

UPDATE – CURTISS SEAPLANE HOMECOMING
September 20, 2007



The Annual Curtiss Seaplane Homecoming was held in Hammondsport, NY on Keuka Lake, Sept 14 thru 16, 2007. The highlight of this three-day event was planned to be a feature flight of a reproduction of the Curtiss 1914 Flying Boat “America.” In 1914, the “America” was the world’s first multi-engine flying boat. Powered by Curtiss water-cooled, overhead valve, V-8 engines, it was designed to be capable of transatlantic flight.

For the past three years, the Curtiss Restoration Shop, located right on museum premises, has been building a flying reproduction of the “America.” Two OXX-6 100 hp Curtiss V-8 engines were being professionally reconditioned to power this seaplane. Additionally, the engines were being modified for counter rotating props, which would provide lift from the elevator. Unfortunately, time and resources did not allow these engines to be completed in time for the Seaplane Homecoming event. This left no other alternative than to use original 90 horsepower OX-5 engines, which were thought to be adequate.

Several flight attempts were made in the days prior to the Seaplane Homecoming. Although both engines started easily, it was just not possible to get the 90 year old engines running simultaneously at full power. A magneto failure in one of the engines caused an unexpected setback, at a time when both engines appeared to be running well.

Needless to say, the proud staff and volunteers of the Curtiss Museum and Curtiss Restoration Shop, many of whom had clocked hundreds of hours of time for “America” development were disappointed when the seaplane was simply not ready to fly. Despite this setback, the Museum put on a very entertaining Annual Seaplane Homecoming event, with a variety of special activities, which kept the air of excitement for visitors and guests. Activities included the starting of America’s engines, taxiing along the waterfront to provide photo opportunities, a Christening ceremony, an impressive seaplane fly-over, seaplane rides, and “Dining with Glenn” dinner.

The “America” has been disassembled, and moved to the museum floor for display. There will be plenty of time this winter to analyze what went right, what went wrong, and install the fully reconditioned OXX-6 engines in preparation for flight tests in 2008. Engine/propeller performance evaluation tests are also planned.

END

Jim Lally, Volunteer, Curtiss Restoration Shop