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Bessie Pittman aka Jacqueline Cochran Female Aviation Phenomenon Formerly of DeFuniak Springs

By Sam Carnley

Bessie Lee, aka Jacqueline Cochran, was the youngest daughter of Ira and Molly (Mary) Ann Grant Pittman. When she was born depends on the source consulted. Reported places of her birth include Pensacola, Bear Head, DeFuniak Springs and Muscogee.

According to one source, Jacqueline Cochran was born in "Pensacola (some sources indicate she was born in DeFuniak Springs)." The same article states she was born 11 May 1906 in Muscogee. (WIKIPEDIA) According to familysearch.org's family tree webpage, she was born in Bear Head. For those unfamiliar with that place, it is or was located near Mossy Head. A bio posted on her Find A Grave memorial page identifies both Pensacola and DeFuniak Springs as her birthplace. Her memorial ID on that website is 7691192. To navigate to it on the Find A Grave website, click on memorials, then on # Memorial ID. That will take you to the memorial page for COL Jacqueline Pittman Cochran, buried at Coachella Valley Public Cemetery, Coachella, Riverside County, California.

An online look-up of Muscogee, Florida reveals its most "Notable Person" to be "Jackie Cochran, aviator, born in Muscogee in 1906." If you have never heard of Muscogee, Florida, you are probably not in the minority.

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Upcoming Reunions

HOBBS: The last known reunion was on 16 August 2009 at the Civic Center on Highway 83 in DeFuniak Springs. No current contact info. available.

THOMASON: They last met in August 2010 in Andalusia, Alabama. No current contact info. available.

INGALLS/WILDER: The last known reunion was on 26 September 2009 at the New Hope Community Center on Highway 163 north of Highway 2 in Westville. No current contact info. available.

BURGESS: The last reported reunion was on 4 September 2010, the Saturday before Labor Day, at the Darlington Baptist Church on Highway 2, west of Darlington. Contact Jerry Burgess at 850-956-4292 for info.

MONK: The last known reunion was 12 September 2009 at the Civic Center on Highway 83 in DeFuniak Springs. No current contact info. available.

KELLY: The last known reunion was on 17 October 2009 at the Indian Creek Baptist Church. No current contact info. available.

For a complete listing see the Reunions page at the following link:

<http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/genealogy.htm>

Walton County Heritage Museum

Open Tuesday – Saturday, 1:00 – 4:00 PM
1140 Circle Drive, De Funiak Springs, FL 32435
850-951-2127

<http://www.waltoncountyheritage.org/>

Bessie Pittman aka Jacqueline Cochran
Female Aviation Phenomenon
Formerly of DeFuniak Springs

By Sam Carnley

(Cont'd from page 1)

According to WIKIPEDIA:

Muscogee, is a ghost town located twenty miles northwest of Pensacola, Florida, in Escambia County, along the Perdido River, United States. Named after the Muscogee Lumber Company, formed by Georgia lumber men, the European-American town was founded in 1857 by a group of lumbermen to harvest timber from the surrounding pine forests. They and the following company clear-cut the timber, and once the forests were gone, lumbering ended in this area . . .



Bessie's father, Ira, worked at the Muscogee Lumber Mill around the time she was born. As of 1900 he appeared in the U. S. census as a resident of Sibleys Mill, Halmons, Baldwin County, Alabama. Sibleys Mill, an Alabama ghost town, was a predecessor of present day Bay Minette, in Baldwin County, located about 30 miles west of the Muscogee site. The precise location of Sibleys is unknown, but it may have been closer to the Muscogee area than Bay Minette now is.

Ira was identified on the census as Orrie Pittman, making it difficult to find him on the census by his correct name. The names of other members of his family, however, confirmed Orrie's household as that of Ira.

Ira's oldest son, Joseph E. registered for the WWI draft in 1917 and on his registration card he gave Gateswood, Ala. as his birth place in 1894. Gateswood, which still exists, is located in Baldwin County and is less than 10 miles from Muscogee. Joseph lived in Millville, Bay County, Florida at the time he registered for the draft. Ira's second son, Henry, however, gave Knoxville, Alabama as his place of birth in 1896 when he registered for the WWI draft in 1918. Knoxville is in Green County, located in the middle part of the state near the Mississippi line, hundreds of miles north of Muscogee. He identified his father Ira as his nearest relative, also a resident of Millville.

As of the 1910 census, Ira lived in Pine Barren, Escambia County, Florida. On that census he was identified as Ira Pitimon, once again making the search for him a challenge. That was the first record in which Bessie appeared. Identified as Ira's daughter, she was 4 years old (estimated) and was born in Florida. The census enumeration date was 29 April 1910, which indicates Bessie's actual age was 3 years and 11 months. Pine Barren is within 10 miles of Muscogee.

Sometime after 1910 Ira left Pine Barren and eventually relocated to Millville, Florida, where he was in 1918 as indicated by the draft registration card of his son Henry. In 1920, he is found in Paxton, Florida where he appears on that year's U. S. census at the age of 54, with no occupation. In addition to himself, members of his household were his wife, Mollie, age 47, and daughter Bessie, age 16

(estimated). The date on the census return was 3 January 1920 at which time Bessie was actually 13 years and 8 months old, and did not turn 14 until the following May 11th.

Ira died 29 May 1928 in DeFuniak Springs and was buried the next day at Magnolia Cemetery. According to his Florida Death record he died of pneumonia with a contributory cause of arteriosclerosis or hardening of the arteries. That document stated that he was born in Mobile County, Alabama, that his father was Jack Pittman, born in Baldwin County, Alabama, and his mother was Elsie Sinclair, birth year and place not stated. Ira's birthplace of Alabama contradicts that shown on his familysearch.org family search website which gives it as DeFuniak Springs. The censuses of 1800, 1810 and 1820, the only ones on which he was found in the research for this article, also showed Alabama as his birthplace. Ira's memorial ID at Magnolia Cemetery is 81530140 and that of his wife, Mollie, who also rests there is 81530370.

The places of Ira's residence on the 1900 and 1910 censuses seem to support Muscogee as Bessie's birthplace, and a document dated 1925 containing information provided by Bessie's older brother, Joseph, confirms she was born there. More on this document will follow. In her autobiography, Bessie herself indirectly confirms Muscogee as her birthplace. She wrote that a tract of land where they once lived was near the town of Muscogee, and that same tract was near the town of her birth. The tract she was referring to was probably in Pine Barren where they lived in 1910 when Bessie was less than four years old.

Twenty-five years later when Bessie aka Jackie was 29 years old, she owned a ranch in California. She was often quoted as saying she was an orphan with no knowledge of when and where she was born, and knew nothing of her family. But she in fact, knew very well who they were and when she decided to build a house on her ranch about 1934-35 she enlisted the assistance of her brother Joseph and brothers-in-law, Jesse Hyde and Willaim Alford in its construction. Living in Walton County at the time, they drove a truck, bought by Jackie in the local area, to her ranch in California. She later rented a train car to bring her sisters, their children and their household furnishings from the DeFuniak Springs depot, now the Walton County Heritage Museum, to California where they resided the rest of their lives.

Her two older sisters were Mamie (1899-1971) and Mrytle (1902-1980). Mamie Alberta was b. in Escambia, County, Florida, probably in Muscogee, and d. in California. She was buried at Oak Hill Memorial Park, Escondido, San diego County. She married Jesse N. Hyde (1894-1970), ca 1916-17. He was born in Geneva County, Alabama and also died in California. He is buried next to Mamie. Their memorial IDs are 15192937 and 15192928, respectively.

Myrtle Mable was born, according to FamilySearch Family Tree, in Westbay, Bay County, Florida. But it is more likely she too was born in Muscogee. She died 7 August 1980 in California and her place of burial is unknown. She married William R. Alford (1893-1973) on 20 May 1917 in Bay County, Florida. He was born in Samson, Geneva County, Alabama and died in Blyth, Riverside County, California. He is buried at Palo Verde Cemetery. Possibly, Myrtle is buried there also in an unmarked grave. Memorial IDs are (Myrtle) 140052803 and (Jesse) 36981019.

Both of the sisters' families resided in Coachella, California, the location of Jacqueline's ranch, as of the 1940 U. S. census. Jesse Hyde was 45 years old and worked as a farm laborer. Mamie was 40 and a housewife. Their children were Ralph, 17, born in Florida; Lloyd, 12, born in Florida; and Jerry, 2, born in California. They also had a son, Ira Sydney, born 19 September 1917 and died 8 January 1918, in Millville, Florida.

Will Alford was 47 and also worked as a farm laborer. Myrtle, 37, did not work outside the home. Children were Wanell, son, 15, born in Florida; Jimmie, 10, born in Alabama; Joyce, 3, born in California and Floyd, born in California.

Bessie's two brothers, Joseph and Henry, remained in Florida. Joseph Edward, Sr. (1894-1972) lived in DeFuniak Springs, to which he returned after helping Jackie build her house. He later moved to Marianna, Florida and remained there until his death. He is buried at Riverside Cemetery in Marianna, memorial ID 105252193. Henry B. (1896-1930) lived in Walton County and is buried in Magnolia Cemetery, memorial ID 62922601.

During the time Bessie and her parents lived in Paxton in 1920, she married Robert H. Cochran, of Noma, Holmes County, Florida. After marrying they lived for a time in Pensacola where their son, Robert Jr. was born on 28 February 1921. According to family sources, they married in Blakley, Georgia on 13 November 1920 when Bessie was 14 years and six months old. (Ayers) The arrival of their child less than four months later suggests he was conceived out of wedlock, unless he was premature, which is not indicated in any of the books written about her. She would have been 2 months and a few days shy of her 15th birthday at the time of his delivery. In DeFuniak Springs on 29 May 1925, at about 1:30 pm, her four year-old son while playing alone in the backyard of a home found some matches and accidentally set his clothes on fire, burning himself to death. The cause of death on his Florida death certificate was "Fire Burned (accidental), no burning bldg. involved." Contributory cause was "Shock." The informant providing the information on the certificate dated 5/29/1925 was J. E. Pittman, Bessie's brother, Joseph E., who lived in DeFuniak Springs at the time. He identified the child's mother as Bessie Pittman, whose birthplace was "Moscooga," (Muscogee) Florida. The child was interred in Magnolia Cemetery, the first of his family buried there. His memorial ID is 81530123.

Following the loss of their child, Bessie and Robert divorced. Deciding to keep the name Cochran rather than her maiden name which she despised, she then set out on a course that would take her to heights, literally and figuratively, she probably never dreamed of. A number of books have been written about her, several of which were consulted in the research for this article. The first was "The Stars at Noon," Cochran's own autobiography, published 1954 (hereafter: Cochran); second was "Jackie Cochran: The Autobiography of the Greatest Woman Pilot in Aviation History," written in 1987 by Maryann Bucknum Brinley (hereafter: Brinley). Third was "Superwoman, Jacqueline Cochran," by Cochran's niece, Billie Pittman Ayers and co-author, Beth Dees, published 2001 (hereafter: Ayers). "Jackie Cochran, Pilot in the Fastest Lane," by Doris L. Rich, published 2007 was fourth (hereafter: Rich); and fifth was "Jacqueline Cochran, Biography of a Pioneer Aviator," written by Rhonda Smith-Daugherty in 2012 (hereafter: Daugherty).

The books of Brinley and Daugherty are essentially reprints of Cochran's autobiography whereas those of Ayres and Rich differ in some significant respects with Cochran. As Brinley and Daugherty for all intents and purposes duplicated Cochran, references to their works are minimal. Ayers and Rich's books on the other hand were compared and contrasted with Cochran's in an attempt to clarify some of the more puzzling aspects of her writing. The tone of her story regarding her early life is set by the first page in which she writes:

I am a refugee from Sawdust Road, which is located in the South close by Tobacco Road of theater and movie fame.

Until I was eight years old, I had no shoes. My bed was usually a pallet on the floor and sometimes just the floor. Food at best consisted of the barest essentials -- sometimes nothing except what I foraged for myself in the woods or in the waters of the nearby bayou or the running "branch." Mullet and beans were the staples with a bit of sowbelly added when we

were in clover, with some black-eyed peas thrown in if and when we were on the crest. No butter, no sugar. My dresses in the first seven years of life were usually made from cast-off flour sacks.

That was my life in the sawmill towns of northern Florida when I should have had toys and been getting schooling. It was bleak and bitter and harsh. But it taught me independence and the necessity of fending for myself. Particularly did I grow independent when at the age of six I overheard, by chance, a conversation in which "Mama" was engaged with another woman which disclosed to me the secret that I was not one of the family, but by a promise made, I was never to know this. "Mama" was slovenly and lazy and her meanness varied from a normal high, when things were going well, to feverishly high pitch, when we were on half-rations -- which was most of the time. The knowledge that I did not belong to her gave me a sense of happiness and exhilaration.

In her book, Billie Pittman Ayers writes that Cochran's reference to Sawdust road came from the practice of spreading sawdust on sandy or muddy mill town roads to make them more easily traveled. In cutting hundreds of thousands of pine logs into tens of millions of board feet of lumber, sawmills created mountains of the dust and putting it on the roads was a good way of disposing of it. Tobacco Road, of course, is Erskine Caldwell's 1932 novel about a hopelessly destitute Georgia family who Cochran saw as analogous to her family, but in the real world, they would have looked upon the Pittmans as rich.

Ayers contradicts Cochran's claims of severe privation. She says the Pittmans, like most other sawmill families were poor, but had gardens and chickens which provided them with sufficient food and sometimes enough to share with those less fortunate than themselves. Those circumstances generally describe the lives of the majority of rural families in south Alabama and the Florida panhandle during that era. As a skilled millwright, the income of Cochran's father Ira, was a little better than that of the average mill worker, enabling him to support his family. Cochran's complaint of having no shoes does not necessarily mean the family couldn't afford them. Virtually all rural children then went barefooted well into their teens, not always out of necessity, but of custom.

REPUBLICA DOS ESTADOS UNIDOS DO BRASIL
FICHA CONSULAR DE QUALIFICAÇÃO

MODELO S.C. 139
2ª VIA 418 193

Esta ficha, expedida em duas vias, será entregue à Polícia Marítima e à Imigração no porto de destino

Nome por extenso Jacqueline Cochran Odium
Admitido em território nacional em caráter Temporario
(temporário ou permanente)

Nos termos do art. 7º letra a do dec. n. 7967 de 1945
Lugar e data de nascimento EUA. 11 / 5 / 1906
Nacionalidade americana Estado civil casada
Filiação (nome do Pai e da Mãe) Ira e Molly Profissão comercio
Residência no país de origem Indio, California

FILHOS MENORES DE 18 ANOS

Passaporte n. 2534 expedido pelas autoridades de Dep.to. de Estado Washington na data 19 março 1953
visado sob n. 1515

ASSINATURA DO PORTADOR:
Jacqueline Cochran Odium

Consulado Geral do Brasil em NOVA YORK
O CONSUL:
17 de março de 19 54
Jose Carlos Linhares
Consul Adjunto

NOTA—Esta ficha deve ser preenchida à máquina pela autoridade consular, sendo as duas vias em original

Cochran's mother, Molly, kept a record of the births of all her children in her Bible. According to Ayers, the paper containing those births ended up in the Bible of her mother and it showed Molly delivered a baby girl on 11 May 1906 whom she christened Bessie Lee. Cochran herself was in possession of a document also showing that as her date of birth. It is a visa she obtained when she traveled to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1954. It gives her birthdate as 11/5/1906, proving beyond a doubt that she knew her birthdate. As proof the date is not misinterpreted, two other dates on the visa show that the formatting is in the order of day/month/year, with the month actually spelled out rather shown as a

Figure 1: Shown above is the Brazilian visa Jackie obtained in 1954 during her trip to Rio de Janeiro in which she lists her birthdate as 11 May 1906.

number. (Figure 1, above)

Ayers attributes Cochran's harsh view of her mother to the fact that the two of them were very alike personality-wise. Cochran's independent, willful, rebellious nature clashed with similar traits in her mother. Everything the mother was determined that her daughter was going to do, the daughter was equally determined that she was not going to do and more often than not the mother relented and the daughter won.

Going to school was an example. As noted on the first page of her book Cochran is critical of her [not] "getting schooling" in the sawmill towns where they lived. She writes that she first started to school in Bagdad, Florida, when she was six. She went for a few days until the teacher tried to whip her. The teacher struck her once, but before she could do it again, Cochran struck back and ran from the room and never returned that year because no one made her, not even her parents. As Ayers tells it, Molly took Bessie to school each morning and left her, but by the time she got back home Bessie would already be there. Mollie finally gave up trying to get her daughter to stay in school, with the result that the child spent her days roaming through the woods.

In further elaborating on the whipping incident, Cochran writes that she thought the teacher tried to whip her because she was poor with nothing nicer to wear [than a flour sack dress], but that she would stand her ground against anyone who tried to whip her regardless of why. On another occasion, her brother was sick with a high fever. Her mother sent her to the store for some ice to help cool him down. But even though she did her best, she could not get back home with the ice before it melted, whereupon Molly was about to whip her. In defiance, she threatened her mother with a piece of stove wood, writing "we talked things out with my eyes flashing fire." Her mother took her daughter seriously and backed down, never to touch her again. Her mother was a coward, Cochran writes, for letting a six-year old get the best of her.

Contrary to Cochran's claim that her mother was slovenly and lazy, Ayers writes that she was a responsible woman with good organizing abilities. She ran several boarding houses, including one in Pensacola and another in Paxton at the time they lived there in 1920. As to her being mean as Cochran alleged, Ayers conceded Molly could be domineering and insistent with a very short fuse. And that was the side of her mother that Cochran saw, probably more frequently than the other children, because she was the one who pushed her button the most often. Even though she sometimes became angry with Bessie, Molly loved her dearly and did everything she could to help her.

In telling of the family's movements in north-west Florida and south Alabama, Cochran identified Samson, Bagdad, Millville and Panama City as the places they had lived by the time she was eight years old. Omitted were Muscogee and Pine Barren, which Cochran did not remember due to her young age at the time her family lived in those places. Her first recollections apparently were of Bagdad where the family lived after Pine Barren.

According to Cochran, she went to work at age seven in Bagdad, which would have been about 3 years after leaving Pine Barren, or about 1913. Ayers places it as 1912, and states that Ira worked at the Bagdad Land and Lumber Company mill located there at the time. Seven year-old Bessie's job at Bagdad involved waiting on expectant mothers of mill town families and cooking, cleaning and babysitting their children for which she received a dime a day.

Ayers writes that Millville in Bay County, Florida was the destination after Bagdad. They were there in 1915, she writes and it was where Bessie's older brother Joseph met and married his wife.

Cochran differs with Ayers though on where she was in 1915. She maintains that about the time she turned eight, which was 1914, the family went from Millville to Columbus, Georgia where they had heard entire families could get work in the town's textile mills. Traveling there by train, Bessie, at

least, went to work in one of the mills. Writing nothing about the activities of other family members while there, Cochran only recounts the details of her work.

In Cochran's version, she worked at the mill for two years after which she left due to an extended labor union strike. She then went to work at a local beauty shop for two years learning the fundamentals of the trade. Later leaving that job, she worked for a time at a department store salon in Montgomery, Alabama.

Ayers says nothing about the family going to Columbus to work in the textile mills or that Bessie ever worked in Montgomery, Alabama. She indicates the family lived in Millville in 1915 and was where they remained in 1917-18 as documented by the Pittman boys' WWI draft cards.

But Cochran writes that her parents returned to Florida and left her in Columbus with the family of a Jewish lady who operated a beauty shop. It was that shop she left after two years to take the job in Montgomery. Her stay in Montgomery, she writes, allowed her to gain experience as a beautician and instilled in her the desire to establish herself as a professional cosmetologist. "She earned money, learned to dance, dressed in stylish clothes, bought a Model T. Ford and dated young college men."

As Ayers tells it, the family moved from Millville to Paxton, where they and Bessie were in 1920. Later the same year, after Bessie married and left home, her parents moved to Lakewood where Ira worked at the Britton Lumber Company Mill until it was destroyed by fire. Moving to DeFuniak Springs after that, Ira, Joseph and Henry found work at the W. B. Harbeson Lumber Mill.

According to Cochran, at the urging of a friend in Montgomery to give up cosmetology and go to nursing school she enrolled in the three year nursing program at a Montgomery hospital and completed it but failed to graduate. Disheartened by that failure, she returned to Florida "13 years after leaving it," which would have been about 1927. Deciding to put her nurse's training to use, although unlicensed, she went to work for a doctor who provided medical services to the poor people of Bonifay, Florida. But soon becoming disillusioned with that job, she abandoned nursing and returned to cosmetology.

If she knew about the nursing episode of Cochran's life, Ayers does not mention it in her book. According to her, after marrying Robert Cochran, who was ten years Bessie's senior, they moved to Miami where they lived until Bessie learned her husband was cheating on her. Leaving him and returning to DeFuniak Springs with her son sometime before 1925, she remained there for a time during which she gained the reputation as a rebellious, daringly liberated, attractive young woman.

Presenting herself in the style of dress and personal appearance of the modern young woman seen in glamor magazines of the day, she stood out from the crowd in staid old DeFuniak Springs. She smoked, which was unusual for a woman to be seen doing in the town, and was rumored as having an affair with a married local business man, who allegedly gave her the cash to buy a "little red roadster." (Ayers) Purchasing it from the local Ford dealer, it was probably the Model T. Ford Cochran claimed she bought in Montgomery, Alabama.

No doubt enjoying the attention the residents of the town lavished on her, especially the men but much less the women, it suddenly shrank in importance with the death of her son. His loss left her in a months-long state of depression which she could not shake as long as she remained in DeFuniak Springs. A little over a year after burying her son, she filed for and was granted a divorce from her husband on the grounds of adultery -- his, not hers. The divorce records however, could not be found in the courthouse. (Ayers)

About 1927, when she was 20 years old, she left DeFuniak Springs and moved to Mobile to live with her mother's sister and her family. Undergoing training as a beautician, she worked for a time in Mobile and later in Pensacola. It was while living in Pensacola that she finally seemed to shed the last vestiges of her depression. The Naval Air Station located there with its hundreds of available young bachelors helped immensely in raising her spirits. After taking lessons, she demonstrated her dancing skills at the many dances sponsored by the Naval Air Station where she was often seen in the company of various young naval airmen. (Ayers) The dancing lessons she took and the young men she dated in Pensacola are reminiscent of events Cochran attributed to Montgomery. One of the young airmen she met in Pensacola was Ted Marshall, who would play a crucial role in her future aviation career.

In her autobiography, Cochran completely omits the fact that she married and had a child before she was fifteen years old and mentions nothing about the time she spent in DeFuniak Springs from 1925 to 1927, including how she came by the name Cochran. She writes that after leaving the nursing position with the doctor in Bonifay, she went directly to Pensacola and went to work in a beauty shop.

An alternate version of events in Bessie's life is given by Doris Rich in her biography of Cochran. She writes that Bessie, after her parents left her in Columbus, Georgia had a "liaison," with Robert H. Cochran and wound up pregnant before she was 14. Instead of going from Columbus to work in Montgomery as she claimed in her autobiography, she went to her parents' home in Paxton where she was in 1920. She married Cochran to give legitimacy to her child and soon after his birth, she left him with her parents in DeFuniak Springs and headed to Montgomery for the job she had her sights set on before unintended consequences intervened. That was when the events involving the beauty shop work, buying the car, taking dancing lessons, the nursing school, and finally the return to Bonifay as a nurse supposedly took place, and only after that did she go to Pensacola to work as she claimed in her autobiography.

Rich also tells a different story about Cochran's divorce. She writes that Robert Cochran initiated it by accusing Bessie of adultery. It did not happen in DeFuniak Springs as might be assumed from what Ayers wrote about the events of Bessie's life while she was there, but allegedly while she was in nursing school in Montgomery. Bessie did not contest it and the divorce was granted February 25, 1927 in Montgomery. Rich cited her sources as Interrogatory submitted to Circuit Court of Montgomery County, Ala. (in Equity), January Term, 1926, in case of R. H. Cochran vs. Bessie Cochran, and Divorce Decree, State of Alabama, Montgomery County. Department of Archives and History ADAH Divorce index A-R.

Robert Cochran, whose middle initial, H., stood for Harvey, was born 24 June 1895 in Alabama and died 30 December 1958 in Montgomery, Alabama. Buried in the City's Greenwood Cemetery, his memorial ID is 186881245. On 10 April 1927, shortly after his divorce from Bessie was finalized, he married Odell Smith in Autauga, Alabama. Robert's parents were Andrew Jackson and Frances Newell Cochran, who resided in Noma, Holmes County, Florida as of 1910 when Robert was fourteen years old. In her book, Doris Rich writes that he was a salesman, and she also writes that Bessie knew an unidentified beauty supply salesman in Columbus, Georgia where she lived when she became pregnant. Rich does not however, suggest he was the unidentified salesman. In today's world, a 25 year-old man who impregnates a 13 year-old girl would go to jail.

After the foregoing three different versions of Bessie's early life find her in Pensacola, they merge essentially into the same story thereafter. Leaving Pensacola by about 1929, initially in pursuit of furthering her career, but ultimately for the "excitement and bright lights," Bessie had made her way to New York City, whose lights were the brightest of all. Around that time, she began calling herself Jackie. Ayers writes it was that name she picked out of a phone book, not Cochran as other writers

maintained. Absent disclosure in her writing, Cochran herself never explained how she came by either of her names.

In New York, she became a hair dresser in the Saks Fifth Avenue salon of Antoni Cierplikowski, reputedly the most fashionable hair salon in America. Before coming to America, he established his first salon, Antoine de Paris, in the French city of that name and became known as Monsieur Antoine. Having become highly competent in her work and knowledgeable in the latest hair styling techniques, Jackie impressed the salon management with her talent, poise and looks, easily landing the job, even with her southern accent. (Ayers) Regarding her accent, Cochran reveals in her autobiography that the only song she ever sang was one she learned as a child and only sang it in a fine southern hillbilly accent, which except for the song, "has left my tongue," but apparently not when she first arrived in New York.

According to Rich, Jackie walked into the salon as a shapely blond "knockout" smartly dressed in the latest fashion of the day. Stopping at the desk of the receptionist who greeted her with a smile, Jackie told her why she was there. On hearing her Florida panhandle drawl, the receptionist suddenly lost her smile, probably stifling the urge to laugh. But just as Molly had once wilted under the fiery gaze of her six year old daughter's eyes so did the receptionist as she looked into those same eyes of the grown up Jackie. Wisely not risking any condescending mockery of Jackie's speech, as northerners are wont to do, the receptionist ushered her into the boss' office, and the rest is history.

Although she credits winning the job to her bravado, it is possible she also had a little help from a secret friend that she never admitted to. On the 1930 U. S. census of Manhattan, New York City, a Jacqueline Cochran is listed as a lodger in a private rooming house. Her age is 24 with an estimated birth year of 1906 and birth place of Florida. Marital status is married and listed next to her is a Charles Cochran, age 30, born in France, occupation is restaurant proprietor and he is also married. Jackie's first residence on arriving in New York, coincidentally, was a room she rented in the back of a restaurant. Could this be a different person whose name, age, birth year and place are coincidentally the same as those of Bessie Pittman Cochran, or could it be Bessie who had a third marriage to a man with a last name coincidentally the same as hers that no one knew about?

The fact that he was a French restaurateur suggests the possibility of a connection with the operators of a salon owned by a man who also owned salons in France. Antoine was Polish, but he likely employed French hair stylists in his New York shop that would naturally gravitate to a nearby restaurant run by a fellow Frenchman. Conceivably, Jackie could have been married to him and through his acquaintance with Antoine's, got the job, after which they divorced. Another possible scenario is that they simply lived together unmarried, leaving people to assume otherwise because they shared the same last name. In view of Bessie's history, such an arrangement would not be out of character for her, and neither would her obfuscation in writing, or not writing about it as Jacqueline Cochran.

If the person on the census was indeed Jackie, which seems likely, then that was the first public record in which she appeared with the name she made famous.

She flourished at Antoine's in New York and in the winter she went south to Miami to work in his salons there. It was a part of Florida unknown to her mill town life in the panhandle and it dazzled her. She began attending parties to which female clients of the salon invited her. At one of them she met Floyd Bostwick Odlum, a wealthy New York Financier. He was married and had two sons, but he and his wife were separated. When he and Jackie met, their attraction to each other was almost instantaneous. After Jackie confided in him about her dream of starting her own cosmetics company

and traveling the country to promote and sell her products, he told her she needed wings to cover that much territory quickly and should get a pilot's license. (Rich)

On returning to New York, she took his advice and enrolled in a pilot training program at Roosevelt Field. After a short introductory flight she was hooked, and knew that becoming a pilot was her future. Twenty hours of flying time were required to complete the program and it took most people two to three months to accomplish it. But Jackie, impatient to get her new career started, needed to compress the time into the three weeks of vacation she had taken from the salon. No one, including Floyd Odium and her flight instructor, believed she could do it that quickly. Taking their doubts as a challenge, she committed herself to a grueling routine of nothing but flying and studying for seventeen days, at the end of which she successfully passed the required flying test. A short time later, with the assistance of a friend in helping her study for it, she passed the written examination and received her private license on 17 August 1932 at the age of 26. (Rich)

But that was just the beginning. The more she learned about the world of aviation and how few women were in it, the more she realized that if she wanted to be a part of it she needed to advance to the next level of a transport license and the training it entailed. New York, however, due to its frequently inclement weather unfavorable to flying, was not the place for a woman of Jackie's limited patience to get the flying and training time needed for transitioning to that license. (Rich)

California's weather, she learned, offered friendlier year-round flying conditions and that is where she headed. Resigning from the salon, she took a week driving from New York to a flying school in San Diego. But the school, like New York weather, proved unsuitable to the impatient Jackie. Near the flying school was the base where the Navy operated its advanced pilot training program. Becoming increasingly unhappy with the flying school, Jackie visited the base and was delighted to find there a number of the student pilots she had known from the naval base in Pensacola. Among them was Ted Marshall, whom had by then advanced to a much higher ranking officer. Following her reunion with old friends were invitations to parties and dances on the battle ship to which they were assigned. On those occasions, Jackie, as a pilot herself, joined her military counterparts in discussions about aviation. Once when she was alone with Marshall, she deployed a tactic from her bag of feminine wiles by shedding tears to him about her disappointing progress at the flying school. The ruse having its intended effect, Marshall told her that if she could buy her own plane he would, in his off duty time, teach her to fly using the Navy's rigorous methods for training its pilots. (Rich)

"Hope springs eternal," wrote Alexander Pope, and that was the effect of Marshall's words on Jackie. With her dream of an expedited aviation career newly rejuvenated, she went out and bought her first plane, an old trainer, for which she paid a little over a thousand dollars. With the help of Marshall and one or two others, and after surviving numerous breakdowns, crash landings and countless other temporary setbacks, she finally received her limited commercial license.

That raised her another rung in the climb to her goal of a transport license but still fell just short of it. To fully qualify for the license required flight time in a commercial aircraft. Following the precedent set in obtaining her trainer plane, she purchased a plane of the type needed for the license. Her first new aircraft, Rich writes it was a Waco four seater with enclosed cabin. Classified as commercial, its engine had more than two hundred horse power and its fuselage was painted green with orange trim. It cost \$3,200.00 which according to Rich, Jackie raised by selling her old trainer and her car. She sold the old plane before leaving California, and bought the new one in New York, after driving back from California and selling the car. (Rich)

Whether a worn out old WWI era airplane and a car, which even if bought new probably cost less than a thousand dollars, would have netted over three thousand dollars, especially in the midst of the Great

Depression, is highly doubtful. At this point the astute reader is probably wondering where an out-of-work hair stylist got the money to pay for the many expensive activities she was involved in after quitting her job and driving to California to get aviation training, not to mention the twenty acres of land she bought in Coachella Valley, California before returning to New York. The answer is that it was funded by Floyd Odlum -- millionaire sugar daddy.

The "liaison," as biographer Doris Rich put it, with Robert Cochran may have been Jackie's first, but with others, far from the last. Her affair with Odlum began when they met in Miami in 1932 and continued until their marriage on her thirtieth birthday, 11 May 1936. Odlum's wife divorced him in 1935, but on grounds of cruelty. He had been so discreet in his affair with Cochran that his former wife never knew about it.

Odlum, in fact, became Cochran's almost exclusive benefactor after she left her job as a beautician at the Saks Fifth Avenue salon. Everything she did after that, including her living expenses and the financing of her flying exploits were possible only through Odlum's financial support. The only exceptions were the occasional prizes she won in flying competitions. In pursuing those competitions, she purchased several very expensive airplanes, again during a time when she was unemployed, leading to the obvious conclusion that someone, most likely Odlum, was financially supporting her. When Jackie started her cosmetics company, Rich writes that "Floyd probably provided most of the capital for the new firm . . ." He in fact, provided all of it because Jackie still had no source of income other than him. The Collins on-line dictionary defines a woman who uses her sexual attractions to accumulate gifts or wealth or advance her social position as a "gold-digger." Jacqueline Cochran fit that definition to a tee.

After purchasing her Waco airplane, Jackie flew it to DeFuniak Springs, setting down on an old dirt and grass strip east of town called "blueberry hill." (Ayers) She brought with her gifts for the entire family. For the mother she called slovenly, lazy and mean in her autobiography, and often publicly denied knowing, she brought an entire new wardrobe. Years later, even after her widowed mother had remarried, Jackie sent her monthly checks to pay for the hotel room where she sometimes stayed for months on end in DeFuniak Springs. On later flights home, Jackie brought her mother more new clothes. Once she even brought her a very expensive chinchilla fur coat. Jackie's fly-ins became a sensation in DeFuniak Springs, drawing crowds to the airstrip to watch her land and exit from the plane, dressed in all-white goggled leather aviators' helmet, blouse, scarf and jodhpurs, looking like a movie star. (Ayers)

Jackie's visits with her family generally brought happy feelings, but sometimes not. Her brother Joseph was a good and dependable provider for his family, but during times when work was hard to come by, his family struggled financially. Finding themselves in that situation during one of Jackie's visits, she made them an offer meant with

NEW YORK WOMAN IN BIG AIR RACE



K. G. Stoddard, London; Airspeed Courier, Cherab V.
 16.—Charles Melrose, Glenelg, South Australia; De Havilland Moth, Gipsy.

Jacqueline Cochran of New York is disappointed because she will be unable to fly the Northrop originally entered, as her co-pilot, Wesley Smith, has only flown their Granville for several hours and it is, therefore, an unknown quantity to them. Miss Cochran, however, declared Smith was one of the best pilots in the world and also praised Roy Leonard, who will be waiting in Allahabad to replace Smith for the remainder of the race.

PLANNED SOLO FLIGHT TO U. S.
 Another reason why Miss Cochran regretted not using the Northrop was that she had planned a surprise return to the United States by a solo flight from Australia. She has now abandoned the idea. She will do half the flying and handle the radio, while her co-pilot will do the navigating.

Miss Cochran arrived at the airrome here today in smart, completely feminine attire, in contrast with when she first came in flying costume.

At present a high northwesterly wind of 50 miles an hour is reported 10,000 feet over Europe and is expected to continue for 48 hours, giving the airman the advantage of a greater speed range, possibly exceeding their original estimates.

Competitors not familiar with the route tonight received a first hand picture of the conditions they will encounter when they witnessed a film recently made along the course by the flier Roy Tuckett. Several times he was forced to fly at a great altitude to avoid severe sandstorms in Persia, and Indian monsoons.

Elaborate arrangements have been made to start the machines at 45-second intervals. Even if there is any mishap, the other planes will adhere to the schedule.

(Copyright, 1934, N. Y. Times-Boston Herald)

(Photo by Wide World)
 Jacqueline Cochran, who has set up her own air service station at Port Darwin Australia. Equipment includes shower bath.

Figure 2. Jacqueline Cochran in her all white flying attire. Boston Herald Friday, Oct. 19, 1934, Boston, MA, p. 15, downloaded from Genealogybank.com, and edited by Sam Carnley, 6/28/2018.

good intentions to be helpful, but received as an insult to their pride. To help reduce the burdens on the family, she offered to adopt Joseph's daughter Billie, age 5, and future author of a book about her aunt Jackie. Such an outlandish idea did not sit well with Joseph, leaving him quite angry. Jackie quickly apologized and as a conciliatory gesture, gave him an autographed photo of herself in her flying togs. (Ayers)

Joseph did however, allow Jackie to fly his older daughter, Gwendoline, back to California with her on a visit in 1933. Ayers includes Gwendoline's story about it in her book. A cross-country flight in that period of aviation infancy could be dangerous, as an emergency landing in a Utah farmer's field proved. Jackie was forced to land when she encountered freakish weather conditions near some mountains. On landing, the plane rolled into an irrigation ditch causing it to pitch over on its nose and break off a wing. Jackie and Gwendoline were not injured, but they had to interrupt the trip for a while to get the plane fixed, which an airplane mechanic did on site. When the repairs were done, Jackie flew the plane off the same field without further damaging it.

Somewhere along the way, Jackie landed and picked up Floyd Odlum. The three of them then flew to Agua Caliente, in Tijuana, Mexico, and from there to San Diego, California. A "Master List" of passengers on the plane prepared at the airport by the U. S. Immigration Service identified them as Cochran, Jacqueline, age 27, female, nationality U. S., destination, 40 East 10, New York; Pittman, Gwendoline, age 12, female, nationality U. S., destination, DeFuniak Springs, Fla. and Odlum, Floyd, age 41, male, nationality U. S., destination, 30 Pine St. New York. The document was dated 9-10-33. They later flew to New York and from there, Jackie sent Gwendoline back to DeFuniak Springs on the train.

In relating the story of Gwendoline's travels, Ayers writes of a touching event Gwendoline told about Jackie when she arrived in DeFuniak Springs to pick up her niece for the trip:

One other memory from that trip with Aunt Jackie stands out in Gwen's mind. "It was the year Aunt Jackie came to DeFuniak Springs to take me with her to California. One day we went to the cemetery to visit the grave of her son Robert Cochran, Jr. I remember her stooping down over the grave, crying pitifully. She stood up, said 'If only he had lived, my life would be so different,' and then ran off into a wooded area. My daddy ran after her and with his arms around her brought her back to the gravesite. We got back in the cars and left."

The pain her son's death brought her and the desire to blot it from her mind were what many writers speculate as the reason she omitted her marriage to his father and his death from her autobiography. Only she knew the answer to that and why she chose to publicly deny her family while at the same time seeming to feel a deep need for them in her life as evidenced by her frequent visits and generosity to them and concern for their welfare. As conflicted as she seems to have been emotionally and mentally about her early life, she was able to rise above it and become the extraordinary person she was in accomplishing many aviation firsts, not only among women, but among men as well. Unlike the muddled and contradictory stories of her beginnings, on which this article focuses, her aviation accomplishments are a matter of public record readily available to those interested in learning about them.



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2018

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