

January 1960

world's first scheduled airline

Hampton Dunn

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Recommended Citation

Dunn, Hampton, "world's first scheduled airline" (1960). *Hampton Dunn Phototouring Florida Collection*. 276.

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



THE WORLD'S FIRST SCHEDULED AIRLINE

By HAMPTON DUNN

TAMPA --- Alongside Hillsborough River near the west end of the Platt St. bridge an attractive marker dutifully records the site where the world's first scheduled airline had a terminal

On Jan. 1, 1914, Tony Jannus, star pilot for the Benoist Aircraft Co. of St. Louis, landed a Benoist airboat here after a history-making 23-minute flight from St. Petersburg. His passenger was A. C. Pheil of St. Petersburg, who paid \$400 for the privilege of being the "first" passenger on a scheduled airline. More than 3000 persons greeted the new mode of commercial transportation.

The St. Petersburg-Tampa Airboat Line, as it was known, continued on regular schedule but when the novelty wore off, interest in the line waned and it finally went out of existence in March, 1914. It had compiled a fine record of passenger flights. Jannus had never had an accident and had flown scores of Floridians across hundreds of miles of Florida. Jannus went to Russia for the Benoist firm during World War I and was killed Oct. 12, 1916, while making a test flight.

Formation of a permanent airline company was stopped by various factors including a new railroad into St. Petersburg, war in Mexico and Europe, money panics and the national preparedness effort. But the Tampa-St. Petersburg airline had made history.

One of the "firsts" by the enterprise was the first air express shipment on Jan. 12 when the Swift plant in Tampa sent a case of Swift Premium ham and bacon to a grocery company in St. Petersburg.

In 1964, on the 50th anniversary of the first commercial airline flight the Tampa Chamber of Commerce had built a replica of Jannus' plane to reenact the historic feat.

