



Maureen Mullen Lynch

Maureen saw her first hot air balloon Jan. 4, 1974 in Oldwick, NY near her home. A trio of balloons, resembling giant Christmas ornaments in the sky, floated past to the south, over a bright morning horizon. Her indulgent father drove her and some siblings over to check them out, and when she got a close up look at the gondola and looked up, the fabric continued into the sky as far as she could see - a look at the interior showed nothing but open air and fabric stretched taught, yet lifting everything into the sky. It was a life changing experience for a 14-year-old.

A close encounter the following July was provided when the Lark Balloon Tour was in progress, spending several days in NJ. Another trip to the landing site led to an impromptu tutorial provided by the pilots, culminating in a short tethered opportunity to put hand on burner. There was no going back, and she was hooked.

The balloon population in NJ was quite small then, and chances to crew and learn more about balloons were few, but grew over the next few years. Volunteering on crew garnered training from multiple pilots and though it took til she was in college to secure her private license, her commercial license followed a year or two later. A summer job working at Terry Wright's repair station (The Wright Place near Statesville, N.C.) provided invaluable training and education in maintenance and repair. It was through this job that she located and bought her first balloon - before she'd bought a car.

Alongside crewing, flying and working in the field, Maureen built up a library and knowledge of aeronautical history, focusing on lighter-than-air flight. The collection grew over the years, and today numbers well over a thousand titles and manuscript/archival materials, as well as artifacts and art. Her knowledge of 20th century ballooning and airship history derived from primary sources, the pilots and people directly involved. Her primary instructor in hot air ballooning was Harris F. Smith, a retired Navy blimp pilot also involved in Project Helios (a Navy stratospheric balloon flight project) with formidable skills. Her training in gas ballooning came from both Tony Fairbanks and Peter Pellegrino, members of the Balloon Club or America which traced back to the 1950's, some of its members going back to the Cleveland Balloon Club active in the 1930's.

From the mid 1970's on, Maureen wrote articles for the field - *Ballooning Journal* counts a lengthy inventory of her work providing both historical accounts and surveys of ballooning history, and current events of major flight projects. She covered more transatlantic flight attempts than likely any other journalist, as well as multiple RTW (round the world) flight projects. Maureen also served as East Coast Editor for *Balloon Life*, an enterprise begun by Tom Hamilton. standard in the sport today.

After documenting the exploits of other balloonists, Maureen took the opportunity in September, 1987(?) to use her ultralight 1-person Raven Orbiter gas balloon to try for a world record. Launching from the Warren County Airport in Queensbury, NY, she logged 8:12 duration time, landing in Manchester Center, VT.



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Almost every issue held copy produced by her, including interviews with acquaintances such as Connie Wolf, Malcom Forbes, Per Lindstrand, and other major figures in the field.

Alongside research and documenting of current events, Maureen co-authored the book *Landowner Relations* with Kevin Poeppelman, the Orbiter gas balloon to try for a world record. Launching from the Warren County Airport in Queensbury, NY, she logged 8:12 duration time, landing in Manchester Center, VT.

This exceeded the current world record for her balloon's size (AA-2) but after the NAA submitted paperwork for homologation, it was not certified, based on the FAI's reasons that the balloon, though filled with the limit allowed of helium (to equal lift limit of hydrogen which the record calculations were based on) was still of a larger volume than its hydrogen equivalent. So the recognized US National record exceeded the FAI's record.

Other gas flights with the Orbiter yielded more favorable results - she flew it in the St. Niklass gas balloon event in Belgium in Sept. 1988, placing 2nd in the Pilot Declared Goal competition. She also flew the Orbiter in Tyndall, S.D. during the world gas balloon championships, and closer to home in Pa and NY.

It was through ballooning that Maureen met her husband Christopher Lynch, in 1985. Another ballooning enthusiast going back to the early 1970's, they met through Mike Fairbanks. Lynch determined he wasn't going to date a commercial balloon pilot without having the same rating, and within 3 weeks had pulled off achieving her commercial license - likely a record in itself!

Maureen and Chris combined a love of travel with their flying, and have flown balloons in the US, Canada, Belgium, India, Jamaica, and Qatar.

Along the way in their joint passion for ballooning and aeronautical history, Maureen and Chris began to collect and organize the postage stamps and flown balloon mail they had acquired over time. This led to more writing and documentation of the field, in the *Airpost Journal* and *Jack Knight Air Log*. She wrote a series of articles over many years documenting major flight projects including all transatlantic balloon attempts, transoceanic flights and attempts, and all RTW flight attempts. These served to document modern day major flight projects, supporting the collecting of their postal artifacts. Alongside this, as the Lynch's balloon mail collection grew, they started to exhibit in air mail and aerophilately conventions and shows, to promote interest in the sub-category of airmail. Maureen's long term goal is to produce a reference manual of modern era (post 1950 or so) flown balloon mail for collectors of such airmail. At present there is no such reference.

Recent years have been devoted to parenting and family, but ballooning interest is always close by. As retirement approaches, more projects will come to the fore as free time opens up!

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