

Augustus Herring of New York was the pilot. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society.

History of

Hamilton's Role in Air Flight



Plane took off from area near what is now boat landing and flew east about 30 feet above the ice for 120 yards.

First New England Air Flight

six years after the Wright brothers took flight at Kitty Hawk, N.C.⁶ This was the culmination of the dreams of two men that began before the Wright brothers' historic event.

Augustus Herring of New York City was designing and building gliders and hoped he could add an engine to achieve longer flight.³

W. Starling Burgess of Marblehead watched, with awe, the Wrights' first public flight at Fort Myers, VA, in 1908.³ Burgess' father was an accomplished builder of racing yachts.¹

Working at Marblehead, Burgess and Herring finished building, in December 1909, their engine-powered airplane. They designated it the Herring-Burgess Model A.¹

Lightweight was essential to the success of the aircraft. Its total weight, including the engine but not the pilot, was 360 lb. The structure was largely made of wood (*spruce*). As with the Wright brother's aircraft, the Herring-Burgess airplane had wood skids, not wheels. There was a center skid and a slightly skid under each lower wing.⁶

Naiad Silk covered the wing surfaces. The wingspans were 26 ft. 9 in. and were 4 ft. 4 in. apart. The plane was 9 ft. 8 in. high, 33 ft. long.⁶

The plane had a four-blade, wood propeller, with a 6-ft. diameter. The 25-hp engine was a modified Curtiss Aeroplane Co. engine. The fuel was a mixture of castor oil and water.⁶

The biplane's construction was completed in December 1909. The H-B Model A was exhibited at the Boston Aeronautical Exposition, at Mechanics Hall, from Feb. 16 to 23, 1910.¹

Charles W. Parker, a carousel and circus equipment manufacturer in Abilene, KS, seeing the plane at the Exposition, offered to buy it for \$5,000, if it was successfully flown.¹

After the Exposition ended, Burgess sent the Model A to Marblehead. He made a duplicate of the plane and fitted it with six triangular control fins atop the upper wing, steering levers for left and right turns. Also added was fore and aft pitch control by a foot lever on the right side, the left side foot pedal controlling the throttle.⁶

Excited at the prospect of selling their plane, Burgess and Herring were faced with the problem of it being winter. New England fields were snow covered.

Fortunately, one of the people that were at the Aeronautical Exposition was Norman Prince of Hamilton. An avid airplane enthusiast, Prince suggested a test flight be attempted on Chebacco Lake, near his family's estate in Hamilton.² Burgess and Herring accepted his offer.

Alongside the lake, at its south end, Prince's father, Frederick H. Prince, owned the Villa Veranda Hotel. Norman Prince opened the hotel for Burgess, Herring, Parker, and others assisting in the venture to stay.⁶

The trip from Boston to Hamilton must have raised a lot of concern for Burgess and Herring, for there was a snowstorm. The next day, the storm had passed and the temperature rose. By late afternoon, snow on the frozen lake had melted and the surface was hard and smooth.³

The biplane was assembled on the lake. The water and castor oil mix that cooled and lubricated the bi-plane's engine was heated on the kitchen stove at the Villa Veranda.⁰⁰

Despite the lateness of the day and the coldness, a small group of people, including local reporters, stood by waiting for the biplane to take flight.³

The plane was moved onto the southern end of the frozen lake, about where the old town beach once was located, and where now is the boat ramp off Chebacco Road. The plane, facing east, had rope lines fastened to wood stakes in the ice, to keep it from moving when the propeller began spinning.³



Augustus Herring, the pilot, used a hand-held steering rudder and foot-controlled elevating rudder. 25-hp engine and propeller, behind the pilot's seat, pushed the plane forward. Pushing a throttle pedal increased the engine to full power. Photo, Hamilton Historical Society.

Augustus Herring, the pilot, used a hand-held steering rudder and foot-controlled elevating rudder. He sat in the center of the lower wing.⁶

The propeller was spun, starting the engine. Herring depressed the throttle pedal, bringing the engine to full power. Herring released the rope lines by pulling a string attached to a butterfly hook.⁶

The plane slid west over the ice for about 80 ft., at a speed like that of an "express train," before becoming air-borne.³

A Gloucester Early Times reporter wrote, "It swooped along an inch or two in the air, gradually ascending, until at 95 feet (*from the starting point*), it was in full flight, about 30 feet above the ice, under perfect control, it droned along for about 120 yards and then gently dropped back to the ice."³ The flight lasted 94 seconds.⁵

The landing was not "gently" as reported, but was hard and not level. The biplane came down on its left skid breaking it. The pilot's seat also broke, but did not come loose.³

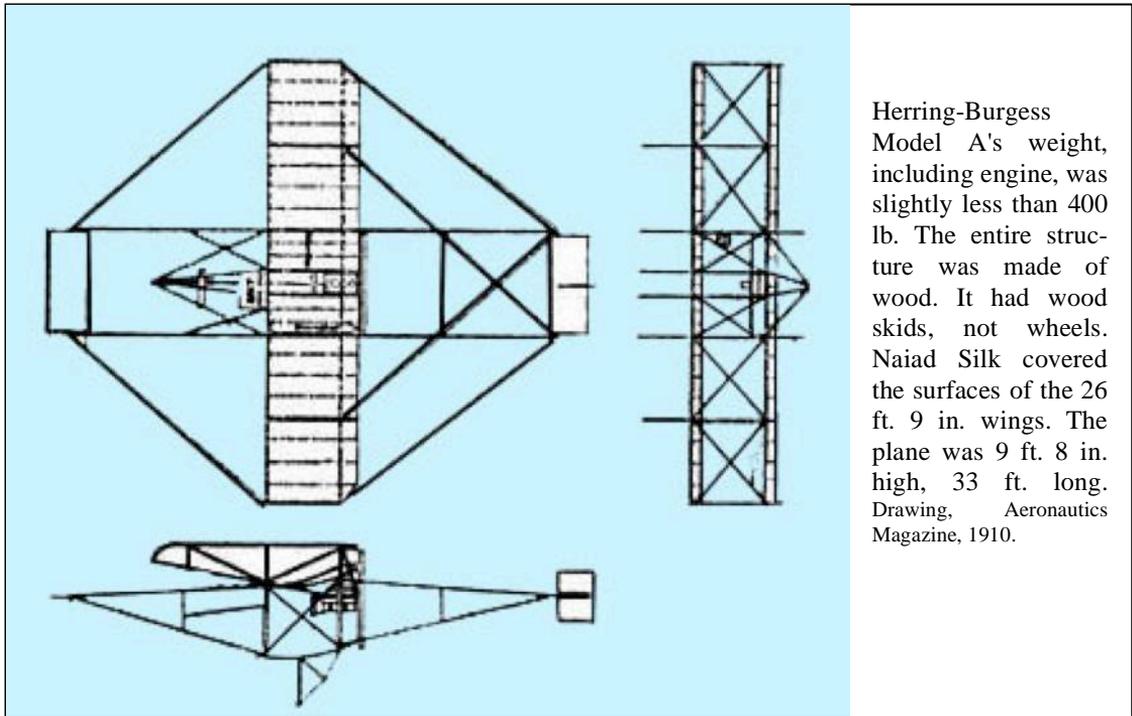
Likely, there were loud cheers from those watching this aeronautical first for New England.

Charles W. Parker reportedly "slapped Augustus Herring on the back and said, 'We've got a deal.'" He gave Herring a \$5,000 check³ (*today worth about \$120,000*).

Parker shipped the biplane shipped to Abilene, KS. However, Herring-Burgess No. 1 several months later may have had a sad ending. Parker started the engine without the propeller, which overheated and destroyed it: Herring-Burgess No. 1 was finished.³

Or, was it. In the July 1912 issue of *Aeronautics* magazine, there was a classified advertisement: "For Sale – Burgess biplane, good condition, complete with Curtiss engine, Cost: \$5,000, Price \$3,500. C.W. Parker, Leavenworth, Kans."¹

As for Herring and Burgess, they built and flew more experimental biplanes at Plum Island and at what now is Candlewood Golf Course, in Ipswich. In 1911, they ended their partnership.³



Herring-Burgess Model A's weight, including engine, was slightly less than 400 lb. The entire structure was made of wood. It had wood skids, not wheels. Naiad Silk covered the surfaces of the 26 ft. 9 in. wings. The plane was 9 ft. 8 in. high, 33 ft. long. Drawing, *Aeronautics Magazine*, 1910.

Burgess opened two factories in Marblehead, where he built more than 300 airplanes. The Wright brothers gave him the first license to build the patented Wright airplanes. A later was model, the Burgess H possibly the first air machine specifically designed and built for military use. It was developed and built in 1912 by Burgess Co., Marblehead, MA.¹

Burgess sold the company in 1917, a year before one of the factories burned on Nov. 10, 1918.

Herring died in 1926, he was 59.

Norman Prince, in August 1911, under the alias George Manor, to conceal his flight training from his father, was the 55th American to be licensed to fly an airplane, by the Aero Club, at Squantum MA, flying a Burgess with a Wright motor. He died in 1916, while flying in WW1, as a member of France's Lafayette Escadrille.

Charles W. Parker went on to become a very successful carousel builder in Leavenworth, KS.

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