



AUGUST 2017

TALK SHOW WITH **LILY COLLINS**
OUTLANDER'S **SAM HEUGHAN** IN GLASGOW
A ROYAL GETAWAY IN **MONACO**
STOCKHOLM'S CULINARY RICHES
1 CITY 5 WAYS: **BERLIN**



FROM DUBLIN'S
TOP CHEFS TO THE
MIDIEVAL STREETS OF
PERUGIA, WEEKENDS
IN **EUROPE** ARE
MAGNIFIQUES.

SPIRIT OF INNOVATION

Delta founder
C. E. Woolman's
commitment to customer
service and relentless
improvement helped
create one of the
world's most admired
companies.



Back to the

FUTURE



ABOVE: Delta Air Service employees in Monroe, Louisiana, in 1929, including general manager C. E. Woolman (second from left). LEFT: Woolman in 1940, next to Delta's first 14-passenger Douglas DC-2.

STARTING WITH A FEW CROP-DUSTING PLANES IN GEORGIA, DELTA FOUNDER **C. E. WOOLMAN** HELPED BUILD THE COMPANY INTO ONE OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST AIRLINES.

BY SARAH ELBERT

C

C. E. Woolman helped create the crop-dusting industry. He orchestrated the delivery of mail in Peru in the late 1920s. And he grew Delta Air Lines from a small fleet of planes to a major airline that had more than 13,000 employees at the time of his death in 1966—and that has 80,000-plus employees today.

Woolman embodied the kind of adventurous go-getters that Horatio Alger wrote about—and are celebrated today as “disruptors.” Like the founders of American Express, who turned an express mail company into one of the country’s largest financial services firms, Woolman seized opportunities as he saw them. And he set standards for the airline that still survive today.

“Mr. Woolman knew how to treat customers and employees,” says Delta CEO Ed Bastian. “And he was definitely ahead of his time in setting high standards for his company and making sure Delta stuck to them.”

Woolman was an aviation buff



at the dawn of the age of airplanes, attending the world’s first aviation meet in Reims, France, during his college years in 1909—just six years after the Wright brothers’ nearly mythical accomplishment in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. He had learned how to pilot Jenny biplanes and combined his interest in aviation with a degree in agricultural engineering from the University of Illinois.

Building off scientific research being conducted at the Louisiana Department of Agriculture, Woolman helped pioneer the first plane used to protect cotton crops from boll weevils. Starting in 1925, he began expanding and marketing the experimental new service at Huff Daland Dusters, the world’s first aerial crop-dusting company. Soon, the company amassed an 18-plane fleet—the largest privately owned aircraft fleet in the world.

When the company was constrained by the seasonal nature of crop dusting, it expanded operations to Mexico and Peru, also gaining a foothold in the delivery of airmail and passenger service in Peru. “We ran into hot competition from wealthy German interests... but we beat the Germans and secured the air-mail rights in Peru,” Woolman was quoted as saying in *The New York Times*. “The South American operation was getting pretty big by the following year, when we found ourselves right in the middle of a red-hot local revolution. Both sides tried to get hold of our planes for their armies.”

It was time to get out: Woolman divested the company of its South American interests shortly before it was sold to Monroe, Louisiana-based investors. The company was renamed Delta Air Service after the Mississippi River Delta region that it served.

On June 17, 1929, the company’s modern iteration was born when Delta flew its first passengers from Dallas to Jackson, Mississippi—with stops in Monroe and Shreveport, Louisiana. The company’s new five-passenger Travel Air monoplanes flew just 90 mph (today, passenger jets fly about 500 mph), and they were the start of Delta’s now-global passenger service. The airline moved further

toward its future when it moved to Atlanta in 1941.

Woolman served in various roles at Delta: He started as vice president and general manager, becoming president in October 1945 and finally serving as the airline’s first CEO in 1965, shortly before his death in 1966.

While he inarguably helped build the company into what it is today, one of Woolman’s lasting contributions to the company was a commitment to customer service and a knack for empowering his team. When he flew, the executive whose handshake was described “like a lumberjack’s,” reportedly preferred to sit in the second row on the right side of the plane, talking to fellow passengers and the flight crew along the way.

“Let’s put ourselves on the other side of the counter,” was one of Woolman’s most enduring quotes, and it is still one of Delta’s guiding principles, Bastian says.

“Mr. Woolman believed that it

Woolman at his desk in 1959, holding a model of a Douglas DC-8, Delta’s first jet. **BELOW LEFT:** In 1940 with two “stewardesses.”



“WHATEVER SUCCESSES WE HAVE ACHIEVED IN THE PAST AND WHATEVER WE MAY ENJOY IN THE FUTURE DEPEND UPON THE PRICELESS ASSETS OF A DEEP-SEATED AND MEANINGFUL PERSONAL INTEGRITY.”

wasn’t enough to simply transport customers safely from point A to point B,” he says. “He knew that the journey itself is a key part of travel, and that people should be treated with respect and consideration along the way.”

Woolman was a beloved part of Delta during his tenure at the company—he was presented with a Cadillac on his 25th anniversary—as well as after. In September 2014, on what would have been his 125th birthday, Delta dedicated a Boeing 737-900ER aircraft in his honor.

More than 700 people attended the celebration, including grandson Stephen Woolman Preston. “What is an organization’s most important asset?” Preston asked at the event. “Simple: its people. Mr. Woolman put people first. The Delta family was not a bumper sticker he came up with. It’s a culture—a culture of employee engagement that continues today.”

And to Woolman, employee engagement meant innovating whenever possible—at the dawn of the jet age and beyond. From the creation of in-flight entertainment to onboard Wi-Fi, the flying experience is constantly changing—and will change even more.

The airline recently collaborated

with students at the Savannah College of Art and Design, for example, to ponder what air travel will look like in the future. One day we may all be exploring Machu Picchu before we’ve arrived at LAX, thanks to virtual reality. Delta’s global innovation center, The Hangar, is testing how technology ranging from voice assistants to bots to heat mapping can make customers’ travel journeys better.

But no matter how cutting-edge the technology, Woolman believed that it’s a company’s people who ultimately bring about growth and success: “Our task is to ensure that people are not denied the opportunity to realize their creative potential.”