

Myrtle Brown



The Brown family had deep roots in Nebraska, but in her late teens, Myrtle relocated with her family to the East Coast. Myrtle was interested in science. After her graduation from Brownell Hale, she attended advanced classes in Chevy Chase, Maryland. This school focused on education of women and was considered a “finishing” school.

In 1922, her sister, Dorothy, married the famous Italian-American pioneer airplane designer and builder, Giuseppe Mario Bellanca. Until 1921, Bellanca was successfully designing biplanes for the Maryland Pressed Steel company, which closed. In 1921, Bellanca partnered with Victor Roos to build airplanes in Omaha, Nebraska.

In 1922, Bellanca built the first enclosed-cabin monoplane, called the Bellanca CF. Today, this iconic design is on display at the National Air and Space Museum. Given family aviation enthusiasm and the women pilots of the late 1920s, Myrtle created her own aviation flight plan. Training in Wilmington, with 13 hours of instruction and only ten hours of solo flight, Myrtle Brown became the first female licensed pilot in Delaware, license #7701.

The headline from a July 11, 1929, newspaper announced, “Delaware Aviatix has great ambition – secures license as airplane pilot – hopes to span ocean.” She operated the fledgling Pennsylvania airfield at Painter’s Crossing, before moving to Omaha, Nebraska, to attend the medical school at the University of Nebraska.

Myrtle was always a big thinker and aviation promoter. She approached the Omaha town leaders several times for sponsorship of flights from the United States to Europe. She proposed a New York to Rome flight where she would be a passenger. The \$25,000 cost, around \$465,000 today, was not deemed a good investment.

In 1930, she proposed a non-stop flight from Omaha to Paris, which she would pilot. Friends tried to dissuade her from this dangerous idea. Her response was, “My time to die

hasn't come yet, and I'll make it." While promoting the building of a new airfield in Cody, Nebraska, she was overcome with a ruptured appendix.

Rushed to the Omaha hospital for treatment, Myrtle died of peritonitis there on June 1, 1934. A story published June 2 in the Daily Gazette of Berkeley, California, reporting her death announced, "Noted Aviatrix Dies." The last sentence states, "Brown was a member of New York's 'Club 99,' composed of women fliers"

Photo: February 15, 1929, Myrtle Madeline Brown in Wilmington Delaware, during her flight instruction. (Wilmington Memories web site)

** Born in Nebraska in April 1899 (even on her headstone the day is not listed)*

By Penny Rafferty Hamilton, Ph.D., Idaho Chapter
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99 Charter Biography File

Maiden Name: Myrtle Madelene Brown

Married Name(s): none

Date of birth: 1899

Birthplace: unknown

Date of death: 1934

Death place: unknown

Occupation(s): pilot, pianist

License(s): 7701; 1929

Known stats: owned and operated Myrtle Brown Flying Field in PA

Publications:

1. Brown, Myrtle. "First long flight her 'big moment'." Philadelphia Bulletin. Mar. 1930.
2. Davidson, B.P. "Today in Aviation." Newark Star-Eagle. Oct. 30, 1929.

Award(s):

1. None found

Miscellaneous information:

1. No marriages found

File contents: two black and white photos of Myrtle (same image, different sizes)