

Pioneer Aviator, Elling Oliver Weeks

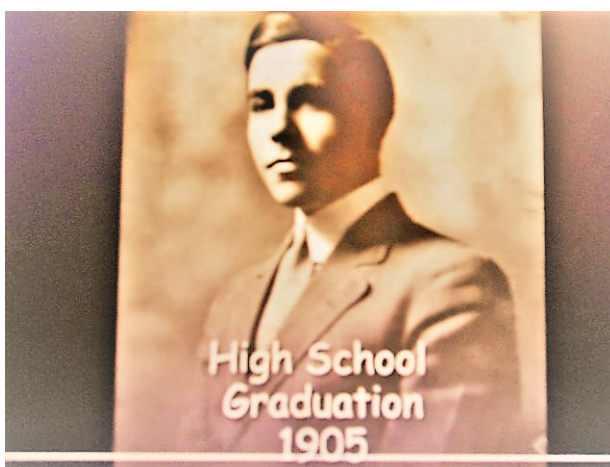
“Early Bird Pilot”

(Iowa Aviation’s Best Kept Secret!)

1890-1956

Soloed in May of 1910, Cicero Field, Chicago, IL

(The same month as Iowa’s first airplane flight in SE Iowa)



Age-22

Slater/Alleman-1890-1900

Eagle Grove-1900-1909

Written by Ober J. Anderson

Preface

Before we get into the Elling O. Weeks story, I think it is important that we have a little background on the early days of flight. In fact, way back in history, people have dreamed of flying. In the years prior to the Wright Brothers historic 1903 flight, there were men in France and Italy writing about it. The difference is, the Wright Brothers “practiced what they preached” and did an excellent job in preparing for the first actual flight. What very few people know, is that four to five years passed before the American public and the US government recognized the importance of what the Wright Brothers had accomplished. This was due to four reasons: 1) The location where they developed their success was at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, located in a remote area where very few people were present and the sand hills and frequent wind was ideal for their purpose. Also, early on, the brothers had decided they would not accept outside investors. 2) In 1903, the same year as the Wright Brothers success, the Smithsonian \$70,000 flight efforts, \$50,000 funded by the government, had failed and were abandoned. The result was that the government military rejected two bids by the Wright Brothers to take a look at their aircraft. 3) The national press did not accept their early flight in 1903, since it was such a short flight and little was known about it. So, for three years they worked tirelessly back in Ohio to perfect the aircraft. Flyer III, a much-improved airplane was developed in 1906. 4) With much interest from the French and having been turned down by their own government, the brothers decided to visit France.

(Note, since our own government had turned down the Wright Brothers, it was up to Early Bird Aviators, such as EOW and others to carry out the research. Once the military got into airplanes in WWI, about 1916, much of the further development was conducted by the government.)

Wilbur Wright spent several months attempting to work out an agreement. The brothers wanted to maintain total ownership and just have an agreement to sell and promote their aircraft in France while the French wanted a piece of the ownership. Wilbur also visited with representatives in Germany. They were confident that they could work out an arrangement and even shipped their first Flyer III to France, where it remained in storage for over a year. Meanwhile, back home, the US had finally shown interest and Orville was working hard to prepare for a demonstration in Virginia. In February of 1908, they promised \$30,000 if the airplane preformed as promised. Back in France, Orville had taken the airplane out of storage and was preparing to demonstrate the plane to government officials and others.

Finally, in 1908, (nearly five years after their first flight), their efforts came to fruition. Wilbur was setting flight records in France and Orville was doing the same back home. Orville set some of the earliest world records for time in the air, speed, and directional change, figure eights. This resulted in a huge increase in publicity both at home and in Europe. The Flyer III had been enlarged to accommodate a passenger and the pilot.

On August 8, 1908, after many successful flights with a passenger, Orville had a mechanical failure which resulted in the death of his passenger, the first fatal airplane accident in history and he was seriously injured. Wilbur would go on to stay in France for a year, training aviators to operate his machine.

As a result of the Wright Brothers huge strides at home and in Europe, other “Early Bird” aviators, such as Elling Weeks, were getting into the action. Just a few months after the Wall Street Celebration for the Wright Brothers in May of 1909, Elling Oliver Weeks would leave the farm in Iowa to pursue his dream of becoming an aviator.

Introduction

While conducting research on the 1855 Palestine Church Wagon Train and the Weeks-Severeid ancestors, I ran across the name of Elling Oliver Weeks (EOW). He was born and raised near Slater/Alleman and Eagle Grove, Iowa, and went on to be a pioneer aviator in Chicago, Scranton, Pennsylvania, and many other states. He made his solo flight in May, 1910, and served as a test pilot for one of the early airplane companies at that time. I found it to be a very fascinating story and decided to share it with our family & friends. His connection to our family is as outlined below.

<i>EOW's Great Grandfather</i>	<i>Wier A. Weeks-1855 Palestine Lutheran Church Wagon Train</i>	
<i>Anfin (EOW's grandfather)</i>	<i>Brothers</i>	<i>Wier W. -My Great Grandfather-Also on wagon train, age 14</i>
<i>Oliver A. (Son)</i>	<i>Cousins</i>	<i>Martha (Daughter) Our grandmother Weeks Severeid</i>
<i>Elling O. Weeks</i>	<i>2nd Cousin</i>	<i>Myrtle Severeid Anderson (My Mother)</i>
<i>Peggy Jane Weeks, Sommersett, Daughter</i>	<i>3rd Cousins</i>	<i>Ober J. Anderson & Siblings</i>

Other Weeks Family members, who contributed much to this story, are Barbara Mallon, Ericka Weeks-Burger and Denny Denton, all of Slater, Iowa. They are descendants of Anfin Weeks, brother to Wier W. Weeks.

Elling Oliver Weeks' family was among the first to move to central Iowa, ten years before the railroad reached Des Moines. His grandfather and great-grandfather were on the 1855 Wagon Train, forty-five years prior to his soloing in an airplane.

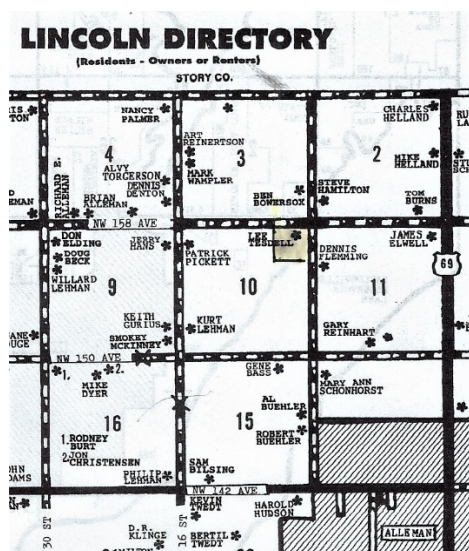
June 1855 Wagon Train Route



Left Kendall County, IL on May 17
Arrived Palestine area on June 7, 1855

300 miles in 21 days, averaged 17 miles per day

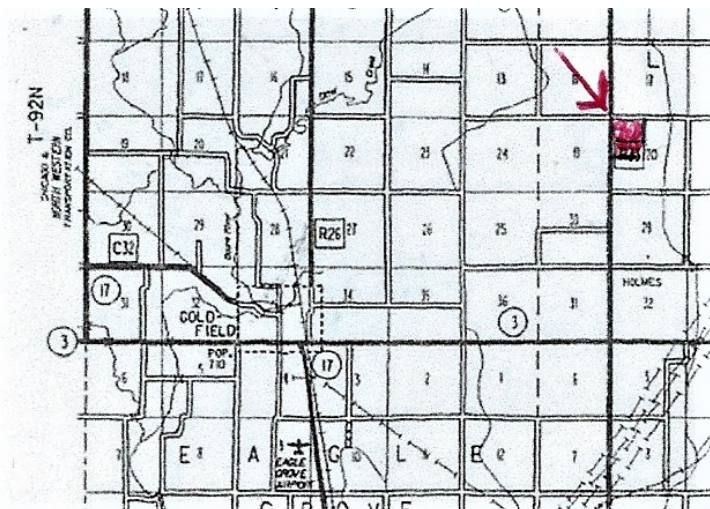
Elling Oliver Weeks (Will refer to him as EOW to save time), son of Oliver A. Weeks and Rachel Halverson Weeks, was born on a farm North of Alleman, Iowa, on August 23, 1890. The NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Section 10 Lincoln Twp., Polk County, Iowa



Sets at
15196 NW
16TH ST
moved 3/4
mile south
1923-
DORMER-BASE
ADDED

School was SW of the homestead. At the age of 9, he moved to a new family farm North of Eagle Grove, in Wright County. Land in Wright County was less expensive than in Central Iowa.

160 acres in Lake Township, Wright County, Iowa, North of Eagle Grove



EOW attended country school Lake Twp., near Holmes and graduated from Eagle Grove High School in 1905. The school only has yearbooks as far back as 1912. So, I was unable to find who his classmates were in 1905.





Elling was the second oldest of nine children. His younger brother, Leonard, must have also had mechanical ability, as he is credited with helping EOW in building several airplanes. They also operated an auto repair and sales shop in Eagle Grove.

Oliver A. Weeks 1866-1924

Randy Nervig Weeks 1877-1937

Anfin O. Weeks 1887-1965

Elling O Weeks 1890-1956

Ruby Weeks 1892-1969

Miller O Weeks 1893-1955

Seward M Weeks 1895-1979

Leonard Martin Weeks 1897-1979

Richard O Weeks 1900-1982

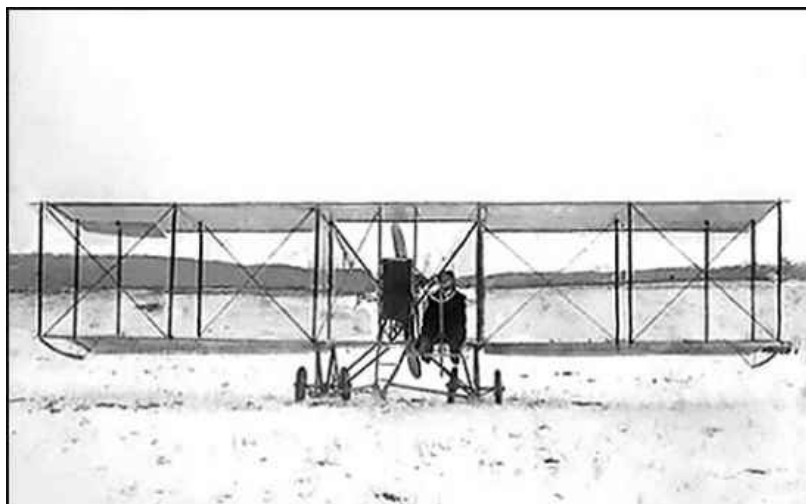
Silford O Weeks 1904-1973

O'Ray Weeks 1907-1966

In the fall of 1909, at the age of nineteen, he became restless and yearned for a faster life with automobile and airplane engines. He hopped a freight train for Chicago, riding on a load of ear corn. He was employed as a chauffeur for an auto livery company. He took night classes to study auto racing and flying. He did some local auto racing. There, he had contact with auto race car owners and one of them heard him say he was interested in flying. The wealthy man went on to sponsor EOW and his pilot friends as they went on to call themselves the “Early Birds.” It is estimated that more than 100 of the “Early Birds” lost their lives in accidents and many more were seriously injured. The group was flying the Wright Brothers Flyer style and other homebuilt innovations. As we know, the Wright Brothers made a brief flight on December 17, 1903, and are credited with the first flight. They went on to construct several planes, Flyer 1, Flyer 2, and Flyer 3, were all planes that were damaged in flight, then further revised. Model A and Model B were then sold to other companies for further development. Patents were being

made at that time, but in the early stages, airplanes were changed multiple times following a crash or problem. The Wright Brothers did file patents and spent some time defending them. Some of the Early Bird aviators may have learned from others and adapted to their own use. However, they did not attempt to mass produce planes that were not patented. The Wright Brothers used two propellers on their Flyers, while O.E. Williams used a single propeller. The Wright Brothers invented “wing warping” and patented their process. That is the trailing edge of the wing could be adjusted up or down using a system of pulleys to change the up or down movement of the plane.

In the early planes, there was no room for an instructor; therefore, there was no practice before soloing. Accidents were unavoidable and part of improving the airplane for the next attempt. The pilot was told to grip tightly to the aircraft’s frame, when in a crash, hoping the impact would not be too painful. They did wear goggles, but windbreaks were not added until later.



Weeks joined the Aero Club at Cicero, Field and started out as an assistant on the ground crew. EOW described his first solo flight in May of 1910 as follows: “Unexpectedly, a delegation of Chicago citizens and reporters came out to our airfield at Cicero Field (near Chicago). The group was interested upon seeing a flying demonstration. No pilots were available and I had never flown before. Against my better judgement, I decided I would give them a very limited demonstration, anyway.

I planned to hop the aircraft a few feet off the ground, then land immediately, just to satisfy them. Although, EOW had handled the controls on the ground, he had no idea how to land the plane. Unfortunately, I froze on to the stick and went airborne. I was forced to ‘zoom up’ to avoid hitting some telephone wires. I had no idea how to bring the ship down. I soared and fell, first one wing low, then the other. The audience thought he was stunt flying. Then, he finally pancaked it to the ground. The crowd had the impression that I had been putting on a show for them. They gave me a big ovation which I did not deserve.” (Note, EOW’s grandmother, Randy Sheldahl Weeks, was age four when she came to Iowa from West of Chicago, on the Palestine Church wagon train. She was just age 59, living on a farm near Cambridge, Iowa, when he made his solo airplane trip. It took her 21 days to travel the 300 miles.)

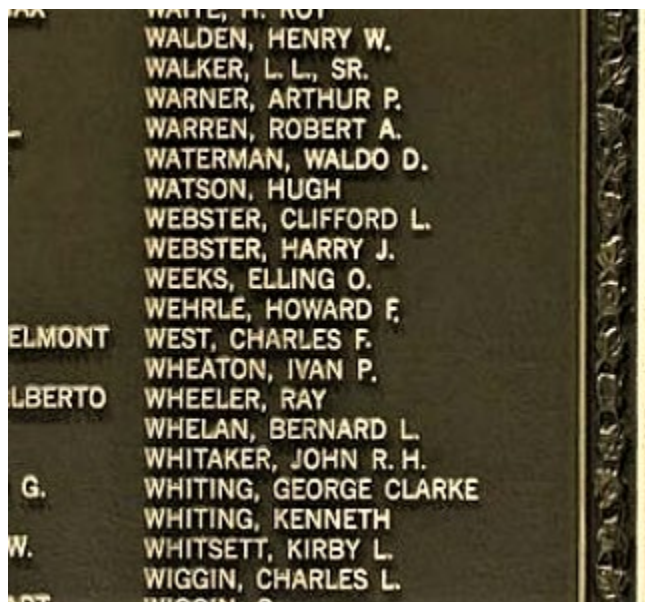
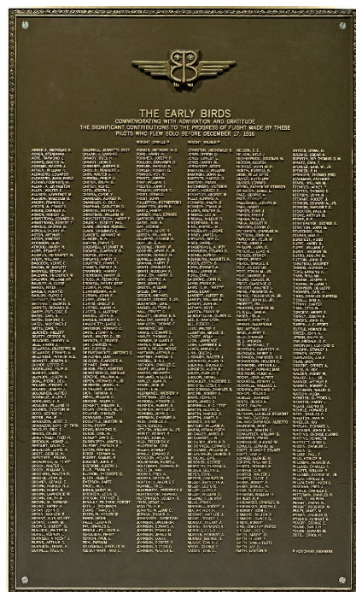


Much of the historic data on pioneer aviation would have been lost had it not been for the Early Bird Society which had its origin at the Air Races in Chicago in 1928. Pride in their accomplishments and a desire to foster aircraft development and to achieve the recognition due the pioneers in this great industry proved additional incentives in the formation of the group.

Pilots who flew prior to Dec. 17, 1916, are considered Early Birds. After this date, the military in WWI, became involved in training and support of aviation and for European pilots prior to August 4, 1914. The Early Bird Society is an organization which came out of discussion at the Chicago Air Race in 1928, devoted to the history of early pilots. They accepted a membership of 598 pioneering aviators from the USA and Europe and held reunions at the Chicago Air Race. The unofficial dress was a black and white checkered hat. More than **100 (20%) of these pilots were killed during the early experimentation** and development of the aviation industry. (Worldwide, the list is over 1,400 deaths, with France and Germany the leaders. That is because they were early in WWI aviation flights. At

various times, and in various groups of aviators in France, the death rate was reported to be as high as 87%.

A Bronze 3 X 5 foot Plaque Hangs in The Smithsonian Institution, Air and Space Museum. The heading for the plaque reads, “TO THE EARLY BIRDS, COMMEMORATING WITH RESPECT AND REVERENCE THE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE HISTORY OF FLIGHT MADE BY THESE PILOTS WHO FLEW SOLO, BEFORE DECEMBER 17, 1916”. Elling O. Weeks name is on that plaque. **Three other current Iowa Aviation Hall of Fame members are also listed on the plaque. They are Orville and Wilbur Wright (2003) and Arthur Hartman (1991).**



Flying was threatening and expensive. Within a short time, an airplane could be crippled or destroyed, then rebuilt, scavenged, or destroyed. In the early days, standards of safety and quality control were unknown to these “Early Birds.” The airplane was an oil stained patchwork of linen fabric, glued wood joints, flying wires, pulleys, bicycle chains and turnbuckle screws. EOW and his friends purchased odds and ends of questionable origin from nearby general stores. In reviewing the ten months he flew with Mr. Williams, I counted twelve accidents. EOW was lucky to survive those early flights when great risks were taken. This may be one reason why he eased back on flying for a couple of years. (We find out later that it was at his father’s request.) Dennis Denton, who lives on a farmstead near Slater, IA, recalls several stories told by his grandmother, Alice Weeks Torgerson (three years younger than EOW), and great aunt, Mabel Weeks (two years older), first cousins. As a young lad, they recall that EOW was always tinkering and could repair anything mechanical. They said that EOW and his brother, Leonard, constructed seven airplanes on the family farm and wrecked them all. Of course, this cost money. Like many early inventors, EOW made and spent lots of money in pursuing his passion for flying.

The “Early Birds” often travelled around as requested. EOW was an instructor in the Thomas Brothers Aeroplane Co. in Bath, New York for a short time. Then, he went on to Terre Haute, Indiana, for exhibition flights. Pilots liked to fly demonstrations and participate in air shows since this promoted the services offered to interest flyers.

On November 22, 1911, a United Press article states that “E.O. Weeks was flying his machine when it fell 50 feet to the ground at the Chicago Flying Field, 22nd St. and 52nd Avenue. The aircraft came straight down, but its pneumatic tires rebounded him twenty feet into the air. Weeks managed to jump and the aeroplane landed on its side. He was badly hurt and walked away from the wreck.” He worked for a short time at the Wright Bros. Aeroplane factory in Dayton, OH.

In April, 1912, EOW joined the O.E. Williams Company as a test pilot and flew exhibitions for the company and participated in air shows. **He flew over 200 times in the ten months on the job. It is felt that this brief period of time was the most productive in EOW’s career. The high risk of early flying resulted in twelve reported accidents during this one year.** After he taught Mr. Williams how to fly, EOW’s job was terminated! Many airplane improvements and many risks took place during a relatively short time. Mr. Williams was employed as an engineer at Hampton Boiler and Power Plant in Pennsylvania. His wife was a mathematics and electrical engineer teacher. In 1910, he became interested in flying and left his day job in 1913 to devote full time to the business. He had purchased his first plane in November, 1911. He called it Model 1 and frequently modified it as improvements were made. This is the plane that EOW first flew for him. It was a 60 hp Curtiss eight-cylinder engine. It had a Farman type landing gear, different ailerons, with the pilot’s seat off-center to the left of the engine, probably to counterbalance the weight of the engine. Wingspan was 31 feet. Net weight was about 700 pounds. Gas tank was small and often limited the length of flight time. Weeks and Williams created a lot of excitement in the Scranton, Pennsylvania, area. Scranton was soon recognized as one of the premier flying locations.

A big event for 1912 was the three-day Annual Fair at Millsboro, Pennsylvania. Headlines stated, “Birdmen to Fly at Annual Fair.” They agreed to fly twice each day and performed for some 1,500 to 2,000 people at each event.



In the fall of 1912, he was delivering *The Times and the Scranton Truth* newspapers to be dropped over the town of Scranton as a promotion. Anyone finding a paper was invited to bring it into the newspaper office and receive \$1.00 (That was about the average wage for a day's work!) In the process of throwing out newspapers, one of them slipped from his hand before he could drop it below the plane as he had been doing. He heard a bang and a snap as the newspaper hit the propeller. He knew he was in trouble. So, he gained altitude and headed back to the field. He found a chunk out of one blade which was cracked and needed to be replaced.

On August 17, 1912, he was flying an exhibition at Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. On one of his flights, he carried a passenger. The rider lost his nerve and became scared. So, he jumped out at some fifteen feet over the ground. You can imagine what happens when you lose some 175 pounds on a 900-pound plane load. The machine dipped to one side and damaged the wing upon hitting the ground. Weeks wired Mr. Williams in Scranton for new parts. He then loaded his damaged plane into an express rail car and headed for Everett, Pennsylvania, his next exhibition.

The October 15, 1912, *Scranton Times* story stated that Mr. Williams had received a congratulatory letter from L.E. Dare, of New York. He was manager of the Aeronautical Society which had sponsored an air show with three Wright Brothers planes, one Captain Baldwin plane and the Williams plane piloted by EOW. The Williams plane, a Curtiss pusher line, had a tricycle landing gear. was accorded praise by the manager of the meet. Weeks had attained a height of 2,000 feet during a twenty-minute flight. A *New York Herald* article conveyed that EOW demonstrated that the plane with its 60 hp Curtiss engine, compared favorably with the Wright plane in trimness and stability.

October 28, 1912, was the start of "Aviation Week" in Scranton, Pennsylvania. EOW made a statement in the three Scranton newspapers (*Scranton Times*, *Scranton*

Truth, and the *Tribune-Republican*) a portion of which I feel is worth stating: "Flying can be a dangerous vocation, but it is the most fascinating sport human ingenuity has ever conceived. The flights that I will make are in a machine equal to the Wright and other comparable machines. Last week, we demonstrated at Oakland, Pennsylvania, to be the fastest craft entered. Scranton's hills and valleys are not the best for flying since the air varies as the earth's surface. At times one can be surrounded with danger. One of my unfortunate experiences was last summer when I was up 50 feet, I ran into a tree and down I came. The machine was smashed. I have wrecked two for Mr. Williams, but that is part of the game. Luckily, the engine did not fail on me. That is one thing about the Williams machine, the seat is on the side of the engine and the pilot is less apt to be thrown out than if the seat were in the front. The higher and faster you fly, the safer you are. Mr. Williams machine is capable of 70 mph. It is a 60 hp Curtiss and I have flown it up to 5,500 feet and remained in the air for more than an hour. With myself in the seat it weighs 900 pounds."

In early winter, he was preparing for a bomb style delivery of theater tickets and prizes over a local Pennsylvania fairground. By then, they had advanced to a chamois skin mask and goggles. He thought he had forgotten them in the excitement of the day. (Later, he found them in his coat squeezed between thick layers of newspapers he had used to insulate his body from the cold winter winds.) His naked eyes began to freeze, but all he could do was blink constantly to avoid them from freezing shut. A large crowd was waiting for him and all he could think of was his past due debts and the \$500 bonus he was to receive for the flight. After the drop, he headed for the home field with his painful sandpapered eyes. He thought to himself, "Man is it cold!"

EOW was a man on the move. After he taught his boss to fly, he was released by O.E. Williams and moved about a great deal. A local news item in 1911, stated that EOW and E A "Gus" Riggs, Terre Haute, Indiana., Two aircraft were built during this period, fairly traditional Wright-type designs. Then Weeks and O. E. Williams built two tractor biplanes in Scranton, Pennsylvania, in 1912, after which he joined forces with Gus Riggs for a couple more in 1915-16. (Later, his nephew reported that EOW had constructed seven airplanes.)

EOW O. Weeks (Aviation Pioneer 1912), received his F.A.I. License No. 214 (March 12,1913), two years after his solo flight. He could have applied two years earlier (when license numbers were still below the 100 mark), but may not have been required until he took his first commercial flight.

In 1912, EOW started flying his first two-seater plane. Then, he could give rides. At Christmas time, he announced he would be giving rides. O.S. Philips, Scranton hotel man offered \$100 for a trip over the city. Within a few days, he was the first to go up for a ride with EOW. Later, he gave several rides in the Scranton to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, area at a charge of \$10 per flight. Again, keep in mind local wages were about a dollar per

day. On at least two other flights he mentions small children running across the field and causing him to abort the flight.

On November 25, 1912, EOW was scheduled to carry newspapers to Carbondale, Pennsylvania. It was a windy day and he had said earlier that wind currents reflect the ground and often produced up and down drafts. He was skimming along above the telegraph wires and noticed a passenger train heading towards him. In order to escape the change in air current, which was sure to follow, he steered the plane up and over a building and missed the chimney by two feet. In the turn he had overcompensated and struck the ground. Thousands of people rushed to the area and he crawled out and was on his feet before they arrived. It started as a friendly group, everyone wanting to shake his hand. Soon, they all wanted a copy of the "airship edition of the newspaper" and they managed to run off with every single copy.

EOW had been requested to visit his home town in 1913. In planning for the event, he had told Slater News Editor, Andrew Maland, that the previous July 4, 1912, he had flown at Linton, Indiana, and drew a crowd of 20,000. The majority of them had never seen a flying machine.

Note improvement in 1913 plane over the 1911 model!

In June of 1913, Elling started first flight tests for an aircraft in Terre Haute, Indiana, built by E. A. Riggs and Lloyd Wehr. This was a tractor-type biplane with an 8-cylinder, 60 hp, Hall-Scott engine. He was soon making daily flights. He made exhibition flights including flights at the Colorado Round-Up celebration in Denver during September.

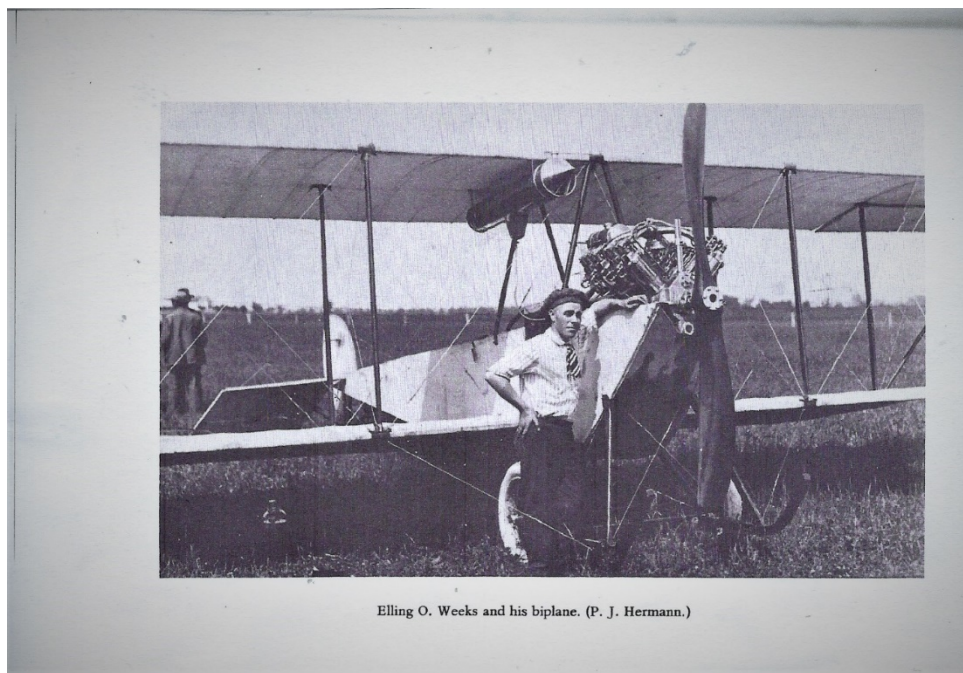
On July 4, 1913, EOW did fly one of his planes to Slater, Iowa, to show his family and friends what he could do. His grandfather would not allow him to give rides to his brothers and sisters as he did not want two of his grandchildren injured or even killed in an accident. In one of his 1913 flights over Slater, he ran into a rainstorm at 4,500 feet. Entering a cloud, he could not see at all. Lightening was flashing around him and he descended quickly to 2,000 feet, reaching speeds of 95 mph, before seeing his landing area. At this time, he and his brother, Leonard, operated an auto repair shop in Eagle Grove.

In March 1914, Elling's father requested that he give up aviation for a year until the American market developed "flying machines on a par with their foreign counterparts." EOW's father, Oliver, had not allowed him to take any siblings on a flight. He did not want to lose more than one of his offspring in an accident. Elling and his brother then

opened an auto repair business at Eagle Grove during that year. It was located on the site where Oldson's Plumbing and Heating business is located at this time.

EW took a break from flying after a very busy four years. It seems logical that after a very busy two years, he realized he had been fortunate to survive the many narrow escapes (twelve by my count) and needed a time to rest and heal.

By March 1915, he knew he wanted to fly again. Continuing to operate the auto repair business, Elling, a younger brother, and a partner, Gus Riggs, began building a tractor biplane. Family legend said that wood joint glue was made from boiled down horse hooves strained into a yellow viscous liquid, then kept warm on the stove. To cover the fuselage, linen would be hand-brushed with insect-derived shellac diluted with alcohol. Many coats of noxious cellulose nitrate would be applied over Irish linen stretched to cover its wings and tail. The plane was constructed in a machine shed located on the site where the Ford Garage now stands.



Elling O. Weeks and his biplane. (P. J. Hermann.)

To power the aircraft, Elling purchased a Glenn Curtiss 400 lb. aircraft engine. The new plane had an 80 hp, Hall-Scott V-8 engine. This plane was completed in June and Elling took it on its 25-minute test flight. He notices upon landing, that the tail skid was too close to the rudder. So, he made some changes and then took passengers up for a ride in the afternoon.

Starting with a primitive motorcycle engine that dripped gasoline into a tomato can stuffed with steel wool, Curtiss had morphed it into a water-cooled, eight-cylinder aircraft, 90 horsepower engine and called it OX-5. Because the early OX-5's were hard to start in cold

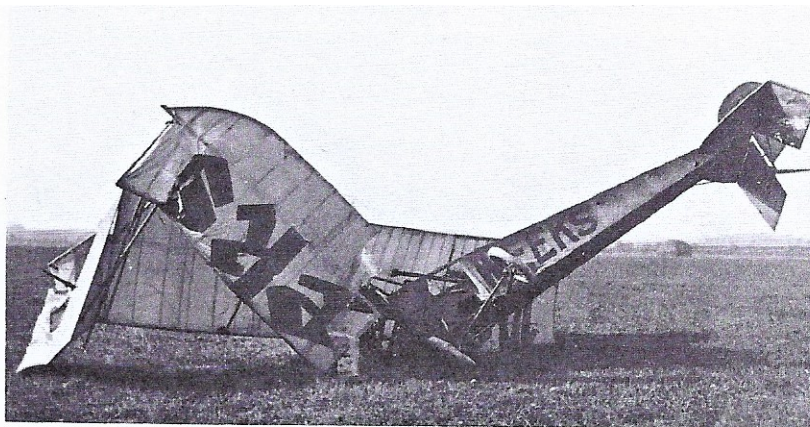
weather, it was common practice to drain its oil after each day's flying, then keep it warm on a stove overnight.

The flying wires were encased wires of hair-breadth thickness. Seven hair-like steel wires were twisted into a strand, and then combined with nineteen others into a completed wire. These cables were attached to brackets and turnbuckles to create structural bays between the vertically butted wing struts, and to secure the tail and landing gear.

Also, in March of 1915, the Eagle Grove, Iowa, business community had made arrangement for what they called a “navigation station” in their town, soon more commonly called an airport. For a charge of \$1,700, EOW agreed to fly people from Eagle Grove to neighboring places. (Not sure if this money was for a contract to fly passengers or the operation of the airport). Among his stops were Boone, Story City, Emmetsburg, and Slater. By this time, airplanes could travel by air to their next scheduled exhibition. Prior to that, the planes were dismantled, crated, and shipped by truck or rail to the next location.

On June 29, 1915, according to an Ames Public Library article, EOW made an emergency landing at Griffith's oat field near Duff Ave. and North 13th Street in Ames when he ran out of gas. The first plane to ever land in Ames, it drew a big crowd. He paid Griffith \$50 for damage to the crop. EOW was reported to be operating a car dealership in Eagle Grove at the time

On September 10, 1915, the Eagle Grove Birdman (as EOW was often called) was scheduled to fly to Thor, Iowa, with a cousin, Seward Heggen. After ascending to 200 feet, his steering rod broke and they plunged to the ground. Weeks unbuckled his belt and jumped clear, suffering severe bruises while his passenger broke his jaw and was in critical condition.



The wreckage of the Weeks biplane. (P. J. Hermann.)

In 1916, Dennis Denton's grandmother, Alice Weeks, recalls that EOW stopped by the farm driving his new Stanley Steamer automobile. (Note prior to the mass produced

Ford Model T, automobiles were very expensive, (\$400 for a Model T vs. \$3,000 for a Stanley Steamer)



We understand that Peggy Sue did graduate from college. She married a man from the Long Beach, CA and no further information is available on her.

About this time, October 25, 1917, EOW's former boss, OE Williams, was killed while landing his plane in Mobile, AL. This was just five years after EOW had taught the engineer to fly his own plane.

When the United States entered World War I, Elling tested Liberty engines in Kansas. In July, 1918, he became Chief Instructor for the Independence Aircraft Company at Independence, KS. (This firm was operated by Billy Cook, Iowan, who had operated the Davenport School of Aviation.) The company, an aircraft company and flight school, started with one dual-control military-type tractor biplane with a Curtiss engine, and planned to build two additional machines. In August, Cook and Weeks re-named their firm to the Pittsburg Aircraft Company at Pittsburg, KS.

In the Spring of 1918, EOW and two other members of the O.E. Williams Aircraft Company, were hired by the Fischer Body Corporation, of Fenton, Michigan, to develop airplanes which they hoped could be sold to the military. (This was often done during both WWI and WWII, as the nation ramped up production for war.) They must not have succeeded in WWI, since records do not indicate so. However, Fischer was later successful in producing the P-75A Eagle fighter plane, pictured below. They produced 14 planes for the government in 1943-44. Then, the \$50 million contract was cancelled.



At this early time, EOW moved around a great deal. Records show he lived in Iowa, Illinois, Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Michigan, North Carolina, Wisconsin, Kansas and California. In 1930, he lived in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, and was listed as president of an aircraft company.

In 1927, Weeks organized and operated the Weeks Aircraft Company at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, conducting flying schools there and at Charlotte, NC. In 1931, he moved to California and established the Weeks Engineering Company at Los Angeles, California.

We are not sure how EOW got into the carburetor business, but assume that it started with adapting one of his airplane engines and then carried over to a successful business for automobiles.



The photo above pictures a Weeks Carburetor still available today from E-bay at a price of \$37.50. This business was apparently quite successful in the 1920s since one report was that the company received an \$18,000 sales tax rebate from the state of Wisconsin. (With this volume of sales in the 1930s, it must have been successful.)

On May 24, 1930, the *Wisconsin State Journal* announced that articles of incorporation were filed for the Weeks-Hollenhoff Flying Service of Milwaukee. We have no indication of how the Great Depression affected his business. Apparently, aviation and his other activities were not as depressed as many other businesses.

His final move was to Los Angeles, California, in 1939 and established the Weeks Engineering Company. No further information was available. He had one older brother and seven younger siblings, all born in Iowa. His youngest brother, Leonard, did help him construct his early planes. A 1953 edition of the Eagle Grove Eagle Newspaper, stated that Elling's wife reported that he had a stroke and had been ill for several months. Elling Oliver Weeks passed away on September 10, 1956, at the age of 66 years.

Summary of Findings

On-line reports show that Arthur J. Hartman is given credit for being the first Iowan to fly an airplane. He was born July 14, 1888, in Burlington, Iowa. At the age of 15, he ran away from home to be a balloonist and parachute jumper. At age 15, he was working in Chicago, and noticed the Goddard Balloon Company. In order to learn about flying, he offered to work evenings and weekends at no charge. He couldn't resist making a balloon flight. So, he asked Goddard to accompany him. In September of 1903, at the age of 15, Harman and Goddard went to Wheaton, IL for the flight. Hartman used the name A.J. Hart, since he was afraid his parents would pressure him to give up his passion and return home. After his marriage in 1909 he was employed by the railroad in Burlington. Most of his spare time was spent building a monoplane. On May 10, 1910, he took the monoplane to the Burlington Golf Club and became the first Iowan to make a recorded and witnessed flight with a heavier-than-aircraft. The plane rose 10 feet into the air before coming down so hard that it damaged the undercarriage. **(Elling Weeks flight, the same month, was longer and he flew higher than Hartman.)** According to records, some 46 flights by 23 aviators were made over different cities in Iowa during the years between 1910 and 1911.

EOW Weeks, like Hartman, left home to chase his dreams of auto racing and flying. It appears that EOW's May of 1910 flight was longer than Hartman's as EOW had to go up higher to avoid telegraph wires before his hard landing while Hartman only flew ten feet off the ground. Since we do not know the exact date of Weeks' flight, he may well have been the first or second Iowa born flyer to solo! Weeks may well be one of the best kept secrets of Iowa aviation. His nephew, Thomas Weeks, reported on many of EOW's activities. Thomas passed away in 1969.

Little more was reported until after 1993. At that time a treasure trove of information was discovered by Nancy Mess, author of *Men, Wind, and Courage*, a book published in 2009. Mess was doing family genealogy research and convinced her father to open up storage containers of family history that had not been opened in many years. She discovered that O.E. Williams, whom EOW Weeks worked for in 1910 and 1911, was her grandfather's uncle. Since EOW made some 200 flights for Williams as test pilot and demonstrator, he had kept detailed hand notes of his activities. It is the opinion of this writer that the time EOW spent with the Williams Aircraft Company were highlights of his career. Also, during the years of 1910 and 1911, great strides were being made in aviation. Great risks were being taken by the pilots. Mr. Williams has been recognized as one of the early pioneers of aviation. He did it all, as aviator, designer, manufacture, instructor, inventor, safety design advocate, and patent holder. Weeks notes show that he was involved in some twelve or more accidents in the short time, ten months, he flew for Williams. They also flew all winter when temperatures were very uncomfortable in Pennsylvania and the Northeast. Ms. Mess attempted to reach members of EOW's family in California in 2002, 2005, and 2006, while she was writing the book, with no avail. Without her years of research, much of the information we know about EOW would not have been made available. The detailed hand written notes of his time with the Williams Aircraft Company were extremely important, since this was the time when many risks were taken as they developed the early models of the airplane. One reason we know little of Weeks career is that he moved around so much. I wonder how he avoided the draft for WWI? It may have been because of his importance in developing aircraft, or the draft board may not have known where he lived.

Photo of OEW Family



Oliver, Peggy Jane & Ada Weeks-1942



OEW- Age 17

The Iowa Aviation Hall of Fame

Near completion of this story, I became aware of the Iowa Aviation Museum at 2251 Airport Road, Greenfield, Iowa. Ph. 641-343-7184. E-mail: aviation@iowatelecom.net



In reviewing their web site, I found that they started the Iowa Aviation Hall of Fame in 1990, in order to recognize Iowa Aviators. They inducted five members the first year and four in the second year, including Arthur Hartman, who is credited with being Iowa's first pilot to fly in May of 1910. This this is the same month that Weeks soloed in Chicago. Since then, they have added two or three each year for a current total of 75 inductees. Shirley Kotz, Historian has been very helpful with information they had on hand. They told me about the book, *Iowa Takes ToThe Air, 1845-1918*, which has some information on EOW. A permanent tribute for each Hall of Fame inductee is featured at the Museum. The Museum is the only place in Iowa which focuses on the state's aviation heritage.

By this time, January of 2021, we were feeling that Elling Weeks may well be the "best kept secret" of Iowa aviation history. After visiting with Barb Mallon, of the Slater Heritage Hall Museum, we decided that an application for Weeks should be submitted prior to the February 1, 2021 deadline. In addition to Mallon and Anderson, two other descendants of the Weeks clan were identified to assist with preparing the application. They were Erica Weeks-Burger and Denny Denton. Denton had a wealth of knowledge he had heard from his grandma, Alice Weeks Torgerson and his great-aunt, Mabel Weeks. They both remembered many stories about Elling and his family when they lived in Slater and later near Eagle Grove. Many of these human interest stories and pictures have been blended into this story which I started writing in January of 2020. On April 16, 2021, we were informed that our application was not accepted. This is difficult to understand for those of us who know of his accomplishments. As a member of the Early Bird flyers, he put

his life on the line hundreds of times in order to advance the interests of aviation throughout the country

Denton also provided additional information on the Weeks family when they moved to the Eagle Grove area. Contact was made to the Eagle Grove Schools, the Eagle Grove Historical Museum and the Eagle Grove Eagle newspaper. The editor of the newspaper, Kim Demory, was very interested in our efforts to learn more about Elling Weeks when his family moved to that area. She worked with Anderson on preparing a story for their February 11 edition of the newspaper. She invited any readers with further information on EOW to send me an e-mail (I have heard nothing so far. So, as I have said, this man is the best kept secret in Iowa aviation history). Joel Halverson of Eagle Grove, also contributed to this story.

Story is below:

Flying high with pride

Ober Anderson trying to get his third cousin inducted into the Aviation Hall of Fame

By Kim Demory
Editor
news@
eaglegroveeagle.com

COVID has left many of us with a lot of extra time on our hands the past 300+ days. Perhaps it's been most difficult on the elderly, but not for 84-year-old Ober Anderson of Ankeny, Iowa. He has found a purpose and a passion to fill these days...he is on a mission to get Elling Oliver Weeks inducted into the Iowa Aviation Hall of

ceptance and popularity of airplanes had really only begun in 1908. Weeks, according to Anderson, was ready to follow in the footsteps of Orville and Wilbur Wright. At first he spent time as a chauffeur, took night classes studying auto racing and flying, and even did some local racing. At the races is where Weeks reportedly met a wealthy man who heard him say he was interested in flying. The man went on to sponsor Weeks and his pilot friends who went on to



Photos provided

Fame. But he's asking for the public's help to fill in additional information.

"My grandmother, Martha Weeks Severeid, was a first cousin to Ellings father, Oliver Weeks," explained Anderson.

According to Anderson, Weeks was born in 1890 and moved to the family farm North of Eagle Grove in 1900. He attended school in Eagle Grove as well as spending some time at the country school near Holmes. In 1909, he hopped a freight train to Chicago to pursue his dream - flying airplanes. Keep in mind that the ac-

call themselves the "Early Birds." This was a term used for flyers before 1914 since after that, the military became involved with aviation so there were a larger number of pilots.

In May of 1910, Weeks took his first flight, reportedly the very same month that Iowa's first flight was made in SE Iowa. Anderson quoted Weeks as saying about that first flight, "Unexpectedly, a delegation of Chicago citizens and reporters came out to our airfield at Cicero (near Chicago). The group was interested upon seeing a flying FLYING MOVED TO PG 10

FLYING MOVED FROM PG 1

demonstration. No pilots were available and I had never flown before. Against my better judgement, I decided I would give them a very limited demonstration, anyway."

The Aviation Hall of Fame submission packet also states that Weeks had only planned to take the plane a few feet off the ground and then immediately land it again, just to satisfy them. Unfortunately, he said he "froze on the stick," and went completely airborne.

"I was forced to zoom up to avoid hitting some telephone wires. I had no idea how to bring the ship down. I soared and fell, then finally pancaked it to the ground. The crowd had the impression that I had been stunting for them. They gave me a big ovation which I did not deserve," is what Weeks reportedly wrote.

In 1913, Weeks returned to his birthplace, Slater, Iowa, to fly a plane and show his family and friends what he could do. His picture even appeared in the Slater newspaper. After that, it is said that Weeks took a four-year hiatus from flying...until March of 1915 when the Eagle Grove business community announced they were building an airport (then called a "navigation station"). For a fee of \$1,700, Weeks agreed to fly people from Eagle Grove to neighboring Boone, Story City, Emmetsburg, and Slater. According to an article at the Ames Public Library, Weeks piloted the first plane to ever land in Ames, but it was not planned. Instead, it was an emergency landing near Diff Ave. and North 13th Street when the plane ran out of gas.

"In March 1914, Week's father requested that he give up aviation for a year until the American market developed "flying machines on a par with their foreign counterparts." Week's father, Oliver, had not allowed him to take any siblings on a flight. He did not want to lose more than one of his offspring in an accident.

Week's and his brother then opened an auto repair business in Eagle Grove during that year," said Anderson.

On September 10, 1915, Weeks was scheduled to fly to Thor with his cousin, Seward Heggen, when after ascending to 200 feet, the steering rod broke and they plunged to the ground. It's reported that Weeks was able to unbuckle his seatbelt and jump free, but suffered severe bruises. Heggen broke his jaw and was in critical condition.

Over the years that followed, Weeks went on to have many great flights, wonderful and nerve-wracking flights, and accomplish many extraordinary things. Awards and honors he received include:

First pilot to deliver newspapers by air;

Developed the Weeks carburetor used in early airplanes and automobiles;

October of 1912, attained an altitude of 2,000 feet in

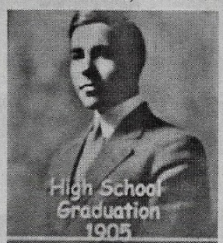


Photo provided

a twenty minute flight for New York air show.

Either the first or second, Iowa born and raised, aviator to solo in May of 1910.

Weeks passed away in 1956, and despite all of this information, Anderson is still in search of more. He stated there are still many missing pieces because Weeks moved around so much. He wonders how he avoided the draft for WWI, for example. Was it because of his work in developing aircrafts? Anderson would appreciate any additional information on Weeks anyone may have. You can contact him at ojanderson@aol.com

"I would like any further information available, but it would be mainly to have a more accurate story for my extended family and copies of the story to be housed in the Eagle Grove Library

and historical museum for future generations. I will also make available to the Slater, IA Museum, since EOW was born there and spent his first ten years on the family farm near Sheldahl.

According to Anderson, the Iowa Aviation Hall of Fame organized in 1990 and inducted five members the first year and four in 1991, including Arthur Harman, who is credited with being Iowa's first successful pilot in May of 1910, the same month as Week's flight in Chicago. They have continued to induct two or more each year with the total now being 75. Anderson is unsure when this year's induction results will be known. Submissions were due this week.

Anderson said one of his inspirations for nominating Weeks is the fact that this story is almost unknown here in Iowa.

"If I don't tell the story, it may well be lost. I had a call from Joel Halverson of Eagle Grove. He is some ten years younger than I and a volunteer at the Eagle Grove Historical Society. He, too, had not heard of Elling Weeks! Although he moved out of state at an early age of 19 and his early flights were out of state, he did return to Iowa many times. He and a brother, Leonard, ran an auto repair shop in Eagle Grove. He also had a contract to operate the first Eagle Grove Air Park. Elling and his brother, Leonard, constructed seven airplanes at their farm, all of which were wrecked in his early flights. He was involved in at least twelve accidents during his first 200 flights," said Anderson. "As a member of the Iowa Aviation Hall of Fame, he would be recognized as the pioneer that he was in the industry. As for me, it would be "frosting on the cake" for my efforts in digging out the information for my story, which started out just for my family."

Editor's Note: Information for this story came from portions in the nomination packet compiled by Ober Anderson.

Resources

Slater Heritage Hall Museum

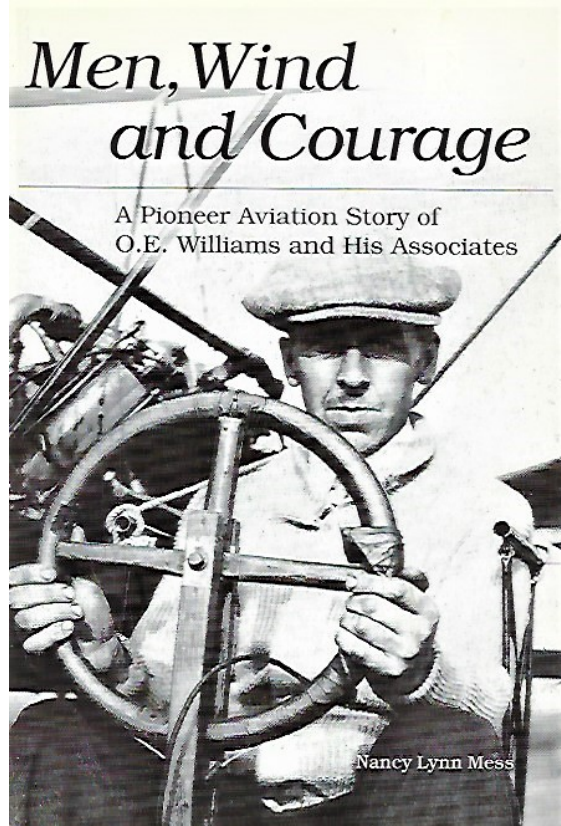
Slater Centennial Book

Eagle Grove Eagle Newspaper

Central Iowa Newspaper articles

On-line Review. Wikipedia report included information from Thomas Weeks, nephew of EOW Weeks. Tom passed away in 1969.

Men, Wind and Courage-A Pioneer Story of O.E. Williams and His Associates, published in 2009 by Nancy Lynn Mess. Ms. Mess's grandfather was the nephew of O.E. Williams (EOW served as his test pilot and a great deal of information is included from hand written reports by EOW as he conducted his test flying and demonstrations for O.E. Williams). In late 1993, she encouraged her dad to open up some old family records while she was conducting some family history research. She was surprised to find that Williams was a pioneer in designing and flying early aircraft. She spent years in further research on Williams. Little is known of EOW's aviation history, since he moved around to ten different states during his lifetime and his hand written notes of the 200 early test flights, were in a trunk stored in the attic for some eighty years (1913-1993) until discovered by the author, Nancy Mess.



Iowa Takes To The Air, 1845-1918, by Ann Holtgren Pellegrino, published in 1980 by Aerodrome Press, Story City, Iowa.

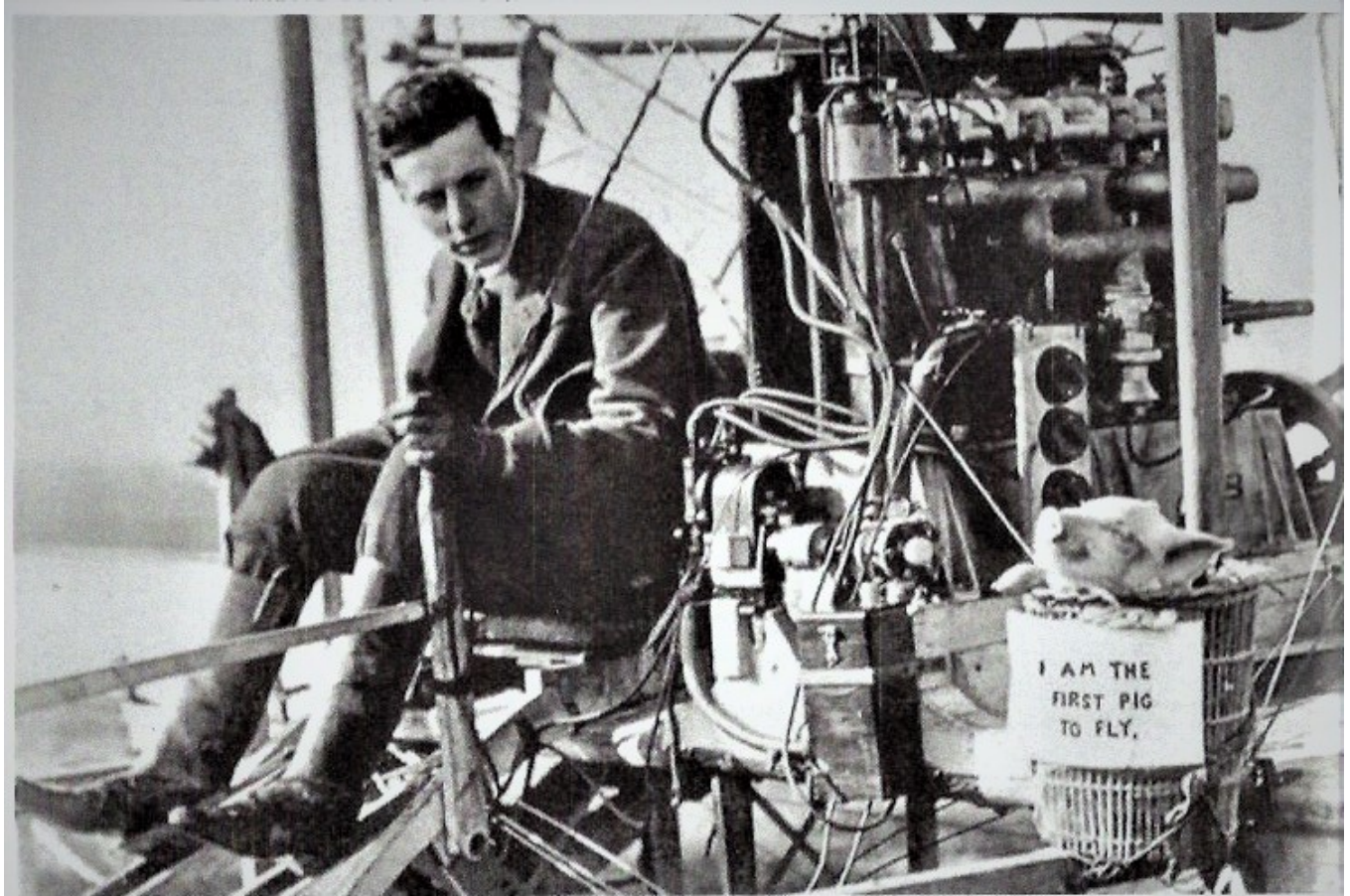
The Wright Brothers, by David McCullough, published in 2015

A Story of Early Aviation Days By Edith Dodd Culver, published in 1986

The Iowa Aviation Museum, Greenfield, Iowa

In reviewing information on-line and reading historical novels on WWI, it appears that Europe, England and France in particular, were slightly ahead of the US in development of the airplane. Much of this is because Wilbur Wright spent parts of two years flying in France, because the US government had turned them down. Their early success gave France and Germany a head start on the USA. Also, France and Germany entered WWI earlier and made faster improvements during combat. At that time, Germany had the most advanced airplanes. This is supported by the true story of the “Red Baron.” (He did paint his plane a bright red in order to scare off the allied planes. He had a record of 90 kills, compared to our top US Pilot, Eddie Rickenbacher, with 26 kills. The picture below indicates one of the achievements of England over the US.

Interesting that here in the USA, the first use of aviation was on March 16, 1916, when Capt. TF Dodd flew an unarmed Curtiss JN-4, into Mexico on a recon flight to observe activity of Pancho Villa’s raiders. A week earlier the raiders had attacked the railroad station in Columbus, NW, and killed eighteen Americans in the raid. President Wilson was so upset that he sent the cavalry 400 miles into Mexico to destroy many of the raiders. Six of the eight Signal Corps airplanes were damaged in the campaign.



"When pigs fly..." - The first flight of a pig took place at Leysdown, Kent, England. 1909.

Epilogue (More About the Wright Brothers)

The two brothers, Orville and Wilbur, were four years apart. Their father was a Bishop in the conservative branch of the United Brethren Church. His duties caused the family to move several times. They even lived for four years in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. They had two older brothers and a younger sister. Never marrying, they continued to live at home. Their parents instilled the love of reading in all their children.

In 1899, at age 28, Wilbur was recovering from a long illness of typhoid fever, and decided to write the Smithsonian and other writers and requested any information they had on aviation. He had been reading about earlier writings on possible flight. I would

also point out that the brothers were interested in bird watching and very familiar with their habits. This too, was of value when it came to designing the wings and flaps on their airplane. The brothers operated a bicycle shop and soon began manufacturing their own machines. So, they had some mechanical and design talents, which carried over to airplane construction. As their bicycle business expanded, they employed a fine mechanic who later supported their efforts in flying.

In 1900, they were interested in trying out a glider and were looking for a site that would provide some wind and a soft landing. One source directed them to Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. It was located on an island with just a few fisherman cabins. After a visit, they decided this was the place some 759 miles from their home in Dayton, Ohio. The shifting sands often resulted in sand hills of 100 feet elevation. Reachable only by boat, the remote location proved to be excellent over the next three years. They would spend several weeks there carrying out their experiments.

In the fall of 1900, they had a glider ready to fly. As bicycle builders, they knew the importance of equilibrium and balance which were also important in flying. Their 50-pound, 17 foot wing span unmanned glider was going up to 400 feet when launched from a sand hill. They controlled it with ropes from the ground. Returning home, they had their business to run, but managed to spend a great deal of time on their plans for flying.

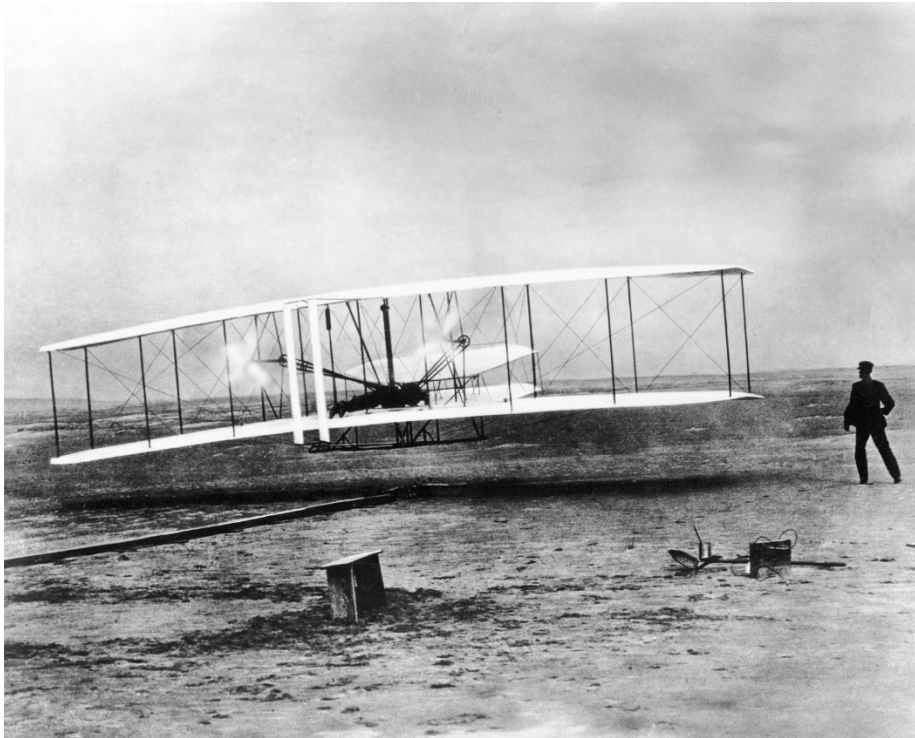
Early on, the brothers had attempted to follow the advice of earlier writers on the effect of lift and drag on the wings of their glider. They had found the information to be in error and decided they must run their own tests. They went back home and started planning for the next year's test of a manned glider. In order to refine the wings surface and the use of the rear flap, they devised and built their own wind tunnel. It was a wooden box powered by a noisy gas engine. One night, when he couldn't sleep, Orville came up with the idea of using a hinged rear flap for easier control.

By the fall of 1902, the manned glider had flown up to 200 feet. They now knew that all they needed was a motor! They turned down a request from an investor, preferring to proceed on their own. Early 1903, they looked all over seven states to find an automobile engine light enough to meet their specification of under 200 pounds as a part of their 605-pound maximum weight load. Unable to find one, they called upon their bike mechanic who felt he could meet the need. In six-weeks' time, he had come up with a 152-pound engine that produced 12 HP, more than their goal of an 8 HP engine. The next challenge was the propeller. With no propellers on the market, they had to devise their own.

As summer approached, the Smithsonian project was moving along. They had a large airplane constructed at a cost of \$70,000, with \$50,000 from public funds. (Cost of the Wright Brothers "Flyer" was some \$1,000, for the three years, including travel to and from Kitty Hawk). After three failed attempts to launch their plane off of a boat, they gave up when the pilot nearly drowned in icy water.

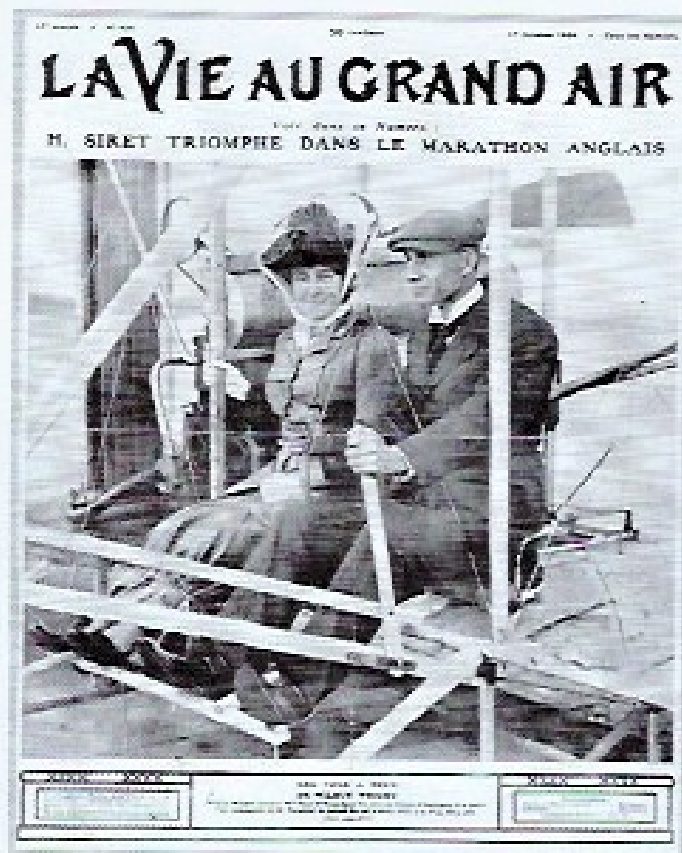
By early December, 1903, the brothers felt they could return to Kitty Hawk with their new powered aircraft. On the morning of December 17, they alternated, each making

two flights. On the 4th flight, Wilbur managed to go 852 feet and stayed in flight for 59 seconds. After four years of work, they were confident they had carried out a successful flight. Interesting enough, the brothers had started selling cameras at their bicycle shop. They brought one along and set it on a tripod some thirty feet beyond the launch pad. They asked a volunteer to press the bulb shutter when the plane passed by. So, they even have a picture of the first flight. Shortly after the flight a gust of wind came up and destroyed the Flyer. They took it home and placed it in storage, never to fly again.



The Flyer, Dec. 17, 1903

Ironically, it took another 13 months, January of 1905, before local Ohio people truly realized the success of the flight. That is because their second plane, Flyer II, had to be field tested near home in order to save on time and money. Winds at Dayton were not as reliable as at Kitty Hawk. Their new, heavier plane, required a catapult to get airborne. Other pioneer aviators were able to then build upon the success of the Wright Brothers.



Wilbur and Edith Berg at Le Mans, as she was about to become the first American woman to go up in an airplane, her long skirts secured at the ankles with a rope in a way that quickly became a fashion sensation.

1908-Flyer III - In France

In May of 1912, Wilbur Wright, age 45 years, had a return of the typhoid fever and passed away. The same disease that he had when he wrote to the Smithsonian Institute requesting information on flying. Wilbur Wright did very little flying after 1911. He was busy running the company and many lawsuits over patents they had filed. Orville Wright gave up flying at age 46 due to injuries from his earlier accident. He was well mannered, but somewhat of a recluse. He passed away from a heart attack in 1948 at age 77.



My first airplane ride was in May of 1958. I was the first passenger to fly with Roger Jones, my ISU roommate. It was a fabric covered Piper Cub plane owned by the local Ames flying club. Roger, a farm boy from southwest Iowa, was an Air Force ROTC student. He went on to fly some 25 years for United Airlines after four years in the Air Force. This was similar to the L-19 plane I flew in at National Guard camp.



My favorite plane ride (four times) in this 1948 Grumman, in Kodiak, Alaska

Closing: I hope that this story will encourage others to support the legacy of Elling Oliver Weeks, Iowa Aviation's "Best Kept Secret" for over 100 years! This story remained hidden for many years because: 1- Elling lived and worked in eleven or more different states during his lifetime; 2-With just one daughter and living in California the last years of his life, it has been difficult to glean information; 3-The hand written records, from his first 200 test flights were stored in an attic trunk and re-discovered in 1993, 80 years after his flights. Even the Iowa Aviation Museum was unaware of his contributions to early flight. They honored Iowa's first soloist in 1991. Elling soloed the same month and was honored now in 2021.

Notes from EOW's nephew-

**' Early Bird ' Pilot & Aircraft Builder—Elling O. Weeks — Pilot's
License # 214**

**A homebuilt constructed with glue rendered from horses' hooves,
with doped Irish linen and questionable wires,
by my uncle and my father in rural Iowa in 1915.**

No electricity—no busses or trains—no telephones.

Photo and legend from L. Weeks, 7-27-08

BIOGRAPHY

via email from L. Weeks, 5-3-06

**My uncle Elling Weeks contracted the airshow-itus disease
in Illinois in 1910. He didn't recover from it until he finished
an airshow in Pennsylvania in 1914 that nearly finished him :**

**In the fall of 1909, a restless teenager cast aside his father's
plow, freed his horse and strode across the furrows of his
family's Iowa farm. Not once did he glance back.**

**He intercepted a grain train and rode in a bed of shucked
corn to Chicago, where he enrolled in a chauffeur's school.
While there, he joined an original cadre of fledglings
pioneering the birth of aviation. Elling, and his conspicuous
pilot friends, would soon become well-known as the Early
Birds.**

**The Early Birds were flying Wright Brothers' Flyers and
homebuilt innovations. The pilot controlled the aircraft with
canards, wing warpers and rudders. His body, lacking a seat
belt and completely vulnerable, jutted out over the lower
wing's leading edge. He was balanced precariously, in a wicker
seat. Close behind his shoulders, two partially guarded oil
spraying motorcycle chains hummed as they drove the hand
carved propellers.**

**The Flyer demanded over 68 feet of wing to leave the
ground. With heart thumping fallibility, no favorable wind to
assist, the underpowered aircraft strained to clear the wires
surrounding the stamp sized airfield. It untrustworthy
engine's radiator, often fuming, was at the pilot's right elbow.
Its streamlined gas tank brushed the tip is his right ear.**

Crashes just happened. Frequently.

**If an accident were inevitable, the pilot would tightly grip
the aircraft's frame hoping the resulting impact wouldn't be**

too painful.

There was no room aboard for an instructor, therefore, there was zero practice time before first solo ride. Listen carefully to the other fledglings, observe their shaky take-offs, uncoordinated turns and crude landings.

Then .. it's your turn. Climb on the peculiar seat, lock your heels in place, adjust your goggles, and nudge your personal courage button as you sweep forward the engine's spark control. Now . . just do it.

Elling described his first solo in May, 1910: *" Unexpectedly, a delegation of Chicago citizens and reporters came out to our airfield at Cicero. The group insisted upon seeing a flying demonstration. No pilots were available. "*

" I had never flown before. Against my better judgment, I decided I would give them a very limited demonstration, anyway. I planned to hop the aircraft a few feet off the ground, then land immediately, just to satisfy them. "

" Unfortunately, I froze on to the stick and went airborne. I was forced to 'zoom up' to escape hitting a string of telephone wires. I had no idea how to bring the ship down. "

" I soared and fell, then finally 'pancaked it in ' [landed hard]. The crowd had the impression I had been stunting. They gave me a big ovation I didn't deserve".

ELLING WEEKS, PILOTS' LICENSE # 214

Flying was threatening and expensive. Within a handful of flying hours, each airplane was crippled or destroyed . . then rebuilt, scavenged, or salvaged. Standards of safety and quality control were unknown to Chicago's Early Bird flyers.

Each of their airplanes was a reeking, oil stained patchwork of doped muslin, glued joints, flying wires, pulleys and turnbuckle screws. In an effort to maintain maximum flyability, Elling Weeks and his friends bought odds and ends of questionable origin from a nearby livestock feed and hardware store.

Most Early Birds owned pilot license numbers below # 99. But because a license wasn't required to fly, Elling was in no hurry to apply. Two years after his first solo, he earned pilots license # 214.

His primary goals were personal high adventure and achieving aviation records. Magazines and newspapers focused on Elling's exploits, much the same as media attention concentrated on the early astronauts. **He was the first pilot to carry daily newspapers between cities . . the 21,000 yards from**

Scranton to Carbondale, Pennsylvania.

Elling went on to set numerous flight endurance and altitude records during those early years. He shared two implausible predictions with the reporters : " *Airplanes will soon be safer than automobiles, and they will be able to carry 500 passengers* "

His kid brother, my father, helped him build seven innovative aircraft from scratch. In one way or another, each of the aircraft was destroyed. It was so risky, my grandfather forbade Elling's numerous brothers and sisters from accepting his offers of free rides. He didn't want to have two children maimed or killed in the same accident.

Dangers were real and appeared quickly from inconceivable directions. For example, one cold, dry winter day in Pennsylvania, uncle Elling was preparing for a bomb style delivery of theater tickets and prizes over a distant fairground. He was so excited about the flight he neglected to cover his face with his chamois mask equipped with eye-slits.

Worse, he forgot to place his protective goggles over his eyes. This essential equipment was just inside his coat, squeezed between thick layers of newspapers insulating his body from the cold wind. As it turned out, it could have been a dozen yards away from his hands . . instead of inches.

Shortly after takeoff, the slipstream's icy impact on his naked eyes made him painfully aware of his overlook. Elling moved his gloved hand from the touchy controls to retrieve his goggles. Instantly, the unstable aircraft headed for the ground. He groped for the control sticks, and he wrenched the Flyer out of its diving turn.

No choice there !

[No goggles either.]

His next mistake was identical to a pilot error causing thousands of pilots' deaths in future years :

It was show time !

An expectant and large crowd was waiting for him. In addition, his debts were past due. His \$500 flight bonus was in jeopardy. Elling ignored the accelerating danger and the growing pain. He pressed on with his flight.

Elling off-loaded the tickets and prizes over a throng of excited people at the fairground, then twisted the wing tips to warp-turn the Flyer for the return trip. The excitement of his achievement momentarily drained away the adrenaline masking him from his pain.

But now, Elling had blinked his wind-dried eyes, to the point where he had severely abraded his corneas. Constant blinking had literally sand-papered his eyes. Nearing his home

field, he thought to himself : " *Man it's cold ! My eyes hurt so badly, I don't know if I can do this [landing]. I'll close my eyes tightly . . JUST FOR A MOMENT . . to warm them a little.* "

By this time, Elling had severely damaged his depth perception and deteriorated his vision. He later recounted : " *When I opened my eyes, I could not see a thing. It was a white haze. I was certain I had frozen my eyeballs ! I started hollering at the top of my voice. I don't know why. But I was certain that I was going to crash. But, I headed downward . . praying that I could make out my field. "*

" *Down and down I went. And I still couldn't make out the ground. Then, I flew by a familiar tall, white shaft [Custer Massacre Monument] and I knew I was safe. "*

Several feet above a farmer's field, Elling stalled out the fragile biplane, and it plummeted into a granite hard landing. The farmer found him, still in his white fog, stumbling around his slightly damaged aircraft.

A pilot's most extreme and visceral-twisting fear is to be flying solo . . without a parachute . . sightless . . in an airplane that's out of control and heading for the dirt.

Elling later said: " *Escaping my death was the biggest thrill of my life. "*

Later, as his damaged eyes healed uncle Elling recovered his eyesight.

Source : Family album clippings and personal discussions

This Story is Dedicated to the Four Anderson Clan Air Force Members. Airman Fourth Class, Orvis is lucky the Anderson Air Force did not get mobilized following his active duty. With a Capt., Major, and Lt. Col. over him, he would have had to do all the work!

Anderson Air Force



**Capt. Cody Anderson
2013-Present Time**



**Major Michael Anderson
Deployed in Iraq, Afghanistan,
Saudi Arabia, Africa, Turkey
and S. Korea, 1989-2009**



**Airman Fourth Class
Orvis Anderson
Korean War, 1950-1954**



**Lt. Col. Robert Lacroix
1964-1984 (Viet Nam War)**