

# AEROSPACE ENGINEERING AND MECHANICS

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## Professor Jean F. Piccard's Contribution to Balloon Flight



J. F. Piccard preparing for a balloon launch

[Dr. Jean Piccard](#) was already a world famous balloonist when he came to the University in 1936. He taught courses in stratosphere flight problems while doing research and conducting many pioneering balloon flights. Dr. Jean Piccard and his wife, Dr. Jeanette Piccard, made their first stratosphere flight in October 1934 at Detroit. Before coming to Minnesota, they were connected 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 stratosphere problems. His twin brother, August Piccard, was also a stratosphere pioneer. Together, the brothers designed the balloons and their gondolas for the first stratosphere flights ever attempted, and together they conducted those flights in Switzerland. Mrs. Piccard, who still resides in the Twin Cities area (now deceased -- webmaster), was the actual 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. Miss Jean Barnhill, now Mrs. Bob Gilruth, 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. Miss Barnhill was the first woman to graduate from the University in Aeronautical Engineering, and was also a championship pilot in national air races.

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