



BHC-MSS 0055

Guide to the Gustav Whitehead Research Collection

By Meg Rinn, September 2019

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Bridgeport History Center

Title: Gustav Whitehead Research Collection

Dates: 1901-1994 [bulk 1901-1937]

Quantity: 2 manuscript boxes, 1 oversize box (2.18 linear feet)

Abstract: Sometimes credited with the first powered flight in 1901 two years before the Wrights, Gustav Whitehead's early airplanes were widely reported on by Bridgeport newspapers and national magazines. This research collection documents those early articles, along with later history has worked to understand Whitehead's early aviation feats, making it a combination of not only a history collection, but a historiography collection.

Language: English, German

Repository: Bridgeport History Center

Biographical History

Born on January 1, 1874, Gustav Whitehead (originally Gustav Weisskopf) is best known as the man who supposedly achieved power flight two years before the Wright brothers did. Whitehead was interested in aviation from an early age, present with his experiments with kites and bird observation. He immigrated to American in 1893, and he began working in the States as a toy designer at first, making gliding toys and the like. He also was a mechanic for the Boston Aeronautical Society.

Gustav came to Bridgeport sometime around 1901, searching for factory work. Bridgeport was an industrial hub at the time, and so moving for such opportunities was a natural choice.

It was in 1901 that Whitehead's claim of managing powered flight occurred. On August 14 of that year, the Bridgeport Herald reports that over in neighboring Fairfield, Whitehead powered the aircraft known simply as the Number 21 for a half a mile, reaching a height of about 50 feet. This article is given as evidence that it was Whitehead, not the Wright Brothers, who first achieved powered flight.

The Number 21 went on to have additional flights in 1902, and Whitehead completed more flights in 1903. He also designed additional planes and other engines throughout this time.

Factory work came with dangers during the time, and Whitehead lost an eye at one point. He also took a bad blow to the chest, although the effects are unknown. A heart attack claimed his life on October 10, 1927.

Academic interest in Whitehead has waxed and waned over the years, as has the debate about who flew first: Whitehead or the Wright brothers. In the 2010s, more credence has been given to Whitehead, including House Bill 6671 in Connecticut which formally recognizes Whitehead as the

first to accomplish powered flight.

Additional information about Whitehead can be viewed in the Bridgeport History Center from the following *secondary* sources:

Berliner, Don. Before the Wright Brothers. Lerner Publications (1990).

O'Dwyer, William J., & Randolph, Stella. History By Contract: The Beginning of Motorized Aviation. (1978).

Randolph, Stella. Lost Flights of Gustave Whitehead. Places Inc. (1937).

--. Before the Wrights Flew: The Story of Gustave Whitehead . G.P. Putnam's Sons (1966).

Scope and Content note:

The Gustav Whitehead Research Collection is an artificial collection primarily composed of photocopied newspapers relating to Gustav's various flights. As newspaper reports are widely the best way to evaluate the claims of Whitehead's early local flights, keeping the papers as photocopies assists in long term preservation. It also serves as a means of documenting the historiography around Whitehead, as the collection includes not only contemporary newspaper reports, but the surges of interest in Whitehead at various points such as the 1930s, the 1970s, and the 1980s.

In addition, the research notes of interested academics are included within the collection as they were either donated by the Bridgeport History Center or generated through correspondence with BHC. Of particular note is the material compiled by Air Force major William O'Dwyer, including extensive city directory searches of witnesses to that first flight.

The use of the phrase "research collection" is meant to indicate the assembled, artificial nature of the collection which has been amassed over decades within the department. See the P.T. Barnum Research Collection (MSS 0001) for a like example.

Arrangement note:

Collection is arranged into three series, dominated by photocopied newspaper and magazine articles. Series I, Materials from Whitehead's lifetime, contains work from 1897-1909 that are contemporary reports on Whitehead's work. Between box 1 and box 2 (oversized articles), there are duplicated efforts. They have been retained should anything happen on one photocopy over the other.

Series II, Articles written after Whitehead's lifetime, contains copies of newspaper and magazine articles about Whitehead's work following his passing. Within series III are research notes from Whitehead scholars such as William O'Dwyer, original research compiled by the Bridgeport History Center (especially from the 1940s), and a few additional pieces of ephemera that were added to the collection by earlier archivists.

Material is chronologically arranged whenever possible.

Administrative information:

Provenance:

Assembled from various sources, primarily newspapers, with some correspondence from scholars

included.

Preferred Citation:

Gustav Whitehead Research Collection (BHC-MSS 0055.) Bridgeport History Center.

Names and Subject Tracings

Personal names

Whitehead, Gustave, 1874-1927

Subject tracings

Airplanes--History

Airplanes, Home-built

Aviation

Bridgeport, Conn.

Fairfield, Conn.

Detailed box and folder listing

Series I, Materials from Whitehead's lifetime

Box 1

1. Patent, Whitehead airplane, no. 881, 837, 1908
2. Patent # 41555 [German], 1910
3. Nomogram by D. Leinart, undated
4. Foldered together: "Whitehead's Flying Condor," Oct. 7, 1897
"Airships which can navigate the skies," New York World, March 1898
World's Fair Bulletin, 1902
"Whitehead still at work," Bridgeport Standard, Oct. 1902
"Un Aeroplane a noteur," Scientific American Sept. 9, 19, 1903;
5. "A New Flying Machine," Scientific American, June 8, 1901
6. Foldered together: "Young's Ocean Pier," Daily Union, Atlantic City, NJ, Sept. 3, 1901
"Kill Devil Hill" - copies re: Wright Bros. undated
"Second annual exhibition of AeroClub of America," Scientific American, undated
7. "An American Made Flying Machine," Collier's Weekly, September 21, 1901
8. Foldered together: "Flying Machine for \$2,000, Bridgepot's Flying machine," Danbury News Times, November 20, 1901
"Bridgeport's Flying Machine," Danbury News Times, November 21, 1901
9. "Flying machine of Gustav Whitehead," from Illustrated Aernautics News", 1901 (German with English translation)
10. "A Herald Man Makes a Trial Trip," Bridgeport Herald, May 31, 1903
11. "Whitehead and his flying machine," Bridgeport Herald, 1903
12. "Whitehead, Gustav," Scientific American, September 19, 1903
13. "Latest marvel in flying machines," Broadway Magazine 1903
14. "Gustav Whitehead shows that he can fly for at least half mile," Bridgeport Standard, 1904
15. "American Flying Exhibition," Automobile Journal, November 28, 1908
16. "Short Hop Flight in Bridgeport," 1909
17. "Whitehead's Flying Machine Soaring Above the Trees," Undated

Series II, Articles written after Whitehead's lifetime

18. "Airplane born a century ago," Washing Post, October 11, 1931
19. Typed copies of newspaper articles, 1935-1937
20. "Did whitehead precede Wright?" Popular Aviation, 1935
21. "Forgotten Bridgeporter was First Aviator," Bridgeport Herald, January 20, 1937
22. "What's new in the clouds," Bridgeport Post, March 14, 1937
23. "Birdman's Perch," Popular Aviation, April 1937
24. "Nicht Amerikaner," with English translation 1942
25. "He flew first," Argosy, 1962
26. "Conn. Pioneers in Avation," 1963
27. "Did Whitehead fly before the Wrights," American Aircraft Modeler, November 1968
28. "Straight and level," American Aircraft Modeler, June 1969
29. "Support for Weisskopf research," Ansbach, city and state, February 16, 1974
30. "Our honorary citizens are here," September 6, 1974
31. "Mayor gets token from German City," Bridgeport Post, November 11, 1974
32. "A Franconian city fights for its famous son," Alt Bayerische Heimatspost, November 24, 1974
33. "Gustav Weisskopf-pioneer of motor flight," from City of Leutershausen, 1974?
34. "Windcrossing, a successful flight," Fairfield Citizen News, November 10, 1981
35. "Gustav Whitehead," 1981
36. Articles from various newspapers following news conference, 1982
37. "Who's Wright in fabled fight over first flight," Star-Telegram, Fort Worth, Texas, September 13, 1982
38. "Motion Picture Magic," Scientific American, September 20, 1982
39. Vom Faustkeil zum Laserstrahl, 1982
40. "Free flight," Bill Arner, 1982
41. "Gustav Whitehead: First to Fly?" Model Aviation, March 1983
42. Space News Round Up, March 1, 1985
43. "The Air Pioneer History Forgot," Washington Post, March 9, 1986
44. "Replica of Whitehead Plane Tested," Bridgeport July 27, 1986
45. "Who Flew First?" Chicago Tribune, September 8, 1986
46. "Will it fly?" Los Angeles Times, September 14, 1986
47. "Was Wright's Flight Wrong Flight?" Wall Street Journal, December 17, 1986
48. Articles and photos by Nick D'alto regarding kites based on Whitehead design, 1990
49. "A Search for evidence supporting or denying claims Gustave Whitehead achieved powered, controlled flight on 14 August 1901," by Todd Gustafson, July 1994
50. Clippings related to early Aeronautical shows, undated
51. "Papers of Wilbur and Orville Wright" re: Whitehead, undated
52. Copy photo from Dream of Winds
53. Photographs of model flown in Germany, 1966
54. Copy photo, Model of #21 in flight, 1982

1. Bridgeport Sunday Herald (Copy), August 18, 1901
2. Collier's Weekly, September 12, 1901
3. Articles from the Bridgeport Sunday Herald, 1901-1937
4. Articles from Bridgeport papers, undated
5. Articles donated by William O'Dwyer about Whitehead, undated
6. Foldered together: "Windcrossing, a successful flight," Fairfield Citizen News, November 10, 1981
 "The Air Pioneer History Forgot," Washington Post, March 9, 1986
 "Whitehead Claim Welcome as a hurricane in Kitty Hawk," Hartford Curreant, August 2, 1986
 "Who Flew First?" Chicago Tribune, September 8, 1986
 "Will it Fly?" Los Angeles Times, September 14, 1986
 "Was Wright's Flight Wrong Flight?" Wall Street Journal, December 17, 1986
7. Original art from New York Subways Advertising Company Inc. with a factoid about Whitehead's first flight, 1941

Series III, Whitehead research and researchers

Box 3

1. Index cards of sources by William O'Dwyer
2. City directory searches and other information by William O'Dwyer
3. City directory searches and correspondence from William O'Dwyer regarding witnesses to flight, 1982
4. Operation Find It copies of letters and other materials, William O'Dwyer, 1964-1968
5. Correspondence to William O'Dwyer from Waldemer Leinert, 1969
6. Correspondence to Henry Kissinger from William O'Dwyer, 1974
7. Invitation to William O'Dwyer to attend reception for Gustav Whitehead Week, 1974
8. Research from Bridgeport Sunday Herald by William O'Dwyer, 1981
9. Suggested corrections for Whitehead mention in Bridgeport, a Pictorial History from O'Dwyer, 1985
10. "Whitehead, Gustav" newspaper articles donated by William O'Dwyer, undated
11. Contest sponsored by Gustav Wiesskopf committee, 1974
12. Correspondence from Gustav Weisskopf Museum to Smithsonian regarding a Public Hearing, 1982
13. Correspondence to Stella Randolph from Waldemer Leinert, 1968
14. Ralph Parker correspondence, 1984
15. Ralph Parker correspondence and papers, 1984
16. Ralph Parker audio tape, 1984
17. Audio tape sent to Nick Pocok by Ralph Parker, 1984
18. Louis Renkavinski audio tape, 1984
19. "Greatest Hoax Ever Perpetuated" audio tape, 1984
20. Windcrossing, 1977, 1981
21. Postage stamp honoring Whitehead, 1981
22. Correspondence to and from BHC regarding Whithead, 1935-1957

23. Gustav Weisskopf Museum material, 1981
24. Dedication of Whitehead Memorial, 1982
25. Fairfield Historical Society Program, 1982
26. German Genius in America statement from the US embarrass, 1983
27. Bibliography of articles and books prepared by tech. services at Bridgeport Public Library, 1940
28. Correspondence to and from Bridgeport Public Library about Whitehead, 1935-1957
29. "Early in Flight CT" exhibition at BPL, 1963
30. Queries and answers sources unknown, undated