

Nov. 14, 1896

My dear M Means

I am in receipt of your pleasant and interesting letter pf the 11 inst.

And first to answer your inquiry. M Herring did not prove satisfactory. He left me about the middle of September, giving as his reason that he did not want to countenance by his presence the pending test of a third machine, designed by m. Paul, as its results would be little short of suicide. These apprehensions proved to be entirely unfounded, as the machine is stable.

I think the real reason is that he knew that I would not consent to apply a motor to a full sized machine, believing this to be entirely premature, while he was at the time so elated by our joint success and the unwelcome (to me) advent of the newspaper reporters, that he thought early success within his grasp. He told me that he intended to build at once a full sized machine with a gasoline motor of his invention, with the assistance of a syndicate of newspapers, or from the proceeds of public exhibition. I understood subsequently that he had applied to Barnum and Bailey's circus, but had been unable to make an arrangement.

His longest glide while with me was 359 feet, at an angle of 10° (1 in 5.6) and the strongest wind experimented in was 31 miles an hour. Since he left me I have learned nothing of his performances, but if he had built a full sized machine and made long flights with it, I think I should have heard something of it through the pesky reporters. The original machine remains with me, it was originally a three decker, but I had the bottom surface removed as a matter of prudence, so as to avoid Lilienthal's fate. When I make sure that there are no hidden defects in the apparatus, I will restore the third surface. I made the original sketch, but M Herring made the working drawings and supplied the regulating attachment.

I am amused to find how similar has been our experience in regard to Beeson and to Lancaster. The letter wrote me in 1894 that having perfected the soaring plane in wind and dropped it as having no practical value, he had developed a soaring plane in calm air, from which motive power could be obtained when perfected to run sewing machines. He wanted financial aid. This I declined to give, and said that I could "only express the hope that he had hit upon an obscure law of nature which he could make valuable." This brought me an abusive letter which terminated the correspondence. I was curious to know how this discovery (?) had turned out and hence wrote to you. I should be glad to look over his letters, but perhaps this can be left until I visit you in Boston. I except we shall have many queer reminiscences to compare as well as some interesting information.

In regard to Beeson, like you, I wrote to him (in 1893) at Dillon and my letter was returned "not found." I then wrote to the Post master, giving the names of the two witnesses to the patent, from whom to make enquiries. The wife of one of them (John W. Ball) said the man had gone to Seattle, and there I lost him. I believe that he is dead, for if he were alive our friends of the press would have brought him to the front with some story or other. I had no sport of luck in imitating "the evolutions of a soaring bird" when I tested the device, yet as I perhaps understand the principles of balancing in the wind better now than I did then, I may try it again.

I am more and more convinced that the question of equilibrium is the first to be settled, and that this can best be worked out with full sized gliding machines, without a motor. I look upon final success as yet very distant, so that nobody is likely to make any money out of the matter for many years. I shall be satisfied if I am able to advance the solution sufficiently as to be set down eventually as one of the pioneers.

Yours very truly

O. Chanute