



Richmond's First Airplane Dealer

By Mark Sternheimer, Sr., VAHS Board Member

The year was 1919. My Dad, Nathan had just been released from the Army, and he returned to Richmond with many ideas of how to enlarge a business that he and his brother had formed several years before World War I started. They had purchased from Richmond Union Passenger Railway, an old power generating plant at the intersection of Lester and Orleans Streets on the James River. This power plant, built in 1888, powered the first trolley car system in the U.S. Lester Street later became Main Street in the Fulton area but in those days that marked the end of the trolley line. When the two brothers purchased the obsolete plant in 1915, it was nothing more than a shell which went fifty feet down into the earth below the bottom of the James River.



1926 View of James River and Yard - Old Warehouse

In 1920, large quantities of surplus materials were sold

in the Richmond area. Much of this equipment was related to the new art of flying. Richmond Intermediate Depot became the sales location for many surplus sales held during the next five years. The intermediate depot was located on the James River, 2 blocks from the old power plant. A large storage depot known as Seven Pines was the Army distribution point for WWI surplus. It's located at Bickerstaff and Osborne Turnpike which is used by VDOT today. A list of the equipment sold during the early surplus sales would bring tears to the eyes of the avid collector today but of course, in those days no one knew how rare certain things would become. For example, just on one sale catalog were listed OX-5 motors, magnetos, propellers, landing wheels, instruments, flying wires, formation lights, and



Page from 1922 A&N Catalog

literally hundreds of items that were used to put together the airplanes of that era. Also sold during that period were balloon baskets and a number

of aircraft in original shipping crates.



Richmond Intermediate Terminal on the James River

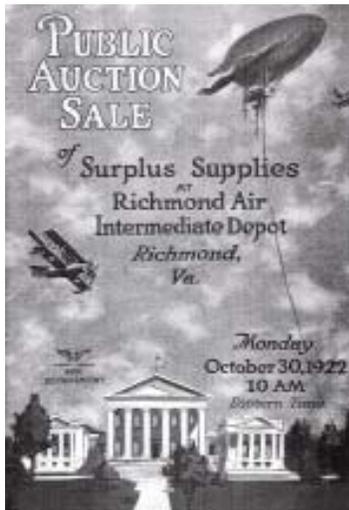
The first airplane that the company offered for sale in 1930 was the Boeing Model C-4L-S Seaplane. Approximately fifty of these were built for the Navy



Seven Pines Government Warehouse

a fully flying horizontal stabilizer much like the Piper Comanche of today. This was the first production aircraft that Boeing designed. A number of these aircraft were assembled and flown away from the river directly from our original warehouse. These were sold for \$2,200 each. Those not flown away were trucked away to various locations, including Norfolk and Washington.

In 1921 they purchased a quantity of Thomas Morse Scout aircraft. This was a small maneuverable plane that had seen substantial duty during World War I as an observation aircraft. My Dad related to me several flights that were made after these aircraft were assembled. In those days the area west of Monument Avenue and Sheppard St. was known as Sheppard Flying Field. William Thalhimer Jr. related how he watched aircraft take off while sitting on the high bank on the north side of Monument Ave. Several aircraft were assembled and flown away in that area. One plane in particular headed for Fredericksburg but had to land in a cow pasture several miles north of Richmond when it had engine trouble. There were many



Catalog of Government Sale - October 30, 1922

interesting first flights since many of the purchasers had relatively little, if any, flying experience.

Although the aircraft themselves have long ago been sold, we kept a few mementos such as balloon baskets, propellers, and various pieces of aircraft hardware that relate to these aircraft. A collection of special curved experimental propellers was given to the Smithsonian during the 1930's and a few machine guns were given to the Marine Museum at Quantico.

During the 1920's through 1935, the yard alongside the warehouse was a favorite place for many of the budding aviators of Richmond to come and look for parts for their aircraft. VAHS member, Judge Bill Spain reminisced that he quite often came to the yard looking for parts to keep their aircraft flying at the Old Charles Field (later known as Hermitage). Such things as propellers, instruments, generators and hardware for the old World War I airplanes were in good supply although stored in outside sheds. This supply lasted up until the late 1930's before it was exhausted.

Some years ago, the Boeing Co. sent the original plans for the C-4L-S and from that an exact scale model was built. Pictures of the model and WWI catalog and aircraft pictures are shown.

as trainers, but the war was over before they had been able to use any. The brothers bought the entire lot. They were powered by a four cylinder Hall Scott Model A-7A 100 HP liquid cooled engine. The empty weight was 1898 pounds, and when fully loaded 2395 pounds. With a top speed of 72 MPH and a landing speed of 61 MPH, there was no margin for error. This plane was also unusual because it had



1920 Catalog Picture of C-4L-S Seaplane



Boeing C-4L-S Seaplane 1920