



**THE AVIATOR IN  
PURPLE**  
Harriet Quimby



**THE INSPIRATIONAL**  
Bessie Coleman



**DOLL OF THE MONTH**

---

# THE DISCOVERY PAPERS

---



## Meelie and Pidge...

Meet the tomboy sisters of Ann Street. They played cowboys and Indians, baseball, football, and made-up adventure games like “Bogie” and “The Pursuit of the Hairy Man.” They went on expeditions to explore caves and collect insects and spiders.

Who are these young adventurers? **Amelia Mary Earhart and her sister, Grace Muriel Earhart.**

**The Earhart’s first home was at 1021 Ann Street in Kansas City, Kansas**

---



## Ladies of the Air

This month “The Discovery Papers” will explore the brief lives and contributions of three women pioneers in the field of aviation. Women have played a role in aviation since flying was attempted. They have been brave passengers in hot air balloons before flying a balloon solo. They have parachuted and flew dirigibles.

In the early 1900s, Katherine Wright, the sister of the Wright Brothers, was truly the woman behind the men. She helped Orville and Wilbur with their experiments, provided financial support, nursed them through injuries, became their executive secretary and social manager as their enterprise grew. She knew everything about how the Wright Brothers’ planes worked and in time, flew them as well.

Today, flying is considered to be one of the safest ways to travel. That has not always been the case. Early planes were made of wood and cloth. They were susceptible to mishaps and crashes. Some managed to eject the pilot and/or passenger.

Early pilots were employed to carry the mail, dust crops in the field, and demonstrate their daring and skills in combat during World War I. Some performed aerial stunts and acrobatics. They competed in aerial contests and feats of endurance to prove their abilities in the air and the safety of flying. Others flew paying passengers aloft to view their farms and communities from the air.

It was challenging time to be a female aviator.

*Soar into history  
with books...*

[Amelia Lost: The Life and Disappearance of Amelia Earhart](#) by Candace Fleming

[The Sound of Wings: The Life of Amelia Earhart](#) by Mary S. Lowell

[Amelia and Eleanor Go For a Ride](#) by Pam Muniz Ryan

[Fly Girls](#) by Keith O’Brien

[Fly High! The Story of Bessie Coleman](#) by Louise Borden and Mary Kay Kroeger

[Bessie Coleman: Daring Stunt Pilot](#) by Trina Robbins

[Brave Harriet: The First Woman to Fly the English Channel](#) by Marissa Moss

[Harriet Quimby: Flying Fair Lady](#) by Leslie Kerr

*I want to do it because I want to do it. Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others.*

*Amelia Earhart*



## The Lady in Purple ...

### ...Harriet Quimby

Harriet Quimby was truly a woman of her age. Born in Michigan in 1875, she was eager to abandon the traditional roles of women in search of romance and adventure. Harriet was a tomboy and ready to try anything. She attended college, studied medicine, and even pursued acting.

She loved the diverse people and opportunities in San Francisco in the early 1900s and quickly became one of California's leading newspaperwomen. Within two years, she was longing for more - more adventure, more opportunities for travel, and more challenges. She set her sights on New York where she became part of the *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* team as a writer and photographer. By 1905, she became the magazine's drama critic.

Always seeking adventure, Harriet entered a 100-mile-an-hour race in a car in 1906 and shared all her experiences with the *Weekly's* readers. Soon there were rumors afoot that a woman was looking to earn a pilot's license at the Moisant School of Aviation in Long Island, New York. People were aghast that a lady would pursue such a dangerous and expensive recreation. It was hardly a fit activity for a female of charm and gentility!

Harriet's stories shared not only details of the proper outfits for the lady aviator but how to become familiar with the plane, its peculiarities, and its mechanics. She quickly became caught up in all the excitement of the world of aviation and longer to be setting records, testing the limits of the plane and the pilot, and sending the watching crowds awhirl. To her faithful readers she became known as "bird girl."

Harriet Quimby became the first American woman to earn a pilot's license on August 1, 1911. She set out to not just report on what she saw but to live it! She became part aviator and part cover girl. She took to wearing a violet satin flying suit. Other reporters dubbed her the "Dresden China aviatrix." Harriet

flew in exhibitions and races, winning her first cross-country race less than a month after earning her license.

She was known as an extremely safe pilot. She wrote about avoiding the dangers of flight and the importance of pre-flight checks and seat belts. Her work helped to establish the importance of checklists for pilots. Some aviation historians write that Harriet Quimby may have been the most important pilot of her time.

She was the first woman to fly a plane across the English Channel (April 16, 1912, the day after the sinking of the Titanic). A few months later, on July 1, she completed her latest article, and headed off to the Harvard-Boston Aviation Meet. The day was filled interviews, demonstration flights and photographs. In preparation for the following day's race, Harriet set off to check out the course accompanied by the event's organizer, William Willard.



She and Willard returned to the field, circling and heading out over the water. Suddenly the plane seemed to stand on end and began plummeting down. Willard was tossed out of the plane with Harriet following. While a crowd of some 5000 spectators watched, Harriet and Mr. Willard plunged into water, 300 feet from shore. The plane glided to earth and lodged itself in the mud.

What caused the crash remains unknown.

Harriet's last article included the following: *There is no sport that affords the same amount of excitement and enjoyment, and exacts in return so little muscular strength. It is easier than walking, driving or automobiling; easier than golf or tennis...Flying is a fine, dignified sport for women...and there is no reason to be afraid so long as one is careful.*

*Harriet Quimby was 37 years old.*

## The Inspiration...Bessie Coleman

Bessie Coleman was the first African American woman in the world to earn a pilot's license. Her inspiring life and achievements helped to break barriers for both women and African Americans.



Bessie was born in Atlanta, Texas, on January 26, 1892. She was one of 13 children of Susan and George Coleman, who were sharecroppers. Her childhood was one of hardship, filled with racism and discrimination. She was an enthusiastic scholar, graduating eighth grade at the top of her class. She went on to attend Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal University. Due to financial challenges, she was only able to attend for one semester.



A Bessie Coleman doll

In 1915, she moved to Chicago where she lived with her brother while working as a manicurist and saving money. She began reading about and listening to the stories about the pilots who flew and fought during the first World War. Her interest in aviation began to grow and she dreamed of flying. She heard stories of French female flyers from World War I veterans and set her sights on France.

She learned French at a Berlitz school and found a higher-paying job so she could save as much money as possible to move to France. In November of 1920, she enrolled at the Ecole d'Aviation des Freres Caudon in France. The following June, she became the first Black woman to earn an international pilot's license from the Federation Aeronautique Internationale in France.

Upon her return to the United State in September of 1921, she was well-known and surrounded by reporters eager to interview her. She began parachuting and stunt flying in addition to performing aerial tricks, barnstorming, and participating in air shows to earn a living. She refused to participate in performances that barred African-Americans from the audience.



While preparing for an air show in Jacksonville, Florida, Bessie was in her plane with her mechanic, William Wills. He was flying the plane. An unsecured wrench caught in the control gears, causing the plane to crash. Bessie fell out of the falling plane at 3,500 feet.

Bessie Coleman was 34 years old.





## The Girl in Brown Who Walks Alone...

### Amelia Mary Earhart

This imaginative tomboy was born at the home of her maternal grandparents in Atchison, Kansas, on July 24, 1897. In addition to being an aviation pioneer, Amelia was an equal rights activist, a poet, an author, a fashion designer, a nurse's aide, a social worker, and an iconic heroine for generations of girls and women.

Amelia spent most of the time with her grandparents in Atchison until she entered high school. She was raised in a home with filled with love and advantages. She had plenty of books to read and cousins with whom to play. She explored the bluffs along the Missouri River, collecting various critters and seeking adventures. She kept these times a secret from her grandmother though. Mrs. Otis was a nervous woman and Amelia worked very hard at not upsetting her.

Following a trip to the St. Louis World's Fair, Amelia tried her hand at creating her own roller coaster after not getting to ride the one at the fair. Using wooden two-by-fours propped up at an angle against the tool shed roof as her track, she created a cab out of a wooden packing box fitted out with roller-skate wheels. Amelia and her chums had quite the ride until Grandmother Otis discovered their ride.

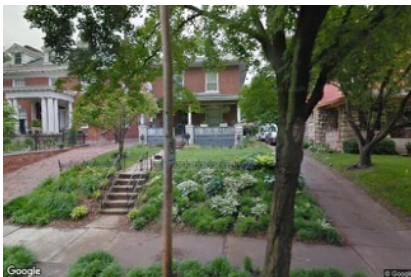
Amelia and her cousins were not alone in their frustrations about being born female and the restrictions society placed upon their activities. To vent their frustrations and lack of freedom, they pretended to be boys, seeking out every opportunity to rough-house with their male friends. Amelia also used her imagination to create games. A favorite was "Bogie."



Bogie was played in the barn on the river bluffs above the Missouri River. There was kept the family's one remaining carriage and Amelia's imagination reinvented as a magic chariot whisking the four girls (Amelia, her sister, Muriel, and their cousins, Katch and Lucy) around the world. Armed with wooden pistols, they set out a boys on an adventure full of excitement and danger. Amelia always supplied the answer to rescue them all from certain doom. Earhart historians believe that Amelia's love of long-distance flying was just an adult, real-life version of Bogie.

Amelia was a talented young woman with a love for words and their unique sound when spoken. She wrote poems and found writing to be an outlet for her thoughts and feelings. She was fascinated by new people, new places, and trying new things. She loved music and was an able musician who disliked performing. Amelia was a good student, excelling at mathematics and able to do algebra in her head. She also loved Latin, physics, and chemistry. Athletic, she swam, played tennis and basketball, and rode horses.

Her high school years were spent in Chicago where she became known as "the girl in brown who walks alone." Her natural resilience and enthusiasm just



The Earhart home on Charlotte Avenue. Modern day.

disappeared and she kept her head down, just going through the motions of life. Her parents had separated and life was challenging for the Earharts. Amelia assumed an adult role in the family of three and cared for her mother. After her graduation, the family was reunited in Kansas City, Missouri, where they lived on Charlotte Avenue.

Amelia was enrolled in the Ogontz School for Girls near Philadelphia in 1916. Ogontz was an exclusive finishing school with an outstanding academic reputation. It seemed like an odd choice for a tomboy who loved to climb things, but Amelia loved it. Far away from the burdens of her family in Missouri, Amelia found the self she lost in Chicago. She threw herself into everything - even climbing on the roofs of the school buildings. Her innate sense of style was emerging, too. Her preference for simple, beautiful, and comfortable clothing impressed her wealthier



classmates and suited her often strapped pocketbook. Imagining her future life, she started a scrapbook of stories of successful women in careers dominated by men. By the time of her graduation, Amelia had come into her own, holding positions of leadership at Ogontz, she was exceedingly popular, and was practically running the school.



With the coming of World War I, Amelia volunteered as a nurse's aide in the Canadian war effort. She worked in various hospital wards and in the laboratory. When the epidemic hit, she stayed in Canada, helping in the pneumonia ward. Thoughts of pursuing a career as a doctor began to stir. She registered at Columbia University in the University Extension Program. Amelia was twenty-two years old.



Her first year at Columbia had been a successful one but she had decided against life as a physician, preferring medical research. At least that's what she told people. More likely it was the pleadings of her parents to join them in Los Angeles. At that time, a young, unmarried woman could not refuse her parents. She left school, she left the East Coast, and headed west

to Los Angeles and into her life in aviation.

California was THE place for flying in America in 1920. Amelia and her father wasted no time in seeking out every air meet possible. Within ten minutes of being aloft, Amelia knew she had to fly. All thoughts of medical research were gone.

She started flying lessons in January, 1921, and within six month owned her own plane. Soon she and "The Canary" were setting world records for female pilots and on May 15, 1923, she became the 16th woman to receive a pilot's license from the Federation Aeronatique Internationale.

In June 1928, she became the first woman to fly across the Atlantic Ocean. Amelia was merely “a sack of potatoes,” as she called her experience as a passenger but it had landed her on the world stage. She captured her experience in her first book, 20 Hrs. 40 Min., Our Flight in the Friendship. She continued to set records as a pilot and founded an organization of female pilots called The Ninety-Nines, named for its first 99 members.

Her celebrity status put on the speaking tour circuit, visiting women’s clubs, schools, and civic groups around the country. She was even a guest of The Women’s City Club of Kansas City, Missouri. Amelia became a voice for women, urging them to take on new roles in society. She started her own line of clothes and began endorsing products with slick advertisements in magazines.



Amelia was a frequent guest of celebrities and became friends with many well-known people of her day, including actors and actresses, fellow aviators, and even President and Mrs. Roosevelt. Her second book, The Fun of It, told of her childhood in Atchison, her early flying adventures and profiled other women in aviation history.

With a new plane, a Lockheed Vega, in 1932, she became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. She became the first woman to fly across the Pacific Ocean. (She was the first PERSON to fly across both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.) She joined the faculty at Purdue University as a career counselor and technical advisor to the Department of Aviation. She saw her role as an educator, a researcher, and a promoter of aviation.

By 1936, she felt she had one “last hop” in her. She would fly around the world as near to the equator as possible. The flight would take a great deal of

organization to coordinate all the stops needed and a special airplane. With the help of Purdue University and the U.S. Government, she secured her flying laboratory, a Lockheed Electra 10 E, and all the necessary paperwork. She found two men to serve as navigators and a third to be a technical advisor. The four took off from Oakland, California, in March of 1937, for the first leg of the flight. When she went to take off from Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on the second leg of the flight, she “cracked up” and severely damaged her Electra. The plane was shipped back to Lockheed in California for repairs while Amelia and her team regrouped.



Her second attempt at her around the world flight began on June 1, 1937, with a downsized crew and a completely new route. Heading out with a single navigator, Fred Noonan, Amelia left Miami, Florida, running the original flight in reverse due to the weather patterns. The flight was relatively uneventful. There were weather delays, of course, but all was on target. The pair landed in Papua, New Guinea, on June 29, with just over 2500 miles left. The next stop was a refueling one on tiny Howland Island, located halfway between Australia and Hawaii.

Bottom line....that's the end of the story. Amelia and Fred took off from New Guinea and were never seen again. The last radio transmission was on July 2 and despite the efforts of the U.S. Government and private searches paid for by Amelia's husband, George Putnam, no trace has ever been found.

At the time of her disappearance, Amelia Mary Earhart was 39 years old.



AMELIA  
EARHART



HARRIET  
QUIMBY



**BESSIE  
COLEMAN**