

Ruth Rowland Nichols



Another Ninety-Nines founding member and Women's Air Derby racer was Ruth Rowland Nichols. Born in 1901 to a wealthy family, Ruth's life changed with an airplane ride. While at college, Ruth secretly took flying lessons. In 1924, she graduated from Wellesley, and earned her pilot's license. Next, she became the first licensed American woman hydroplane pilot.

In January 1928, as a co-pilot with her flight instructor Harry Rogers, they set a record for their non-stop flight from New York to Miami, Florida. Due to her family background, the press named Ruth the "Flying Debutante."

By 1927, Ruth was one of the few women licensed to fly transport planes. Over her aviation career, Ruth Nichols held more than 35 women's aviation records. She flew every type of aircraft, including dirigible, glider, autogyro, fixed wing, seaplane, transport, and even a supersonic jet. In 1958, at the age of 57, as co-pilot, she set new women's world records for altitude of 51,000 feet and a speed record of 1,000 miles per hour in a TF-102A Delta Dagger.

Writing in her autobiography, "Wings for Life," Ruth Nichols explained her passion: "To the public I suppose I have often seemed to be the original 'flying fool.' While flying over 140 different models of aircraft, I have piloted a plane in a plaster cast and a steel corset, too impatient to wait for bones to knit from the last crash. Maybe it doesn't make sense...family and friends have urged me to keep my feet on the ground. The only people who haven't tried to change me are flyers. They comprehend."

From *101 Trailblazing Women of Air and Space: Aviators and Astronauts* by Penny Rafferty Hamilton, PH.D.

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