

Author speaks on USS *Shenandoah* disaster

By [Erik Martin](#) - emartin@civitasmedia.com

GREENVILLE - Aaron Keirns, author of *America's Forgotten Airship Disaster: The Crash of the USS Shenandoah*, spoke to a gathering of more than 65 people at the Garst Museum Sunday. The lecture was the last of four in the museum's annual Speaker Series, sponsored, in part, by the Harry D. Stephens Memorial, Inc.

The *USS Shenandoah* (ZR-1) was America's first airship, the first airship to be filled with helium, and the first to be moored to a floating mast. It was the first of four rigid airships built for the U.S. Navy in that era.

While flying over Noble County, Ohio, in the early morning hours of Sept. 3, 1925, the vessel got caught in a violent squall line, or line of thunderstorms, which tore the airship apart. Of the 43 crewmen aboard, 14 died.

Among the dead was the *Shenandoah's* commanding officer, Lt. Cdr. Zachary Lansdowne, a U.S. Naval Academy graduate and Greenville, OH native.

In his talk, Keirns noted that 2015 marks the 90th anniversary of the disaster. While the fiery crash of the German Zeppelin *Hindenburg* in 1937 is still remembered by many, mainly due to the iconic film and radio broadcast of the event that still exists, the crash of the *Shenandoah* has largely been forgotten by the American public.

"It's an event that has sort of faded away," he said.

In its time, the *Shenandoah* was an object of great sensation among the American public. It was 682 feet in length, had a total weight of 41 tons, and had a cruising speed of 60 miles per hour. In fact, the vessel had just commenced a public relations tour of the Midwest when it met its demise.

"People would drive for miles and miles if they knew it was going to fly over," said Keirns.

As part of his talk, Keirns presented a slideshow, which not only displayed photos and maps related to the airship's wreckage, but also the construction of the vessel and airship-related advertising and memorabilia of the day.

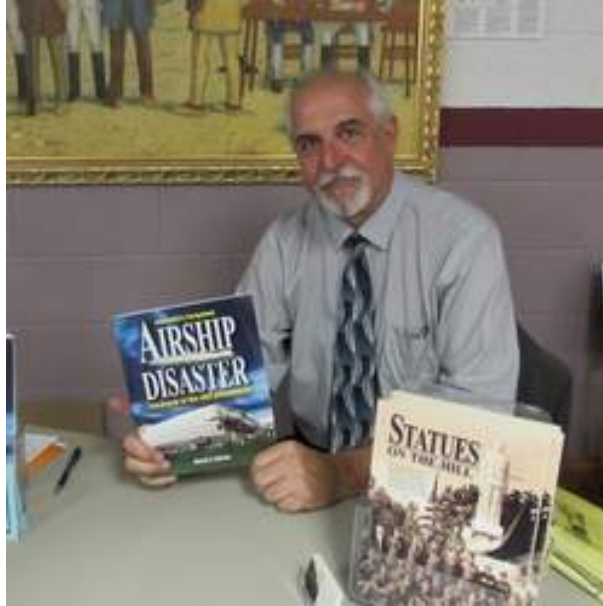
Keirns, from Knox County, Ohio, said he first became interested in the *Shenandoah* while attending a gathering on the 75th anniversary of its crash in 2000.

"It was the first I'd heard of it," he related. "I've been interested in history all my life and I'm fascinated by how quickly history gets forgotten."

Though Keirns has been a prior visitor to Greenville, this was his first official speaking engagement.

"It's neat to be here in [Lansdowne's] hometown. It's a nice connection," he said.

Following the presentation, the author answered audience questions and signed copies of his book.



Author Aaron Keirns was on hand at the Garst Museum Sunday to talk about the USS Shenandoah and its commander, Greenville native Lt. Cdr. Zachary Lansdowne.

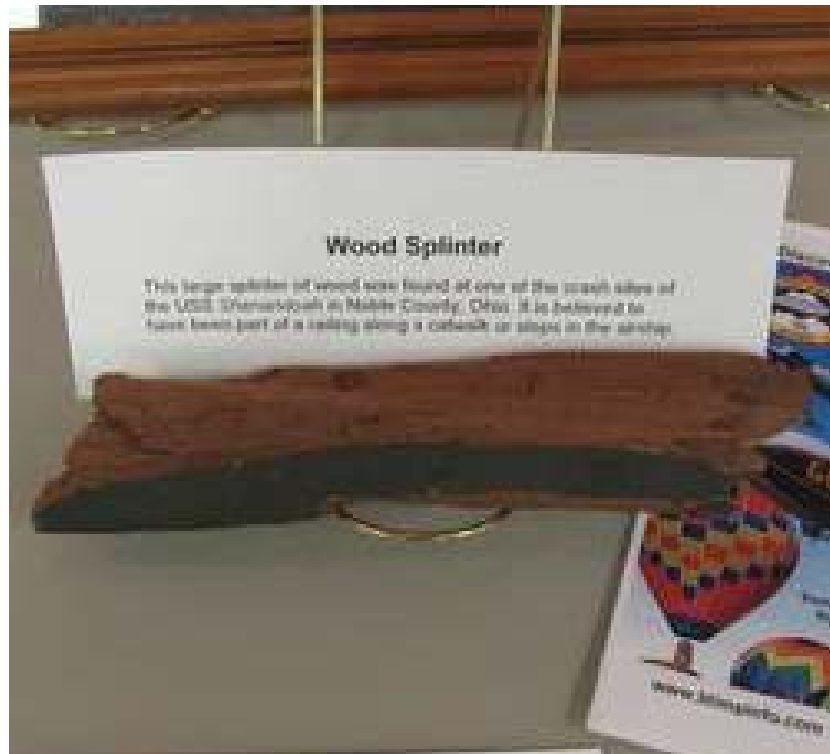
A display of artifacts from the *Shenandoah* was loaned for the presentation by members of The Lighter-Than-Air Society of Akron, Ohio, who were in attendance. Items on display included original pieces salvaged from the wreckage, photos and contemporary media accounts of the disaster.



Goldbeater Fabric



On display was a piece of the USS Shenandoah's internal structure, courtesy of The Lighter-Than-Air Society of Akron, OH



Wood splinter thought to be from one of the railings inside the Airship.

Also in attendance was one of five grandchildren of Lansdowne, Judy Hunt, of Washington, D.C. At the end of the presentation, local resident and Lansdowne family friend Florence Magoto presented Hunt with an original ink and watercolor print by artist Paul Ackley. The print featured renderings of the *Shenandoah*, Lt. Cdr. Lansdowne and Lansdowne's Greenville home, a historic house listed on the National Registry of Historic Places.



Florence Magoto (left) presents Lansdowne descendent Judy Hunt (right) a watercolor and ink print depicting Lansdowne, the USS Shenandoah, and Lansdowne's Greenville home.

America's Forgotten Airship Disaster: The Crash of the USS Shenandoah is available for purchase on Amazon.com and at the Garst Museum gift shop. To receive an autographed copy of the book, contact the author by email at ajkeirns@hotmail.com.