

= Mary Meader =

Rachael Mary Upjohn Light Meader (April 15 , 1916 ? March 16 , 2008) was an American aerial photographer and explorer . Heir to the Upjohn Company fortune , she is best known in aerial circles for her 1937 ? 1938 35 @,@ 000 @-@ mile (56 @,@ 000 km) flight in which she photographed unprecedented images of South America and Africa . Her African photographs were later featured in the book Focus on Africa . In her later years , she also became known in her native Kalamazoo , Michigan , for her philanthropy to Western Michigan University , the University of Michigan , and various Kalamazoo charities .

= = Early life = =

Mary Meader was born to William H. and Genevieve Upjohn in Kalamazoo , Michigan on April 15 , 1916 , a grandchild of Dr. W. E. Upjohn , the founder of the pharmaceutical Upjohn Company . Meader majored in French and Spanish at Smith College . She left the college in preparation for a marriage to the neurosurgeon Richard Upjohn Light , a first cousin of hers . Since the two could not legally marry each other in Michigan , they moved to Maryland , where they married in 1937 .

= = The flight = =

Dr. Light became famous among aviation enthusiasts due to his 1934 around @-@ the @-@ world flight . To celebrate his marriage to Meader , he wished to approximate the same , and Meader was happy to comply . During the planning of the trip , many points on Earth had not been captured on film from the air and the American Geographical Society promoted these photographic flights , as they were trying to build an aerial collection . Light 's idea was to travel across areas South America and Africa never been aerially photographed .

Meader took flying lessons and learned morse code so she could become her husband 's co @-@ pilot , navigator , and radio operator . During this training , her first son , Christopher , was born . In an interview with Encore Magazine in 2006 , when asked why she decided to take the journey , she replied :

" It just seemed like a great adventure ? something I wanted to do . Why ? I 'm not certain , other than we both knew we would be doing something that hadn 't been done before . "

The two Lights took off out of Kalamazoo in September 1937 in a Bellanca monoplane . Its cabin lacked heat or pressurization . To survive , they were forced to breathe oxygen from a tank out wooden mouthpieces . Wearing a fur coat and boots , Meader took photographs out of a window frame .

The Lights were banned from photographing all of Central America except Guatemala , Ecuador , and Colombia , as a safety measure against the gathering of strategic knowledge . They took advantage of the Peruvian government 's allowal to take pictures in the air by capturing the earliest photographs of the Nazca lines . These were unable to distinguish from the surface , though further into the atmosphere the designs can range from simple patterns to hummingbirds and llamas .

Following their photographal of South America , the couple crossed the Atlantic Ocean before arriving in Cape Town , South Africa . While there , she took a picture of the ice dome and crater of Mount Kilimanjaro and of the glaciers and pinnacles on Mount Kenya . Her photographs include different views of native villages , urban areas , and the Egyptian pyramids , among other subjects . Every day they would awake at 4 a.m. , fly until 11 a.m , then visit some of the farms , mines , and native settlements Meader planned to photograph the following day .

The couple 's original plan was to fly into Asia ; however , this was not accomplished due to the damaging of the plane and Meader 's pregnancy with a second child , Timothy . The two returned to Kalamazoo in February 1938 . In all , Meader took over 2 @,@ 000 photographs on her two flights .

= = Later life and philanthropy = =

Three hundred twenty @-@ three of Meader 's African photos were included in Focus on Africa , a 1941 book written by her husband and published by the American Geographical Society . The book was only their second which included aerial photos ; the first was Peru from the Air by George R. Johnson published in 1930 . A review of the book by Mary Jobe Akeley of the New York Times called her pictures " superb " . In addition , the photos have been featured in several exhibitions over the years .

Meader was a member of the Society of Woman Geographers since 1942 , whom granted her the Outstanding Achievement Award for her pioneering aerial photography in 2005 . Light and Meader divorced in the early 1960s . In 1965 , Meader married Edwin Meader , a geography professor . The new couple settled on a farm outside of Kalamazoo , and according to Western Michigan University president emeritus Diether Haenicke , " for years their barn loft was one of Kalamazoo 's foremost intellectual meeting places " . They donated millions of dollars to Western Michigan University , the University of Michigan , and various Kalamazoo charities . Mrs. Meader traveled to an elementary school to teach children how to read into her 70s .

One of her largest gifts was her donation of \$ 4 million to Western Michigan University . It resulted in the creation of the W.E. Upjohn Center for the Study of Geographical Change , after her grandfather . It digitizes maps and aerial photographs from all over the world and documents and evaluates geographic changes . She also donated \$ 1 million gift to WMU 's Waldo Library for a library renovation in the early 1990s and helped construct the W.H. Upjohn Rotunda , which was named after Meader 's father . The Edwin and Mary Meader Rare Book Room was later dedicated to the library . The Meaders also gave \$ 18 million to the University of Michigan , Edwin Meader 's alma mater , in 2004 -- \$ 8 million to U @-@ M 's Kelsey Museum of Archaeology , which was the largest gift ever to U @-@ M 's College of Literature , Science and the Arts , and \$ 10 million to build a center for the study of depression , which was named the Rachel Upjohn Building after W.E. Upjohn 's first wife .

On November 21 , 2006 , Meader was awarded the title of honorary member of the American Geographical Society and was invited to sign her name on its Fliers ' & Explorers ' Globe . This was part of a tradition spanning back to the 1920s in which noted explorers are asked to place their signature on the Globe . Meader was the 79th to do so . Other signers of the globe include Charles Lindbergh , Amelia Earhart , Sir Edmund Hillary , Robert Peary , Richard Byrd , and the astronauts on Apollo 8 . Meader was one of only three people to sign it twice ; across East Africa and the Andes .

Mary Meader died on March 16 , 2008 in Kalamazoo at the age of 91 . Her husband died one year before . Survivors include sons Christopher , Timothy , and John , of Kalamazoo , and Rudolph , of Ukiah , California ; seven grandchildren ; and five great @-@ grandchildren .