

The 1910 Los Angeles Airshow: The Beginnings of Air Awareness in the West

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THE 1910 LOS ANGELES AIRSHOW ELECTRIFIED the western United States. Reporters and boosters came from throughout the region.¹ But they didn't want to just see an event in southern California; they all wanted to sponsor their own airshows. As a result, the Los Angeles airshow, more than any other event of the era, awakened air awareness among westerners. In fact, as the *Los Angeles Times* looked forward to air travel, it declared 1910 "a wonder year for the West" because of the potential of the airplane.² This study will examine the reverberations that the Los Angeles airshow had in communities throughout California, the Southwest, the Pacific Northwest, and the Intermountain West.

The Los Angeles airshow was conceived as a publicity stunt by the Merchants' and Manufacturers' Association, a segment of the business community, as a chance to be the first in the West. In January 1910, the airplane was not yet seven years old, and most Americans knew about it only vicariously by reading the newspapers. Those that had first-hand knowledge were excited by the possibility of flight but were invariably frightened by the fragility of the aircraft and impatient of its seemingly endless mechanical problems.

The organizers of the Los Angeles airshow played on the excitement and fear that aircraft held for the American public during the 10-20 January 1910 event. They believed that the activity would be good for Los Angeles but even they were surprised by the positive reaction. When they began to tally the reservations of people attending from throughout the West, a committee member exclaimed, "In every way I am sure this will be one of the biggest advertisements Los Angeles has ever had."³

Before it reached that conclusion though, the Aviation Week

Executive Committee sweated over raising enough money, providing an adequate air field for the competitors and the spectators, and publicizing the event throughout the nation. By 3 January 1910, however, about a week before the show was to open, committee members were optimistic that everything was going well and that the show would effectively promote the Los Angeles area. The secretary of the aviation committee declared that at least "110,000 visitors from outside points" would come to the area to witness the extravaganza.⁴

The aviation show began on 10 January 1910, and for the next ten days the Los Angeles *Times*, one of the sponsors, carried glowing reports of flyers from all over the United States and Europe. These included daily articles on the intense rivalry between Glenn H. Curtiss, a young aeronautical engineer and aviation pioneer, and Louis Paulhan, a handsome French aviator. These two competed to go the farthest, the fastest, and the highest.⁵

All types of "firsts" were ballyhooed about the airshow. Glenn Curtiss's first trial run was billed as "the first flight in an aeroplane west of the Great Plains. . . . It marked an epoch in the affairs of the West for a flight had never been made on the Coast, and native sons were skeptical of its accomplishment until they actually set eyes on the performance."⁶ Curtiss, along with others, participated in endurance and speed races. After one qualifying run, Curtiss was described as "always businesslike and rarely spectacular, but the observers seem to enjoy unlimited confidence in his performance and express great delight when the American makes a good showing."⁷

The hero of the show, however, was Louis Paulhan. The Frenchman, whether knowingly or not, played beautifully into the promotional goals of the airshow organizers. He bragged that California was a "terrestrial paradise!" His wife also emphasized the boosteristic undercurrent present throughout the event, declaring, "You live in a modern Eden." She spoke disparagingly of the difficulties of crossing the "interminable desert" of the American Southwest, and declared, "What a great country is this—how vast! And what a blessing it is to be in California now!"⁸

By any standard the airshow was a success. More than half a million people turned out to see the events. The Los Angeles *Times*

reported that the opening day “will never be forgotten in Southern California.” Over twenty thousand people came out to see the first flights, to eat, and even to purchase special glasses sold by an “optician.” In the glowing language of the time, the newspaper declared, “There is a fascination about watching the flight of one of these strange things that can’t be set in cold words and black type. It is almost like the sensations of a dream.”⁹

Just three days into the activity, the newspaper declared, “The committee and members of the Merchants’ and Manufacturers’ Association generally have shown great capacity for planning and accomplishment in this undertaking. . . . ‘For the good of Los Angeles’ has been their motto, and they are exceeding the expectations of their fellow citizens.”¹⁰

The newspaper reported at the conclusion of the airshow, “A week of aviation in Los Angeles has left half a million people in and about the city ‘up in the air,’” it was “one of the greatest public events in the history of the West.”¹¹ Some of the reasons were that “world’s records have been established, new possibilities of flying as a practical method of locomotion have been fixed in the minds of hundreds of thousands of people, and an impetus has been given to aerial sport in America such as no other form of exhibition ever enjoyed.”¹² The *Times* explained that the local community had finally “demonstrated that Los Angeles is a metropolis great and influential enough to handle the biggest world’s events. . . . Los Angeles has gained a new confidence in its own powers.”¹³

Cortland Field Bishop, head of the Aero Club of America, echoed this perspective. He told the California chapter that “this section [of the country] had taken away from the East the opportunity to begin conducting great aviation meets.”¹⁴

Although the airshow took place in Los Angeles, it was a western event. The airshow organizers foresaw this interest and dedicated individual days activities to various cities. In so doing, they made other western cities feel more a part of the meet. San Diego, Oakland, San Francisco, and Phoenix, for example, sent delegates to Los Angeles on their designated days.

But it was more than just businessmen traveling to Los Angeles. Newspapers from throughout the West sent reporters. The airshow was front page news from Washington to Arizona.

For example, throughout the Los Angeles meet, the *Oakland Tribune* carried extensive reports of the meet. Reporting the activities of the first day, the paper declared, "As the aeroplanes one by one left the ground in flight and cleared the tops of the trees, surmounting the low rolling hills across the aviation field, their graceful outlines were brought into bold relief against the leaden sky above the snow capped peaks of Mount Wilson."¹⁵ While Glenn Curtiss went for speed and distance and Louis Paulhan went for altitude, the Oakland paper published commentary from Cortland Bishop who insisted, "Each of the contests is important because it teaches something in the way of lessons that tend to advance the art of flying. Progress in aviation can only be made through healthy competition stimulated by enthusiasm on the part of the people."¹⁶

As the Los Angeles airshow was taking place, attendees from Oakland, California, began to speculate about the possibility of hosting one of their own. Because "the shrewd and enterprising men of Los Angeles had a clear business comprehension of the value of the venture as an advertising proposition," Oakland observers concluded, "Everywhere throughout the civilized world the name of Los Angeles is as familiar as the great earthquake and fire made that of San Francisco in 1906."¹⁷

Based on the experience of Los Angeles, Robert Martland of the Oakland Aero Club urged his Chamber of Commerce to sponsor an aviation meet because it "would be an excellent advertisement for the city."¹⁸ The Oakland mayor took little convincing and traveled downstate near the end of the Los Angeles airshow to try to persuade aviators to come to Oakland on 23-25 January 1910 to repeat their aerobatics.¹⁹

While Oakland was trying, unsuccessfully as it turned out, to organize an air meet, San Francisco community leaders got into the act. For its day at the Los Angeles airshow, the local Chamber of Commerce and the Merchants' Exchange sent a booster train. All of the businessmen in town were invited to "witness the first aeroplane exposition on the Pacific Coast, and to show our appreciation of the enterprise of the citizens of Los Angeles in getting up such a notable event."²⁰

On 15 January 1910, 147 San Francisco businessmen boarded the special southbound train. The paper added that many applica-

tions had to be turned down because the train was as long as possible and already required two engines. Nothing exciting occurred on the San Francisco Day, but the San Francisco *Chronicle* rationalized, "While there was some disappointment that there had not been spectacular features with which to please the visitors from San Francisco, it was generally agreed that the day was an interesting one and that if the elements had not prevented them greater feats would have occurred."²¹

Like Oakland's leaders, the San Francisco representatives considered sponsoring their own airshow in the Bay area to capitalize on the enthusiasm of the Los Angeles event. A dose of realism entered into this debate, however, when some community leaders questioned whether a meet in the city was possible because of the wind, generally poor flying conditions, and the lack of an acceptable landing field.

The next day, city leaders did an about-face on an airshow when William Randolph Hearst announced that he would put up \$50,000 for Louis Paulhan to fly in his home city. The arguments about weather and flying fields immediately fell by the wayside. Civic leaders secured the use of San Francisco's Tanforan as a flying field, and Paulhan made plans to come to San Francisco.²²

The San Francisco show had to be put together in a hurry, and that proved a difficult task but by 23 January 1910 the San Francisco *Chronicle* reported that despite only four days notice "everything [is ready] for flights of [the] French aviator" and that "Paulhan would fly "rain or sunshine."²³

These high hopes, however, were quickly dampened. It rained for four days, and Paulhan's flights were short and uneventful. When he finally flew on the last day, the San Francisco *Examiner* declared, "He did it. It took four days to get the proper weather and perfect atmospheric conditions but when these requisites were obtained, Paulhan demonstrated the abilities of the machine and his control of it to the perfect satisfaction of the vast crowd."²⁴

San Diego was also excited about the Los Angeles air meet, especially San Diego Day. With the support of the Chamber of Commerce and the Merchants' Association, a special committee arranged for trains to carry local observers from San Diego to the show and to coordinate activities.²⁵ The San Diego *Union* bragged

that they “let Los Angeles know even more positively than before that San Diego is on the map...”²⁶

The San Diego newspaper continued to carry stories about the Los Angeles show on the front page, usually with a little local twist. For example, when Louis Paulhan flew to San Pedro, the paper declared that “he will visit San Diego next.”²⁷ When local flier Charles K. Hamilton announced he would fly from Los Angeles to San Diego, the local businessmen raised \$5,000 to encourage him to make the flight.²⁸

San Diego leaders did convince Hamilton and other fliers to repeat their flights in their city after the Los Angeles show. The mayor, Grant Conrad, thought that it was an important enough occasion that on Monday afternoon, 23 January 1910, employees should be given a half day holiday. He explained, “Let us all boost aviation and the Panama-California Exposition.” That same day schools were canceled for half a day. Trials in the municipal courts were even delayed.²⁹

Just as the residents of San Diego expected a great show, so did Hamilton. When asked if he would break records, he replied, “Ask me—that’s all I got to say,” going on to declare, “I thought when I got to Los Angeles that perfection had been reached, but this is so far better from the aviators’ standpoint that there is no comparison. I’m a fair judge of aerial conditions, and I believe that there is not a city in the world where there are so few cross currents in the air as here.”

The *Union* was especially impressed with the show. “On the field where exciting games of polo have thrilled thousands there came thrills yesterday which polo have never excited.” However, the day was not without mishaps. One plane had to crash to avoid hitting Hamilton. And when Hamilton took a reporter up, he got caught in an “eddy of wind” which forced him to land. In doing so, he broke three ribs on one of the planes. Despite the mishap, reporter John F. Greer gushed his excitement over the flight.³⁰

After Hamilton’s last flight into the sunset, he declared, “Rheims was beautiful, Los Angeles was exquisite, San Diego is ideal.”³¹ The next day he flew thirty-seven miles to cross the border into Mexico, “the only moonlight flight ever attempted under the auspices of the Aero Club of America.”³²

Residents of Portland, Oregon, also caught the aviation bug at Los Angeles. E. Henry Wemme, who attended the airshow, brought back a Curtiss airplane he bought in Los Angeles. As the first aircraft ever to arrive in Portland, it stirred up much local interest. Civic leaders wanted to organize an air meet in the city to repeat the excitement they experienced in Los Angeles. Business leader K.I. Barnard offered to bring the Los Angeles aviators to Portland. In anticipation, a local store had an aviation sale and showed pictures of aeroplanes in flight.³³

Barnard made good on his promise and in March 1910 Charles K. Hamilton arrived at the invitation of the Portland Aeronautic Club. This club, in concert with the Portland Fair and Livestock Association, held an air meet at the state fair grounds. An estimated crowd of 50,000 watched Hamilton fly and “electrify” the crowd by “darting down on the race course in front of a swiftly speeding automobile with which he was racing. . . . The crowd cheered the daring feat. . . . Hamilton sat in his seat, a cigarette in his mouth, with his hands firmly clutching the steering wheel, his thin set face strangely like an eagle.”³⁴

This airshow registered the first negative publicity associated with aviation in the West, however, when it failed to make expenses. While an estimated 70,000 people saw some part of the airshow, only about 6,000 actually paid because of gate crashing and watching the planes for outside the fairgrounds.³⁵

The Seattle *Post Intelligencer* also carried long articles about the Los Angeles airshow in January 1910, even sending its own photographer and carrying exclusive pictures of the event. Following the meet, the Seattle-Tacoma area was anxious to entice the aviators to bring their airplanes there.

At first the area hoped it could attract Glenn Curtiss. Since Ellis Lewis Garretson, a local Tacoma attorney, had ordered a Curtiss plane, he felt that he could talk Curtiss into coming because he would be able to sell other airplanes. The newspaper bragged that the airshow would be as big as the Seattle exposition and that as a result “a whole lot of people that now give the matter no thought will get the flying machine bug.”³⁶

But Curtiss did not participate in any of the airshows immedi-

ately after the Los Angeles show. Instead he went east to prepare for a court case with the Wright Brothers over alleged patent violations.³⁷

Yet Garretson was not willing to give up. He talked with Dick Ferris who had been a driver in organizing the Los Angeles and San Francisco airshows and asked him to schedule something for the Pacific Northwest. Garretson then approached the Tacoma and Seattle businessmen and asked for their financial support. These businessmen were willing to raise the \$15,000 needed for the meet. The president of the Tacoma Commercial Club appointed a committee to make arrangements for the meet. Yet just three days later—after the \$15,000 had been guaranteed and flying field arrangements made—Garretson announced that he had not been able to persuade the aviators to come to the area.³⁸

Plans were finally announced for a Seattle airshow in February 1910. The Western Washington Fair Association signed an agreement with Charles K. Hamilton to come after his flight in Portland. "Hamilton is regarded as one of the most daring of aeronauts," reported the airshow boosters, "He is the protege of Glenn Curtiss who has forsaken the air to devote his attentions to the manufacturing of his machines." Those who had seen Hamilton fly declared he was "just as good as Paulhan. . . Paulhan was the rage at the Los Angeles meet, but Hamilton is every bit his equal in point of daring." The flights in Seattle, local promoters believed, would spark the sale of airplanes in the area.

It would also be good for Seattle. H.R. Williams, the president of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and Puget Sound Railroad, had been to the Los Angeles show and explained, "I am glad to see that Seattle is not behind in this respect."³⁹

In order to promote the meet, Hamilton offered to take a Seattle woman for a flight. Thousands of local residents wanted to fly, and he had no difficulty finding a woman volunteer. As one young woman explained, "I would be keenly disappointed if I am not allowed to accompany Mr. Hamilton. It isn't so dangerous, is it?" She added that she felt "flying in an aeroplane I would believe to be very much like automobiling, with the exception that you don't get the bumps and hit street cars."⁴⁰ With so many women willing to fly, the local newspaper speculated that if their "enthusiasm . . . becomes

contagious, the amphitheater and adjacent grounds will not hold the crowds that will see them.”⁴¹

Finally after all the promotions, Hamilton arrived, assembled his plane, and was ready for his test flight. He told the newspaper, “Sky sailing is like automobiling—only different.... You don’t get the bumps. It’s just as safe as driving a motor car. I’d rather be killing time in an aeroplane than in a gasoline car.”⁴²

And once Hamilton took off, glowing reports appeared in the paper of how Hamilton flew among the local seagulls. It told of the people who planned to attend the meet, the name of the young woman whose name was drawn out of a hat who would fly with him, and the transportation arrangements to and from the airshow. It bragged that W.W. Harbeck had been taking moving pictures that would be “syndicated over several vaudeville circuits.” The paper declared that as a result, “Not only may Hamilton set this city on the aeronautical map by establishing new aviation records, but the city is certain of obtaining wide publicity through the medium of moving pictures.”⁴³

On 12 March Hamilton made four flights, but in the end crashed his plane in the lake and had to be rescued. The young aviator tried to fix the plane but was not able to fly the next day. The paper enthused, “With patience never equaled in any local public exhibition, the men and women in the grand stand, the members of countless automobile parties, besides the black specks of humanity seen on the rooftops, the surrounding bluffs and other points of vantage, remained restless but quiet.”

This patience did not last. When there was no flight, they demanded their money back. The clerks slipped out with the money and the people were given rainchecks instead. When they ran out of these checks, however, the crowd was upset again. In order to create better feelings, Hamilton worked all day to start the plane and as a result almost fainted. “I expected to be hit by a brick any moment,” Hamilton said later. “The crowd acted the best I have ever seen but there was some rowdies and I would not have been surprised if they had flung a stone at me as they threw stones at Paulhan in Denver.”⁴⁴

The next day Hamilton made two short flights but was not able to continue. In order to save face, the people with rainchecks were told they could go to a baseball game. Hamilton was paid \$2,000 for

his flight, less than he had contracted for, but with gate receipts at about \$5,000 the committee refused to give him more since it wanted desperately to meet expenses.

In the end the airshow did not pay for itself; those who gave the guarantee and those who did not see a flight were asking for their money back. The paper reported that the Western Washington Association "washes its hands of the affair and refuses to be interviewed on the subject."

After all the complaints, Hamilton agreed to return to Seattle in April 1910 to "make good with the people of Seattle." A site was selected for two days of flying. Despite a rain that delayed the flight, 500 people saw Hamilton fly. The crowd was especially amused when a dog was frightened by the plane and ran backwards into a steep gully.⁴⁵

Even with such disasters, enthusiasm for aviation was not dampened. The aura of the Los Angeles airshow helped spread the gospel of air-mindedness beyond the West Coast. This excitement found tangible expression in an aerial exhibition in Salt Lake City on 30 January 1910 when French barnstormer Louis Paulhan flew at an exhibition at the city fairgrounds.

Before a crowd estimated at 10,000, Paulhan flew for approximately 10 minutes and 30 seconds above the city. According to the *Salt Lake Tribune*, Paulhan "established a new world's record, for he sailed to a height of approximately 4,600 feet, while his best previous performance was 4,165 feet above sea level, done at Los Angeles." Unfortunately, because of the altitude of the city, the crowd saw the aircraft fly only about 300 feet above them. The pilot was disappointed that he "couldn't rise to a greater height, but the heavy biplane could not soar higher in this rarified atmosphere. I hope to come back some day with a lighter machine and do some real high-flying."⁴⁶

Denver leaders were also thrilled by the 1910 Los Angeles airshow. They jockeyed to persuade aviators to stop there and fly for the community during trips back East. There was even some talk of the Aero Club of America organizing a major airshow in Denver for the fall of 1910.

This theme of an international airshow in Denver continued dur-

ing the next few days while the Los Angeles airshow was in progress. A cartoon showed a little girl with Los Angeles written across her skirt joyfully playing with airplanes and another little girl with Denver on her skirt pouting because she only had a car and horse around her. The caption was “she won’t be happy till she gets it!”⁴⁷ An article declared, “A stand for altitude and for aviation. Considered alliteratively and alphabetically, one does not have to go beyond the first letter to get the combination that will make Denver the world’s center of aeronautics.”

In discussing the meet, Cortland Bishop said he favored having it in Denver. Advantages were that the city was large enough to accommodate the crowds; the disadvantages were the winds might be hard on the balloons. Promoters declared that having the airshow would be important to “put Denver on the map. . . . We want it here and I believe that \$100,000 can be raised in no time for that purpose.”

Even though other cities were also interested in hosting such a meet, the city boosters were convinced they could get it because Bishop favored Denver.⁴⁸ The next day the editor of the Denver newspaper declared, “There is nothing in the world which I know of that would create more enthusiasm to bring more people to Denver than the international aviation meet.”⁴⁹

While Denver did not get the favor of the Aero Club of America for an international airshow it was not entirely left out of the airplane circuit. The city was delighted when Louis Paulhan agreed to come to Denver after Salt Lake City. The newspaper announced that local carnival men had drawn up a contract, explaining, “Denver is aviation mad.”⁵⁰ They ballyhooed Paulhan’s plans to circle Pike’s Peak and to break the altitude record. The major concern was how Paulhan’s airplane would react in the mile-high city, since it had already had trouble in Salt Lake City. A headline read, “Paulhan must fly at terrific speed to keep from falling in rarified air of Denver.”⁵¹

Paulhan started out slowly in Denver. He complained that his first flights were not successful because of the crowds: “There is no trouble about the altitude; the plane is in perfect condition, but as soon as I start I look ahead, and there in front I see the people crowding through the ropes and fences.”⁵²

But still Denver was impressed with Paulhan. For people in the

community, just seeing an airplane in flight was exciting. According to the newspaper, one society woman said as she left after the second flight, "I'm satisfied. . . . I know now that flying is possible and that's what I went to find out. I wouldn't have cared if he had flown only one little time."⁵³ And the *Post* told its readers, "We are on the eve of a surpassing era in history, and Paulhan is here in Denver as its herald."⁵⁴

Even after Paulhan crashed in an attempt to miss a moving crowd, the paper declared, "Notwithstanding many disappointments of the Paulhan's visit, the general opinion is that to see Louis Paulhan . . . added a new lyric to the sum of life's wonders [and] was worth all the admission one might be able to pay. May he come again—and that soon."⁵⁵

Residents of Boise, Idaho, had to wait a little longer to see an airplane in flight. Prompted by the success of the Los Angeles airshow, local entrepreneurs worked to bring a flier to the Idaho Intermountain Fair in October 1910. They succeeded in persuading, although everyone admitted that it did not take too much persuasion, Tacoma businessman N.A. Brown to demonstrate his newly purchased Blériot monoplane at the fair in Boise. The *Idaho Statesman* pointed out there was "no doubt" that there would be "at least one flight per day." It then cautioned, "There are, however, many difficulties which often arise, making scheduled flights with aeroplanes very uncertain as to time, but no effort will be spared to make these flights as regular and prompt as is possible. An effort will be made to maneuver with the monoplane in front of the grand stand at the fair grounds."⁵⁶

On 10 October 1910 everything was all set for the big flight, but all of Brown's attempts were unsuccessful. The newspaper headline accurately caught the moment: "Aeroplane is Huge Success Except that it Utterly Refuses to Fly." Three weeks after the triumphant announcement of Brown's attendance at the fair, he left town "in great disgust with himself and the machine which refused to fly." The whole experience, unlike that in Los Angeles, was "a fiasco" according to the *Idaho Statesman*.⁵⁷

Nearly concurrent with the silliness in Boise, another flier, James J. Ward, took his Curtiss biplane to a fair in Lewiston, Idaho, and made the first aircraft flight in the state. A representative of the

Curtiss Aircraft Co., Ward sent a message on 5 October to the fair's organizers about his arrival. It asked them to "Advertise flying machine big. It always draws big crowds." He hoped to interest at least some of the crowd to purchase an airplane of their own.

His first flight took place on 13 October 1910. Before he could do more than buzz the airfield, engine trouble forced him to land. He continued his flights the next day, but on 15 October a special report left Lewiston: "The Curtiss biplane with which J.J. Ward of Chicago has been making daily flights at the fair, tonight lies a heap of junk on the banks of the Snake River, and that Ward himself is not in a morgue or at the hospital, is almost a miracle." It was an inauspicious beginning for aviation in Idaho.⁵⁸

The 1910 Los Angeles airshow had an important affect on southwestern communities as well, as promoters organized airshows in Phoenix, Santa Fe, Tucson, Douglas, Bisbee, Albuquerque, and other regional communities during the rest of the year.⁵⁹ As elsewhere, the business, civic, and political leaders of the southwestern cities were not content to stand by and let Los Angeles have all the glory. If airshows would bring the type of attention that Los Angeles received, other leaders wanted to host them, too. City leaders from Phoenix and Tucson attending the Los Angeles airshow pursued the staging of their own expositions.

Phoenix was especially aggressive. Nat Reiss, a local promoter, returned from Los Angeles "more enthused about it than with any spectacular entertainment idea he ever possessed" except when "he decided that he was born to be a showman." Based on his lifetime experience in the amusement field, he declared that the "flying machine is the biggest, the best, the cleanest and most interesting [form of entertainment] he had ever seen." According to Reiss, Phoenix could have an airshow for only \$12,000. However, "the scheme is . . . all up in the air until some local committee takes hold of it" and tried to raise that much money. Reiss stressed, "The flying idea . . . has got the people going, and now is the time to strike. A year or two later, it may be too common to interest but just now, the country is aviation mad and the advertisement it would give Phoenix to be the scene of the third aviation meeting in America would be incomparable and attract the attention of millions who never yet have heard of the place."⁶⁰

After a great deal of effort putting all of the pieces together, the local business community proudly announced, "Phoenix will 'aviate,'" explaining that Glenn Curtiss, Charles K. Hamilton, and several other flyers would stop in Phoenix during their return to the East. In a spasm of enthusiasm a few local residents formed the Phoenix Aero Club and developed the details for the show.⁶¹ K.L. Bernard, "professional instigator of high class sport and aviation impresario," explained that since the Associated Press had already announced the Phoenix meet, "hundreds of thousands" who had never heard of Phoenix would "look it up now and see what manner of berg this is."⁶²

Part of city boosterism was not only singing the praise of one's own city but also stressing it was better than any other. In response to newspaper accounts in southern Arizona that an aviation show would be held in Tucson or Douglas, the *Republican* carefully explained, "For the benefit of those who may be led astray by such items and plan on a show nearer home instead of coming to Phoenix, it is announced authoritatively that if such meetings are held, Glenn Curtiss, the leading aviator in the country, will not be there" since Curtiss was under contract with Bernard. The article continued, tongue in cheek, "This is said without acrimony against Tucson, Douglas, or any other town, but Phoenix acted first, got the plum, and will try to make the meeting the finest kind of a success."⁶³

As elsewhere, Curtiss did not make an appearance in Arizona because he had to return to New York to take part in a court case against the Wright brothers. Even so, local officials believed the airshow had been a success, commenting that "It is likely that no single event ever occurred that will give Phoenix as much advertising of a sort that can be secured by purchase as the late aviation meet."⁶⁴

Tucson also had an airshow, for the same promotional reasons that had motivated Phoenix community leaders. But it was not nearly as successful as the Phoenix show. Hamilton agreed to go to Tucson for \$2,000, much less than the \$20,000 that Salt Lake City and Denver paid to lure Paulhan to those cities. Yet only \$1,616 was collected at the gate, and the committee in charge had to absorb the remaining costs of the show. Even though unsuccessful in yielding short-term profits, city promoters believed that aviation held promise for the development of their area and promoted the South-

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west as a center of aviation. They even tried to persuade firms to build aircraft plants in the area, "thus giving the city prestige as an aeroplane manufacturing center and furnishing it with a prosperous industry."⁶⁵

The Los Angeles airshow of 1910 started a fad that spread throughout the West that year. Airshows continued to be popular the next few years. Los Angeles and San Francisco sponsored shows in 1911 that were still front page news. The *Los Angeles Times* reported the 1912 Los Angeles show on the sports page. But even though flying became a dare-devil sport, it still was considered noteworthy.

As the decade progressed, less ambitious airshows were organized in cities all over the region. Virtually every county fair tried to lure aviators. Promoters saw these events in short term publicity terms. Just flying was enough to attract an audience. In these first shows prominent aviators throughout the United States and Europe demonstrated that people could actually fly, that the earlier photographs of airplanes were not hoaxes, and that the Wright Brothers were legitimate pioneers. They transformed an abstract concept into a tangible reality. Later aviators had to do ever more daring tricks to attract attention, and to offer rides to anyone with a little money.

An important result of the Los Angeles 1910 show and those that followed was that local community and government leaders began to perceive a tremendous economic potential for aviation. While many could not predict the full value of aviation as a means of travel, the sky was still a new frontier waiting to be conquered.

And it was also a way for local business leaders and politicians to promote their own city. This self-promotion of cities was nothing new to the West, but it has become increasingly more important in the twentieth century with the rise of advertising. Richard White astutely noted that "In the twentieth century urban governments [of the West], like city governments in the rest of the country, moved from merely regulators of public life to promoting growth."⁶⁶

Aviation was one important way for communities to champion the community and to demonstrate progressive thinking. That conquest held commercial value that could be exploited. From those first airshows aviation in the West began to emerge as an important

ingredient in the evolution of the region. Although the early airshows did not necessarily advance the practical use of airplanes, at least they showed that flying was possible and prompted a greater air awareness among the populace than would have been present otherwise.

NOTES

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²"A Wonder Year for the West," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 March 1910, sect. 2, p. 4.

³"Thousands to See Flights," *ibid.*, 3 January 1910, sect. 2, p. 2.

⁴*Ibid.*, *First in America Aviation Meet Los Angeles*, official program, 14 January 1910, Aviation Collection, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming, Laramie.

⁵"Final Days for Aviation," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 January 1910, sect. 2, p. 9; "Air Meet in Los Angeles Most Celebrated Event," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 January 1910, sect. 2, p. 1; "World's Question Fully Answered," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 January 1910, sect. 2, p. 1; Juliette A. Hennessy, *The United States Army Air Arm. April 1861 to April 1917* (Washington, DC: USAF Historical Division, 1958), pp. 86-106.

⁶"Curtiss Biplane Flying at Aviation Camp," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 January 1910, sect. 1, p.

1.

⁷"Miracles Made Sports," *ibid.*, 14 January 1910, sect. 1, p. 8.

⁸"Famous French Aviator has Great Hope for the Future," *ibid.*, 10 January 1910, sect. 1, p.

4.

⁹"Circling, Swooping, Tilting Skyward, Paulhan Swiftly Flies Eleven Miles," *ibid.*, 11 January 1910, sect. 2, p. 1.

¹⁰"Splendid Work is Done by Aviation Committee," *ibid.*, 13 January 1910, sect. 2, p. 9.

¹¹"World's Progress Shown in a New Light by Week's Triumph at Aviation Meet," *ibid.*, 16 January 1910, sect. 2, p. 1.

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³"Week's Triumphs," *ibid.*, 16 January 1910, sect. 2, p. 8.

¹⁴"Best Climate for Aviation," *ibid.*, 18 January 1910, sect. 2, p. 8.

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¹⁷"Aerial Advertising," *ibid.*, 17 January 1910, p. 6.

¹⁸"Oakland Will Have Third Aviation Meet," *ibid.*, 8 January 1910, p. 9.

¹⁹"Man-birds to Flutter in Oakland Skies," *ibid.*, 19 January 1910, pp. 1-2.

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²¹"Business Men Go to Los Angeles," *ibid.*, 15 January 1910, p. 7; "San Francisco Business Men Witness Flight," *ibid.*, 16 January 1910, p. 7.

²²"Oakland May Get an Aviation Meet," *ibid.*, 19 January 1910, p. 2; "Paulhan Will Fly at Tanforan," *ibid.*, 20 January 1910, p. 4.

²³"Manager Says Paulhan Will Fly in Rain or Sunshine," *ibid.*, 23 January 1910, p. 27.

²⁴"Nothing Lacking in Aerial Exhibition," *ibid.*, 27 January 1910, p. 2.

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- ²⁸"Hamilton Will Attempt to Fly from LA to San Diego," *ibid.*, 20 January 1910, p. 2.
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- ³¹"Hamilton Sets New Mark for High Gliding," *ibid.*, 24 January 1910, pp. 1, 5.
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- ³³"Aircraft coming," *The Oregonian* (Portland), 22 January 1910, p. 3; advertisement for Meier and Frank store, *ibid.*, 14 February 1910, p. 16.
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- ³⁹"Aviators Will Fly Over City in Two Weeks," *ibid.*, 27 February 1910, pp. 1, 2.
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- ⁴¹"More Women Volunteer to Fly in Biplane," *ibid.*, 8 March 1910, p. 5.
- ⁴²"All in Readiness for High Flyers," *ibid.*, 11 March 1910, p. 11.
- ⁴³"Aviator Flying Over Them Gives Birds a Fright," *ibid.*, 12 March 1910, pp. 1, 12.
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