

THE 1910 BOSTON GLOBE AIR MEET

by

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To see the importance of the Air Meet held at Squantum, Mass., in 1910, and to understand the excitement of all concerned, it is necessary to sketch briefly the development of and interest in, the airplane up to that point.

Although the Wrights have a claim to be the fathers of the airplane, it can also be claimed that they did as much as anyone to retard its growth once they had fathered it. In their anxiety to get what they considered their just rewards for their patented lateral control system, they slowed up their own work and tied up promising designers in lawsuits all over the world. In an attempt to break their patents, Glenn Curtiss even took time out from his own developments to rebuild and fly the old Langley Aerodrome, which flight was instrumental in losing them the support of the Smithsonian Institution.

In Europe, would-be inventors were hampered by complete information about the American achievement and unable or unwilling to pay the Wright patent royalties, and it was not until November, 1906, that Santos-Dumont was able to leave the ground for even 100 meters in his machine, "Numero 14". Not until June, 1908, did an Englishman, A. V. Roe, take off and then only in fifty-foot hops. That same summer Roe bicycled across France to talk with Wilbur Wright, who was showing his machine to the French government at Le Mans. It was this demonstration of Wilbur's that seemed to arouse Europe to the possibilities of flying. In July, Louis Bleriot flew the Channel, and the first Air Meet was held in Rheims in August. At this meet Curtiss won the Gordon Bennett Cup, and the next Cup contest was accordingly scheduled for Belmont Park, in the United States, the following October.

In line with the growing tradition of newspaper-sponsored aviation events - the Daily Mail prize for a flight across the Channel, and one for a flight from London to Manchester and the New York World prize for a flight from Albany to New York - the Boston Globe offered \$10,000 for the shortest time from Squantum, a field near Boston, around Boston Light, back to the field, around the State House in Boston, and back to the field. Later the Boston leg was omitted, and the course changed to twice around the Light, on the grounds that a flight over the city was too dangerous. There were other prizes for other events and the whole meet was organized by the Harvard Aeronautical Society, James V. Martin, chairman. It was scheduled to start September 3, 1910, right after the second Rheims Meet, and just before the Belmont Park Meet, to cash in on the presence of the foreign aviators.

There was a great deal of excitement as the plans unfolded, or didn't unfold. New records were being set almost daily. At the end of August, Curtiss had set a new overwater record of 45 mph, and Leon Morane set an altitude record of 7045 feet the same day. Walter Wellman was preparing his airship, the America, to cross the Atlantic. At Squantum, the Meet seemed set to open with no fixed list of entrants and activities began on the field well ahead of the opening time.

Samuel F. Perkins came early and brought his kites, similar to the Hargrave and Cody types, and sent visitors (men only, and under 200 lbs.) 20-75 feet into the air. The chairman of the Entertainment Committee, Carl A. Sylvester, had to be urged to come down after ascending dangerously high over Dorchester Bay. Charles J. Glidden observed that he would try when an automobile could be lifted first. Four days before the meet opened, Horace F. Kearny flew his Pfiltzner monoplane, an interesting design equipped with retracting wingtips for lateral control to avoid the Wright patent. He flew it thirty yards and crashed, and was immediately disqualified for flying without permission. He was later requalified, however, and had the honor of being the first off the ground under power.

The competition started to arrive. Claude Grahame-White, fresh from his famous attempt to fly from London to Manchester, arrived on the Cymric with a Farman biplane and a Bleriot, and with him was A. V. Roe, who brought his little triplane which had been bought by the Harvard Aero Society. Both Englishmen proceeded to take a boat trip around Boston Harbor, studying the islands for possible landing places. Globe readers were interested to see that each imported machine was valued at \$5000 or more, and the owners were under bond not to sell them in this country, to avoid paying duty on them.

Cromwell Dixon arrived with his small airship, the Harvard. Three years earlier, at the age of fourteen, he had flown a cycle-powered airship, the Moon, in St. Louis. Charles F. Willard's Curtiss arrived, followed by Curtiss' own, which was set up beside it. W. Starling Burgess expected to enter two Burgess-Curtisses: #2, type B, with a 25 hp Herring-Curtiss engine and #6, type C, with a 30 hp Clement-Bayard. Only the #6 had been sent from his Marblehead shops. Kearny was busily repairing his Pfiltzner. The first injury on the field occurred when Fred Williams fell from a team at the main gate. Meanwhile, Bostonians on their way to the South Station from work looked in vain to the sky for signs of the flying machines they had heard so much about.

The day before the Meet opened, the following aircraft had arrived, of which none but Kearny's had flown: two Curtisses, belonging to Curtiss and Willard; two Burgess-Curtisses, belonging to Burgess; Roe's Avro; Grahame-White's Farman and Bleriot; a second Farman belonging to Clifford B. Harmon; two Wrights, to be flown by Walter Brookins and Ralph Johnstone for the Wrights; and the Pfiltzner. Stanley Y. Beach entered a Bleriot with gyroscopic stability control, and A. W. Benson entered a helicopter powered with an Anzani engine, designed by H. Rietman. The lighters bringing the English aircraft ashore went aground, and three Navy torpedo boats arrived to patrol the harbor and pick up survivors, if any.

There was some sporadic flying on the opening morning, the 3rd. The English Bleriot was flown, partly to test it, and partly to appease the growing crowd of spectators who wanted to see the famous Englishman fly. Harmon flew once, and Cromwell Dixon went up in the Harvard. Grahame-White dropped some dummy bombs. At 3:30 PM the Meet opened officially: the two Wright pilots flew, and Harmon ran his Farman into the creek. Augustus Post worked to ready his Curtiss, which had just arrived. Evening Globe readers noted that Grahame-White had met and talked with John Trowbridge, the author of "Darius Green and His Flying Machine"; that in France Bielovucic had flown from Paris to Bordeaux in only seven hours, and with only four stops; that Morane had raised his altitude mark to 8471 feet; that starting September 5, the play, "The Aviator", would open at the Tremont Theater, "with a real airplane in full flight," and that in Quincy Arthur Dunn had managed to grow two 15-1/2" cucumbers.

On Sunday Dixon flew his dirigible again, and was censured by the Society for violating the edict of Harvard's President Lowell that no Harvard activity should take place on the Sabbath. As if by divine retribution, his motor had quit, anyway, and he had had to valve hydrogen to get down. The following day, the 5th, Burgess put his plant's facilities at Harmon's disposal for repairing his Farman: Kearny cracked his Pfitzner up against a fence: Roe found his triplane (or, rather, the Society's triplane) tail-heavy and under-powered and smashed his landing gear. Globe readers also read that two girls, Miss Phoebe Dwight and Miss Marie Campbell, had been given rides: that John B. Moisant had flown from Paris to the Crystal Palace in England in exactly three weeks: and that a girl swimmer had finally made it from Charlestown to Boston Light: and that the Crippen murder trial was starting.

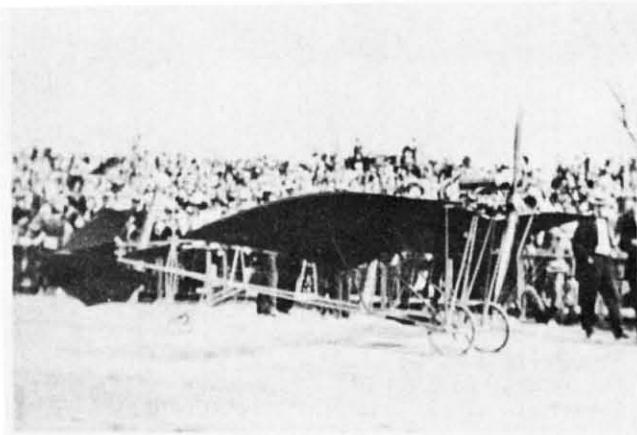
Tuesday the 6th was a slow day, but on the 7th, Grahame-White took off in the Bleriot and flew the course around the Light in 40 min. 1-3/5 seconds, at an altitude of between 800-1000 feet. He was congratulated by Baron Rosen, the Russian ambassador and the other contestants became worried. Walter Brookins flew the slow lap in 22 min. 8 seconds. The following day Roe wrecked the triplane again and Grahame-White announced he planned to try the course again with a set of racing wings on the Bleriot. While waiting, he flew Mayor "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald on the Farman. Curtiss was waiting for a new propeller for more speed, and Cromwell Dixon took off to fly around the State House, and got lost, flying around the Christian Science Church instead, and had to land in Boston's Back Bay. On September 12, Curtiss installed in his plane the engine from the Burgess type B and his new propeller, and found that Grahame-White had just flown the course again, this time in 34 min. 1-1/5 sec. Curtiss then took off himself, but the new engine failed him. Globe readers read that the altitude record had been set ahead again by Chavez at Issy, this time to 8792 feet, and that in war maneuvers by the Prussian army the side with the airship had won. They were disappointed to read that Grahame-White and a friend had been arrested for speeding (in an automobile, this time).

On the 13th, the last day of the contest, a Lieutenant Fickel shot with a rifle at a target from Willard's Curtiss, impressed military observers, and gave the Globe reporters something to speculate on. The same day Maine went Democratic, and the next day news came that the Zeppelin LZ6 had burned at Baden-Baden.

In the professional class, Grahame-White won a total of \$22,100: the Globe prize, first in the bomb drop, first in speed (52.4 mph), first in the get-away (26'11"), and seconds in altitude, distance and duration. Ralph Johnstone won \$5000: first in landing accuracy (5'4" away, with skids), and second in the slow lap. Walter Brookins won \$4250: first in altitude (4732'), first in the slow lap (22.8 mph), second in landing accuracy. Glenn Curtiss won \$2000 for a second in speed, and Charles Willard won \$50 for a second in get-away.

In the amateur class, Clifford Harmon won \$7500 for first in speed, duration, the slow lap, and the bomb drop. (The fact that he won both speed and the slow lap suggests the absence of competition!) Burgess won \$250 for a second in duration.

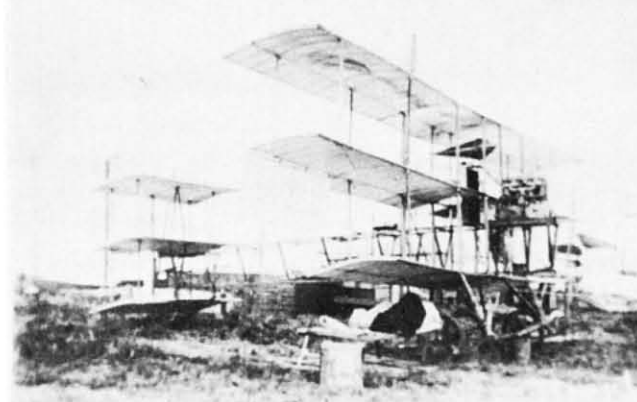
Letters were issued by the Harvard Aeronautical Society to identify each type of aircraft and each entering aviator, as follows, although the letters did not, for some reason, appear on the airplanes themselves.



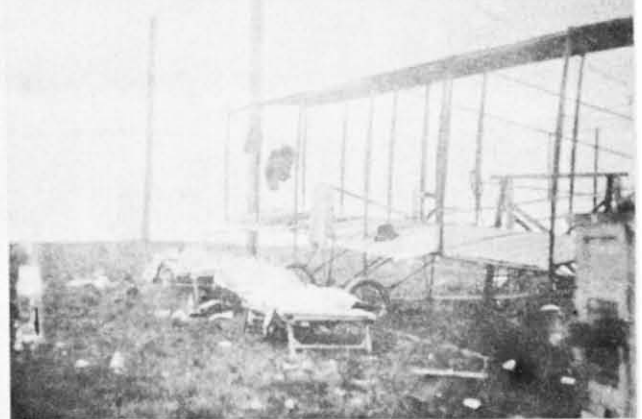
Demoiselle



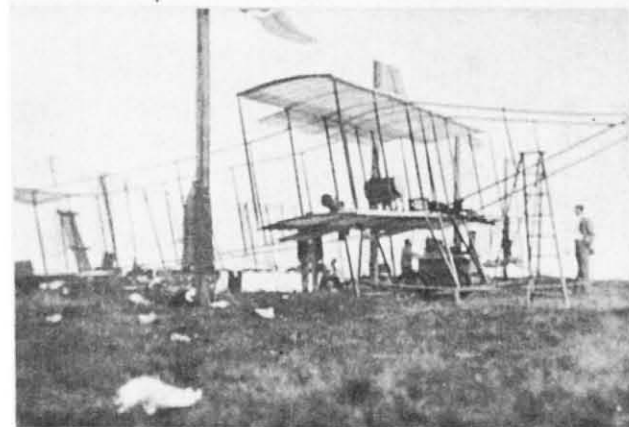
Grahame - White at T.O.



Roe Triplane



Asleep



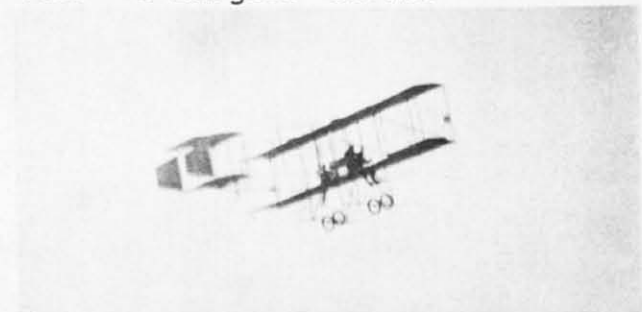
Harman Farman



Hilliard's Burgess - Curtiss



Asher Post in a Curtiss



Grahame - White



Harman wrecked Farman

All photos courtesy of Boston Globe

Aircraft

A Wright
 B Curtiss
 C Farman
 D Bleriot
 E Roe
 F Vendome
 G Antoinette biplane (?)
 H "Harvard" dirigible
 I Burgess
 K Burgess-Curtiss
 L Pfizner
 M Christmas
 N Demoiselle
 O Hubbard
 P Conners
 R Rietmann helicopter
 S Wilson

Aviators (and their aircraft)

A Walter Brookins (Wright)
 B Ralph Johnstone (Wright)
 C Glenn Curtiss (Curtiss)
 D Charles F. Willard (Curtiss)
 E Didier Masson (Vendome monoplane)
 F F. de Baeder (Vendome monoplane)
 G A. V. Roe (Roe triplane)
 H Claude Grahame-White (Farman, Bleriot)
 I Augustus Post (Curtiss)
 J Gardner G. Hubbard (Hubbard monoplane)
 L John W. Wilson (Wilson monoplane)
 M William M. Hilliard (Burgess)
 N H. A. Conners (Conners biplane)
 O J. M. Allias (?)
 P Ernest P. Lincoln (?)
 Q A. W. Benson (Rietmann helicopter)
 R Stanley Y. Beach (Bleriot)
 S Clifford B. Harmon (Farman)
 T Dr. W. W. Christmas (Christmas biplane)
 W John G. Stratton (Burgess-Curtiss)
 X Horace F. Kearny (Pfizner)
 Y Greely S. Curtis (Bleriot)

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