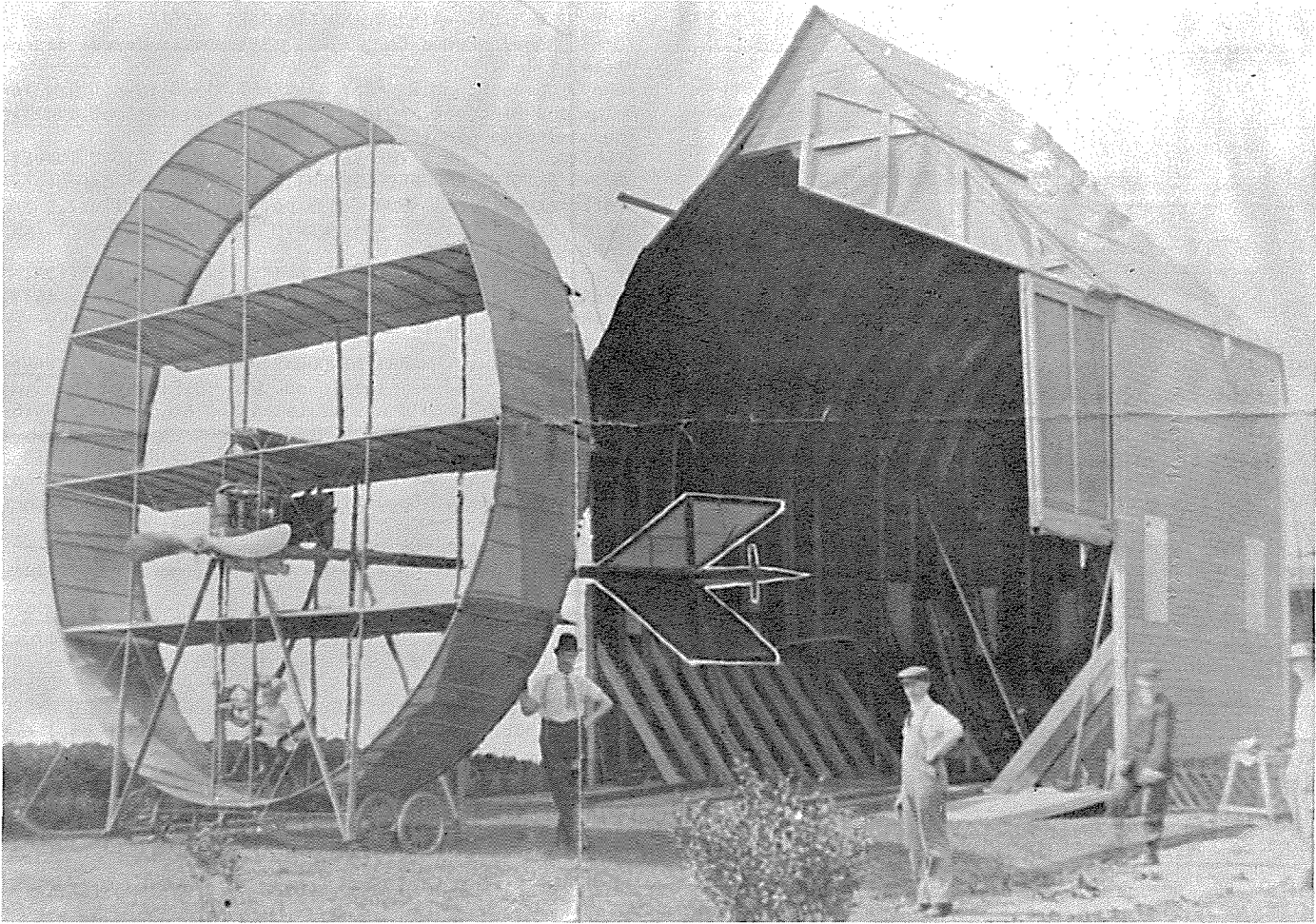




William Pierce Gary's Hoople in front of the Hoople hangar which he also constructed in Paterson, New Jersey.

Bill Gary and the Hoople

By JOHN W. CLARKSON, JR.

"It'll never get off the ground."

Without doubt, Bill "Bing" Gary, inventor, builder, newspaperman and pioneer aviator, heard these words more often than most early aircraft designers. The Sunday crowds that flocked around his home and workshop in Totowa, New Jersey, in the years just preceding the first World War, were there for the most part in the hope of witnessing failure--preferably spectacular failure in the shape of an exciting crack-up. One of Bill's daughters, who lives today in Belleville, New Jersey, told me that the most vivid and painful of her childhood memories are those of defending her dad against jibes beginning, "Crazy 'Bing' Gary...." Nevertheless, Bill Gary's strange designs not only got off the ground but flew considerable distances. Somehow, though, his name has never become known to the general public outside the immediate area of Paterson, New Jersey. Even today, few Patersonites can say they remember those long-ago Sunday afternoons when Bill's weird aircraft trundled down Union Avenue in Totowa Borough and wavered uncertainly into the air.

William Pierce Gary was born in Washington, New Jersey somewhere around the year 1874. The death of his

mother, when he was about ten, precipitated the first crisis in his young life. His father remarried, and Bill, unable to endure one whom he felt to be an interloper, left home.

His first adventure involved stowing away on a cattle boat bound for Scotland, the home of his ancestors. During the voyage he was collared by the ship's officers and forced to peel potatoes, mountains of them, in order to work his passage back to America. Thereafter, Bill always felt an understandable aversion to Irish caviar and even in later years rarely allowed a portion to be placed on his dinner plate.

Upon arriving back in the United States, Bill, no doubt wishing to put as much distance as possible between himself and salt water, took off for the far West "riding the rods" for transportation. After almost dying of thirst in the Mojave Desert and being rescued by a friendly Indian, Bill wound up in Laramie, Wyoming. From there he returned and set up his headquarters in Paterson, New Jersey just before the turn of the century--as nearly as his daughter can determine.

Shortly after his return, Bill met pretty Ruth Bar-ned, the daughter of a well-to-do paint store owner,

courted her with the aid of a borrowed horse and buggy, and married her in 1901. For a wedding present, Bill gave his wife a house, and a unique house it was. Entirely by himself, Bill constructed it of cement blocks molded in hand-made forms. Basically the house was of circular design and quite large even for that day of large houses, and it is still standing today at 75 Lincoln Avenue in Totowa Borough, little changed in outward appearance. The house took Bill four years to build, and he and his growing family moved in during 1905.

He had found employment upon his return to Paterson as a photo-engraver for the Paterson News Guardian, but men like Bill Gary are never happy with just one job. Fully understanding the time-honored economic plight of young marrieds, he worked out a plan whereby a young couple could establish themselves in their own home. He built modest houses into which a couple could move and then pay off the cost as rent at \$35.00 a month, thus anticipating the FHA by about 30 years. No couple was ever dispossessed, for Bill was always ready to extend credit as far as it could possibly be stretched.

Bill also built a toy factory in East Paterson and there manufactured the toys he invented. These creations were "field tested" on his own brood, which eventually numbered three daughters and a son. In addition, he conceived and constructed an early version of the novachord, which he somehow hooked up to the piano in his own parlor, and delved into the mysteries of photography and sculpture.

It was about 1905 when he became interested in aviation. Being Bill Gary, he was unsatisfied with the conventional designs of his day. Instead, he devised the rather frightening constructions illustrated by the accompanying photographs. The present writer is not an engineer, but he has been told that there are elements in these designs that are directly related to certain features found in present-day aircraft construction.

Just who tacked the name "Hoopie" onto Bill's design, or exactly when the first Hoopie flew, or tried to fly, is unknown. All that is certain is that Bill worked with the design between 1905 and 1913.

It can easily be seen that there were at least three basic Hoopies--one employing a concave hoop, a second with a straight hoop, and a third, a real departure, with triplane wings fitted inside the hoop. Side vanes were added to some models (or perhaps originally designed), no doubt to lend stability to the craft. Today, nobody seems to know for certain which design came first or exactly how many Hoopies were built. (Perhaps some readers with long memories can add to the meager store of information.) His daughter, however, did tell me that she does not feel the most complex plane, the one employing the triplane wings, was a final development of the simpler designs. To add to the general confusion, variations in undercarriage construction are apparent. The main point, however, is that the Hoopie flew.

Bill Gary also designed and built more conventional aircraft, at least one of which was fitted with floats. This machine gave Bill an opportunity for one genuine crack-up. While descending to a landing on the Passaic River one day, he omitted to take into account a heavy cable that had been strung across the stream. He and the plane came to grief. The man emerged scarred but undaunted; the fate of the plane has not been recorded.

By 1913, Bill Gary apparently felt that the Hoopie design had proved itself and, characteristically, he seems to have lost interest in that particular phase of aeronautics. During World War I, he became increasingly concerned with his construction work, which developed into a full-time business. He left the News-Guardian in 1915 and became known primarily as a builder. Just as he was to be called into service, the war ended.

Governmental interest in the possibilities of an air mail service appear to have aroused his concern for aircraft and their design a second time. He set about creating a plane to fly the mails. Confusion among his

family exists as to the exact facts, but it was about this time he also developed an improved aileron design that was to be successfully employed by Clarence Chamberlain in the later 1920s.

By 1922, Bill's mail plane was ready for testing. Only one photograph was ever taken of it, so far as is known, and a reproducible copy has not been located. Bill's daughter recalls it was of conventional design, apparently an aluminum covered monoplane, and that "it looked like something you might expect to see around World War II."

The day of the tests dawned cold, wet and windy, a March-like day in August. Ruth Gary was more than a little apprehensive as Bill set out for Murchio's field in Wayne Township where his work had been carried on since the Hoopie hangar had been removed from the Totowa property. Arriving at the field, he determined to get the "feel" of the air by taking up a JN-4 prior to flying his new plane. With him as a passenger in the Jenny he took a man by the name of Fisher. Over Barbour's Pond, a small body of water near the field, the plane hit an air pocket, fell off on its left wing and crashed. A newspaper account of the accident reads in part:

Gary, who had recently completed a monoplane which he expected to test today, received numerous cuts about the head and body, while Fisher received minor injuries.... It was stated this afternoon that both men would attempt to fly the new plane probably tomorrow. Spectators...were surprised to see either of the men alive and were more astonished when Gary, half hidden from view in the wreckage, instructed his rescuers how to remove parts of the plane that entangled he (sic) and his assistant.

Carried to the nearby home of a friend, Bill Gary telephoned his wife to say he would be away for a few days getting certain parts he needed for the new plane. The actions were characteristics; he didn't want her to



William Pierce Gary

worry. But Ruth Gary already knew what her husband probably did not--he was dying. She had been told by several newspaper reporters, who had come to her door seeking information, that the control column of the Jenny had pierced his stomach.

Resisting the efforts of others to have Bill hospitalized, Ruth Gary brought her husband home. Within the next 24 hours, he suffered no fewer than 72 hemorrhages, and three different doctors despaired of his life. But, somehow, through the use of hot bran packs, the help of her daughters, and the intervention of a higher power, Ruth Gary saved her husband.

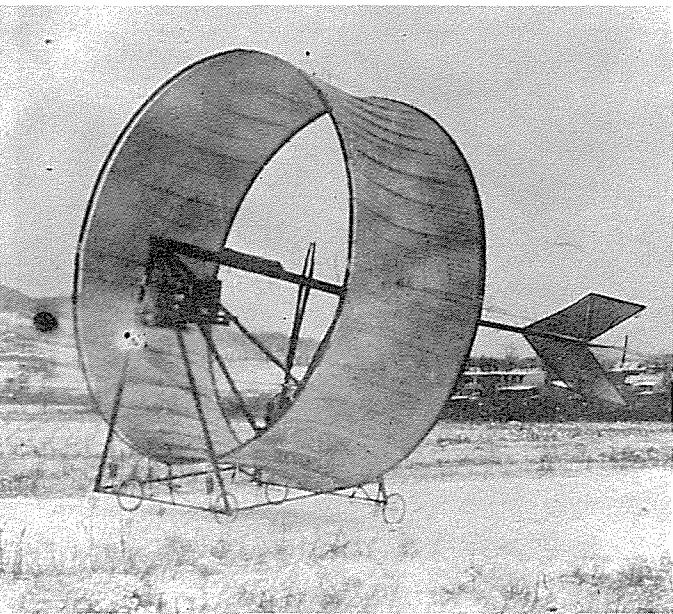
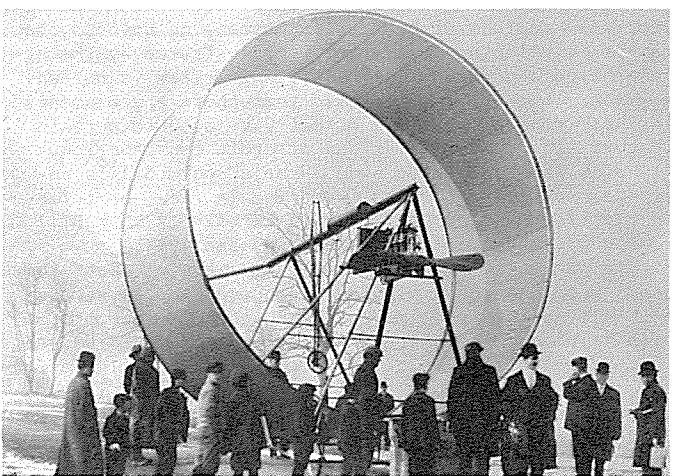
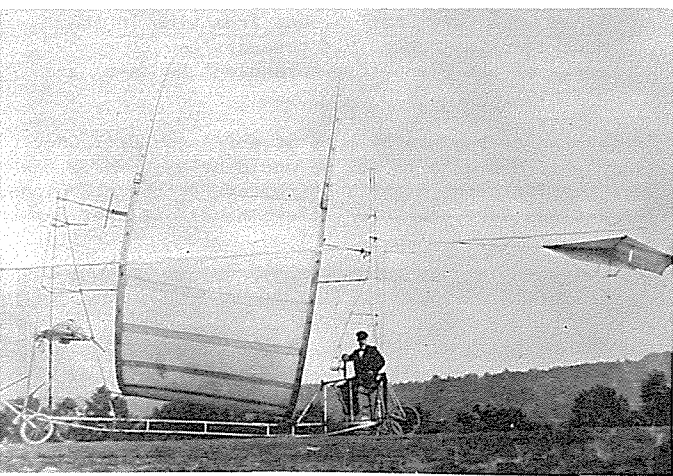
Bill's convalescence was a slow and painful one, and for several years the big, athletically-inclined man was a cripple, unable to walk the shortest distance. Occasionally, when no one was available to help him, he would crawl like a baby from the porch, where he liked to sit, into the house. Finally, just as his full recovery seemed assured, he developed Parkinson's disease (palsy). It grew progressively worse for the remainder of his life, which extended for another 30 years.

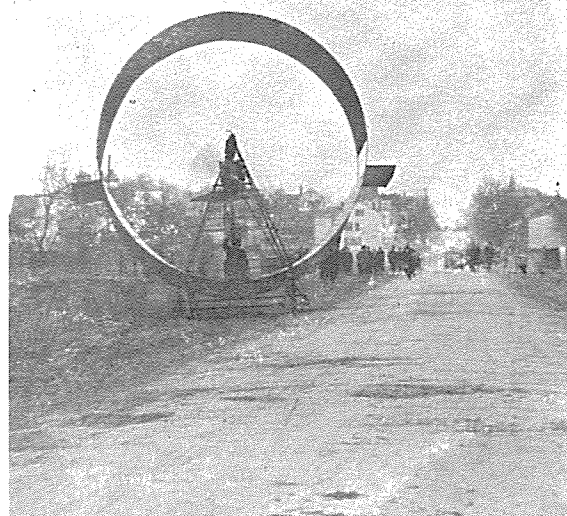
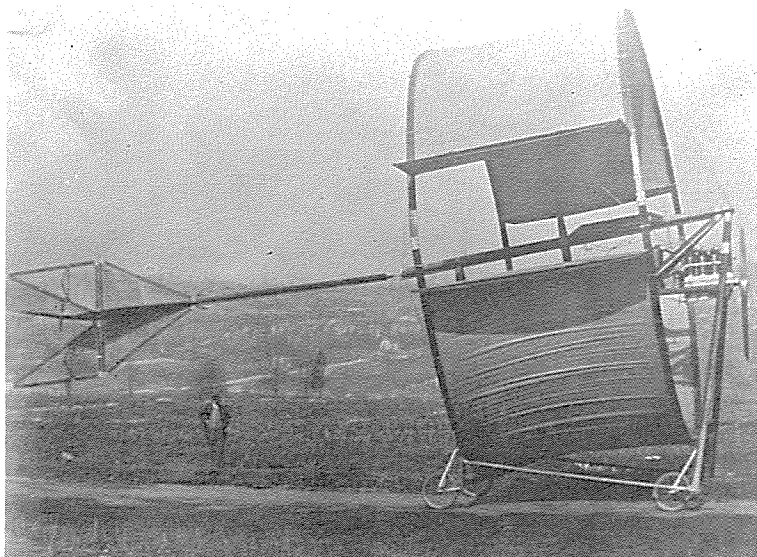
Naturally, his flying was finished. Even if his physical condition had permitted further active work in the air, Ruth Gary would not have let herself be convinced that he should ever again get off the ground. It was finished--no more Hooples, no more mail planes. The mind, however, refused to be convinced, and despite a body that would no longer obey his commands, Bill retained a keen interest in aviation.

During World War II, disregarding his ever-worsening condition, Bill went to work for the government at College Point, Long Island. Even such local fame as he once had was now gone, and the death of his son in 1937 had been erroneously reported as his own. Except for two columns printed in the Paterson Evening News sometime after 1948 and a photograph of one of the Hooples which appeared in an aviation supply catalog a few years ago, no word of Bill or his accomplishments has ever been brought before the eyes of the public. His death occurred quietly in Paterson in the spring of 1951.

A wise man once wrote, "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or far away." Bill Gary, newspaperman, builder, inventor, aviator, was one of the rare ones with the courage to do just that.

EDITOR'S NOTE: In that there are virtually no facts on the Hooples, the majority of photos of them are presented on this and the next page without captions so they might tell their own story. It should be noted that the great number of bracing wires, especially from the hoop to the tail assembly, do not show on these photographs. It would be appreciated if anyone having additional information on the Hoople and/or Bill Gary would contact the author--John W. Clarkson, Jr., 25 Woodstock Drive, Wayne, N.J.--who will prepare it for a future JOURNAL.





All of the photographs of the Hooples and William Pierce Gary accompanying this article were located by the author and photocopied by Richard C. Robey.

