

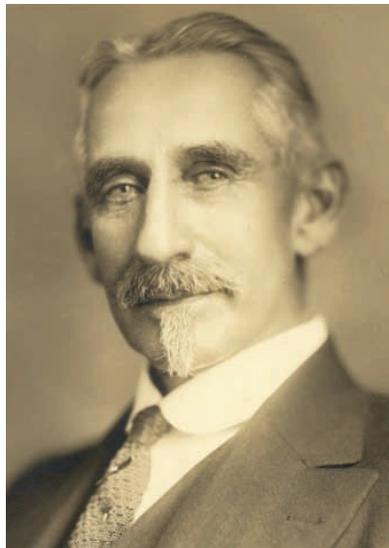


WHAT DO ORVILLE WRIGHT, A FAMOUS ANTARTIC EXPLORER, A TITANIC VICTIM, AND AN INVENTOR OF AN EARLY BICYCLE HAVE IN COMMON?

Just “up the street” a bit, in Sewall’s Point, Martin County, lived a man who intersected with history in many ways. Although **Hugh De Laussat Willoughby** did not live in Jupiter, he passed through the area frequently – in his car, one of his boats, and even piloting his own plane.

Hugh De Laussat Willoughby (HLW) was born in 1856 at “Solitude” the De Laussat family estate in Delaware County, New York. His father was named Samuel Augustus Willoughby and was from Nova Scotia. Samuel’s first wife’s family owned a large farm which would become a part of downtown Brooklyn, NY. Samuel started Brooklyn Bank. HLW’s maternal grandfather was a cousin of Pierre Clement, Baron DeLaussat, who presided over the ceding of the Louisiana Purchase property to the United States.

With his wealthy family, HLW was a privileged child. In about 1867 HLW travelled with his family to France and met a man named Pierre Michaux, who taught HLW to ride a bicycle. This is interesting because Michaux was



the inventor of the bicycle HLW was riding. Michaux was certainly one of the earliest bicycle manufacturers.

The answer to the question posed in this article’s title is that HLW knew all these people. HLW was an athlete, bicyclist, auto racer, pilot, socialite, yachtsman, inventor, real estate developer, and explorer. His many interests, accomplishments, and experiences brought him into contact with many luminaries of the day. Willoughby’s many and varied interests will be listed by category.

I. Sport

Willoughby attended the University of Pennsylvania where he was an athlete in track and field and in the rowing club. He was the first athlete to earn a letter for sport. He left Penn in his Junior year to pursue other interests.

II. Bicycling

After learning to ride in Paris and bringing a bicycle to

the United States as a youngster, he founded the third bicycle club in the US in Saratoga New York in 1878 and also helped found the League of American Wheelmen in Newport Rhode Island in 1880. This group was very instrumental in getting better roads for bicyclists.

III. Boating

HLW was a long-time member of the New York Yacht Club that sails from Newport, Rhode Island where he lived. This is the organization that holds the famous America's Cup. The Club held the cup from 1857 to 1983, which is the longest winning streak in the history of sport!

HLW was into boating all his life. He was a "canoeist" owning the "Proa," and also had a house boat the "Manatee." He had yachts "Coquette" and "Windward." His motor yacht the "Sea Otter" was one of the first (and the smallest) to have wireless on board.

HLW also had speed boats. The "Tortue" was often raced by his son Hugh Jr. and he had the "Possum" and the "Seminole" that was raced at the high speed of 14.7mph.

HLW was interested in submarines and dove with the "Adder" (1903) and "Shark" (1904.)

He knew the builder of the famous battleship Maine, Edwin S. Cramp, (which holds a place in Jupiter history) and went on the trial run of the ship.

He participated in, sponsored, or helped run, countless regattas in Palm Beach County and Newport, Rhode Island.

He told the newspapers after the Titanic disaster that more wireless operators should be on board ships. This wasn't surprising since he knew the John Jacob Astor family who perished in the disaster and the Vanderbilts who decided at the last minute not to sail on the ill-fated ship.

IV. Automobiles

HLW drove in one of the very early Ormond-Daytona Beach auto racing events. He didn't win any of the several races he entered – but he was 48 years old at the time!

HLW was an early proponent of traveling by auto car - newspaper articles showed he purportedly made a speed record driving from Philadelphia to Newport; he travelled from Philadelphia to Florida in a specially equipped car while tent-camping at night; and he covered 678 miles in an auto test without breakage or repairs! Willoughby wrote letters to newspapers on the importance of good roads for auto travel. (HLW's son-in-law was a member of the family that founded the Autocar Company.)

HLW knew Orville and Wilbur Wright and we have letters from Orville Wright at the museum.

V. Aviation

HLW might be best known for his aviation interests. He knew several aviation pioneers including Orville and Wilbur Wright and Glenn Curtiss. Some of his activities/ accomplishments are:

HLW corresponded with Orville Wright about principles of aviation and claimed to assist him with his flight tests for the Army at Ft. Myer.

HLW built a plane called "The War Hawk" which was believed to be the largest amateur built aircraft at the time.

HLW built the "Pelican" hydroplane and started a factory to try and put them in production. He touted the safety of flying low over the water and landing there easily in case of trouble – instead of crashing. (Unfortunately the public didn't agree and the hydroplanes never went into production.)

HLW started flying at the age of 53 and was flying well into his 70s!

One of the founders of the Aero Club, HLW compiled scrapbooks of club activities and contributed to the club's initiatives to make aviation safer through Federal legislation.

VI. Exploration

In 1897 HLW crossed the Everglades in a canoe with hunter-guide Ed Brewer. He was the first person to make such a trip that documented it with personal photographs and a book, "Across the Everglades."

HLW was invited by the famous Antarctic explorer, Richard Evelyn Byrd, to become a member of The Explorer's Club in New York City, which was founded in 1904.

VII. Land Developer

HLW moved to the Sewall's Point area and built his beautiful home "Mandalay." He envisioned the area as being the winter home of the New York Yacht Club. He was instrumental in getting the Sunrise Inn and Twin Rivers Country Club built in the area. With Captain Henry Sewall, HLW founded the Sewall's Point Land Company to subdivide the area into estates.

To learn more about Hugh De Laussat Willoughby, see artifacts from his life, gaze at a life-size replica of his hydroplane "Pelican," or see scrapbooks, correspondence, and other documents from his lifetime, visit the [Elliott Museum](#) on Hutchinson Island in Stuart, FL.



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