



Warren Township pioneer lands in N.J. Aviation Hall of Fame

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Stephen Stirling/For The Star-Ledger



Aline Rhonie

WARREN TOWNSHIP — There are few in Warren today who would likely recognize her name, but slowly one of the township's most historically notable residents is getting the recognition she has long deserved.

Aviatrix Aline Rhonie would have been 101 this week, and though her trailblazing story has seldom been told in the nearly five decades since her death, Warren resident Esta-Ann Elliott is going out of her way to make sure that changes.

I'm definitely hoping to let people know more about her. The more I learn about her the more I want to learn," Elliott said. "I've just gotten very connected."

Though she was also an artist, philanthropist and entrepreneur, Rhonie's passion was flying.

She received her transport license in the United States at 21 and just three years later, in 1934, piloted the first non-stop solo flight from Newark to Mexico City.

Rhonie was also an early member of the Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron during World War II, a forerunner of the Women Airforce Service Pilots, who ferried bomber and fighter planes from aircraft plants to stateside ports for eventual delivery overseas.

"She was gutsy and courageous and a free spirit," Elliott said. "She was really quite unique."

Elliott said Rhonie was never afraid to follow her passions. When she wanted to learn how to paint a mural, she traveled to Mexico and studied with artist Diego Rivera. She returned and spent three years painting a 1,400 square foot mural detailing aviation's early history on the wall of a hangar at Roosevelt Field in Long Island.

Sometimes her passions even intertwined.

"She would even sketch while she was flying," Elliott said. "She was said to always have a sketch pad with her on the plane."

Rhonie was married twice, first to stockbroker L. Richard Bamberger, who she divorced and then to stunt pilot Peter Brooks.

"She was society," Elliott said. "Her marriages and divorces made the New York Times."



Alexandra Pais/New Jersey Local News Service

Aline Rhonie's image is now on the wall at New Jersey's Aviation Hall of Fame in Teterboro.

"When she married Brooks, who was quite a personality himself, they had his-and-her airplanes which they took on a 17,000-mile honeymoon."

In March, Rhonie was posthumously issued the Congressional Gold Medal, which Elliot accepted on her behalf. In May, Rhonie was inducted into the Aviation Hall of Fame and Museum of New Jersey, which Shea Oakley, the museum's executive director, said was

more than merited.

“She flew under the radar next to some of her contemporaries like Amelia Earhart,”

Oakley said. “But she was so multi-facted and accomplished so much that in some ways she’s really more of a Renaissance woman.”

Before she rose to fame as a pilot, however, Rhonie grew up in Warren, attending private school in Plainfield. She was a member of the wealthy Hoffheimer family, and lived in the building that now houses the Elks club.

Elliott said after Rhonie became a pilot, she would frequently fly into Hadley Field, a small airstrip in South Plainfield at the time, and fly her family members over their homes.

Elliott said she plans to continue studying Rhonie’s life and hopes teach more people about the Warren aviatrix’s story.

“I just hope to keep spreading the word,” she said.

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