

First Flight Not Wright? [Part 2]
 Commentary by George W. Earley

As you may remember [I hope you remember!] last December I wrote about a German-American chap named Gustave Whitehead who, some folks believe, actually flew a heavier-than-air craft about 16 months before the famous December 17, 1903 flights by Orville Wright.

Well, there's another claimant to those first flight honors, a man whose descendants believe he actually flew almost 40 years before Wilbur and Orville made those famous flights at Kitty Hawk.

The claim about that flight, and a later one, were made ten years ago by Anita Tatsch who self-published a little book about her great-grandfather titled "Jacob Brodbeck 'Reached for the Sky' in Texas."

According to Mrs. Tatsch, Jacob Brodbeck, who was one of several thousand Germans who emigrated to Texas in the mid-1840's, flew in an aircraft of his own design shortly after the Civil War ended.

A college-trained music teacher, Brodbeck emigrated in 1846 from Wurttemberg, Germany, traveling two months by ship from Antwerp Harbor to Galveston, Texas.

According to family tradition, Jacob, who was well known to have an inventive and inquiring mind, decided there must be a better way of traveling than by ship. Noting the sea birds that followed his ship, Jacob began envisioning an airship.

From vision to reality took many years. It was not until 1865 that the *San Antonio News* was to inform its readers that Jacob Brodbeck had developed his "Air Ship" plans sufficiently to begin construction of "a machine which should enable man to use, like a bird, the atmospheric region as the medium of his travels."

Brodbeck issued \$5 shares and in a few weeks collected enough money to finish building a man-carrying version of the model airships he had been demonstrating for several years.

That first flight was made in September, 1865 [38 years before the Wrights flew] and it was both a success and a failure.

In those days, of course, the internal combustion engine did not yet exist nor were existing steam engines small enough, light enough, and powerful enough for use in an aircraft. Brodbeck had therefore conceived the idea of a spring motor; his account of that first flight was as follows:

"I wound up the massive coil spring and cut loose the rope as I released the lever for take-off. The take-off was a success and the 'Air Ship' soared majestically over the tree tops. As the coil spring unwound, suddenly something happened with the mechanism and I was unable to rewind the spring fast enough to remain aloft. I found myself dashing towards the ground with my spirit shattered. I suffered only minor injuries, but my 'pride and joy' suffered severe damage."

The damage to the Brodbeck's "Air-Ship" caused his investors to lose faith in the idea. Further monies were not forthcoming and nine years were to pass before the inventor, scrimping and saving, repaired his plane and tried again. The results were unfortunately the same as before: "My ship took off and I sailed around until the power of the coil spring gave out again after a few minutes of flight. Then down into the corn field I crashed . . ."

Jacob clearly had control problems. Despite the brevity of his accounts of his two flights, it seems embarrassingly clear that once the spring motor ran down, his craft became uncontrollable. It didn't glide, it plunged to the ground like a wounded bird, breaking many of its structural members and bruising its intrepid inventor.

The contrast between Brodbeck's short hops -- they can't really be called true flights, given his control problems and the short working life of his spring motor -- contrast sharply with the flights claimed by Whitehead and the documented, sustained and controlled flights made by the Wrights a few decades later.

That second flight was apparently Jacob's last. Later that year he journeyed to Michigan and met with Octave Chanute who was then testing gliders. While Chanute evidenced considerable interest in Brodbeck's designs and a flying model he had brought with him, he was unable to help him further his plans.

Brodbeck later told friends that although "I demonstrated my model to many prominent businessmen . . ." he was unable to secure financial backing. The final blow came when, while in Chicago, "some very important papers were taken from my briefcase. I later felt that my plans were used to benefit those who in later years were successful in flight due to the invention of a small gasoline motor used for their motive power." Brodbeck named no names, but in his great-granddaughter's book is an artist's drawing of the "Air Ship" and the Wright Brother's "Aeroboot." While there are striking similarities, there are also substantial differences, making it difficult to argue if anything more than sheer coincidence was at work.

Brodbeck died in 1897; for many years afterwards, a model of his "Air Ship" rested in a wooden cabinet in his deserted workshop. But according to family members, the model mysteriously disappeared from its cabinet some years before a fire "of unknown origin" destroyed the workshop in the 1930's.

So -- did Brodbeck really fly his spring-powered "Air-Ship" in 1865 and 1874? Anecdotal evidence says he did; unfortunately no adequate supporting evidence exists to prove the fascinating, but hand-me-down tales his descendants have collected. But I can't help wondering what our world would be like today had heavier-than-air flight truly gotten off the ground in the years immediately following the Civil War. ♦♦♦

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We will hereafter believe less history than ever, now that we have seen how it is made.
 Don Herold, b. 1889



Sasquatch Sighted: Released earlier this month, this 1995 photo by retired professor Josiah Carberry was taken in eastern Oregon while the professor was testing an ultra-light aircraft of his own design. It was released by the American Academy of Scientists Seriously Seeking Sasquatch [AASSSS] whose president, Dr. George Burns Jr., announced that the AASSSS was planning a major summer expedition to the location where the photo was taken.

A philosopher will not believe what he sees because he is too busy speculating about what he does not see.
 Le Bovier de Fontenelle, 1657-1757

COUNTER CULTURE
 by Sandy Rea

Regular readers will have noticed that Seaside does not generate much coverage in the Upper Left Edge. That could be because Seaside is to Clatsop County what Pluto is to Oregon -- somewhat removed from the mainstream.

Those of us who live here know there are actually two Seasides: One where locals and friendly visitors mingle (with reservations), and, the other, where the Chamber of Commerce shills this poor little burg as the Vegas/Disneyland/Mecca of the northwest. Seaside's truest attractions do not lie in the candy shops or arcades downtown, but rather, in its beach, rivers, wetlands and its people.

I spend a lot of time downtown. I see it all, from delightful tourists to yuppie trash; from disgruntled locals, to the ladies who make sure everyone gets a piece of homemade cake; from fellas who are short on a place to stay and long on the fine art of hanging out, to the real estate barons, sneaking a few minutes of rest between contracts and closings. I like them all.

There's a kid who comes in a couple of times a year. He's about ten, thin, with short brown hair and gray eyes so intense they can nail you to the floor. He seeks me out, to share out mutual obsession -- shells. This is no ordinary child visiting a beach town: He expects me to know where to find them, common names, Latin names, classification, and even the temperature of water in which they normally can be found. He stands on the other side of the counter and drills me like a biology professor in tight shoes. No casual collector, this guy. I imagine him discovering fossils, and hope that he finds someone more knowledgeable than I to help him explore that field.

Last fall he promised to come in the following day, so I brought in an envelope of miniature sand dollars and clam shells for him, but he didn't show. It's March now, and the envelope is still under the counter.

On the beach, with my faithful companion, Maggie and Chappie, I think of him for a bright second as I bend to pick up a skate egg case in the aftermath of a good north coast rain. He would like this. I better read up on them, be ready. He'll be back, he likes Seaside, too.

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LEWIS AND CLARK BICENTENNIAL ASSOCIATION, INC. LOGO DESIGN COMPETITION

The Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Association seeks community participation in the design of its logo which will be used to promote and support the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the Lewis and Clark expedition at the "end of the trail" in Clatsop County in the year 1805.

The competition is open to all interested designers including students and professionals, alike.

The design should convey Lewis and Clark's connection to the Northwest and the "End of the Trail" and should be suitable for use on a range of materials and products from letterheads to memorabilia such as bookmarks, posters, banners and mugs. Designs must be black on white and submitted on 8 1/2" by 11" heavy paper. The artist submitting the selected design will receive a \$300 honorarium. The competition will be judged by a panel of members of the Association and graphic and historical experts.

All entries must be submitted by May 1st, 1996 to the Lewis and Clark Association Inc., P.O. Box 2005, Astoria, OR 97103.

The selected logo will be announced in June. Entries will be the property of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial Association Inc. which may adapt the design as needed.

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