

ACCELERATING SENTIMENT

By William Hickman Pickens

THE laws of gravitation and pure food have extracted the glory and glamour from the science of vigorous outdoor promotion. The old-time promoter drowned his conscience in his imagination, and when facts interfered with the truth, he discarded them both. We believed ourselves to be honest, but we never investigated too personally. Our books were open to the public, but as these were twenty-four-sheets on the sides of barns, we were forced to make the statistics attractive and the totals stupendous.

There was no deliberate attempt at hoodwinkery. We simply tried to make the public believe things that we hoped were true. It was fortunate for us that none of our brilliant statements had to be indorsed by three reliable witnesses. We operated on the theory that the billboard is half the circus and never insisted on each of our bill posters being accompanied by a notary public. We were pasting up twenty-four-sheets and not affidavits.

The ancient flaming billboard has faded under the restrictions of supervised advertising until it is now an anæmic thing of pink, white and lavender. When a modern manager gets a diamond in the rough he proceeds to polish it off and round it. When I got a diamond in the rough I always made it rougher, and when I got through billposting a suburb I could make you think the sun was setting in sixty-seven different places. If some philanthropist wishes to perpetuate an important branch of American art and literature, he should build a wing on the Metropolitan Museum of Art and dedicate it to the housing of the twenty-four-sheet. Its classification will be difficult, as it was profane to the ethical but sacred to the young.

Not only has the color faded from the poster but the accompanying legends have lost their authority and sting under the close overseeing of earnest young secretaries, of chambers of commerce and the demand for the finer things of life. Where Barnum billed the hippopotamus as the blood-sweating behemoth of Holy Writ, Mr. Ziegfeld would take the same animal and placard it as Miss Africa.

The Spin of Death

MY FIRST practical valuation of the twenty-four-sheet was gleaned while ballyhooping for Lee Richardson, the most reckless and daring comet who ever hurled flesh and steel forward at the wool-bleaching speed of thirty miles an hour—which might have been a thrilling performance on the back of a razorback leopard. But the most dangerous animal ever ridden by Lee was a bicycle; and a bicycle was no novelty, even in 1896, so it was up to Will H. Pickens to paint a frenzied halo of heroism around Lee's head that would convince the pliable public that Richardson was the pathfinder for the man who carried the message to Garcia.

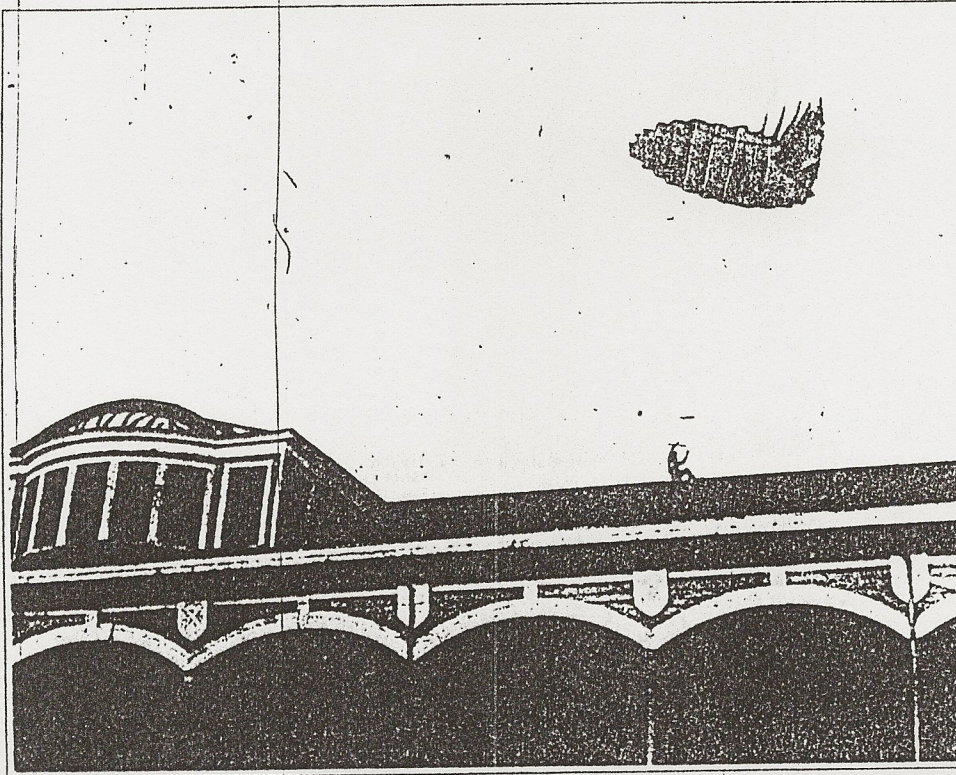


PHOTO BY JOSEPH A. MARION
Sky-High-Irving Landing on the Roof of the Tanforan Race Track Grand Stand, San Francisco, 1911

He held a world's record for riding a bicycle backward for one mile without stops for refreshments. He could also ride with both hands off the handlebars, both feet off the pedals and both eyes on the fair sex in the audience. His best stunt was spinning on the back wheel with the front wheel raised a dizzy sixteen inches from the ground. It was this feat which I selected to capitalize and my lithographers were instructed to emblazon Richardson as the Angel of Desperation in the Spin of Death.

This whirl of horror was nothing more than a few dozen revolutions on the back wheel of a bicycle, with no more centrifugal force involved than that generated by a Japanese waltzing mouse on parade. But a good sincere lithograph, if mishandled properly, can make a school picnic

dreaded competitor until a tendency to overeat slowed him up considerably. I had prepared for this contingency, however, by having myself appointed traveling correspondent for Bozeman Bulger, then sports editor of the Birmingham Age-Herald. The slower I raced on the track, the faster I spurred toward the telegraph office, and the Birmingham Age-Herald never lacked for victorious tidings of Birmingham's favorite son. I won many telegraph victories over the greatest in the land and might have been world's champion if a check-up by the conscientious Bozeman Bulger hadn't curtailed my career.

I went to Atlanta in 1895 to ride against a young fellow by the name of Bobby Walthour, who filled a spot in Georgian hearts now occupied by Bobby Jones. There were about thirty starters in that race and I wired my usual victory to Birmingham. The next day the Age-Herald carried this news of my victory:

Will Pickens came very close to winning his race against Bobby Walthour and a field of thirty yesterday in Atlanta, and would have made a very creditable showing if unforeseen circumstances had not compelled him to finish last.

The unforeseen circumstances were my slowness and the fact that Bulger was suspicious of my monotonous triumphs. So he had appointed a reliable Atlanta newspaperman to relay the correct summaries to the Age-Herald. That was my finish as an athlete and my start as a ballyhooper. I strung along with Lee Richardson and the Spin of Death until he left for a tour of the world in 1899.

The day of the bicycle was nearing its finish anyway, for a factory in Waltham, Massachusetts, was manufacturing a tandem equipped with a small one-and-three-quarter H. P. motor made in France. This was not a motorcycle, for the riders on the tandem were forced to pedal and

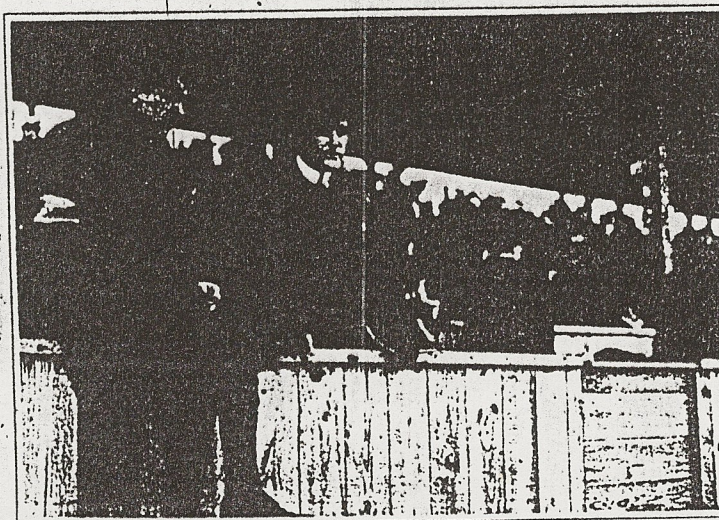


PHOTO JOHN KEESTER
William K. Vanderbilt, Jr., (at Left) Watching the 1900 Vanderbilt Cup Race

look like the third day at Gettysburg. The resulting twenty-four-sheets depicted Richardson in an eight-colored battle with the forces of sudden oblivion. The descriptive legend beneath the picture was both educational and vitriolic, and when the villagers scanned the result their eyes popped out so far that they would have been as easy to pick as berries on a bush.

Barking Bicycles

I HOOKED up as personal ballyhooper for Richardson in 1896, when the bicycling craze was at its zenith and the bloomer girl was causing the reformer to polish up his vocabulary and his spectacles at the same time. Up to that time I was ballyhooping myself, for I held the Mississippi velocipede records for all distances up to a mile. I also won the Alabama quarter-mile record in 1894 from a high-class field of neighbors.

Cycle racing was the star attraction at all Southern state fairs and Will H. Pickens was a

pedaling. The motor, which was the Dion one-cylinder affair, simply accelerated their efforts and made more noise than progress. I bought a battery of these machines and made a tour of the country with a troupe of famous pace followers, among them being Miller and Waller, noted six-day racers.

The De Dions made such a terrific racket that audiences would leave their seats and the building. It was necessary for me to spiel a long ballyhoo before each race, telling the crowd not to be frightened at the unusual noise, which was simply an explosion of gasoline ignited by an electric spark. It was all new to the crowds in those days. They never did become accustomed to the barking bicycles.

Promoters must keep pace with progress. Just when I had figured that there could be nothing more dangerous than motor-paced cycling, I heard about two fellows in the Middle West who were tinkering around with a new contraption. One was in Cleveland and the other in Detroit, and you may have heard of their names—Alexander Winton and Henry Ford. Tom Cooper, who had been the star of a cycle-racing team which I managed for Chicago manufacturers of wheels, returned from Europe with wild tales of great speed shown by racing automobiles in France. He claimed that these cars could go a mile a minute.

Cooper brought back a motor which he intended to place on a bicycle and break all speed records. The daily papers carried descriptions of this wonderful thingumajig, and Henry Ford, being interested in anything mechanical, called on Cooper and examined the motor. Ford asked Cooper what he intended doing with the engine and Tom told him. Ford didn't care much about bicycles and informed Cooper that he was building an automobile that was better than motorcycles for frightening horses.

The Last Word in Speed

NOW Cooper was a showman who had made plenty of money in cycle racing and he asked Ford why he didn't make a racing car that could be used to break records in front of big profitable crowds. The result was a partnership, Ford to build the machine and Cooper to drive it. While they were building the car, Cooper sent for me and asked me to ballyhoo the first modern car of Juggernaut. I got all steamed up over the possibilities, but my ardor cooled when I saw how long it took to build the car.

The casting was bad in those days, each cast taking several weeks to make and the work being crude. The metal was full of sand holes and air bubbles which would not be discovered until the casting was being dressed on the lathe. Realizing that the job would take some months, I left and opened an amusement park in Alabama. But the persistent Ford managed to finish the job and challenged Winton, who was then the recognized American champion.

A date was set for the race, but on the eve of the contest Cooper was stricken with appendicitis. There was a young fellow in the Ford camp who had made a good reputation as a daring rider of motor tandems on the bicycle track. Like all young fellows, he was eager to do anything dangerous, and Ford selected him to take Cooper's place at

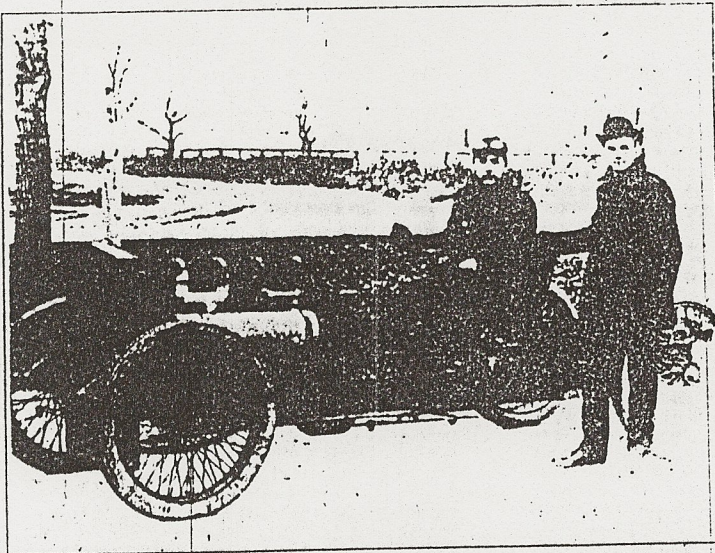


PHOTO FROM KEYSTONE

An Early Photograph of Henry Ford

the wheel. The youngster made good, beating Winton's famous car, Bullet Number 1, and hanging up a world's record on the Grosse Point track in Detroit. An old railroad engineer was one of the big crowd which saw the race, and as Ford's car scooted by he took off his hat, wiped his brow and said, "Boys, she runs faster than the 999."

The 999 was the locomotive which had drawn the first Empire State Express between New York and Buffalo. She was looked upon as the last word in speed. And that's how Ford's first car came to be named 999, which meant glory not only for the car and for Ford, but also for its first driver, Barney Oldfield.

Oldfield sprang into instant fame. After driving the 999 in a few exhibitions and races, he hooked up with Winton to drive the Bullet Number 2. Cooper bought out Ford's interest in the 999 and again sent for me to manage his interests. Realizing that the automobile was a going concern, minus sand holes and air bubbles, I sold the amusement park and came North with plenty of money to promote Cooper. We figured that the new car built by Winton was faster than the 999, and that the Bullet Number 2 would win all the silver cups and cash prizes in match races.

So we cooked up a scheme whereby Cooper and Oldfield would both make money and Will H. Pickens would also get his share of the plunder. Cooper sold the 999 to me and made a deal to manage Oldfield. I had the 999 but no driver, for I was too busy trying to make a living with a crippled head to take chances on a crippled body. I finally signed Dare-devil Hauseman to pilot the car. The combination began to function as per schedule and I publicly challenged Oldfield as quickly as I could get out the twenty-four sheets.

Early Hood Styles

COOPER accepted in Barney's behalf and the first race was pulled at Savannah, Georgia. Oldfield won. His reputation was growing rapidly, having been enhanced a few days before the Savannah race, when he defeated W. K. Vanderbilt, Jr., driving his \$40,000 racing car over the Daytona Beach course. We toured the country and Oldfield never lost a race. But my disappointment was assuaged by the fact that I got my share of the gate money. The 999 began to develop spavins and we discarded it. I signed to manage Oldfield, for I realized that he was destined to be the greatest figure that the racing game ever knew. We formed a partnership in 1904 and it has survived wind, storm and quarrels through almost a quarter of a century. During that time nearly every man, woman and child has paid fifty cents to see Barney race around the motordrome. If there is anybody who missed him, that person can send me the fifty cents.

After being out of Ford's hands for more than twenty years, the old 999 is back in his possession. I allowed it to be sold for freight charges in Los Angeles and one of Ford's dealers bought it in. Very few people know that Ford was once a dare-devil race driver and held the world's speed record for one mile. He read one day that Henry Fournier had covered a mile in forty seconds in France.

In December, 1903, Ford borrowed the 999 from Cooper and took it to Lake St. Clair, near Detroit. The lake was frozen solidly, and, after the ice had been sprinkled with hot cinders which would enable the 999 to get traction, Ford drove the car a mile in 39 2-5 seconds.

During a practice spin before the big attempt, Ford discovered that the intense cold would freeze the carburetor in an open position and it would be impossible for him to shut off the throttle. It looked as if the attempt would have to be abandoned, until a young fellow called Spider Huff volunteered to lie over the top of the engine and shut off the carburetor at the end of the drive. The car was nothing but a chassis, the engine being set on a frame with four wheels. There was no hood on the engine and Huff was warmer than Ford, for the Spider was a straddle the hot cylinders. The only protection Ford had was a thin board, which he used as a wind-shield.

Ford's mile record stood for three weeks, when W. K. Vanderbilt, Jr., lowered it to 39 seconds flat on the Ormond-Daytona Beach drive. Ford's performance is the more meritorious of the two, for it was made in zero weather under adverse conditions. The 999 really belonged to me when Mr. Ford made

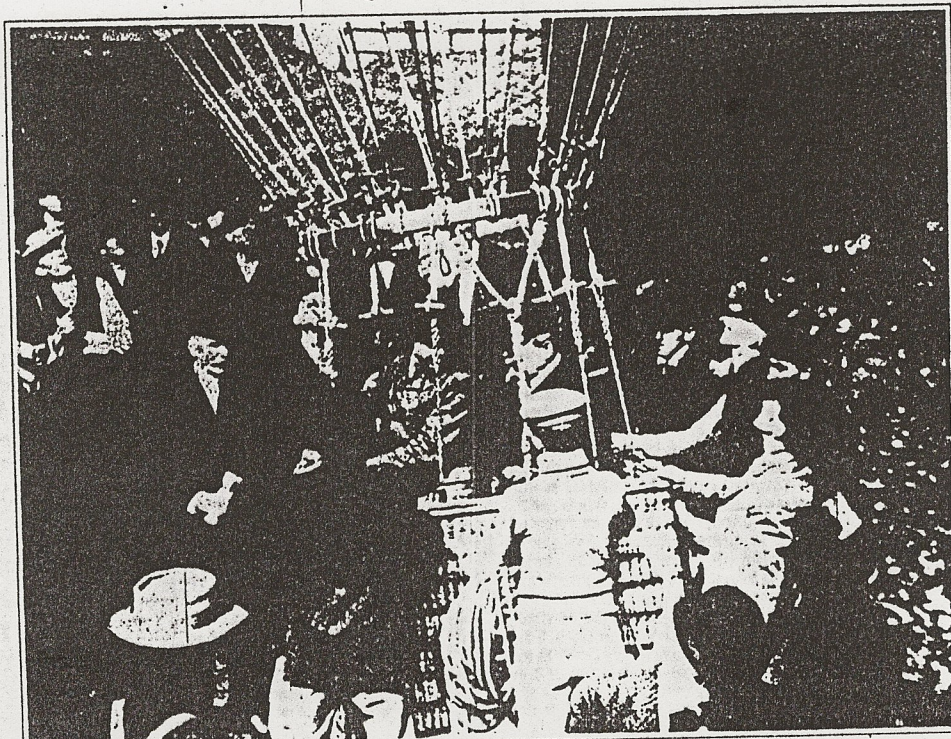


PHOTO BY BROWN BROTHERS, N. Y.

Erbsloh and Hardemann in the Basket, Jockeying for a Start in the St. Louis Balloon Race, 1907

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ACCELERATING SENTIMENT

(Continued from Page 27)

his record, for I had bought it from Cooper about two weeks before that; but Cooper had promised Mr. Ford the use of it for the speed trials on Lake St. Clair. The 999 was a remarkable piece of fast junk.

Ballyhoing Oldfield was very profitable and had but one bad feature. Barney had the habit of accumulating a huge bank roll and then retiring from the dare-devil business. This retiring from active warfare would cause Will H. Pickens to revise his plans and think up other methods of contributing to science and sport. I never worried over Oldfield's retirements, for I knew that Barney would get back on the track the day some other dare-devil broke his mile record. But in the meantime, during these intervals, I kept abreast of the times.

Grass has grown under my feet, and I admit it, but I also claim that I always grabbed a scythe and made hay out of that grass. At the end of the outdoor amusement season of 1907, a year of financial panic, I found myself broke in San Antonio. I had just finished staging motor races at the big fairs in Texas and had fifteen star drivers under contract. Farmers and promoters have sometimes been ruined by the drought in Texas, but in the summer of 1907 my ruin was accomplished by heavy rains on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Times were so difficult that most of my drivers and mechanics were reduced to a hot-tamale-and-chile-con-carne diet. I disbanded the speed circus in San Antonio, and when I got through paying off the boys I had just enough money for a ticket to Chicago.

I broke the jump at St. Louis, where the James Gordon Bennett International Balloon Race was being held that fall. The right to hold the race in America was won by Lieut. Frank P. Lahm, of the United States Army, who had finished first in the Bennett race of 1906 in Europe. There were nine huge bags in the contest and I was impressed by their size and beauty. Another item dear to the heart and pockets of a promoter was the fact that nine nations were represented in the race, thus making it a world championship.

This was America's first big aerial contest, for 1907 was long before the day when airplanes flew around in the air like chips in a lumber camp. The heavier-than-air machine was still an unrealized dream and veteran balloonists laughed at the secret flights of the Wright brothers.

A Blow to Patriotic Pride

There is something mysterious and awe-inspiring about a monster balloon. People saw it rise and soar away at the mercy of the air currents. Nobody knew where it was going to land—least of all the occupants of the basket, whose one dread was that they would be blown over the same ocean so recently traversed by Lindbergh and others.

The St. Louis race was won by Dr. I. Erbsloh in the German balloon Pommern, which landed at Asbury Park, New Jersey, 876.75 miles from the starting point. This was a new world record and the contest aroused great interest all over the country. I knew that the next Bennett race would be held the following year in the country corresponding with the winner's nationality and realized that it was a staggering blow to the United States. It meant that America must go through the year 1908 without a balloon race, and being a scion of a proud old Southern family, I determined that this glorious nation would have a balloon contest in 1908 if I had to make balloons out of paper bags and blow them up myself.

I had counted the gigantic cotton-and-rubber bags and knew that there were nine balloons to a race. Outside of that information I was still a pedestrian. St. Louis already having seen one race, I decided to confer the honor on another city. My ticket read from San Antonio to Chicago. I

couldn't go back to San Antonio, for that half of the ticket was already canceled. I have never confided to a single Chicagoan that his town's choice of the famous balloon race of 1908 was decided by the railroad company which sold me a ticket to Chicago. Another point in favor of the lake metropolis was that Will H. Pickens had unlimited credit at the Stratford Hotel, now torn down, so you can give credit where credit is due.

If you will follow me step by step, I will show you just how a promoter promotes. I took the train for Chicago and figured out my battle maps on the way. I didn't have a dime and balloons cost about \$2000 apiece, uninflated. Anybody who has ever dropped a quarter in the cellar meter realizes how much gas would cost to fill a balloon of approximately 60,000 cubic feet capacity. In the first place, I needed a man who would ride the white horse in front of the procession. This man would have to be a sincere amateur sportsman along the type of W. K. Vanderbilt, Jr.—a man who didn't call for his lawyer every time he saw his picture in the paper, and a man who would take a sporting chance. There was very little money involved in the initial steps, but the man on the white horse was expected to furnish that.

In the Best French Manner

I finally selected a well-known Chicagoan, Charles Andrew Coey, for the honor. Mr. Coey was a leading automobile distributor and an amateur sportsman who had frequently raced against Oldfield in open speed tournaments in the Middle West. A promoter's idea of an amateur sportsman is a man who is satisfied with a silver cup instead of a 50 per cent slice of a \$10,000 gate. No sportsman could be too amateurish in that respect for Will H. Pickens.

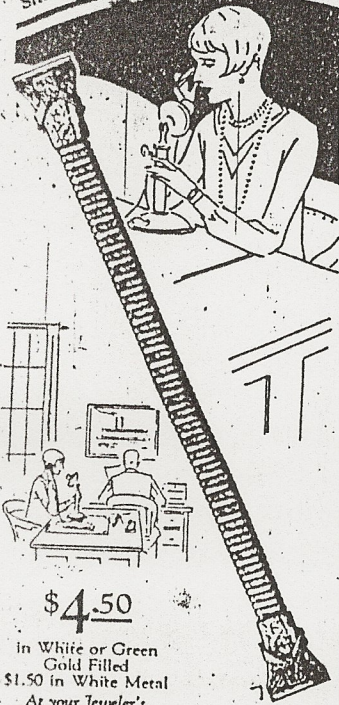
Upon arrival in Chicago I called on Mr. Coey and outlined my plan for filling the vacuum in American balloon racing for the year of 1908. I told him what a wonderful sight a balloon race was and how much one meant to the fair town of Chicago. There were also commercial possibilities in the scheme, and under proper direction, Chicago could soon be the balloon center of the universe. Mr. Coey was very enthusiastic and agreed to finance the promotion. The first installment was a check for \$250, made payable to Will H. Pickens. This payment is what a promoter calls front money. It enabled me to live in my accustomed style, to mingle with the best people and put up a good front. It also enabled me to flash a bank roll with a wrapper consisting of a \$100 bill and a filler of ones, fives and tens.

The next step was organizing an Aeronautique Club in the best French manner. As a comic opera needs at least one joke to make it comic, the Aeronautique Club of Chicago required one practical member who knew something about ballooning. We found that man in Octave Chanute, whose writings on ballooning were recognized as international authority. Coey called on Mr. Chanute and had no difficulty in persuading him to join the movement to make Chicago the home port for the world's runaway balloons. With Chanute as the nucleus of the organization, Coey called together a group of influential friends in commercial and financial circles and the Aeronautique Club of Chicago was launched.

The charter was procured, handsome stationery engraved, membership cards embossed, and, most important of all, engraved announcements of membership were ordered. Coey was elected president at the first meeting, and in his acceptance speech he painted the picture of the wonderful panorama of the St. Louis balloon race of 1907, and proposed a resolution that the Chicago club sponsor a similar race on July 4, 1908. The resolution was carried with the proviso that it would be possible to procure the services of a competent

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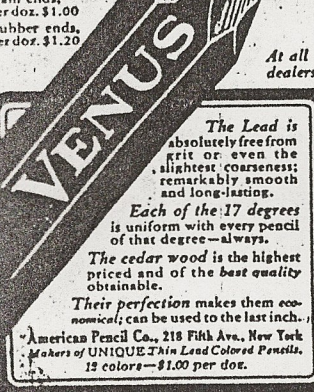
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promoter to handle the details. Will H. Pickens was very much at leisure. Coey was authorized to engage my services. He had no trouble signing me up.

I estimated that it would require \$20,000 to stage the race. The next step was to raise the money. That's where the important engraved announcements of membership came in. We realized that there were many sportsmen and prominent men throughout the country who would not be able to sleep nights if Chicago suffered from a dearth of balloons. Therefore we didn't slight a single citizen in our efforts to line up a strong brigade of volunteers who would struggle for science and sport. The announcements were sent forth like doves from the ark, and soon our mail bag was full of acceptances.

There were 300 members in all, and after a reasonable period we forwarded each member his bill for his first year's dues. The assessment was \$100 a head and this filled our coffers.

Remember that there was nothing shady about this stunt. Every member of the club was an amateur, pure and simple. The promotion was on the level and no club or club ever got a greater run for its money than Chicago in 1908. The only mercenary person in the organization was Will H. Pickens, whose activities were professional and whose efforts were to be rewarded with coin of the realm.

Adding International Flavor

Realizing that few of our new members knew anything about the science of brushing the clouds in spherical blimps, we determined to furnish them with information by publishing the first balloon magazine in the United States. We stuffed this magazine with data, illustrations and educational matter to enlighten the members and enable them to carry on an intelligent balloon conversation with persons who had only themselves to blame for bringing up the subject. This magazine was called the Aeronautique Review and was printed in lavish style on heavy calendared paper. The date of the first issue was February, 1908. There never was a second.

An obstacle developed at this stage which didn't worry me, but greatly perturbed less-experienced members of the club. This hurdle was furnished by the Aero Club of America, headquarters New York, which declared the proposed race to be an outlaw contest and forbade any of its members or pilots entering or participating in the race. This meant that we would have to procure our own balloons.

I immediately started on a hurr-up tour of the country east of the Mississippi for the purpose of organizing aero clubs in other cities. After planting the seed I returned to Chicago, and President Coey issued a call for all loyal balloonists to meet in Chicago for the purpose of organizing the Federation of American Aero Clubs. The original Aero Club of America had but around six affiliated clubs. When our outlaw banquet was held in Chicago a few weeks later we found that we had thirty-six cities represented and each town pledged an aero club. This took off the outlaw stigma and caused the balloon center of America to travel overnight from New York to Chicago.

Needless to state, the race was immediately sanctioned by the new federation and Will H. Pickens was appointed director general of contests. Everything about the balloon race was going along fine except that we had thirty-six balloon clubs and not a single balloon.

There must be nine balloons in every balloon race. I had learned that in St. Louis and might even have been considered an expert on that one detail. The time was now ripe for the big balloon that would get the people of Chicago and other cities in the federation interested in the essential industry of ballooning. President Coey of the Aeronautique Club came to the front by ordering the biggest balloon in the world, capacity 100,000 cubic feet. He planned

down \$3500 and made a trial flight that qualified him as a legitimate and experienced pilot. He flew from Quincy, Illinois, to Clear Lake, South Dakota, a distance of about 600 miles.

Coey's flight was widely exploited and stimulated interest among other sportsmen. I splattered the country with a twenty-four-sheet showing him in ballooning costume with his balloon Chicago in the background. Colonel Scott, of St. Paul; Dick Ferris, of Minneapolis; Norman G. Keenan, of Cincinnati; and Dr. Frederick J. Fielding, of San Antonio, built balloons at their own expense and entered them in the big race.

That made five in all. We were still four shy of the correct number. The Aeronautique Club decided to finance the building of the necessary four bags. The entries were now complete and, like home-brew, the only thing lacking was an international flavor. One day a chap walked into my office and introduced himself as Captain Muller, of Alsace-Lorraine. He furnished me with the missing link of the race.

I decided that Captain Muller would represent France, and cabled Louis Strang, one of my automobile-racing protégés, who was in France racing over the Dieppe circuit, to cable the entry of his balloon, the Ville de Dieppe, and nominate Captain Muller as pilot. I next took the gallant captain to a costumer and invested five wise dollars in renting a French army officer's uniform, rank captain. I could have made him a general for three more dollars. Then I hustled him to the barber and had his straggly mustache turned upward in military fashion. The Chicago papers fought for the privilege of printing Captain Muller's picture on their front pages.

With Europe taken care of, we next turned to Japan. While trying to get hold of a Nippone pilot I went down to a Jap curio store and ordered a polite Japanese printer to make up some stationery on rice paper bearing the insignia of the Ballooning Club of Tokio. This title was in the original Japanese. Then I went to another Japanese shop and paid an industrious Jap schoolboy to write a letter, begging the honor of being permitted to enter Taro Wasaro, champion balloonist of all Nippon, in the honorable contest against so many worthy competitors. He closed by hoping that the race would be won by the most courageous of all the seekers after celestial science and by affixing a signature purporting to be that of the dean of the aeronauts of Tokio.

A Balloon, But No Pilot

I fully intended to hire a Japanese pilot to guide a balloon in the contest, but was unable to get one. That's where complications set in, for, after showing the letter to other sport editors, I had foolishly left it on a desk in the sport department of a Chicago newspaper. I also left a press story explaining the contents of the Jap's epistle.

When the sporting editor came in he sent a famous football player to a real Japanese student. This student translated the letter and pronounced it authentic. He went one better by claiming to know the illustrious Japanese balloonist, Taro Wasaro. When I called on the editor the next day I was astounded to learn that he had prepared a three-column layout of the letter and was going to run it the next day. By this time it was too late for me to confess that it was a fake and the layout appeared the following morning. The Japanese student might have been right and there may actually have been a Taro Wasaro. But I couldn't discover him or any other Jap who was willing to take a chance in a strange balloon.

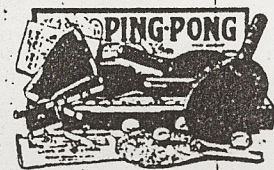
I issued a statement to the press, saying that Taro would be unable to appear. Then I assigned the balloon I had intended to dedicate to the Land of the Rising Sun over to the Aero Club of Winnipeg. We painted out the Japanese inscription and lettered in the august name of King Edward, monarch of England. We called our third balloon

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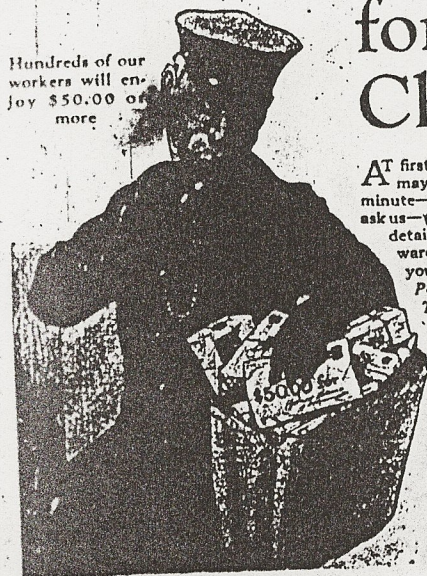
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the Columbia. The fourth one was christened the United States.

That completed the nine entries and the race had taken definite form. All Chicago was balloon mad. I had even been infected by the spirit of sportsmanship, and when I heard that another promoter was planning to stage a balloon contest in Ohio I denounced him as an outlaw. I made a plea that the sport be kept free from the profit-sharing element who would taint and injure the glorious pastime of aeronautics. But I didn't go so far as to relinquish my contract, which entitled me to 25 per cent of the gate receipts.

We rented a plot of ground on the South Side and erected temporary stands which would accommodate 25,000 people. Another 25,000 could be parked in the standing section. Board fences were slapped together around the inclosure and everything was ready for the race. The gas was tested and declared to be the most buoyant of any municipal gas in the country. Final preparations were completed and we sat back and waited for the big day.

I had worked a total of eight months on the contest and it was the biggest thing I had ever tackled. It had gathered momentum like the well-known snowball. Although I was the recognized ringmaster, I was smart enough to exploit the big names in the Aeronautique Club and to keep myself in the background. Coey's trial flight in the Chicago was the turning point in our publicity and we got more newspaper space than any other sporting event ever held in the Middle West.

July Fourth dawned clear and hot. The balloon-inflating zone was wired off and guarded by militia to prevent smokers from flipping lighted cigar butts into the danger area. Picture nine mammoth balloons swaying like inflated elephants in a gentle breeze. The seats were graded from a dollar to two dollars. Standing room was fifty cents. When the crowds started storming the gates, I might as well have been alone on a desert island, for I was fascinated by the nine big balloons. No less than 50,000 people jammed the park and another 500,000 surrounded the park and studded the streets and the lake front. We put both Chicago baseball games on the bum that day.

Doctor Fielding, of San Antonio, who stood six feet four inches. Captain Muller was the next broadcaster to take the air. His companion was George Schoeneck, a boy of seventeen with a reputation for dare-devil automobile racing.

Muller's Ville de Dieppe plunked right into the middle of Lake Michigan and only his nerve and quick thinking saved him and the boy from drowning. He climbed into the rope rigging, pulled the kid up after him and cut the basket loose with a pocket knife.

The Ville de Dieppe shot 5000 feet into the air and the captain should have been pronounced dead right there. But through some mysterious method he brought the bag down in a beet field in Northern Michigan. The kid now knows that Captain Muller had never been off the ground before but is convinced that he was then the greatest balloonist in the world. The seven other balloons got off rapidly and sailed over the lake.

Hero of the Air

The crowd went home thrilled to the marrow, for it had witnessed Chicago's bid for the supremacy of the air. The spectacle was over for the spectators, but it had just begun for the pilots. They came down all over the map. The next morning wires drifted in from the vagrant bags. Four balloons had dropped in the province of Ontario, having covered distances from 300 to 600 miles. You know about Muller. Three more landed in Michigan. Only Doctor Fielding was missing in the check-up. It was impossible to get news of the San Antonio and it was feared that it had selected one of the five Great Lakes as a landing station.

Then came a flash late the following afternoon. It had landed in West Sheffield, province of Quebec. I hastily consulted an outline map on the wall. I measured the distance between West Sheffield and Chicago and realized that the doctor had certainly hopped far and wide on his maiden jump. I didn't know how far it was until I had wired the United States Geographical Survey office in Washington and the Canadian officials in Ottawa. They verified my suspicions. Doctor Fielding had covered 895 miles and broken the world's record!

He had beaten the previous mark established by the Pommern in St. Louis the year before by almost twenty miles. He came back to Chicago and was acclaimed a hero. He was tendered a big banquet and became an international figure in ballooning.

When the returns were all in and the balloonists were safe on earth, I became a promoter again. My share of the proceeds was around \$16,000—\$6000 of which I had drawn in advance. The success of the meet resulted in many cities clamoring for the

(Continued on Page 210)

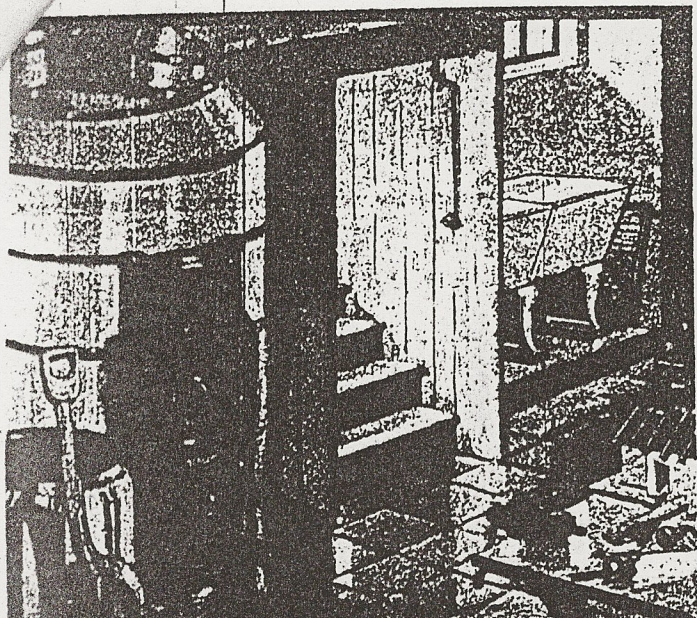
Nine Balloons—Count 'Em

But for once I forgot that I was a promoter and kept staring at the swaying bags. No matter what happened, no matter if the race was a success or a disaster, I felt vindicated every time I checked off the bags, for there were nine of them and it required nine balloons to make a race. I had learned this in St. Louis when my ballooning was in its infancy.

Coey was the popular favorite. So much had been written about Captain Muller that he was the second choice. The most imposing figure of all the entrants was



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(Continued from Page 208)

Federation of Aero Clubs to sanction meetings and provide the balloons for races in their towns. I determined to give up automobile contests and devote myself to the science of aeronautics. After visiting many towns and playing one against the other, I selected Columbus, Ohio, for the next Sky Derby. All contracts were speedily signed and the race was scheduled for August 29, 1908. In the meantime I studied the rule book and discovered that it was not necessary to have nine balloons in a race. So I decided to limit Columbus to five. The city was all smoked up, for by now ballooning was the great American sport. I plastered the state with twenty-four sheets and an enormous crowd paid to see the spectacle.

The balloons were inflated at Driving Park with gas piped from a main several blocks away. The bags filled as usual and everything looked auspicious for the greatest contest ever staged. The five pilots and their aids had equipped themselves with enough food to last a week. The word was given, the ropes were thrown off and the crowd cheered itself hoarse. But nary a balloon budged an inch. Some of them were nodding sleepily, like round-shouldered clerks on a hot day.

I rushed out and told the pilots to unhook their bags of sand ballast. This was done, but still the balloons hugged the

ground affectionately. Then I ordered the five aids out of the baskets. They dropped out, but still the balloons acted like sick lollipops. The week's supply of food was dumped overboard without effect. Not a balloon lifted its chin off the ground. The cheers of the crowd changed to hoots. Finally all the balloons got off the ground and sailed back and forth across the city like lazy buzzards. Two of them managed to sail out of sight, but the three others hung over Columbus the rest of the afternoon. The trouble was in the gas supply. Air had leaked into the pipes and was pumped into the bags, diluting the lifting power of the gas.

Of the two balloons which got away, one landed in Lake Erie and the other dropped into a railroad cut at Niagara Falls.

I left Columbus rather hurriedly, determined to give up the science of ballooning and stick to automobile racing, for motor enthusiasts are unable to hoot so loud and so long as balloon fans. That was my last balloon race, although I had made a fair profit at Columbus, and I had provided the city with the greatest spectacle ever seen in Ohio up to four o'clock that afternoon—which was the time that the balloons were supposed to get off the ground.

Editor's Note—This is the second of a series of articles by Mr. Pickens. The third will appear in the issue of November 26th.

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

(More Than Two Million Seven Hundred and Fifty Thousand Weekly)

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