

"Why the 1903 Wright Aeroplane Is Sent to a British Museum"

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I have sent our original 1903 machine to the British National Museum because of the hostile and unfair attitude shown towards us by the officials of the Smithsonian Institution.

While Professor Langley was secretary of the Smithsonian all of the relations between that Institution and ourselves were friendly. At that time Wilbur and I were universally given credit not only for having made the first flight, but for having produced the first machine capable of flight, and for the scientific research from which this first machine sprang. Our 1903 machine was based entirely on our own scientific tables and none other. Langley's published work in aerodynamics consisted of measurements of air pressures on flat surfaces only. By an entirely different method we had made measurements of a great number of cambered surfaces, as well as of flat surfaces. Our measurements of flat surfaces did not agree with those made by Professor Langley. Although we were not able to use any of Professor Langley's measurements, because we had found them far from accurate, yet on every occasion where opportunity was offered we expressed our sincere appreciation for the inspiration and confidence Professor Langley's standing in the scientific world had given us when we were starting.

After Professor Langley's death the attitude of the Smithsonian began to change. The Institution began a subtle campaign to take from us much of the credit then universally accorded us and to bring this credit to its former secretary, Professor Langley. Through some clever and some absolutely false statements it succeeded in doing this with people who were not acquainted with the facts.

To illustrate the kind of thing to which I object in the attitude of the Smithsonian, I will cite out of many a few specific cases:

It misrepresented in the Annual Report of the Secretary for the year 1910 (page 23) the statement made by my brother Wilbur at the time of the presentation of the Langley Medal to us by inserting a quotation not used by him on that occasion, but used in a different connection at another time. The improper use of this quotation created a false impression over the world that we had acknowledged indebtedness to Langley's scientific work and our mechanical ingenuity that produced the first flying machine. This was not true. In a private letter to Octave Chanute at the time of Professor Langley's death we had used the words in acknowledging an indebtedness to Langley for the inspiration he had been to us. We had previously told Mr. Chanute of our entire lack of confidence in Langley's scientific work in aerodynamics.

Our original 1903 machine was offered in 1910 to the Smithsonian for exhibition in the National Museum. The officials did not want it, but preferred a much altered model of less historic interest. After the United States Circuit Court of Appeals had given a decision pronouncing Glenn H. Curtiss an infringer of the Wright invention and recognizing the Wrights as "pioneers" in the practical art of flying with heavier-than-air machines, Curtiss was permitted to take the original

1903 Langley machine from the Smithsonian to make tests in an attempt to invalidate this title of "pioneer," for purposes of another lawsuit. The Smithsonian appointed as its official representative at these tests the man who had been Curtiss' technical expert in the former suits and who was to serve again in that capacity in a new one. It paid Curtiss \$2,000 towards the expense of the tests.

It published false and misleading reports of Curtiss' tests of the machine at Hammondsport, leading people to believe that the original Langley machine, which had failed to fly in 1903, had been flown successfully at Hammondsport in 1914, without material change. (See Report of the National Museum, 1914, pp. 46, 47. Smithsonian Report, 1914, pp. 4, 9, 217-222.) These reports were published in spite of the fact that many changes, several of them of fundamental importance, had been made at Hammondsport; among which were the following: Wings of different camber, different area, different aspect; trussing of a different type, placed in a different location; Langley's fixed keel omitted; motor changed by substituting different carburetor, different manifold, and different ignition; propeller blades altered; hydroplane floats added; wing spars, which collapsed in 1903, reinforced; tail rudder made operable about a vertical axis, and connected to a regular Curtiss steering post; small vane rudder replaced by a large rudder of different design.

This machine restored back to its original form with much new material, the old having been mutilated or destroyed at Hammondsport, was placed in the National Museum with a false label, saying that it was the first man-carrying aeroplane in the history of the world capable of sustained free flight, and that it had been successfully flown at Hammondsport, June 2, 1914.

Following the controversy on this subject three years ago the old label was removed and a new one still containing false and misleading statements was put in its stead.

In spite of this long-continued campaign of detraction, for years I kept silent, with the thought that anyone investigating would find the facts and would expose them. I had thought that truth eventually must prevail, but I have found silent truth cannot withstand error aided by continued propaganda. I have endeavored to have these matters investigated within the Smithsonian itself.

I wrote to the Chancellor of the Institution asking for an investigation of the acts of its Secretary in this matter, and received an answer that while the Chancellor nominally was the head of the board of the Smithsonian Institution, his other duties were such as to make it impossible for him to give any real attention to the questions which have to be settled by the Secretary. I have publicly expressed the wish that some national scientific society or other disinterested body make an impartial investigation of my charges against the Smithsonian. To this there has been no response.

In sending our original 1903 machine to the Science Museum, London, I do so with the belief it will be impartially judged and will receive whatever credit it is entitled to. I regret more than anyone else that this course was necessary.