

# VERMONT HISTORY



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- Green Mountain Merinos: From New England to New South Wales in the Nineteenth Century
- Negotiating Community Values: The Franklin County Agricultural Society Premium Lists, 1844-1889
- Vermont as a Way of Life

*By Rebecca J. H. Wood*

*By Chris Burns*

*By Dona Brown*

**The Journal of the Vermont Historical Society**

# About the Cover Illustrations

## Robert “Bob” St. Jock Photographs

The daredevil courage of Vermont’s Bob St. Jock was legendary. This son of Vermont thrilled audiences across the nation with acrobatic maneuvers in the sky. In 1938, at the age of 28, he was being described as the outstanding stunt pilot in the East. Four years later his obituary recounted that “he became famed as one of Vermont’s outstanding contributions to the aviation profession and won renown in many fields.”

The Vermont Historical Society Library is fortunate to have two collections that document, in part, the brief but glorious career of Robert St. Jock Jr., of Morrisville. One item, a large scrapbook of newspaper clippings kept by St. Jock’s mother, was given to the library in 1981 by St. Jock’s long-time Morristown friend, Francis A. Clark. The second is seven folders of material on St. Jock and early Vermont aviation in Clark’s own files, given to the VHS by his family in 2013. The library also has an informal biography written by St. Jock’s friend Grace H. Pugh, the first woman pilot to be licensed in Vermont.

Bob St. Jock was born in Elmore in 1909, the son of Robert and Gertrude St. Jock. He graduated from People’s Academy in 1928 and went to Park Air College in St. Louis, where he learned to fly. After doing barnstorming in the South, St. Jock returned to Vermont and earned his transport pilot’s license (back cover) at the Vermont Aviation Corp. at the Barre-Montpelier Airport in 1930. For the next seven years he was an instructor at the Burlington airport and performed stunt flying in the area.

St. Jock combined his skills as showman with more practical uses of his aeronautical talents. In the 1930s the state’s ground transportation infrastructure was undeveloped and air travel was seen as having great potential for everyday transportation. As can be seen in the cover photograph, St. Jock (standing, right) flew for the Burlington Champlain Air Taxi Service, which provided air service to Plattsburgh, Westport, Lake Placid, Malone, and Albany, New York; Rutland and

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Burlington, Vermont; and Montréal, Québec. Other small air companies operated out of other local airports.

St. Jock's pilot's skills were heralded in an undated newspaper clipping in his mother's scrapbook. The newspaper reported, "Flying a Waco plane, owned by Manager Harold Pugh of Municipal airport, Robert St. Jock, pilot, is believed to have made record time in an emergency flight to the Newark, N.J., airport." St. Jock left Burlington at 10:00 P.M., carrying a student whose father was gravely ill to Newark in two hours. The student switched planes in Newark and arrived in Omaha, Nebraska, at 8:40 A.M. the next morning.

St. Jock and his father loved husky dogs. In 1936 the younger St. Jock brought two seven-dog teams to the Burlington Country Club and then to the Lodge on Mount Mansfield, where he and another handler gave rides. Many photos of the pilot show a dog by his side.

St. Jock moved to Bangor, Maine, in 1937 to work for the Dingley Air service and Maine Airways. He continued to participate in air meets across the country, as is documented by his mother's scrapbook. Air shows during the late 1930s were immensely popular events across the country, and St. Jock, billed variously as the "Mad Monk of Maine" and "The Houdini of the Air," was a big draw. In 1939 he won the New England championship and \$7,500 in prize money at the National Air Races in Cleveland, Ohio. The number of airshows in which he participated in 1940 is staggering: Miami; Winston-Salem, Salisbury, Fort Pierce, and Raleigh, North Carolina.; Atlanta; Cincinnati; Muskegon, Kalamazoo, and Saginaw, Michigan; Minneapolis; Sheldon, Iowa; Memphis; Toronto; and Richmond, Virginia. At Winston-Salem, the newspaper reported that "he held thousands breathless as he flew the length of Mille Field upside-down, less than 300 feet in the air with a wind that sometimes blew a gale." The *Muskegon Chronicle* on July 12, 1940, reported, "Lieut. Bob St. Jock is regarded by aviation experts as America's No. 1 up-side down flier. Among his specialties are the 'Square Loop and Bottle Neck Loop.' Show officials said no other stunt fliers have successfully perfected these two loops."

After World War II started, St. Jock trained bombers for the Royal Canadian Air Observers' School in Québec City, and then started flying for the United States Ferry Command to move goods and airplanes within the country and to Great Britain. In 1942 a recurrence of malaria that he had contracted early in his career in the South forced him to take a leave from the ferry service. However, he couldn't stay out of the sky and took up crop dusting. On August 19, 1942, his plane hit a power line in Arkansas and he was killed. His friend Francis Clark received the Western Union telegram asking him to notify St. Jock's fam-



ily. Robert St. Jock Jr., was 32 when he died; his funeral took place in Morrisville. The scrap book, items in the Francis A. Clark Papers, and Grace H. Pugh's biography are available for further study at the Vermont Historical Society's Leahy Library.

PAUL A. CARNAHAN, *Librarian*  
*Vermont Historical Society*

*Front cover: Robert St. Jock Jr. (standing, right) and three colleagues from the Burlington Champlain Air Taxi Service. Burlington, Vermont, ca. 1935.*

*Back cover: Robert St. Jock Jr.'s Aircraft Pilot's license, 1930.*

*Above: Robert St. Jock Jr. with his plane, a Stinson SM8-A, and his dog, "Tusko." Burlington, Vermont, ca. 1935.*



# VERMONT HISTORY

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1930

STATE OF VERMONT

No. 23

MOTOR VEHICLE DEPARTMENT.

## Aircraft Pilot's License for Operating

"<sup>TRANSPORT</sup>  
~~INDUSTRIAL~~" PILOT 9-4-30 287

This Certifies that ROBERT ST. JOCK, JR.

of MORRISVILLE VERMONT has this day been  
licensed to operate an aircraft of the above class, in this State,  
until midnight of December 31, 1930.

Age 20 Sex MALE Height 5'8" Weight 152 LBS

Color of Eyes GRAY Color of Hair BROWN

Dated JUNE 21st 1930.

*Chas. P. Peirce*  
Commissioner of Motor Vehicles.