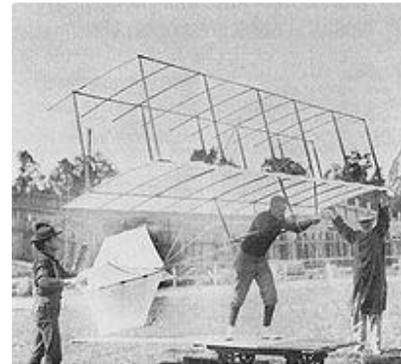


OCTAVE CHANUTE (1999) (1832-1910)

Octave Chanute was possibly the first person to publicly promote the sport of gliding and soaring in the United States of America. In September 1896 a Chicago Tribune reporter quoted him as saying, “. . . *With the high wind the practice was full of excitement for beholders. The devices showed several capers while still under control which were new to their riders. . . .*” In 1897 the Chicago Sunday Times Herald reported, “*If the spectator is daring enough to tackle the machine himself and succeeded in getting the right kind of start, he would be willing to take the oath that the machine flew. He would also be willing to testify that his sensations while the flight lasted were indescribably thrilling and delightful. . . .*” We, in the modern era, can relate to these feelings!



Octave Chanute was born in France in 1832 and emigrated to the United States with his father in 1838. He began his training as a civil engineer ten years later in 1848. His early career was involved with bridges, stockyards and railroads. However, in 1856 he saw a balloon take off in Peoria, IL. He didn't catch the bug just then but, in 1883, when he retired from his railroad profession, he decided to spend some time furthering this new science of aviation. He collected all the data he could find from throughout the world and combined it with his background in civil engineering to produce a series of articles in *The Railroad and Engineering Journal* from 1891 to 1893 – re-published in the book *Progress in Flying Machines* in 1894.



Chanute felt he was too old to fly so partnered with younger, would-be explorers of the air – William Avery and Augustus Herring. In 1896 they conducted some flight tests along the sand dunes by the shore of Lake Michigan at Miller Beach – some hang gliders of their own design plus a design based on Otto Lilienthal's work. Based on these tests, Chanute decided a suitable design would be to stack several wings together in the style of Francis Wenham of Great Britain.



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Among Chanute's greatest contributions to the science of flight was his willingness to help other investigators including financially. Starting shortly after he retired from his railroad work, he began correspondence with many people involved in aeronautics including the Wright Brothers. Wilbur had contacted Chanute after reading his book *Progress in Flying Machines*. Chanute had designed a bi-plane glider in 1897 and it is said that the Wright Brothers based their glider designs on the Chanute configuration which they called the “double-decker.” Chanute visited the Wrights in Kitty Hawk and continued the contact until his death in 1910.

Chanute's other pioneering aviation correspondents included Otto Lilienthal, Louis Blériot, John Montgomery and Alberto Santos Dumont. Chanute not only shared his knowledge with these pioneers, he publicized their efforts thereby broadening interest and advancing the art – however, sometimes generating controversy.

Chanute was hopeful for the future of the aeroplane with sentiments as expressed in his book:

"...let us hope that the advent of a successful flying machine, now only dimly foreseen and nevertheless thought to be possible, will bring nothing but good into the world; that it shall abridge distance, make all parts of the globe accessible, bring men into closer relation with each other, advance civilization, and hasten the promised era in which there shall be nothing but peace and good-will among all men."

Octave Chanute was enshrined in the National Aviation Hall of Fame in 1963 with a citation including the words, *“To Octave Chanute, for outstanding contributions to aviation through his compilation of the aeronautical accomplishments of the pioneers of flight, his demonstration of successful man-carrying gliders, and his valuable counsel to others engaged in flight research, this award is most solemnly and respectfully dedicated.”*

His contribution to our sport of soaring is best expressed in the Conclusion of his nomination to the United States Soaring Hall of Fame: *“While the Wright Brothers were the first to enjoy a long soaring flight in 1911, they mostly used the glider as a tool to perfect their controlled, powered flying machine. Chanute arguably carried out his tests with a different goal: **to have fun gliding** while he experimented with aeronautical design. And he did this for almost twenty years.”*

Above adapted from his nomination to the National Aviation Hall of Fame, The United States Soaring Hall of Fame, and Wikipedia. For details: *Locomotive to Aeromotive Octave Chanute* by Simine Short 2011