

Tells of Chanute's First Glider Flight From High Dune in Miller

PIONEER WILL BE PRESENT AT PARK SERVICES

Westergren Describes Early Experiments Along Lake Shore

BY JAKE THIXTUN
The only surviving Gary spectator at the first known glider flight, made by the late Octave Chanute, "father of the airplane," off a high dune of the Steel City lake shore 40 years ago will be on hand when the memorial marker for the aviation pioneer is dedicated at ceremonies in Marquette park Saturday, July 11.

This witness of the historic flight is William Westergren, city police officer, Miller resident for the last half century and former township justice of peace. Westergren is 67 years old and resides at 611 Howard.

Also to attend the ceremonies and to be recognized appropriately in the memorial program is John Ansboro, age 65, of 5024 East 6th, who was born in Miller, resided there 61 years and served as telegraph operator from 1889 to 1900 at the Baltimore and Ohio railroad stop, "Wilson," which stood on the present site of the billet mill in Gary. Westergren of the Carnegie-Illinois Steel corporation before the Steel City even was planned.

Possessed Two Gliders
Unlike Westergren, who viewed the first flight, Ansboro's observations of Chanute's aerial pioneering were confined to "ground" work.

In addition to his distinction of being a first flight witness, Westergren also had in his possession for two or three years the two gliders with which Chanute engineered the initial glider trips. The date when this occurred was in June, 1896, the day generally believed to have been June 27.

At any rate, the Chanute glider flight took place seven years before the Wright brothers flew the first heavier-than-air machine at Kitty Hawk, N. C.

Chanute had been experimenting with gliders on the Gary-lake shore for five years before the first successful flight was made, according to Westergren. Ansboro, too, recalled having been at Chanute's improvised duneland airdrome in the few years preceding 1896 and having watched work on the aerial experiments.

Chanute Not First Flier
Chanute's companion-employee, a young man named Robinson, and not the so-called "father of the airplane" made the first successful glider flight, Westergren related in an interview.

"Chanute gets the credit for the first flight and, of course, ought to have it because the idea was his," Westergren said.

The first flight was made from a dune about 75 feet high which stood 40 years ago at what is now the southeast corner of the intersection of Lake and Juniper, just north of the Marquette park lagoon, according to Westergren.

"Few people knew of Chanute's experiments," he said. "In the first place, Chanute discouraged anyone from getting around him and his companions. Secondly, the 'Chanute' hill was hard to reach and in the third place Chanute was regarded as just a little nutty.

"I'll admit I was one of those who viewed the experiments with my tongue in my cheek. After seeing that first flight, though, I became so sold on the idea that I later spent \$300 trying to build an airplane.

Burned by Vandal
"Before the first flight was made, the few spectators kept at a distance. After that, though, Chanute's companions were so elated that they talked pretty freely.

"Chanute kept to himself. We could see he was tickled to death by the success of the experiment. But as soon as the flight was finished he was ready to leave.

"That's how I happened to get the gliders he used. They were left with me by Robinson who said they would call for them later. They never returned and I lost the gliders when my fishing tower was burned down two or three years afterwards."

Westergren said William Cook, now a resident of Portland, Ore., and Bob Carlson, since drowned in a lake mishap, were with him when the first flight was made.

"We got wise to Chanute's experiments when he went out to the cattle range near 'Chanute' hill," he continued. "We weren't very old then and, of course, had no idea how important Chanute's work later would prove to be. The novelty of the thing kept us interested.

Pioneer Wore Beard
"Chanute had Robinson, who then was about 24 years of age, and a younger fellow with him. The younger one apparently was a flunky for Chanute and Robinson.

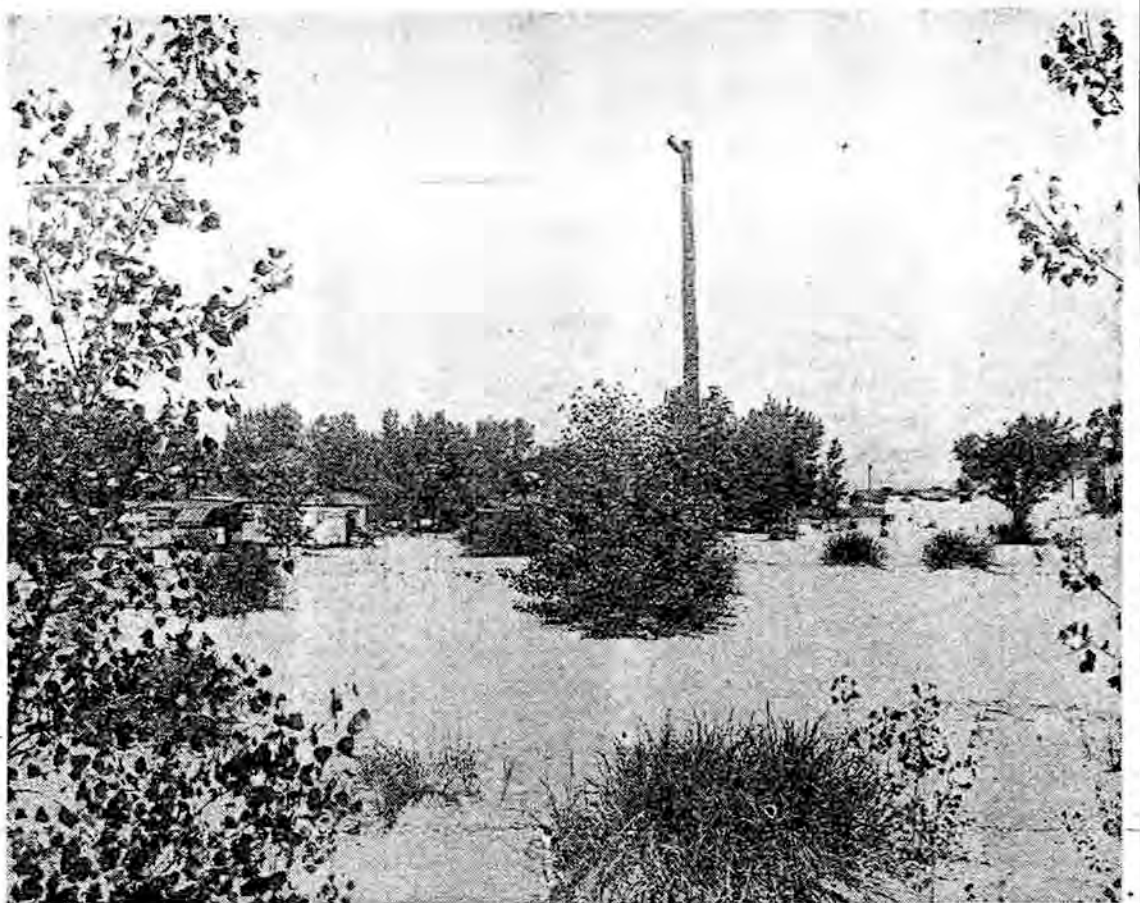
"I believe Robinson was a parachute jumper by profession. At any rate, I saw him jump from a balloon some few years later at a picnic at Willow Creek.

"Chanute was small and of medium build. His hair was grey and he wore a short beard which was neither a goatee nor a full

Recall Early Flying Attempts in Gary's Duneland



William Westergren (left) and John Ansboro, pioneer Gary residents, shown at the left above, have personal recollections of the Chanute glider flights from the dunelands on the Miller lake shore. Westergren witnessed the first flight in June 1896, which will be memorialized in Marquette park next Saturday afternoon. In the picture at the right above is shown an eastern view, from Lake street, of all that remains of the once high dune from which the Chanute glider experiments were conducted. In the lower photograph is shown a present-day view of the duneland and lake shore over which the first known glider flights were made. It was taken by The Post-Tribune photographer from the sand mound forming all that remains of the now historic "Chanute hill," located at the southeast corner of the Lake and Juniper avenue intersection.



beard. He usually wore gray suits.

"Robinson also was small, but had a muscular physique. He was dark complexioned and wore a small mustache. He wore tights and a regular showman's outfit for the first flights.

"Chanute and his companions came out from Chicago on days when they worked on the dune. They'd go back at night. They built their two gliders on the dune and left them covered with a canvas at night. No one bothered the contraptions, because few knew about them and those who did didn't feel quite safe.

Worked Hard on Gliders

"They worked hard on the gliders. We worked about as hard trying to see all that went on. You had to walk around the Grand Calumet river dam, then located at the west end of the lagoon, to get to 'Chanute hill' or you had to walk along the edge of the river to the lake outlet, north of the present Marquette park pavilion location, and then cross and walk west. The eastern route was dangerous because of quicksand.

"No road had been built from the Miller community to the lake at that time."

Westergren said he used to watch Chanute's party at work from a nearby dune. He described Chanute as "unapproachable."

"Three flights were made before success was achieved," Westergren said. "The first flight was made with a feathered glider, about 18 feet wide. Robinson, who was on the glider, barely got 50 feet away from the peak of the dune before the glider dropped him pretty suddenly.

"The feathered glider didn't have the power that the other, made of canvas, proved to have. The canvas glider was wider, having a wing span of 18 feet.

Lands in Lake Michigan
"Robinson glided about 800 feet and landed about 100 feet out in Lake Michigan with the canvas glider, after making one shorter flight.

"This was the first successful glider flight.

"Chanute was elated. So was Robinson, despite the soaking he got in the lake."

Westergren said Chanute previously had been careful of wind when making any experiments with either of the gliders. On the day of the first flight, scarcely any wind was noticeable, Westergren said, until a sudden gust blew across the lake shore while Robinson was in air at the start of his glide.

"He manipulated the glider somehow with the handles he had on the bottom of the lower wing," Westergren said. "We could see the wind lifting and pushing him forward. He didn't go so very high, about 50 feet, but, just the same, he went places with that canvas glider."

As described by Westergren, Chanute's gliders were of biplane type,

but the lower wing was fastened vertically at an angle to the upper span. Each glider was constructed with handles for the pilot, fastened to the lower wing and made of rocking chair rockers.

He said the wings and struts were fastened together on both gliders with piano wire.

The feathered glider was fashioned on bamboo with the wing surfaces made out of three overlapping Plymouth Rock chicken wing feathers. The piano wire was interlaced through the feathers to hold them intact.

"We could see by the way the glider worked that the feathered wings did not give enough resistance to hold up the man," Westergren stated. "The canvas glider was sewed together firmly with wire on an ash or hickory frame and held up enough for successful flight."

Westergren said "Chanute hill" was a "natural" for the glider flying. He said the dune sloped upward steeply from a point where Lake street now leads to Lake Michigan, but on the north side dropped at a sharp angle to the fairly even surface of beach then running back from the water to the base of the dune.

Canvas Glider Better

"All Robinson had to do was to grasp the handles of the gliders and take a run down the sharp north side of the dune," he explained. "When he used the feathered glider, he got into the air but he got dropped pretty suddenly when he'd reached the point at the base of the hill.

"The canvas glider enabled him to soar right out and away toward the lake. I guess he came down because the carrying power of the glider gave out."

Westergren said he stored the Chanute gliders in an old railroad crossing tower he had purchased and made into a fishing shanty on the south lagoon shore, about 100 feet east of the Lake street bridge. Vandals later set fire to the tower, burning the gliders and all his possessions in it.

"I guess those gliders would be worth plenty today," Westergren observed.

HOLD RITES FOR PRIEST, HEAD OF PORTLAND 'U'

South Bend, July 6.—(UP)—Funeral services were held here today for the Rev. Joseph Boyle, C.S.C., president of the University of Portland, Portland, Ore.

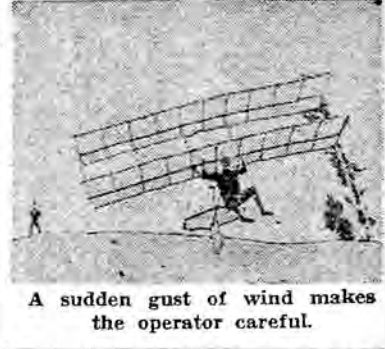
Father Boyle, who retired from active duties at Portland in January after a stroke of apoplexy, died Friday night in the home of relatives in Mason City, Ia.

He was nationally known as a member of the Notre Dame mission band giving retreats for laymen in all parts of the country. He was known as a pulpit orator, and from 1928 to 1933 was prefect of religion at St. Thomas college, St. Paul, Minn.

An Ancient Glider Flight



Here's the Chanute glider of 40 years ago poised to go.



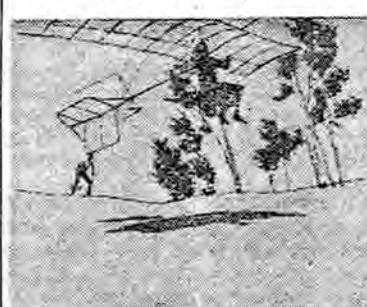
A sudden gust of wind makes the operator careful.



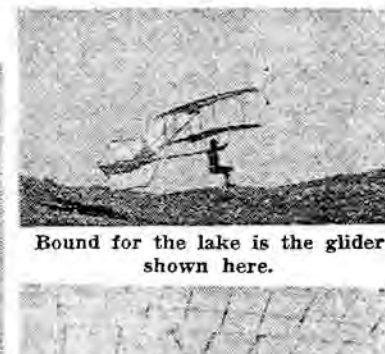
In this view the glider's well underway over the dunes.



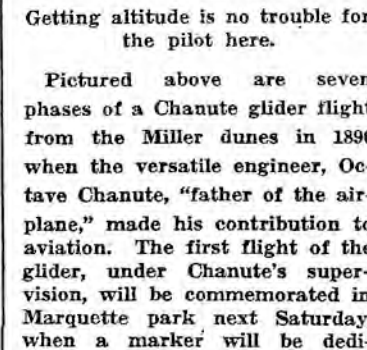
Straightened out and going strong again.



Getting altitude is no trouble for the pilot here.



Bound for the lake is the glider shown here.



Time to land," says the glider operator here.



located near the dune used by the engineer for his experiments.

TOLLESTON DEMOCRATS TO ORGANIZE TUESDAY

Making ready to unite with Lake county democrats in the coming campaign, Tolleston democrats will form another Gary organization at a meeting at 2900 West 15th at 8 o'clock tomorrow, according to the organizers. James Connelly and Frank Sierakowski.

Approximately 40 persons are pledged to join the organization, the organizers said, and efforts will

be made to boost the membership above the 500 mark.

The organization meeting will be attended by Congressman William T. Schulte, John Lyddick, district chairman, and State Senator Fred Eichhorn, former county chairman. The club will elect officers, select a name and begin the drafting of a constitution and by-laws, the organizers said.

The average human body loses weight at the rate of one pound every eight hours by evaporation of moisture through the lungs and the pores, and through exercise.