

Dirigo Flyer

Newsletter of the Maine Aviation Historical Society
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Welcome to the 19th year of the *Dirigo Flyer*. The lead article for this issue is excerpted from the Oct. 17, 1996 issue of the *Ellsworth (Maine) American*. Originally written by Herbert Silsby II it concerns an attempt by an Ellsworth man to build an ornithopter.

James Crane's AMERICAN EAGLE

James A. Crane had an idea that came to him in a dream in 1909 which started his pursuit of a “bird motion flying machine.” The problem with fixed wing aircraft was the enormous runway required to get up to speed for takeoff and for braking when landing.

Crane's solution to the problem was to design an airship with “a pair of oscillating wings for moving the ship vertically. The flapping wings will enable the ship to rise off the ground without a running start and will enable the ship to descend upon a small clearing as it does not need a long runway to check its momentum.” His aim was to copy the flight of a bird as nearly as mechanically possible.

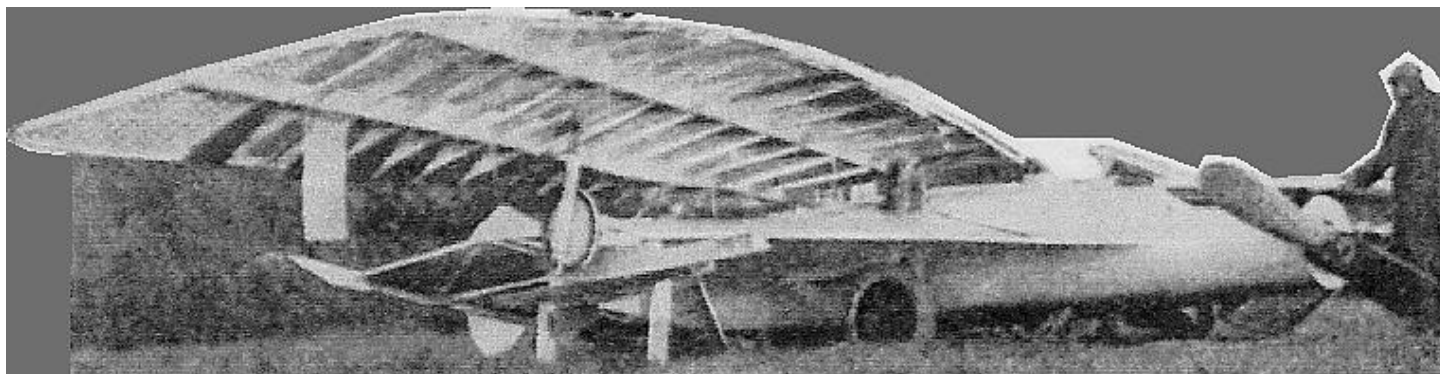
His original vision was in 1909 and he worked on the design of his airship from time to time and by 1925 the design was completed enough for him to get it patented. He then organized a corporation to build and promote his airship.

The Eagle Airship Company was incorporated under Maine law on Nov. 17, 1925. Crane transferred his patent to the corporation in exchange for stock. Shares of stock were issued and sold to investors with all the proceeds to be used in the business. No more stock was sold than necessary to finance the company. Shares were sold in Hancock County. The company prospectus gave the advantages of the birdlike airship, among which, besides the oscillating wings, were pontoons which could be attached as well as wheels, and that every feature of the airship was mechanically correct and simple in operation.

The Eagle Airship Co. bought a 16 acre lot at what is now known as the Triangle in Ellsworth. By May 1927 as assembly plant and a gasoline filling station were built.

The plane was built in Connecticut and was a fully equipped working model with a wing span of 40 feet and a length of 30 feet from nose to tail. It was built of wood and had two engines, one to power the wings and the other to power the propeller. There were many delays in Connecticut and with the assembling of the airship in Ellsworth. The local newspaper reported that “Ellsworth watches with interest the progress of this new enterprise.”

Finally, Thursday afternoon, Sept. 27, 1928, the time was set for the first test flight of Crane's flapping-wing machine. The general public was excluded. However, representatives of several newsreel companies with movie cameras were present and recorded on film the great test flight.



When all was ready, both engines running, movie cameras aimed, the test pilot revved up the engines and the wings flapped vigorously. The plane seemed to lift itself off the ground two or three times. In dropping back to the ground, one of the struts let go and penetrated the light wooden body of the airship. No one was hurt, but the airship was pretty much destroyed. (editor's note: *The whole episode is in a movie called Gizmo and can be viewed on Google. Go to Google, then to Google videos. Type in Gizmo. At the time this is written, it is the third selection down titled simply Gizmo and is a 6 minute film submitted by Metacafe.com. Crane's attempt at flight is 3 minutes and 33 seconds into the movie.*)

Crane said the plane was not designed to actually fly but only to demonstrate the correctness of the principle of his invention. He declared that he was certain now that his invention would revolutionize aeronautics. His investors at the onset of the Depression were not so sure. Also, his wife became ill with cancer and nothing more was done about the airship. The land was lost on tax liens in the late 1930's.

After World War II he built another airship out of metal. Called the American Eagle it was pictured in the Oct. 17, 1996 issue of the Ellsworth American. (editor's note: *The Flyer editor has not been able to obtain a copy of the original picture of this airship and the newspaper has not retained copies of pictures from those years.*): It was built of material from the salvage yard where Crane worked and many local people assisted in the construction.

At age 90, Crane still held to his belief in the principle of bird motion flight which he looked forward to being accepted and giving purpose to what he called "the mystery of my life."

He became feeble and ill as his second airship was nearing completion. It was never tested. Crane entered a nursing home in Sullivan and after a long illness died in 1974 at the age of 97. He is buried in Winter Harbor.

For many years the airship sat idly on the grass at the Triangle. (*the editor remembers seeing it sitting there through the late 1970's with bushes growing up around it.*) It was crushed and hauled away when the land was developed.

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CROSS COUNTRY

James E. McCarthy

It was late February 1950. I was under the tutelage of that great flight instructor, Norm Houle, pursuing a Commercial Pilot Course at Doane's airport in Brewer, in those days before he suddenly and quietly flew off with Northeast Airlines, that soon became part of Delta.

On a day that promised good weather I took off from Doane's on my Commercial Cross Country in Cessna 140, N-76197, headed for New Haven, Connecticut, with the intention of spending the night there, returning to Brewer the next day. Two hours and 50 minutes late I checked into New Haven, had my log book signed, and them made arrangements for the night.

In the morning I awoke to a big surprise. During the night it had snowed, depositing 2 or 3 inches of wet snow on the New Haven runways. In due course, after the surprise wore off, it was cleared away enough to provide take off and landing paths. I took off for Meriden, Connecticut, about 20 miles almost due north, with the thought of paying a surprise visit to an old Army buddy, who was a flight instructor for the fixed base operator on the airport.

He had been a sort of enigma at the Reno Army Air Base where we were both GIs because it was generally known that he had been a flight instructor prior to the war. But, here he was, doing duty as a mechanic with the rest of us 'grease monkeys.' He was a tall, quiet, soft spoken guy with big feet. Although I never measured them, they had to be big, providing sure-footing enough for him to walk around, even down to the flap area, on the heavily cambered, slanted, tail-down wing of the Curtiss C-46 aircraft that we maintained. He seemed serenely unconscious of the fact that nobody else would dare, or could, do it.

I passed over the Meriden airport, looked it over, did a 180, and landed to the north. It has seemed very quiet: there was no sign of movement anywhere on the ground, but it was still early in the day, I speculated. There was no control tower to ask, but there appeared to be a light cover of snow, nothing to worry about. I hit the ground, letting the airplane slow down in preparation for an early turn off to the hangar and other buildings I observed to the right, when the Cessna came to a sudden stop. The snow had crusted over (it had been a few degrees colder than in New Haven), and as the airplane weight increased I broke through the crust. The wheels, surprisingly, wouldn't climb over it. So there I was, stuck in the middle of the field. I had been observed by somebody in the fixed base facility. They came out with a truck, breaking up the crust permitting me to move on in to the hangar area.

I asked for my pal, Jennings. He was off, severely stricken with the flu. I phoned him. He, and his whole family were victims of a local epidemic, couldn't come out, and certainly, no one should visit. He and I talked several times but that was it. In the meantime a substantial oil leak was noticed on the Cessna engine, and the right flap piano wire hinge was sliding out of place because of a broken safety. Repairs were made.

I checked in at a nearby motel, spent the night, and departed the next morning for Portland. The snow storm that was rather moderate in Connecticut had hit Portland much harder. The runways and taxiways were well plowed, but from the level of the Cessna cabin I couldn't see over the snow thrown up on each side, so I could but follow the cleared path into the terminal ramp. I had my log book signed by one P.E. Gallant, jumped back into the airplane and took off for Brewer. My log book shows that for some reason I finished up at Old Town airport. Maybe Brewer was still snowed in. After all, it was winter in Maine.

That completed another step in my progress to a Commercial. I didn't really finish up until some months later, after a move to Anchorage, Alaska, at Merrill Field, the operating base for Bob Reeve of Reeve Aleutian Airlines, Mud-hen Smith of Cordova Airlines, Whiskey Willis (a Washington junk dealer) and his Alaska Airlines, and Pacific Northern Airlines (later part of Western Airlines and finally Delta) a far cry from today's operations at Anchorage International Airport.

But, as the old saying goes; that is another story.

The Memorial Pathway Program. Buy a Brick and Support the Maine Air Museum.

The Maine Air Museum is proud to announce the memorial Pathway Program. Here's how it works: To successfully carry out and reach the museum vision, and to refurbish Building 98, the Maine Air Museum needs the financial support of business and public community leaders and individual private citizens. Your interest in the rich Maine aviation history will require funding presently not available to the museum effort. To this end, the museum board has established the following contribution plan for receiving your monetary donation and recognizing your gift permanently in the museum pathway and wall of honor. Remember: your donation is fully tax deductible.

Stratocumulus Member - \$100 Donation. Entitles the gift giver to a one-year membership, an MAHS patch and a benefactor's engraved 4" x 8" x 2.5" red clay brick

with up to two lines (14 characters/line, 0.65" high) of commemorative text in the name of the gift giver or his/her memorial to others. Brick to be installed on the museum grounds, walkway or building facade.

Altostratus Member - \$150 Donation. Entitles the gift giver to a two-year membership, an MAHS patch, a copy of "The United States Air Force in Maine" and a benefactor's engraved 4" x8"x2.5" red clay brick with two lines (14 characters/line, 0.65" high) of commemorative text in the name of the gift giver and his/her memorial to others. Brick to be installed on the museum grounds, walkway or building facade.'

'Altocumulus Member - \$250 Donation. Entitles the gift giver to a five-year membership, an MAHS patch and a benefactor's engraved 4" x8"x2.5" pearl gray marble brick with up to two lines (14 characters/line, 0.65" high) of commemorative text in the name of the gift giver and his/her memorial to others. Brick to be installed on the museum grounds, walkway or building facade.

Cirrus Member - \$2500 Donation. Entitles the gift giver to life membership status, an MAHS patch and a benefactor's engraved three foot white marble sitting bench with one line (27 characters/line, 2" high) of commemorative text in the name of the gift giver and his/her memorial to others. Bench to be installed in the museum building or on the museum grounds.

UPCOMING:

April 9 Monthly meeting of the Maine Aviation Historical Society to be held on at 10 a.m. at the Museum.

June 11-12 Portland Jetport Open House.

Aug 13-14 Portsmouth, NH Air Show which will feature the USAF Thunderbirds.

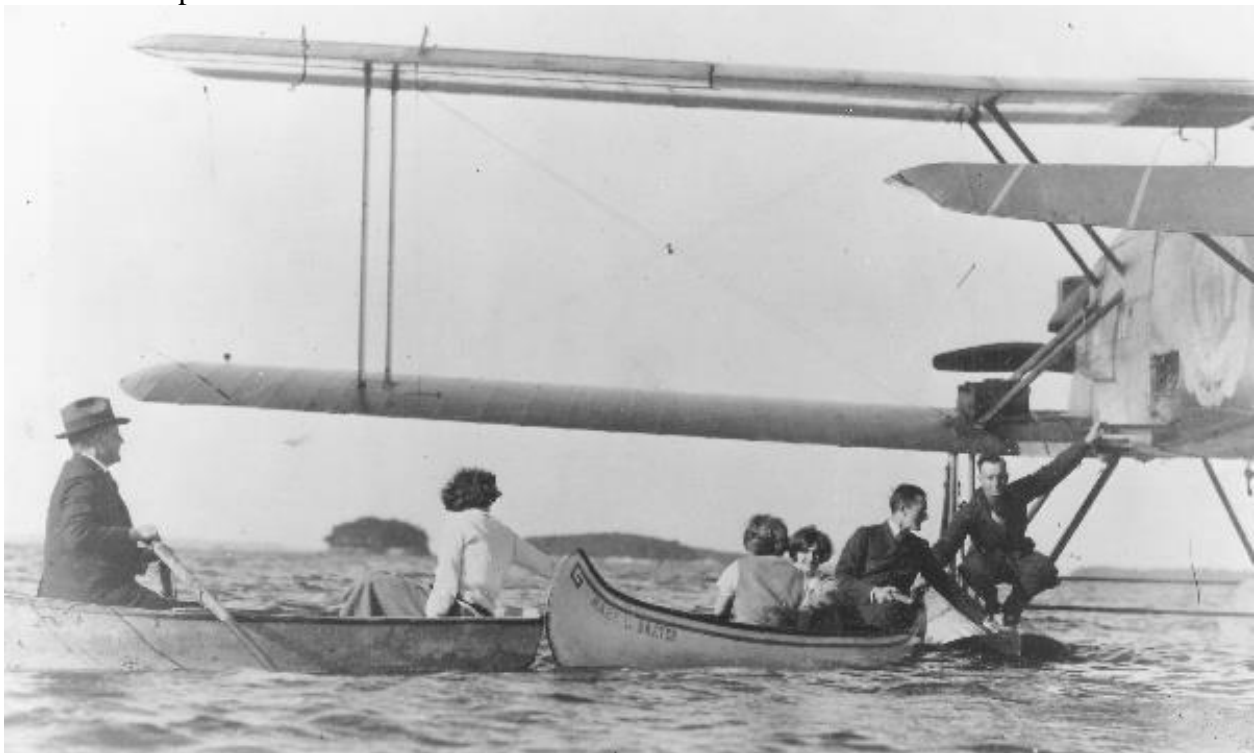
Aug. 28 The last Great State of Maine Air Show at Brunswick will feature the Navy Blue Angels.

Sep. 8-11 The 2011 Greenville Fly-in.

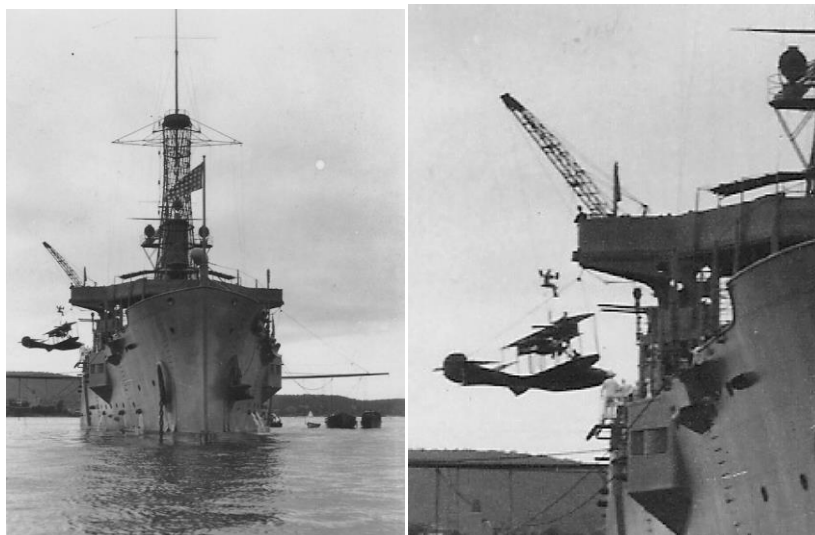
PHOTOS

This month we will look at some photos from the archives. These were unidentified photos and perhaps someone might have information concerning them.

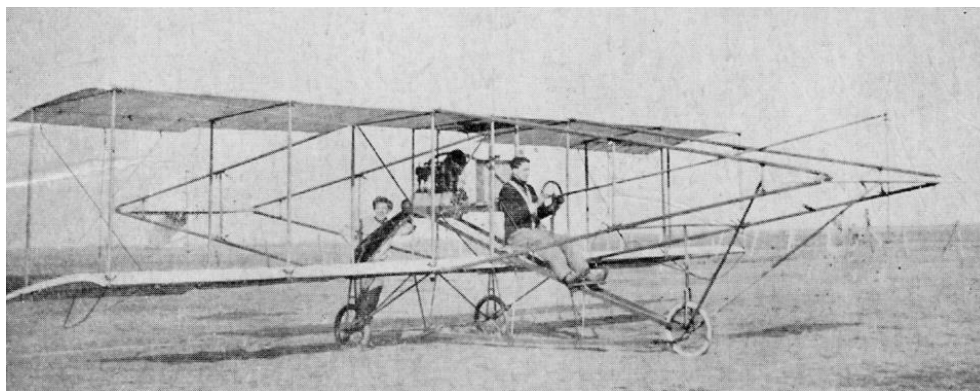
The first shows some canoes at a float biplane. Location is reported as being in Maine but the date and circumstances of the photo are not known.



The second photo shows a float plane being lifted onto a naval ship in the early 1900s. Believed to be in Bar Harbor this photo is on a postcard that was postmarked in Nov. 1917. The aircraft appears to be a Curtiss type and the ship might be either the battleship Illinois or Kentucky both of which visited Bar Harbor in 1916. The location might be at the Naval Coaling Station at Lamoine.



The photo below is titled “George Schmitt in His Aeroplane Will Make Daily Flights at the Great Waterville Fair” and is undated.



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The Maine Air Museum is located at the 98 Maine Avenue adjacent to the Bangor International Airport.
44° 48' 2.10" North 68° 48' 36.02" West

NEEDED: Volunteers are always needed. Contact Les Shaw les@maine.edu or via the museum address.

Newsletter articles and photos. The editor has nearly expended all new material for the newsletter. Email material to wtownsend@roadrunner.com or mail to the museum attention: Dirigo Flyer



Maine Aviation Historical Society Maine Air Museum * Membership Form

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Dues are for one year, and membership will expire in the month you joined.

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Membership	Dues	Benefits
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Family	\$35 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Corporate	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission
Supporting	\$100 annual	Newsletter, Museum Admission, .
Lifetime	\$500*	Newsletter, Lifetime Membership Number, Museum Admission,
	* 2 annual \$250 payments	

We need volunteers-docents, mechanics, maintenance, librarians and exhibit specialists, etc.

- Please call me. I want to be active in the organization.
- I cannot join now, but would like to help. I am enclosing a check for \$_____.
- Contributions over \$20 are tax deductible within the limits of the law.
- I wish to support and obtain membership by purchasing a memorial brick.

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