



Jean Piccard

Notable Early Faculty Member

Deceased January 28, 1963

Dr. Jean Piccard was already a world famous balloonist when he came to the University in 1936. He taught courses in stratospheric flight while doing research and conducting many pioneering balloon flights. Dr. Jean Piccard and his wife, Dr. Jeanette Piccard, made their first stratospheric flight in October 1934, in Detroit. Before coming to Minnesota, they were associated with the Bartol Research Foundation of the Franklin Institute. At that time, they were foremost among the five or six persons with scientific knowledge of the stratosphere. Jean's twin brother, Dr. Auguste Piccard, was also a stratospheric pioneer. Together the brothers designed the balloons and their gondolas for the first stratospheric flights attempted, and together they conducted those flights in Switzerland. Jeanette Piccard was the pilot of the famous Piccard balloon expeditions. She was the first licensed woman balloonist in the world and the first woman to ascend into the stratosphere.

One of Dr. Jean Piccard's first projects at the University was constructing an unmanned hydrogen-filled transparent cellophane balloon for ascents 10 to 14 miles into the stratosphere. The balloon was successfully flown on June 24, 1936. Three aeronautical engineering students—Harold Hatlestad of Minneapolis, who built the radio equipment for the flight, Robert Hatch of St. Paul, and Robert Silliman of Duluth—maintained radio contact with the balloon from the station on the roof of the University armory. Jean Barnhill was a graduate student who worked with Dr. Piccard and aeronautical engineering students Harold Larson and Lloyd Schumacher in cutting by hand the sixteen 33-foot long tapered gores that made up the 25-foot high balloon. The 'orange peel' gores were fastened together by a revolutionary product, inch-wide strips of cellophane covered with adhesive, called Scotch tape, developed by the Twin Cities' 3M Company. Jean Barnhill was the first woman to graduate from the University in Aeronautical Engineering, and was also a championship pilot in national air races.