORMICK-ROMME CYCLOPLANE AT TAKE-OFF - CICERO FLYING FIELD - AUGUST 30, 1911
- CARROLL F. GRAY AERONAUTICAL COLLECTION



McCORMICK-ROMME CYCLOPLANE ALOFT - CICERO FLYING FIELD - AUGUST 30, 1911
- CARROLL F. GRAY AERONAUTICAL COLLECTION



McCORMICK-ROMME CYCLOPLANE - CICERO FLYING FIELD - NOVEMBER 1911
- CARROLL F. GRAY AERONAUTICAL COLLECTION



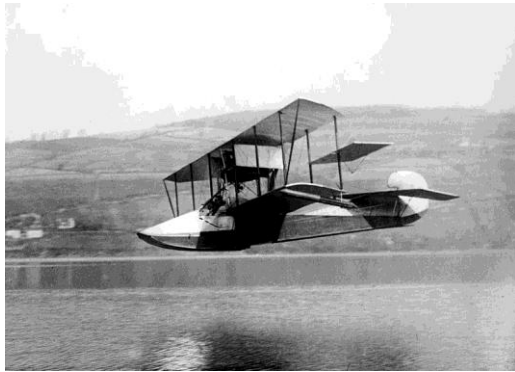
McCORMICK-JAMES "MUSTARD PLASTER" MONOPLANE - CICERO FLYING FIELD - NOVEMBER 1911
DESIGNED BY SIDNEY V. JAMES, FUNDED BY HAROLD F. MCCORMICK - NOTE ROUNDED PARASOL-TYPE REVERSE CAMBERED WING, POWERED BY GIGNE 50 H.P. ROTARY ENGINE DRIVING PARAGON PROPELLER
- CARROLL F. GRAY AERONAUTICAL COLLECTION

Harold McCormick was one of a handful of people, appointed with the responsibility for aviator licensing flights at Cicero



THE 1911 CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL AVIATION MEET - GRANT PARK
AFTER THE AVIATION MEET THESE HANGARS WERE MOVED TO CICERO FLYING FIELD
(PHOTOGRAPH BY F. M. WOODRUFF) - CARROLL F. GRAY AERONAUTICAL COLLECTION

"McCormick was known as a fellow who, despite his social standing and wealth, didn't stand on ceremony when it came to aviation. At the 1911 International Aviation Meet he was described as having "torn shirt sleeves and with the brim of his straw hat torn off hat torn off.



Harold McCormick was the first person to use aviation to commute to work. He would fly from his country home in Lake Forest (Villa Turicum) to his downtown Chicago office. The flight could be done in less than 30 minutes.



Note "Edith" is the name on the aircraft



Daughter says goodbye



Taxi out

Now the rest of the story-



Harold Fowler McCormick, Sr. (May 2, 1872 - October 16, 1941)

Edith Rockefeller McCormick (August 31, 1872 - August 25, 1932)

Edith Married Harold F. McCormick, November 26th, 1895

Harold And Edith had 5 kids

- John Rockefeller McCormick (1896-1901) He died of scarlet fever.
- Edith McCormick (1897-1898)
- Harold Fowler McCormick, Jr. (1898-1973)
- Muriel McCormick Hubbard (1903-1959)
- Matilda McCormick Oser (1906-1947)

- Edith and John lost their son John Rockefeller McCormick to scarlet fever. A year later they established the John McCormick Institute for infectious diseases. This group later found the bacterium responsible for causing scarlet fever.

When taking bids from different architects Frank Lloyd Wright was considered and submitted a drawing



Frank Lloyd Wright's drawing of Villa Tugendhat

In the end they went with

During the two year construction of Villa Tugendhat things for Edith's mental health took a turn for the worse. Whether it was the loss of two of her five children, problems with her marriage or just trouble with her "condition" a panic disorder. Edith went to a sanitarium and was being treated for a panic disorder by Carl Jung. Jung was a student of Sigmund Freud. Edith followed Carl Jung to Switzerland and worked as a pupil/assistant for seven years.

Edith believed she was the reincarnation young wife of King Tut from another life.

Harold McCormick was also a trustee of the Rockefeller-created University of Chicago

Harold and Edith McCormick were big supporters of the Opera in Chicago.

In 1918 Opera star Ganna Walska sought out Harold McCormick in the hopes of furthering her singing career in Chicago. She did not have much singing talent but very very beautiful.

In 1919 Edith McCormick donated land she had received from her father as a wedding gift to the Forest Preserve of Cook County, to be developed as a zoological garden, later to become Chicago's Brookfield Zoo.

After Edith returned from switzerland Harold filed for Divorce.

Silvador Dhalia had painted Ganna Walska and the painting had been titled "wife of Mrs. Harold McCormick" After the divorce it was retitled "wife of Mr. George Tait II"



Harold had heard that opera star Ganna Walska husband had died. He quickly took a steam ship to europe. Upon arriving he discovered it was too late, Ganna Walska had already married again. She did not love the third husband and Harold begged her to get a divorce and Marry him. Ganna refused at first, but agreed several years later and in 1922 amidst a large scandle she divorced Alexander Cochran (fortune from carpet mfg) and agreed to married Harold McCormick.

The ship Harold sailed on in the paragraph above was the which was the younger sibling to the Titanic. It had set the record for being in service for the longest period of time.

During their marriage Ganna refused to live in Chicago and only visited Harold when she had a singing engagements. In 1931 Harold filed for divorce on grounds of abandonment. They parted on good terms.

Ganna was married 6 times to men of wealth. She settled in california and has built a famous garden "Cuesta Linda" which you can visit today. She was on a quest to find the meaning of life and was know to attend seances and consult with a Ouija board.

At the time of her death in 1933 Edith was said to have spent only one night in Villa Turicum. She had kept a full staff there maintaing the grounds and building in case they should choose to visit.

When she died Villa Turicum was worth 1.5 million but she owed 3 million. Her final days were spent in the downtown Chicago hotel where she lived.



Edith



German prisoners help from fort sheridian



Harold



McCormicks house in Chicago



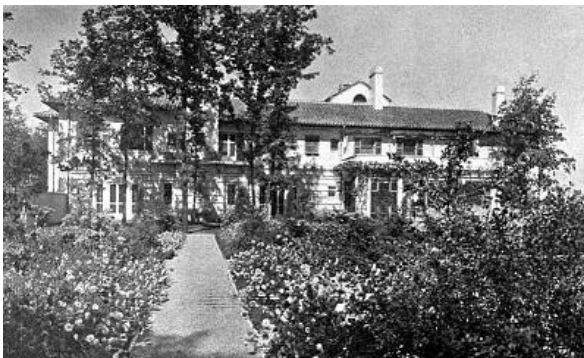
Waterfall



We were not the only ones who conued there



View from the lake



Garden view from the tea house



Villa Turicum from the air



Beach view from air today



Reflection Lilly pond



waterfall & Cascade

After her death their was an auction to cover her expenses and the fine furnishings and belongings were sold for pennys on the dollar.

The house and grounds fell into decay after the decline and death of Edith Rockefeller McCormick, and the house was torn down in 1965 after years of vandalism and neglect. The extensively landscaped lands were subdivided and sold for development.