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# ‘The Flying Schoolgirl’: Katherine Stinson and Early Women Aviators Crossing Frontiers

Julie Williams\*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of New Mexico – United States

## Abstract

Katherine Stinson, the fourth woman pilot in the United States, was only 21 when she earned her license in 1912. Soon after she was licensed, she billed herself as a 16-year-old and took the moniker “The Flying Schoolgirl” to launch her career in exhibition flying. She was the first woman aviator to fly an airmail route in both the United States and Canada, the first woman to fly at night, built her own plane, established an aviation school, and flew in exhibitions across North America and Asia. When World War I broke out and her family’s aviation school closed, Stinson answered the army’s call for volunteer pilots, but her application was rejected twice due to her gender. Stinson and her contemporaries crossed both ideological and geographical borders with their aviation expertise. Although Amelia Earhart’s exploits and tragic end are the most well-known example of women breaking gendered barriers in the aviation world, I argue that by repositioning Katherine Stinson and other early women aviators we shift the framework of how women aviators are viewed even today and allow them the important position as aviation pioneers that they deserve. Through shifting the discourse regarding early women aviators away from Earhart and her disappearance and allowing Stinson and others to occupy the place of prominence they deserve, we restructure the framework of women’s aviation history to highlight the daring, cutting edge successes of these pioneer pilots and can trace how women pilots have been breaking barriers since the beginning of aviation history.

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\*Speaker