



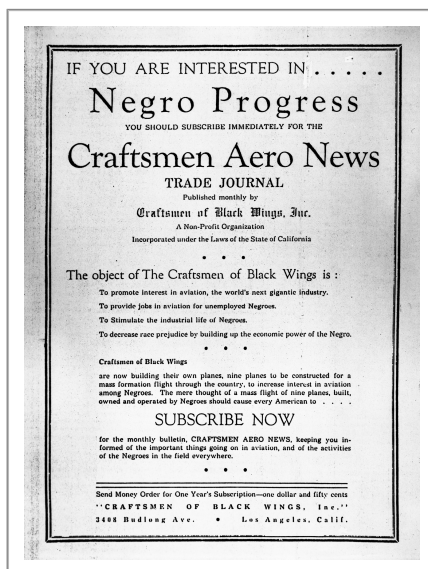
Smithsonian

National Air and Space Museum

William J. Powell (Craftsmen of Black Wings, Inc.) Photograph Collection

Elizabeth C. Borja

2017



National Air and Space Museum Archives
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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Air and Space Museum Archives
Title:	William J. Powell (Craftsmen of Black Wings, Inc.) Photograph Collection
Date:	1928-1939 (bulk 1937-1939)
Identifier:	NASM.1996.0008
Creator:	Craftsmen of Black Wings, Inc.
Extent:	0.05 Cubic feet (1 folder in a shared box)
Language:	English .

Administrative Information

Acquisition Note

NASM Generated. Images in this collection were copied by the NASM Branch Photo Lab from issues of *Craftsmen Aero-News*, which were loaned to Von Hardesty by Ted Robinson for copying and inclusion in the 1994 edition of Powell's book *Black Wings*.

Processing Note

Researchers may wish to consult other collections in the NASM Archives: William J. Powell Collection (Accession 1999-0049).

Described and encoded by Elizabeth C. Borja, 2017.

Preferred Citation

William J. Powell (Craftsmen of Black Wings, Inc.) Photograph Collection, Accession 1996-0008, National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

No restrictions on access.

Conditions Governing Use

[Permissions Requests](#)

Historical Note

William J. Powell (1899-1942) was a prominent African-American entrepreneur and pilot who urged African-Americans to become part of the future aviation industry.

Powell was born in Henderson, Kentucky, on July 29, 1899. He moved to Chicago at the age of eight. He entered the University of Illinois in 1916. He went to Officers' Training Camp in Fort Des Moines, Iowa, in June 1917, and was commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the American Expeditionary Forces at the completion of training camp.

He served with the 317th Engineers and 365th Infantry during World War I. After his honorable discharge in 1919, he returned to the University of Illinois, graduating with honors and a degree of Bachelor of Science in electrical engineering in 1922.

He worked as an electrical engineer and electric welding instructor for Rock Island Railroad for two years. In 1924, he opened his first filling station and in two years' time, he had built a successful automobile business in South Chicago before moving to Los Angeles in 1928.

During the late 1920s and 1930s, Powell worked tirelessly to promote air-mindedness in the black community. Under his umbrella organization, Craftsmen of Black Wings, Inc., Powell wrote a thinly disguised autobiography, *Black Wings*, in 1934; wrote and directed a 1935 documentary film, *Unemployment, the Negro and Aviation*; and published a trade journal entitled *Craftsmen Aero News* (1937-1938). Powell was also instrumental in organizing the Bessie Coleman Aero Club and the "Five Blackbirds" demonstration team. William J. Powell died in July 1942.

Scope and Contents

This collection consists of 9 copy prints and 14 copy negatives. The bulk of the images were copied from issues of *Craftsmen Aero News* and relate to the Craftsmen of Black Wings organization, including photographs of William J. Powell, Marie Dickerson, and Myrtle Bishop.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Aeronautics
- Aeronautics -- Societies, etc.
- African Americans in aeronautics

Types of Materials:

- Photographs

Names:

- Bishop, Myrtle
- Dickerson, Marie
- Powell, William J., 1899-1942

Preferred Titles:

- Craftsmen Aero News (journal)*

Container Listing

Box 62 (Shared),
Folder 1

[Photographs, Late 1930s](#)