

Times photos by Jason Wachter
Donald Braun, 79, St. Cloud, has the 1861 deed given to his great-grandfather, Xavier, signed by President Abraham Lincoln.

Old paper carries special meaning

Local man treasures deed signed by Lincoln

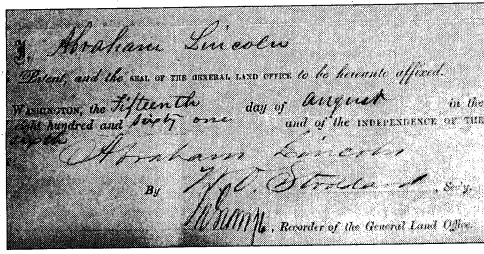
The wrinkled piece of paper that has turned yellow with age hangs in a corner of Donald Braun's living room.

It's an 1861 deed given to Braun's great-grandfather, Xavier, and signed by President Abraham Lincoln.

The deed was only noticed — and handled with care — within the last 20 years.

Before that, it had been stuffed away with other documents and shuffled around the house and attic, said Braun, St. Cloud.

The red ribbon on the lower left corner has been bleached white by the sun's glare. On the document, the family name is spelled BROWN instead of BRAUN.



Braun's 1861 deed was signed in two places, one by Lincoln, the other by his secretary.

Xavier Braun bought 76.97 acres from Pvt. Henry Griffin for an undisclosed amount of money. Xavier Braun's land went west to Clearwater Road, south to Sportsman Island Road, north to Aldon Drive and east to the Mississippi River.

In the 1940s and 1950s, parts of the land were sold because the property was too valuable to keep as a farm, Braun said.



Along the way
By BRENDA LING
Times Staff Writer

Pilot recalls adventures in Northwest Territories

His eyes are not as good as they used to be, yet the feisty 79-year-old hopes to fly a few more times this summer.

Donald Braun has logged close to 17,000 hours of flying time.

In 1967, he was the first man to land a wheel-equipped plane on the North Pole. He flew the plane for a group of scientists, who wanted to conduct some tests that included everything from measuring the depth of the ocean to ice thickness.

Braun set to speak

Donald Braun will speak Friday about his work in the Northwest Territories before the Minnesota Aviation Trade Association.

The association meets at 8:45 a.m. at the Radisson Suite Hotel, 404 W St. Germain St.

Rolling out a well-used map of Canada on the thin carpet, he kept the paper from curling up with his wooden cane.

For 15 years, Braun flew all over the Northwest Territories for Wardair Canada Inc.

His long fingers tracked the route he and other pilots flew twice a year to take Judge John Howard Sissons to the villages of the natives. They made the trips so the natives could be tried in their own jurisdictions.

They would start in Yellowknife and go up to Grise Fjord, the most northern village in the Northwest Territories. Then they would go down to Victoria's Island and back to Yellowknife.

The group, which included five court members, spent three weeks on the trek, flying from town to town. Sometimes, they would reach neighboring towns by dogsled, skis or foot.

Braun's single-engine Otter held only 10 people.

There were no airstrips and Braun would land in a clear area, sometimes on a frozen lake.

All those adventures have prompted Braun to write a book. "I've been procrastinating for the last 20 years," he said.

It was a serious illness two summers ago that made Braun start dictating his life story. He was in the hospital with chronic diarrhea and his weight dropped from 178 pounds to 138. Braun wanted to leave his family his story.

His book, tentatively titled "True Life Story of The Arctic Fox — Bush Pilot of the North Country," will have 24 chapters. All but eight chapters are done.

Growing up on the farm fields of Central Minnesota, Braun knew since he was 6 that he wanted to be a pilot. That was when an old Standard plane landed in the fields right in front of his house.

Two men got out and stayed overnight.

Braun spent that night and morning inspecting every part of that plane.

That was enough to fire Braun's passion.

He learned to fly in a glider built by a friend, Ray Russell. When Braun was 17, he built his own glider. With his homemade glider, Braun was able to fly from 600 to 800 feet above the farm.

After graduating from Cathedral High School, Braun worked a series of mechanic jobs before he joined the Royal Canadian Airforce in 1941. After five years, Braun joined Wardair Canada.

Braun retired and returned to St. Cloud. His wife, Marie, died in 1990.

Braun turns 80 on Feb. 20. Age hasn't stopped him from doing much.

Looking back, Braun said he enjoyed every minute of his work in the north country. "My hobby became my life."

How is your own's about aviation? He is a very interesting man. He looks like an old man. Don't forget!