



The AMA History Project Presents: Club History of the DECATUR MODEL AIRPLANE CLUB



Written by CG & PH (2014); reformatted by JS (06/2014)

Below is The History of the Decatur Model Airplane Club, written by Carl Grover and Pat Helpingstine, sent to the AMA History Project in June of 2014.

Austinville Model Airplane Club

1937



c. 1960s

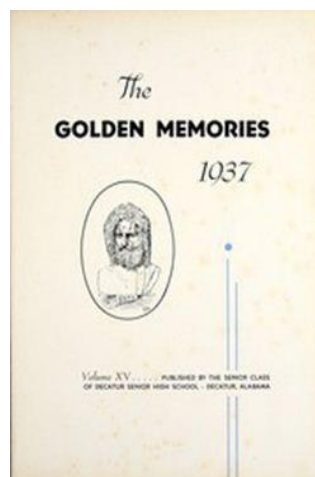


2009

The History of the Decatur Model Airplane Club Decatur, Alabama 1937 to present



Decatur, 1930s



Decatur High Yearbook



Decatur Railroad Shop

The **Decatur Model Airplane Club** was organized on **February 24, 1937 (77 years ago as of this writing)** by the Senior students of Decatur High School. The club was originally called the Austinville Model Airplane Club. At the first meeting, these officers were elected: Pete Henderson - President, Jack Tankersley – Vice President, and Rodney Barron – Secretary.

The mission of the club is to promote interest in model aircraft and aviation.



James Brown, DMAC member, c. 1930s



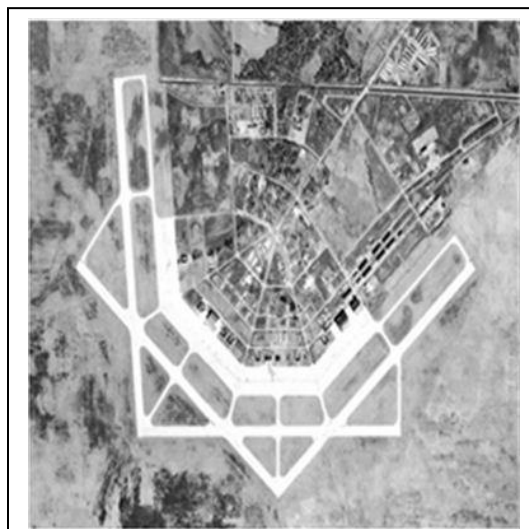
James Brown and friend.

Sometime between 1937 and the 1960s, the name was changed to Decatur Model Airplane Club. The Decatur Model Airplane Club (DMAC) is based in Decatur, Alabama, and is the third oldest AMA chartered club in America. The club's Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA) charter number is #102. The exact age of the charter is not known, but the earliest charter certificate on hand was issued by the AMA on March 25, 1966.**

Flying began in the late 1940s to early 1950s at a dump behind the current Decatur Aquadome. There was also a second site at the old Courtland airbase.



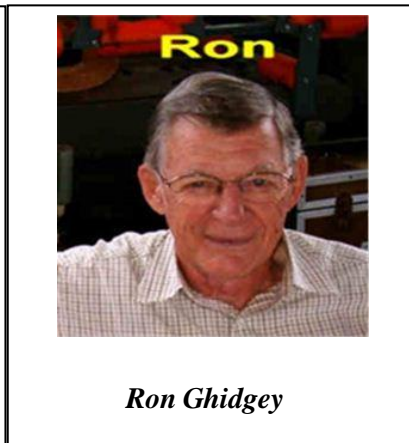
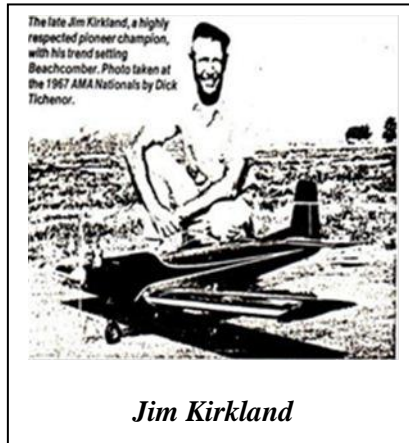
Former Dump Area



Courtland Airbase, c.1949

** [Editor's Note: Birmingham RC Association is the first chartered club, #100, and the second is Fingerlakes Air Pirates, #101.]

Club meetings were originally held at various members' houses, but were moved to the Aquadome in the 1960s where meetings are still held every month. During the early days, most flying was control line, but there were also some single-channel homebuilt radio systems in use. Pattern contests were held at the Courtland site and attracted some big name competitors such as Jim Kirkland, Hal Debolt, Ron Chidgey, and Doc Edwards. Back then, there were no purpose-built Pattern planes like today, so everyone flew whatever they had. The radio systems were "reed" type.



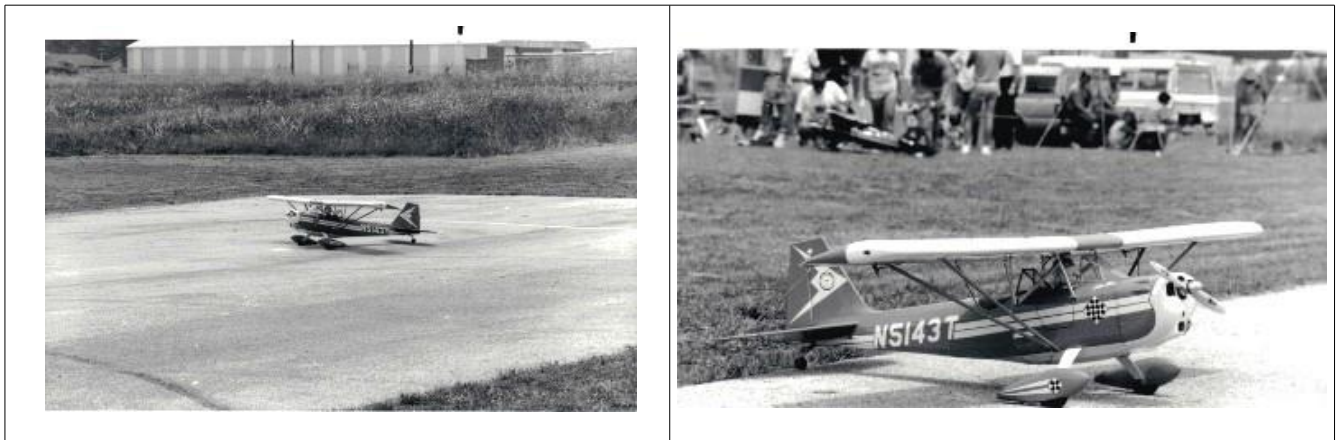
DMAC article in the Decatur Daily from 1972, featuring member James Stockton, his wife Nelda, and member Donnie Duncan's wife, Brenda.

Some flying occurred in the 1960s in the Austin High School area. One of the control line contests conducted was an "apple crate derby," where each contestant was given an apple crate to saw up and build a model. The first person to make one lap would be declared the winner. The first ever winner of the derby was Gene Brooks. Gene and Dick Austin had a hobby shop. They sold radio systems to other club members and introduced radio control flying to the area.



Apple Crate type model

The fairgrounds flying site was procured through the Decatur City Council and was the predominant flying site for a long time. Club members volunteered to help park cars during the annual Fair to prevent installation of lights in the parking area where the flying took place. Originally, all flying was done inside the Fairgrounds fenced-in area, but later moved outside the fence. The site was sold to Home Depot in the 1990s.



Above: Fairground Field

In the early years, flying at the Courtland Airbase was mostly limited to contests because permission had to be obtained in the form of a permit. The arrangement continued for a long time. Flying was suspended for a while but started back up until Lockheed bought the land to build missiles.

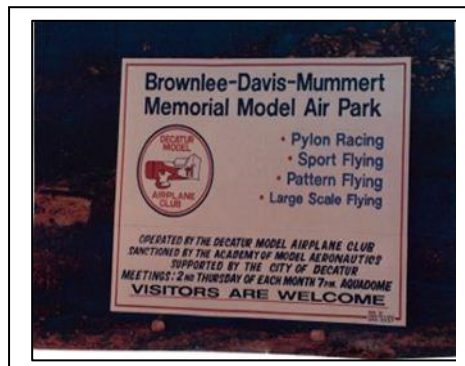


Above: Courtland Airbase, 1987



Above: Courtland Airbase, 1987

Flying has taken place sporadically in several areas while more permanent facilities were being procured. DMAC has flown at a very small full-scale airport in Lawrence County, an abandoned airstrip in Hillsboro, and even in someone's front yard in Pumpkin Center. The Courtland Airbase and Decatur Fairgrounds were used extensively until the 1990s when both were closed. A new site was constructed from an old landfill in Flint that lasted for several years, but had to be shut down due to various legal issues. The Brownlee-Davis-Mummert Memorial Model Air Park in Flint was officially dedicated June 10, 1995.



Above: DMAC Brownlee-Davis-Mummert Memorial Model Air Park, Flint, Alabama

Flying currently takes place at a former sanitary landfill on Highway 20 in Trinity, Alabama, and a small grass air strip in Decatur off Central Parkway.



Highway 20 DMAC Field Entrance



Highway 20 DMAC Field



DMAC Farm Field



DMAC Farm Field

The DMAC has held numerous contests over the years to include Pattern, Scale, and Quickie 500 Pylon racing. The Quickie 500 racing National Championships were hosted by the DMAC in Courtland, and there also have been several Scale masters qualifiers held at the Flint site. Quickie 500 racing, along with ½ A and the club's own "20 size" racing were very popular at one time. The 20 size racer was a scaled down version of a Scat Cat Quickie 500 that used a K&B .20 Sportster engine.



DMAC ½ A Pylon Race March 1987

The DMAC has held two swap meets a year for many years at various venues in Decatur. Currently, the swap meets are being held at the Decatur Shrine Club building.



DMAC Swap Meet, October 2013

The club has held fundraisers that benefited the Sheriff's Boys Ranch as well as the Decatur Police's "DARE" drug abuse resistance program.

THE DECATUR DAILY, Sunday morning, August 5, 2001

Model plane club raising DARE funds

By Paul Huggins
DAILY Staff Writer

Ever been fascinated by radio-controlled airplanes and wondered what it would be like to fly one?

The Decatur Model Airplane Club wants to give you that chance Saturday at its DARE to Fly Air Show. The event is a fund raiser for Decatur police's DARE program, so participants can get high in the sky to help children stay off drugs.

For a \$5 donation, a club pilot will work with a trainee for a 19-minute flight. The pilots connect trainees to a "Buddy" box, which gives them partial control of the airplane and, in case of emergency, allows the pilot to quickly regain total control. Trainees can control lift and turns.

The trainer planes have 4- to 5-foot wingspans and can travel as fast as 50 mph.

Lamar Blair, president of the club, said like most activities in life, doing it is much more fun than watching.

"And it gives you a better appreciation for how hard some of these acrobatic moves are," said fellow club member and pilot Gus Gustafson.

The show begins at 10 a.m. with two hours of flying lessons. From noon to 12:30 p.m., pilots will present an air show featuring giant 3-D flying and helicopter demonstrations from a U.S. World Team pilot.

Flying lessons return from 12:30 to 2:30, followed by a second air show from 2:30 to 3. The club will offer one more hour of flying lessons from 3 to 4.

In addition to lessons, the club will offer free soft drinks and hot dogs, and draw for door prizes. The club pays for all giveaways; all donations will go to the Sheriff's Boys Ranch.

DAILY Photo by Gary Cosby Jr.

Gus Gustafson, left, T.A. Burlison and Amanda Allen are among those involved in Saturday's DARE to Fly Air Show. The public can fly a remote-control airplane for a \$5 donation.

expect to do much better this year.

The club consists of about 60 members with a range of backgrounds. Some enjoy flying, while others prefer to build models and let others test them.

The idea of letting the public try flying was natural, Gustafson said, because people regularly come by the flying field at Flint and inquire about the sport.

"Four young men stopped by last night as I was leaving because they just wanted to give it a try. I said, 'How would you like to fly?' and they said 'Oh boy! Yeah.' So they're coming back out here this afternoon.

"Any time we're out here, they're welcome to come by," he said.

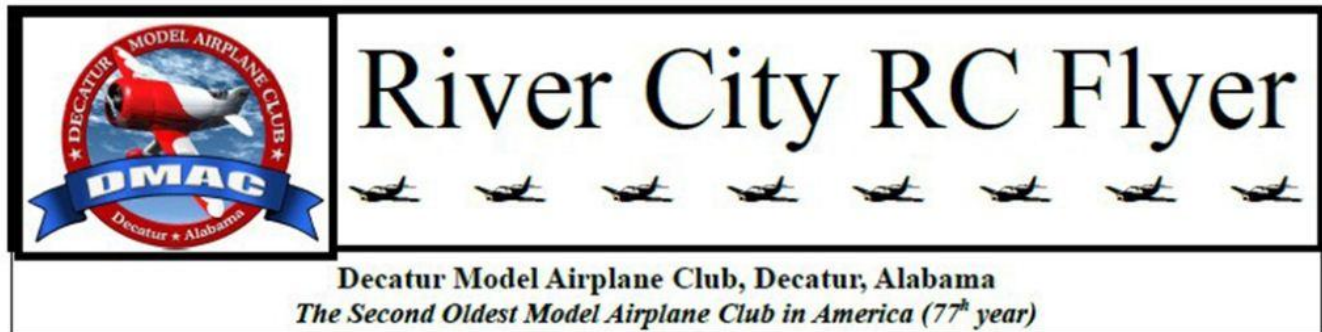
The club's 80-acre flying field is off Deer Springs Road, west of U.S. 31 South by the old county landfill. A Brownlee-Mummert-Davis Model Air Park sign marks the entrance. For more information, call Blair at 355-8445 or Gustafson at 352-0242.

Money will go toward textbooks, educational materials and promotional tools that officers use to deliver the department's drug awareness program. The program reaches about 4,500 students per year in third, fifth and sixth grades, as well as high school classrooms.

The fifth-grade program is the most extensive. This year it will be a 13-week program, during which officers spend one hour per week telling students about the dangers of drugs, how to improve self-esteem and how to say no to drugs.

The first time the club held the fund-raiser, it generated about \$700. Club members sold their

There have been a couple of versions of a club newsletter put out over the years. The first was known as “The Aeronut” and was hand written. The Aeronut was abandoned and a newer version, “The Fairground Flyer” was established. Our current newsletter is called the “River City RC Flyer” and is available online at our website <http://www.ourdmac.com>.



Above: Club newsletter masthead

A newsletter has been continuously published on a monthly basis for the last 20 years or so.

The club was started with about 10 or 12 people. At its peak (in the late 1980s and early 1990s), there were approximately 88 members. Membership has fluctuated from 25 to 50 members for approximately the last 10 years. The club was incorporated in the 1990s and maintains a non-profit status. A constitution and bylaws were adopted and ratified, along with club officers to consist of a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer.

Many thanks to long time modelers James Brown (our oldest member), James Stockton, James Ray, and Jim Forthman (DMAC President) for their contributions towards this article.

Original history compilation by Carl Grover, DMAC Secretary; re-edits and additions by Patrick Helpingstine, DMAC Vice President.

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