

# State Archives of North Carolina

## Tiny Broadwick Pioneer of Aviation Biography



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**G**eorgia Ann Thompson was born April 8, 1893 in Granville County, North Carolina. She was the seventh and youngest daughter of George and Emma Ross Thompson. As an infant she was very small, weighing only three pounds when she was born. For that reason she was called “Tiny”. She remained small even as an adult, topping out at a little over 4 feet tall and weighing 80 pounds.

When she was six years old the family moved to Henderson in Vance County. Ms. Thompson’s early life was difficult both as a child and in early adulthood. In 1905 she married William A. Jacobs and had one daughter in 1906. Her husband abandoned her shortly thereafter.

In 1907 Thompson attended the North Carolina State Fair and saw an aerial show that featured Charles Broadwick. He went up in a hot air balloon, climbed over the side and parachuted back down to earth. Tiny was determined to join his act. “When I saw that balloon go up, I knew that’s all I ever wanted to do!” She spoke with Charles Broadwick and asked to become part of his show. Broadwick seeing that this pretty young lady, with her diminutive size would be a perfect addition to the show agreed to hire her. Tiny joined the Johnny J. Jones Carnival and Broadwick’s act, Broadwick’s World Famous Aeronauts, leaving her daughter with her mother, with the understanding that a portion of her earnings would be sent home to support the child.



*Promotional image of Tiny Broadwick with her balloon.*

In 1908 Tiny Broadwick made her first jump at the North Carolina State Fair. She loved it even though she landed in a blackberry bush. When asked about her first jump she said “I tell you, honey, it was the most wonderful sensation in the world! From up in the air I can appreciate the beauty of the earth from a new perspective and felt that I was in the presence of God.”

After Tiny joined the act, Charles Broadwick adopted her and her name was legally changed to Tiny Broadwick. At the time it was thought to be improper for young ladies to travel with older men and it was for this reason the family probably did not object to the adoption. Charles Broadwick emphasized Tiny’s small size and dressed her in girlish clothes and curled her hair in ringlets. He billed her as “the Doll Girl.” When she was interviewed later in life Tiny said that she hated being dressed up like a doll. She had been a tomboy all her life and just did not like to dress up.

In order to jump out of the balloon Tiny Broadwick had to sit on a trapeze that hung from the bottom and jump off when the correct altitude was reached. Her parachute would open and she would float to the ground to the delight of the crowd below. Her performances drew large crowds, and she became the star attraction of the show. Newspaper accounts described her as the most daring female aeronaut (balloonist) ever seen and marveled at the dangerous maneuvers she performed with apparently little or no fear. The young woman had numerous falls and rough landings but, although she broke some bones and dislocated her shoulder a few times, she was never seriously injured.



*Tiny Broadwick and Glenn Martin*

airplane, making her the first woman to parachute from a plane. For that first jump, Tiny was suspended from a trap seat behind the wing and outside the cockpit, with the parachute on a shelf above her. Martin took the plane up to two thousand feet, at which point Tiny released a lever next to the seat, allowing it to drop out from under her.

She floated to earth and landed in Griffith Park in Los Angeles. Later that year she became the first woman to jump from a hydroplane where she landed in Lake Michigan.

In 1912 the Broadwicks met Glenn L. Martin in Los Angeles. Martin was an early barn-stormer, a person who traveled around doing stunt flying at carnivals and fairs. He asked if Ms. Broadwick would be willing to parachute from his airplane. Charles Broadwick developed a parachute for her made of silk and packed into a knapsack weighing six pounds, attached to a canvas jacket with harness straps. A string was fastened to the plane's fuselage and woven through the parachute's canvas covering so that when the wearer jumped from the plane, the cover tore away and the parachute filled with air. This parachute was one later patented by Martin and Broadwick.

June 21, 1913 Tiny made her first jump from an



*Tiny Broadwick sitting on the jump seat and Glenn Martin flying the plane.*



*Tiny Broadwick taking a wreath to Governor Edward Fitzsimmons Dunn of Illinois after landing in Lake Michigan, accompanied by Henry Harrison Carter, Jr., Mayor of Chicago, 1913.*



*Tiny Broadwick jumping from an airplane.*

In 1914, representatives of the Army Air Corps visited her in San Diego and asked her to demonstrate a jump from a military plane. War was already raging in Europe. Many pilots of the corps had perished, and more would surely follow if nothing was done to help them. Tiny made four jumps at San Diego's North Island that day. The first three went smoothly, but on the fourth jump, her parachute's line became tangled in the plane's tail assembly. The wind flipped her small body back and forth, and she could not get back into the plane. Tiny Broadwick did not panic. Instead, she cut all but a short length of the line and plummeted away toward the ground. Pulling the line by hand, she freed the parachute to open. She demonstrated what would be known as the rip cord. Her quick thinking and coolness under pressure made Tiny Broadwick the first person ever to make a planned free-fall descent. The mid-air accident she survived demonstrated that a person leaving an airplane in flight did not need a line attached to the aircraft in order to open a parachute. A pilot could safely bail out of a damaged craft. The parachute became known as the life preserver of the air. During World War I, Tiny served as an advisor to the Army Air Corps.



Tiny Broadwick wearing parachute coat, man standing next to her is Charles Broadwick, North Island, San Diego, California.



*Tiny Broadwick wearing the parachute, now in the Smithsonian Institute, showing the one of a kind dress she jumped in, 1913.*

**T**iny Broadwick made more than 1,000 jumps from airplanes and balloons, enduring and surviving several harrowing mishaps. She ended up on top of the caboose of a train that was just leaving a station; she got tangled up in the vanes of a windmill and in high-tension wires. She suffered numerous injuries along the way – broken bones, sprained ankles and a wrenched back. Broadwick loved her work and looked back on those days with great fondness in her later years. In 1912 Tiny Broadwick married Andrew Olsen but the marriage did not work. During this time she continued to do exhibition jumping in California. She married Harry Brown in 1916. He did not approve of her parachuting and left her in 1920.

In 1922 Broadwick made her last jump. During World War II she worked at Rohr Aircraft Company. After the war she continued to live in California, although she came home to North Carolina for visits.

In 1953 she received the U.S. Government Pioneer Aviation Award and in 1964 the John Glenn Medal. She was inducted into the OX5 Hall of Fame along with Orville and Wilbur Wright, Charles Lindberg and Glenn L. Martin. She received the Gold Wings of the Adventurer's Club in Los Angeles. It commemorated 1000 jumps. During her lifetime she actually did over 1100. She joined the

Early Birds of Aviation. This group only allowed people to join if they had flown solo before December 17, 1916. In 1976 she received the wings of the 82nd Airborne and become an honorary member.

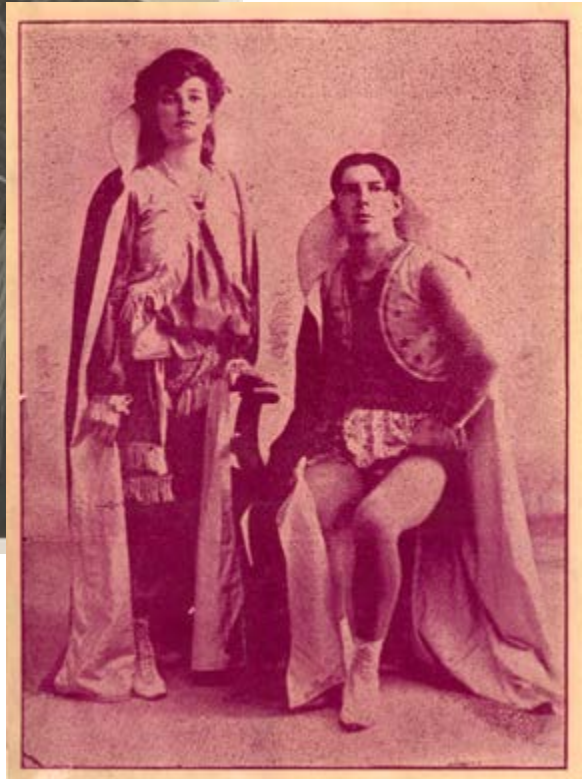
Tiny Broadwick died at age 85 on August 25, 1978 in California. She was returned to Henderson North Carolina for burial in the Sunset Gardens Cemetery.



*Tiny Broadwick, landing at Griffith Park, Los Angeles, California, picture is an action shot and was a stand up landing.*



*Charles Broadwick shows his parachute to Captain Hanks and Marin Hollister*



*Charles and Maude Broadwick*

**C**harles Broadwick (c. 1875-1943) was jumping from balloons before the Wright brothers ever took flight. Born John Murray, he took the name Charles Broadwick as a stage name when he performed at fairs and carnivals. He was 13 when he made his first ascension in a hot air balloon, a balloon that promptly caught fire once it was up in the sky. The quick-thinking Murray climbed up the balloon lines and extinguished the fire with his coat and a sandbag. By the time he was 16, John Murray had taken his stage name and was already performing at fairs by jumping from balloons with a parachute. It was not a job for the faint of heart and the crowds loved it. In 1905, however, Broadwick's partner who was known as Maude Broadwick and may have been his wife, fell from the trapeze and was killed. Her death affected Broadwick badly. Since a balloon went where the wind took it, it was not uncommon for them to crash into nearby buildings or trees. Another danger to the aeronaut was the lines attached to both the person and the balloon. In 1906 Broadwick invented a parachute that was not attached to the balloon but folded into a pack on the jumper's back, giving the jumper some control over the descent. In 1908 Broadwick met Georgia Jacobs, the 15 year old that would change both their lives. She asked to perform with him and after the complicated issues of her life were sorted out, the duo went on tour. Broadwick billed her as the Doll Girl and the crowds loved her. Even as they were performing, however, the field of aviation was developing rapidly. At an air-show in 1912, the Broadwicks met Glenn L. Martin, who was flying a plane. Martin immediately saw the possibility of having the young woman jump from a plane like she was doing from a balloon. During the two years that the Broadwicks were with Martin, the woman garnered several world records and Charles Broadwick and Martin received a patent on the coat parachute. Most parachute historians believe that Broadwick actually invented it and Martin, due to his name recognition, patented it. Broadwick never really made an issue of the patent, but Tiny Broadwick said years later that Charles Broadwick had invented it. The coming of the World War brought a decline in air shows and effectively ended all of their careers as they knew them. Broadwick remained in the business for some years longer, married again, and was widowed again, when his second wife Ethel was killed parachuting from a plane. Again, he took her death badly and, indeed, was never the same after that. Charles Broadwick died in 1943, unknown and alone.



*Glenn L. Martin and Tiny Broadwick*

**G**lenn L. Martin (17 Jan. 1886-5 Dec. 1955) was a pioneer in the field of aviation and showed an aptitude and love for flying at an early age. He had built a plane and taught himself to fly by 1909. From 1910-1914, he traveled the United States as a barnstorming pilot, and opened his first aircraft factory, Glenn L. Martin Aircraft Company, in 1912. At the third professional air meet in the United States in 1912, Martin met Tiny Broadwick, who was jumping from a balloon. She accepted his invitation to jump from his plane for an exhibition and did so in June 1913. They were in great demand for the next year but by the first World War, interest in flying exhibitions was waning. In 1915 he portrayed a pilot in *A Girl of Yesterday*, starring Mary Pickford, and in the film, used a camera to take the first aerial shots for a motion picture. The following year Martin Aircraft merged with Wilbur and Orville Wright's Wright Company to form Wright-Martin Aircraft Company. Martin, himself, left the company in 1917, establishing a new company on his own, which became well known for making bombers and seaplanes. Very early during World War I he proclaimed prophetically that the war would be won from the air. The Glenn L. Martin Company produced over 11,000 planes between 1909 and 1960 when the company stopped producing aircraft. From 1960- 1995 the company produced missiles, space hardware, avionics and guidance systems. When, in 1995, the company merged with Lockheed, it once again began producing aircraft. Martin himself remained with the company until his death in 1955. He is buried in Fairhaven Memorial Park, in Santa Ana, California.