

## **The "History Detectives" Investigate Plane Fabric Fragment with Ties to Grand Island**

LINCOLN, Neb. (July 7, 2010) -- Investigators from the PBS television series "History Detectives" found a key clue at Grand Island's Stuhr Museum while searching for answers about a small swatch of plane fabric. On it are written the words "Dixon" and "Grand Island, 1911." Could these words refer to the pioneering aviator, Cromwell Dixon? And, could this piece of fabric possibly be part of his airplane wing and the last remaining artifact of Dixon's brief aviation career?

The puzzling story is the subject of a segment on the "History Detectives" that was videotaped in Grand Island in March. This episode of "History Detectives" airs Monday, July 19, at 8 p.m. CT on NET1 and in high definition on NET-HD. It repeats on NET2 Tuesday, July 20, at 9 a.m., and 3, 5 and 8 p.m. CT. The episode also airs Sunday, July 25, at 6 p.m. CT on NET1 and in high definition on NET-HD.

Patricia Godwin of Salt Lake City, Utah, found the four-by-three-inch swatch of fabric among her late grandfather's possessions, and wondered if it was tied to Dixon. Reporters called him the "Boy Genius" pilot, who at 19-years-old was the first man to fly across the Continental Divide, as well as the nation's youngest licensed aviator. In August of 1911, Dixon flew at an exhibit for the Grand Island Merchants Association and made his mark on the Central Nebraska town. Two days later, a wind current flipped his plane and Dixon fell to the ground at an exhibition in Spokane, Washington. He died a few hours later.

"History Detectives" host Elyse Luray goes up in a plane to see the world from Dixon's perspective and to relive the memory of one of America's youngest barnstormers. She talks with a Cromwell Dixon biographer, consults with the curator at the Glenn H. Curtiss Museum in New York, and finally comes across a key clue at the Stuhr Museum. Dixon became somewhat of a legend around the Grand Island area before his name and many of the artifacts representing his career were lost to history.

Members of the "History Detectives" crew spoke to Stuhr's Curator of Collections Leslie Vollnogle about the fabric fragment, and about the interest in aviation during that time period. In 1911, thousands turned out for the city's first air show, contracted by the Glenn Curtiss Aviation Company. When the scheduled performer was unable to fly, Cromwell Dixon was selected.

The Stuhr Museum plans a special screening of the "History Detectives" episode on Monday, July 19, at 7:45 p.m. Guests are invited to watch the program on the large screen at the Grand Theatre in downtown Grand Island when it airs on NET Television's NET1 and NET-HD beginning at 8 p.m. CT. There will be a short presentation about research and "behind the scenes" work on the program before the screening, as well as a short question and answer session at the end. The screening is free to the public and seating is limited.

The episode also includes details about scenes in a sketchbook that may illustrate the first ever US-Mexican border survey, a jazz history treasure found in a dumpster and metal "Duke Ellington Plates" that could have printed the first copy of the Ellington hit "Take the A Train." "History Detectives" is devoted to exploring the complexities of historical mysteries, searching out the facts, myths and conundrums that connect local folklore, family legends and interesting objects. NET1, NET2 and NET-HD are part of NET Television, a service of NET. For complete program schedules, visit NET's website at [netNebraska.org/television](http://netNebraska.org/television).

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**NET Television:**

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