Restoration of the fuselage began this spring, continuing through the summer and is scheduled to be completed before the shop suspends activity during the winter months when the shop is not heated.

It was determined that a complete disassembly of the fuselage was required in order to do a thorough restoration. Although the fuselage appeared to be in remarkably good condition, it is almost 100 years old. A detailed investigation uncovered a number of cracked, broken or deteriorated parts that needed to be removed for repair.

Removal of the 100 year old dirt, grime and dried castor oil was a labor intensive job but one that was necessary to preserve Tommy for future generations.

The process included the removal of every single metal part so that it could be cleaned, soda blasted, etched primed and painted. The wood parts were restored, (very few needed replacement), varnished and then the entire fuselage reassembled.

We are delighted to report that we now have several teenagers volunteers engaged in the restoration process. Giving the younger generation the opportunity to learn while doing is a major consideration in our mission statement.

Overall volunteer participation has been exceptional. We have volunteers traveling from as far away as Rochester to be a part of this unique historical event. If you know of someone who may be interested in helping, suggest they go to our web page; www.TOMMYCOMEHOME.ORG and click on the VOLUNTEER tab for more information.

Well over 200 visitors have come to the shop to see and learn about the project this summer. Regular hours are Monday and Wednesday from 9 to 3, other times by appointment. For directions and contact, see the VOLUNTEER tab on our web page.
Fabric is Removed (left)

Complete Disassembly underway (Below)

Going Back Together (Below)

Tommy's Fuel tank gets converted back to original configuration (Below)

Jim Rundle truing the fuselage (Left)
Mike Shay, our nuts and bolts guy, with Roger Pellerin (background) in charge of all vises. (Right)

Buckey Dew & his Son-in-Law “Masked Man” welding a critical part (Left)

Steve Umscheid goes to work on the turtle deck (Left)

Dr. Thibault and his grandson, Trent, visit the shop while in Ithaca celebrating the holiday season with his son’s family. (Above)

Volunteer James puts finishing touch on the cockpit loop. (Left)
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Origins and Development of Thomas-Morse Aircraft

By Jim Rundle

Flying boats; Thomas Aeroplane Company moves to Ithaca

Flying Boats
In 1912 the Thomas brothers began producing flying boats, which they continued to do through 1915. The column below from the March 7, 1914 issue of “Flight”, the journal of the Aero Club of the United Kingdom, shows that the brothers were now attracting international attention. The photo, from a 1915 issue of “Flight”, shows a later model over Cayuga Lake. It had obvious similarities to the Curtiss flying boats of the time.

The Thomas Brothers Aeroplane Co. and Aviation School move to Ithaca, NY, December, 1914
In 1914 the Ithaca Board of Trade was looking for an industry to occupy the vacant E.G. Wycoff poultry incubator plant on Brindley Street. They invited the Thomas Brothers Aeroplane Co. to move to Ithaca and set up shop at the plant. It offered three times the floor space they had in Bath.

The Thomas Brothers were not only building airplanes, they were also running, since 1913, a flying school on Conesus Lake, a considerable distance from Bath. Their school was granted a charter “to give instruction in the care and use of aeroplanes by the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York.” (Heritage of Bath)

The City of Ithaca had been deeded a tract of land right on the lake, close to the Brindley Street plant, which they were leasing to a peach grower. How the deal came together is not clear, but anyone could have seen the attraction of the plant with a nearby landing strip on the lake, and so between the Board of Trade, the City, and the Thomas Brothers, an agreement was struck. The brothers cut down some, but not all, of the peach trees for a landing strip, and got themselves a place to launch seaplanes too, all within easy transport to and from Brindley Street (AAHS, 1970). They moved on December 7, 1914.

In 1914 aviation was a new and unproven field for commercial development. In the U.S., flying was still a novelty mainly suited to county fairs, races and other demonstrations. Aviation news was a mix of daring exploits and fatal crashes. There was simply no sign that much money was to be made in it. Curtiss was doing well in Hammondsport, but largely from foreign sales of his flying boats, and the Thomas Brothers had not managed to penetrate that market, although they certainly tried. By 1914 they had a produced an impressive variety of aircraft, but probably very few sales. The British and U.S. military orders were still in the future.

Helping an airplane company come to town probably wasn’t a high risk initiative for the City or the Board of Trade, since not a lot was at stake, but it was an imaginative one, with no clear prospects. Beyond the economics, it brought to Ithaca an excitement and technological cache that few other industries could match.

NEXT: Part Three, The Thomas T-2, Ithaca's first airplane

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