



"North Adams No. 1" Preparing to Launch from Aero Park, 1908

North Adams' Aero Park was located adjacent to the town's coal gas plant. Coal gas was used to inflate gas balloons. (Postcard courtesy of a private collector.)

PHOTO ESSAY

History of Ballooning in Springfield and Western Massachusetts, 1852-2000

JOSEPH CARVALHO III



Editor's Introduction: *The golden age of sport ballooning was 1900 to 1915, and Western Massachusetts was one of its epicenters. Springfield, Pittsfield, and North Adams all played important roles in ballooning history and all had built "aero ports." The Aero Club of New England (Boston) and the Aero Club of America (New York City) were the principal financiers, developers, and participants of sport ballooning in New England. Western Massachusetts' locations were ideal because they were located away from the ocean. The prevailing winds, which blew from west to east, were favorable and permitted safe flights of reasonable distances. Each of these cities also had large "gas works" and gas storage facilities which had the capacity to provide coal gas in sufficient volumes to inflate balloons at relatively reasonable prices. Western Massachusetts' proximity to wealthy urban centers was another factor: sport ballooning was an expensive hobby, although many Western Massachusetts residents became eager spectators.*

A gas balloon rises and floats because it is filled with a gas lighter than air (such as helium or hydrogen). When not in flight, it must be tightly tethered to prevent it from flying away, and it is sealed at the bottom to prevent the escape of gas. Gas balloons were sometimes called "Charlières"² after their inventor, the Frenchman Jacques Charles. Well into the twentieth century, manned balloon flight utilized gas balloons before hot-air balloons became dominant.

Unlike hot-air balloons, gas balloons did not depend upon fire to power their flight. Thus, they were able to stay up longer and their altitude could be controlled somewhat easier with the use of ballast. Gas balloons continued to be the primary mode of air travel (limited as it was) until the Wright brothers' invention of the airplane in 1903. However, it was expensive and time-consuming to inflate a gas balloon, so flying was not very affordable. These balloons were also challenging: untethered flights of gas balloons depended on the skill of the pilot.

On January 9, 1902 the Aero Club of New England, America's first aeronautical club, was organized in Boston. However, the roots of ballooning in Western Massachusetts extended back into the nineteenth century, as author Joseph Carvalho reveals in this fascinating article that focuses on the history of ballooning in Springfield from the 1850s to the 1980s. Joseph Carvalho III is the former president and executive director of the Springfield Museums Association and founder of the Lyman and Merrie Wood Museum of Springfield History.

—L. Mara Dodge

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Today, the skies over Springfield are filled with a myriad of flying objects: airplanes flying to and from Bradley Airport in Windsor, Connecticut; huge military aircraft from Chicopee's Westover Airforce Base; Swift fighter planes from Westfield's Barnes Airport; private planes out of Northampton and other small airfields in the region; helicopters from MassMutual or local medical facilities; low-flying drones; and yes, on special occasions, hot-air or gas balloons traverse the sky above the city.

Prior to the fall of 1852, the skies over the newly incorporated city of Springfield were uncluttered and blissfully quiet, other than occasional flocks of birds passing through to alight in neighboring ponds or wetlands or to feed in local farmers' fields. Although Frenchman Jean-Pierre Blanchard had made the first manned (hydrogen-filled) balloon flight in the United States on January 9, 1793, Springfield residents only knew about ballooning from newspapers for the next fifty years.¹

SPRINGFIELD'S FIRST BALLOON FLIGHTS DRAW HUGE CROWDS, 1852-94

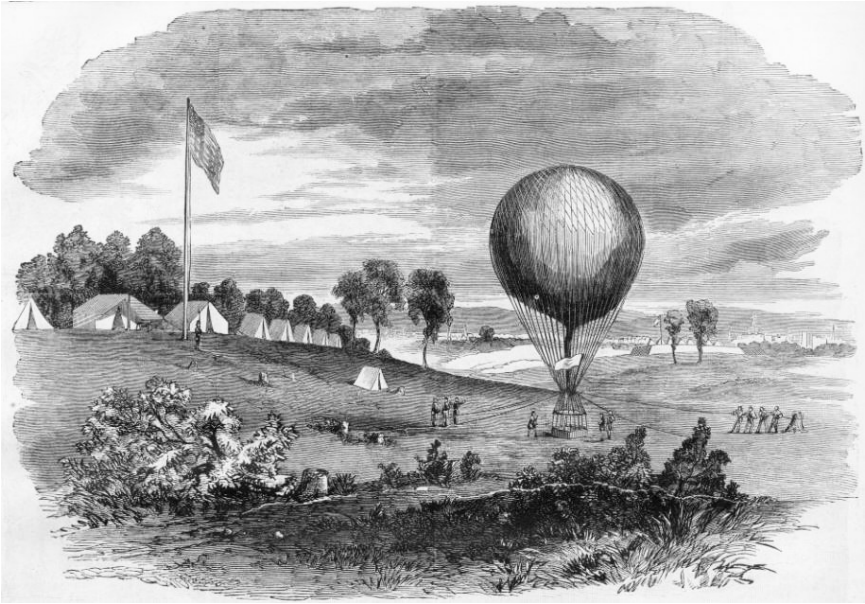
This all changed on September 30, 1852, when French balloonist "Monsieur Ernest Petin" and his assistant Gustave Reynard, a French mechanic, ascended in their gas balloon above Spring Street near the U.S. Armory as the "high point" of the Hampden County Agricultural Society Fair.² A "huge crowd" gathered in an open lot between the U.S. Armory and Spring Street to witness this unique event while the Springfield Brass Band

alternated tunes with the Springfield Cornet Band as the giant balloon was being prepared for launch. The Springfield Gas Light Company provided Petin with 50,000 cubic feet of coal gas collected over a day and a half to inflate the balloon.³ At about 4:15 p.m., the men of Springfield's Eagle Fire Company pulling on ropes (two men to a line) led the huge balloon into full view from behind a fence. After shaking hands with friends and admirers, Petin and his assistant climbed into the "boat" suspended below the balloon and the firefighters let go of the ropes.⁴

As the balloon rose into the sky, the U.S. Armory cannon announced that the flight had started and a roar of approval was sent up by the thousands of onlookers. Petin pelted the crowd below with flowers as he drifted across the Armory grounds. The *Springfield Republican* reported that "[a] sea of upturned faces was a sight to behold, more eyes being turned heavenward than are often seen in these days of low morality."⁵



The Springfield Gas Light Company, seen here in the early 1900s, manufactured coal gas from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s. (The building was razed to make way for I-91 in the 1960s.) At the time, gas for both heating and lighting was commonly manufactured from coal. Unfortunately, coal tar was a toxic, carcinogenic byproduct of this process. Over many decades, a thick coal tar spill of eleven acres accumulated as the company discharged liquid tars through pipes and municipal storm drains into the Connecticut River. Popularly known as the "Springfield Gas Works," the company evolved into Bay State Gas in 1974 and became today's Columbia Gas Co. In 2004 the state deemed Bay State Gas responsible for the clean-up. In 2022 Columbia Gas engineers began working on capping and containing a one-acre section of the spill. (Photo courtesy of the Wood Museum of Springfield History.)



Petin and Reynard steered the balloon by using large American and French flags which hung from the basket. The crowd stayed riveted to this marvel of flight until it disappeared to the south. Two hours after launching, Petin and Reynard landed safe and sound eighteen miles away in Broad Brook, Connecticut. They returned to Springfield via the Connecticut River Railroad the next day.⁶

Three years later on July 4, 1855, another balloon ascension from the U.S. Armory grounds was conducted by Gustave Reynaud, described as “a Frenchman from Bridgeport, Connecticut.” It was reported that “the wind was high and when the cords were loosed, the balloon with its daring aeronaut shot upward like a rocket, rapidly rose and swept away to the east of north, and in a very few minutes was lost behind a huge bank of white clouds.” As part of the well-attended event, “at an estimated height of about 4,000 feet, a white cat was sent down in a wire cage suspended from an umbrella-like contrivance” by Mons. Reynaud.⁷ The *Springfield Republican* commented, “Poor pussy was terribly frightened, but finally landed at Chicopee Falls safe and sound.”⁸

During the Civil War, aeronaut Thaddeus Sobieski Constantine Lowe (1832-1913) directed the Union Army’s Balloon Corps, which consisted of men from various units, including a large detachment of men under



1886 Poster Advertising Aeronaut Charles H. Kabrich

Kabrich served during the Spanish American War in the balloon section of the U.S. Army's Signal Corps, which provided observation reconnaissance in Cuba including for Roosevelt's famous charge up San Jan Hill. (Image courtesy of a private collector.)

the command of Lieutenant G. C. Kalmbach from Springfield's 10th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment. Lieutenant Kalmbach and his men assisted "frequent ascents made by skilled aeronauts."⁹ They were part of the crew for America's first "aircraft carrier," a barge with a converted flight deck which Lowe used to ferry his balloon thirteen miles. At the Battle of Fair Oaks (May 31-June 1, 1861), Lowe was able to observe the battle from 2,000 feet and telegraph information about Confederate deployments directly to General George McClellan.¹⁰ The men detached from the 10th Massachusetts Volunteers were returned to their regiment on June 18, 1863 when the Balloon Corps was disbanded "and the airships were sent to Washington."¹¹

On May 3, 1871, the "Great Stone & Murray Circus" came to Springfield. Their lead attraction was a "Grand Balloon Ascension" by Professor J.W. Hayden, a French aeronaut. Stone and Murray constructed "six monster Balloons or Air-ships" so that during their stay in Springfield each day the French aeronaut could make his "perilous journey beyond the clouds."¹² Years later on August 25, 1888, a number of Springfield residents attended the widely advertised balloon ascension of the "Famous Aeronaut Ned Hathaway" at Lake Pleasant in Montague. Hathaway treated the assembled crowd below to a "startling Trapeze Performance in Mid-Air," while the Worcester Cadet band played rousing marching music for the spectators.¹³ On September 20-21, 1894, the 50th Annual Fair of the Hampden Agricultural Society held at Springfield's Hampden Park and City Hall headlined the daily ascension of "Prof. Charles H. Kabrich, the most daring aeronaut in the world."¹⁴

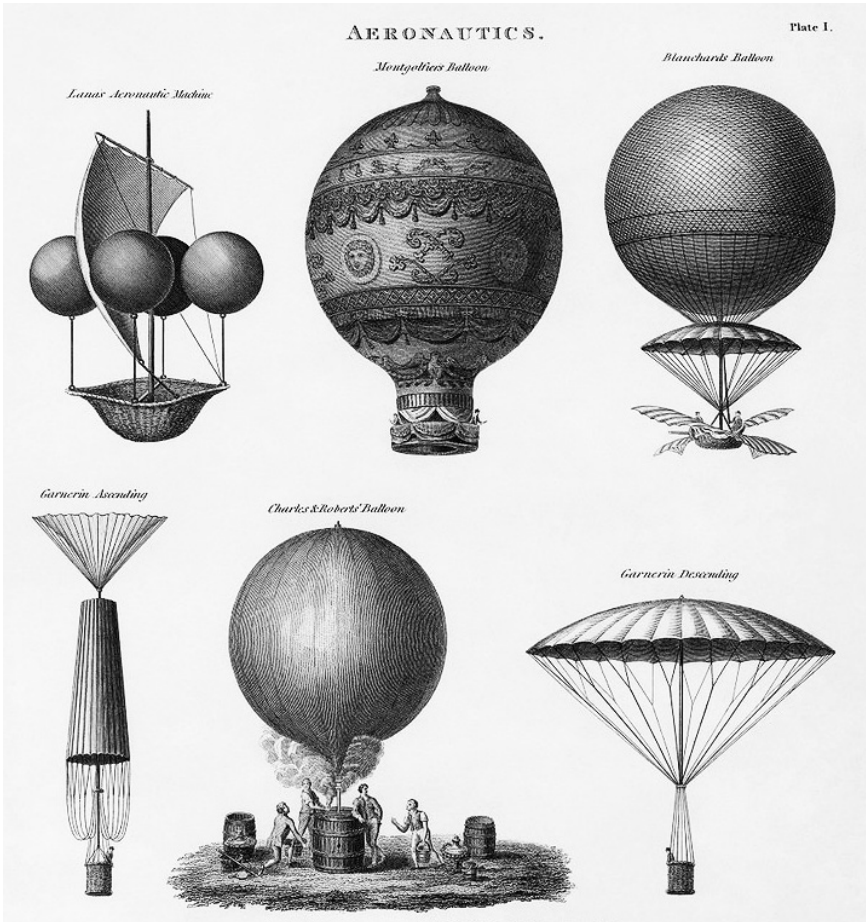
SPRINGFIELD'S FIRST "AERONAUTS," 1900-17

Despite the interest in ballooning and the Springfield newspapers' detailed coverage of international ballooning events and tragedies, Springfield residents were only spectators, or, in the instance of the 10th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment troops, assistants to actual ballooning aeronauts, until the turn of the century. It wasn't until the early twentieth century that ballooning in Springfield began in earnest with Greater Springfield's own "aeronauts." Advancing the United States' interest in gas ballooning, New York Herald owner Gordon Bennett announced the establishment in 1905 of a new international competition—the Gordon Bennett Aeronautic Cup—to encourage aerial sport competition.¹⁵

In those early days, Pittsfield's "Aero Park" emerged as the national site for balloon races sanctioned by the Aero Club of America beginning in 1906, when the first gas balloon was inflated on March 10 from the Pittsfield Coal

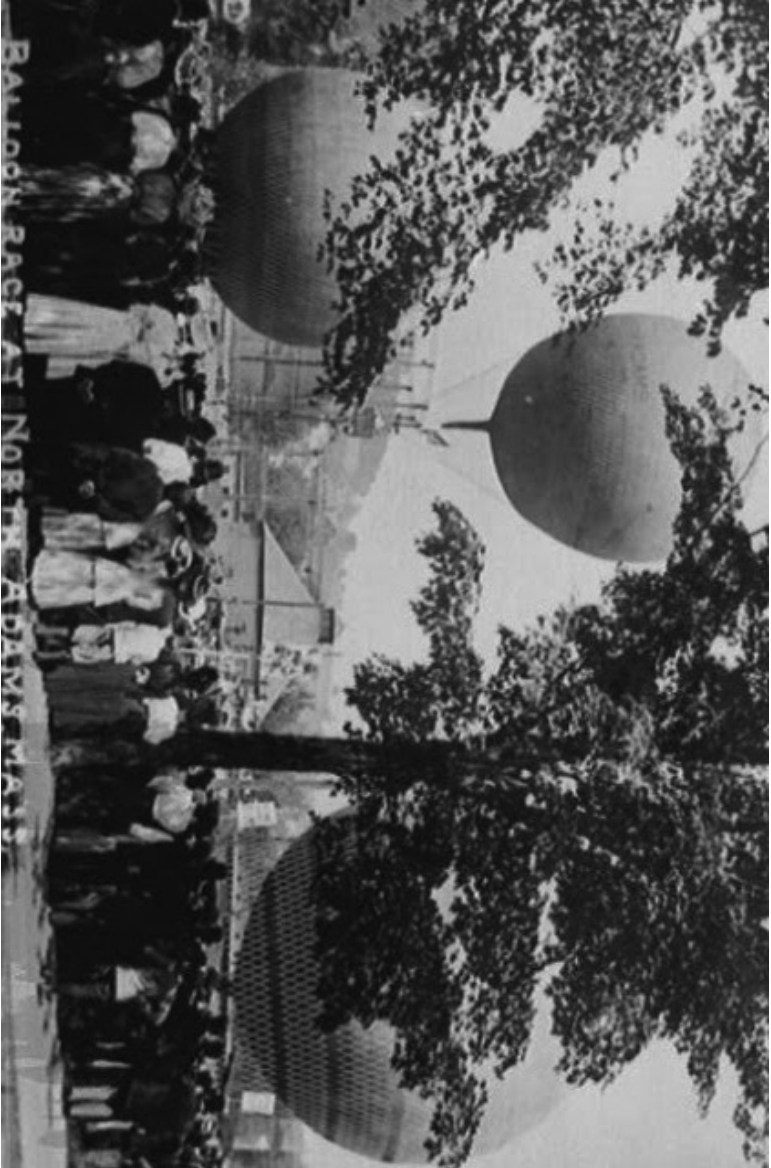
Gas Company's tanks. The first flight launched on April 11 of that year with the balloon "Orient," piloted by Charles Levee, travelling 60 miles southeast and landing in Somers, Connecticut.¹⁶ Clarence J. Bousquet founded the Pittsfield Aero Club. He also pioneered aviation in the Berkshires as aircraft began to be developed.¹⁷

Local interest in ballooning began modestly in 1906, when Springfield "automobilists" were enlisted to serve as "pursuit" teams for a balloon race launching from Pittsfield's Aero Park on November 9. The event was organized by the representative of the Aero Club of America, Alan R. Hawley of New



Aeronautics (1818) – Early Balloon Designs

Technical illustration shows early balloon & parachute designs, including "Lana's aeronautic machine." Engraving by W.W. Warren, London. Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division.



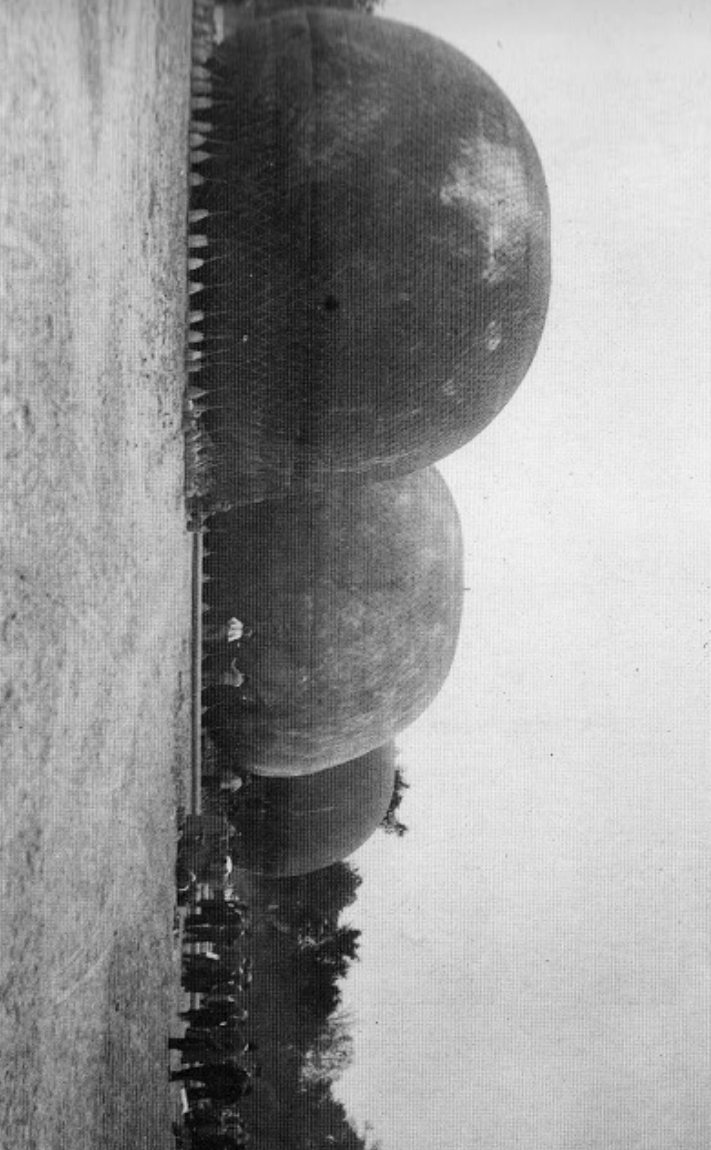
Ballons Launching for a Race Starting from North Adams' Aero Park, c. 1909

(Postcard courtesy of a private collector.)



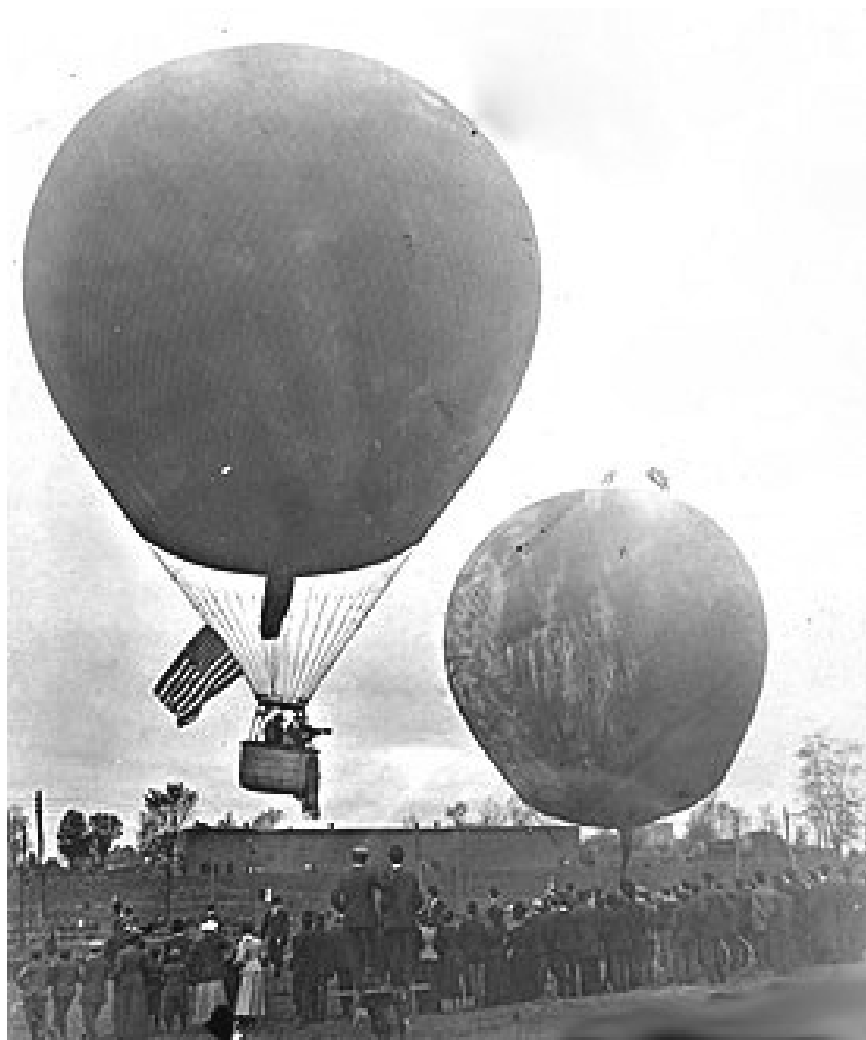
St. Paul Commandery, K. T., No. 40
NORTH ADAMS, MASS.

Postcard of a Knights Templar-sponsored gas balloon launch at North Adams Aero Park, c. 1907. No. 40 was the organization's local chapter. (Postcard courtesy of a private collector.)



Pittsfield Aero Park, 1914

Three "netted" gas balloons being inflated prior to launching. They are surrounded by bags of sand ballast that are sequentially moved down the netting as each gas balloon is inflated. In the final stage of launching, the sandbags were attached to the balloon basket for the pilot to dispense while in flight.



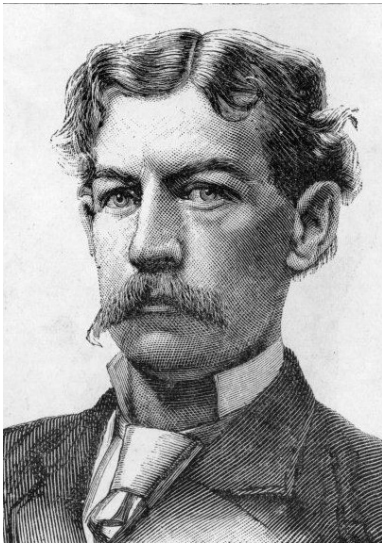
Gas Balloons Launching from Pittsfield Aero Field, Oct. 26, 1906

Archives, Berkshire Athenaeum, Pittsfield, MA

York, one of its charter members who would later become the winner of the 1910 Gordon Bennett Cup with co-pilot Augustus Post.¹⁸ On August 29, 1907, Hawley launched his “Stevens 20” (a 22,000 cubic foot balloon) from North Adams. It landed in Springfield’s Indian Orchard later that same day.

Noted Aero Club of America aeronaut Charles Jasper Glidden of Boston came to Springfield and demonstrated filling a gas balloon and preparing it for launch before launching from Court Square on Sept. 30, 1908, to the delight of the general public and a small cadre of aspiring Springfield balloonists. He piloted his balloon “Boston” with fellow balloonist William Morison of Minneapolis aboard as a passenger. After lifting off, they flew twelve miles in two hours. Inspired by Hawley and Glidden, Charles T. Shean and several others formed the Aero Club of Springfield in September of 1908 and affiliated with the Aero Club of New England and the Aero Club of America.¹⁹

1909 was a banner year for Springfield ballooning. The Aero Club of Springfield engaged the famed American balloon engineer and maker Leo Stevens to make a balloon for their club. By April of that year, the Aero Club was the proud owner of its own balloon, appropriately named the “Springfield.” On May 24, William Van Pelt aboard the Balloon “Massachusetts” ascended from Aero Park in Pittsfield and flew east over the Berkshires. His flight took him over Holyoke, Springfield, and Ludlow and ultimately landed in Palmer.



Left: James Gordon Bennet Right: A. Leo Stevens in his Balloon.

Source: *Republican* file photos.

Now it was Springfield's turn to compete. On May 27, 1909, A. Leo Stevens ascended from Court Square with the president of the first Aero Club of Springfield, Charles T. Shean, aboard. This was a "water gas" filled balloon. Some of Shean's later flights used coal gas from the gas plant in Springfield's South End.

Years later, local balloon pilot, journalist and children's author Nason Henry Arnold reminisced about those early days of flying: "Scarcely a town or village in central and Western Massachusetts that has not had a little thrill of an aeronaut and his companions dropping in unexpectedly." Arnold pointed out that "Connecticut, southern Vermont, and even New York are sprinkled with landing spots that were reached by balloonists in late 1907 and in 1908, 1909 and 1910." In those years, Arnold reported that "quite a few flights" were made from Springfield's Court Square due to its proximity to the Springfield gas works next to the Connecticut River.

Leading aeronautics promoter Charles Jasper Glidden was enthused about Springfield's potential to become the ballooning capital of New England, if not America. In its April 1909 issue, the journal *Aeronautics* published an article entitled "Big Aeronautic Concern to Be Established." It was reported that a "half-million dollar company" was "negotiating for the acquirement of grounds and facilities [in Springfield] which, if all plans are carried out, will make the greatest aeronautic park in the world." Glidden was to head the company with balloon-maker A. Leo Stevens serving as general manager. To be located in Springfield along the Connecticut River, "a large plot will be purchased adjacent to one of the largest gas plants in the world, where buildings will be erected for the building and storing of balloons, dirigibles, and flying machines." Glidden also planned to have at his facilities steam-heated drying rooms for drying balloon cloth, vulcanizing machines, and "even sleeping accommodations for aeronauts overtaken by fatigue, night, or other misfortunes." Glidden claimed that "balloons will be kept inflated at all times ready for ascension." He and Stevens assured readers that "owing to arrangements with the gas company, there will be no necessity of erecting new tanks for coal gas and the equipment of the gas company is already great enough to accommodate 12 or 13 balloons at one time." They also planned to install "apparatus for making hydrogen gas by both the sulfuric and electrolytic processes."

Unfortunately, 1910 was not Springfield ballooning's best year. "Pioneer Balloonist" Charles Jasper Glidden was "greatly provoked at the inability of his balloon to rise" due to the "poor quality" of the coal gas from the Springfield gas plant. As a result, the exasperated Glidden moved his "aeronautic base" from Springfield to Pittsfield. The *Springfield Republican* bemoaned the loss



The Springfield Aero Club's Gas Balloon, *Springfield*, 1909

**Every Town a Landing Place in
Old Springfield Ballooning Days**

Silently These Birds of the Air Took Wings in Marked Contrast to the Roar of Engines That Herald the Rise of Airplanes — 400 Flights and Never an Accident

Springfield Sunday Republican, Oct. 16, 1927

and quoted Glidden's statement before leaving the city: "We live in hopes that something may be done to correct the errors, as Springfield should not lose the opportunity of becoming an international balloon center." Within a year, the Aero Club of Springfield sold their balloon, the "Springfield," back to its maker A. Leo Stevens. In 1914, the "Springfield" and its pilot were lost along with two other balloons in the Cascade mountains in Oregon.²⁰

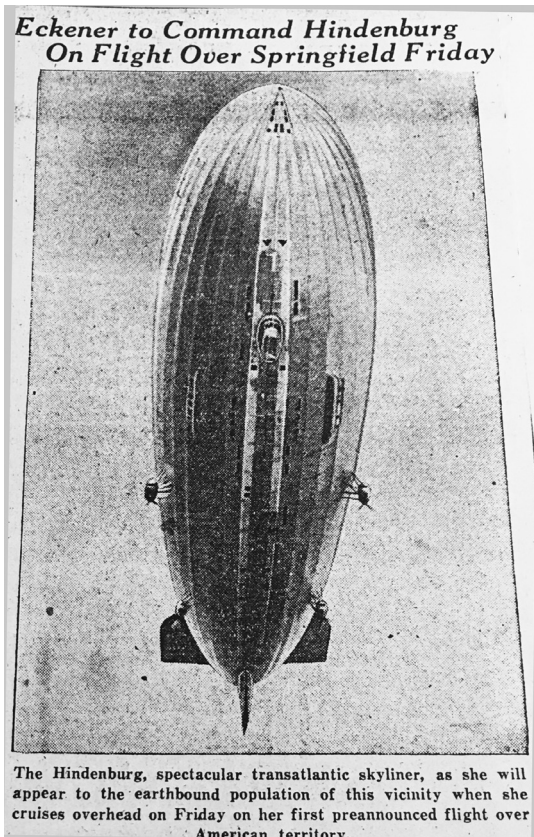
On October 25, 1917, balloonist Nason Arnold piloted "the last flight from Court Square" until the 1960s. The organizers of the Springfield Liberty Loan drive requested that he fly his balloon and drop Liberty Loan pamphlets.²¹ He was accompanied by U.S. Army flying Cadet Edward Mulliken, who helped him tie several "huge bags" of pamphlets to the sides of the basket. Arnold described what happened next: "No sooner had we cleared the chimneys than we began slashing open the bags from which dropped on the heads and housetops of devoted Springfield enough propaganda to have floated the entire loan."²² Despite lingering local interest in the exotic world of gas ballooning, the first "golden age" of Springfield gas ballooning was over.

Despite this, Major Glidden's influence had a lasting impact on Springfield. A national leader in the gas ballooning world, he had been one of the organizers of the Aero Club of America and the Aero Club of New England. From 1901 to 1907, he had served as the president of the Aerial Navigation Company. Years later, he became president of the World Board of Aeronautical Commissioners headquartered in New York City. His leaving was a major blow to Springfield ballooning. Nevertheless, he never forgot the city.

In the 1920s Glidden became one of the advocates for the establishment of an airfield in Springfield.²³ This culminated in the development of the Springfield Airport, located where the Springfield Shopping Plaza in the East Springfield neighborhood exists today. This airfield attracted world-famous aircraft manufacturers the Granville Brothers, known for developing one of the fastest airplanes of their time. It was named the GeeBee airplane after the initials of their designers. This airplane influenced the direction of aircraft development in the United States prior to World War II by demonstrating that high speeds could be achieved in a monoplane design. It was U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Jimmy Doolittle who piloted the GeeBee Airplane and broke the previous speed record, proving the superior quality of this aircraft design. Doolittle is best known for orchestrating an air raid in 1942 by the United States on the Japanese capital Tokyo in response to the Pearl Harbor attacks during World War II.

WORLD WAR II BALLOONING

During World War I, the dirigible (which the German's referred to as the zeppelin after its inventor Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin) took center stage as the most dramatic lighter-than-air craft. Prior to World War II, Germany's premier zeppelin—the hydrogen-filled 803 foot-long and 135 foot-wide Hindenburg—passed over Springfield on October 9, 1936. It was viewed by “thousands of spectators below with U.S. Armory workers casting leery eyes skywards.”²⁴ The Hindenburg's Nazi propaganda tour of the United States ended explosively on May 7, 1937 in Lakehurst, New Jersey.²⁵ As it approached to land at the Naval Air Base, the Hindenburg burst into flames and dropped to the ground in a little over half a minute. Thirteen passengers and twenty-two crew members, as well as one member of the ground crew, died in the tragedy.



Hindenburg Zeppelin Over Springfield

At the outset of World War II, the U.S. Army Air Corps constructed the Northeast Air Base in Chicopee, Massachusetts (eventually extending into neighboring Ludlow). On December 1, 1939, it was re-named “Westover Field” (now Westover Air Reserve Base) after Major General Oscar Westover, who had been the commanding officer of the Army Air Corps in the 1930s. Although Westover never lived in Western Massachusetts, he was an early gas ballooning enthusiast. During his younger years he had entered the Gordon Bennett International Gas Balloon Race three times. Upon his retirement, Westover said that one of his greatest regrets was not having won the Gordon Bennett race.²⁶

1960S: MODERN ERA OF HOT-AIR BALLOONING

On October 10, 1960, American balloonist Ed Yost of Raven Industries in Sioux Falls, South Dakota inaugurated the modern era of hot-air ballooning when he flew a balloon using nylon fabrics and propane burners.²⁷ With this new technology, more people became interested in ballooning and received hot-air balloon pilot certificates under fairly liberal requirements. Candidates for a free certificate (limited to hot-air balloons) had only to meet requirements as to age, character, citizenship, education, and physical condition. Surprisingly, they did not have to demonstrate aeronautical knowledge, experience, or skill.

On August 7, 1962, all that changed. The Federal Aviation Agency (now the Federal Aviation Administration) instituted new rules requiring applicants to demonstrate their ability to handle a hot-air balloon in a solo flight.²⁸ During the 1960s, balloonists in the Pioneer Valley often used the Pilgrim Airport in Hatfield to launch their flights. One of the more notable Pilgrim Airport pilots was Barbara Keith of Hartford, Connecticut. Tragically, she was lost at sea off the coast of San Diego during a distance race with eight balloons. A huge air-sea search failed to find her.²⁹

In July of 1970, Robert “Bob” L. Waligunda of Longmeadow, a 1967 graduate of Springfield College, operated Balloon Enterprises, Inc. of Springfield, doing business as “Sky Promotions.” He referred to his company as “the world’s only balloon airline.” After a brief bureaucratic tussle with West Springfield regarding launching from the Eastern States Exposition grounds, this FAA-licensed balloon pilot flew regularly from Pine Knoll Swim School on Allen Street to Hampden or Wilbraham pastures.³⁰ The previous year, Waligunda had launched his hot-air balloon from the Century Shopping Plaza in West Springfield as a sales marketing stunt for the Consumer Value Store. Once he was about 300 feet in the air, he dropped 500 ping pong balls

down on the crowd of 150 spectators below each hoping to catch one of the balls with “lucky numbers” they could trade in for cash prizes.³¹

In 1972, Waligunda filmed a Time-Life Films television special entitled “The Great American Balloon Adventure” which documented his trip across the country from San Francisco to New York in his eight-story red, white, and blue balloon, “Adventure.” One of the sequences was filmed in Brimfield, Massachusetts at the balloon school operated by Clayton and Margaret Thomas of Dingley Dell. Waligunda flew a propane gas balloon and made several stops along the way. However, he had to be rescued by two U.S. Army helicopters after crashing into the side of a mountain at 14,000 feet while sailing over the Rocky Mountains.³² Waligunda eventually owned ten balloons, including those used in the movies “Around the World in Eighty Days” and “The Great Race.”³³ Soon after moving to Princeton, New Jersey, he caused a political stir in 1974 when he set up his seven-story high hot air balloon in front of the New Jersey State House to protest Gov. Brenden Byrne’s unpopular income tax bill. A UPI reporter quoted Waligunda as saying that his balloon “held 56,000 cubic feet of hot air . . . almost as much as is in the governor’s office.”³⁴ In 1982, Waligunda co-wrote with Larry Sheehan *The Great American Balloon Book: An Introduction to Hot Air Ballooning*.



Clayton Thomas' Balloon School

Republican file photo.

By the 1970s and early 1980s, hot-air ballooning had become fairly common in the Pioneer Valley and nearby Berkshires. Waligunda trained Dr. Clayton Thomas in hot air ballooning with their first flight taking place on June 29, 1969. Famed balloon pilot Ed Yost then trained Dr. Thomas how to fly a gas balloon, and by the end of 1970, Thomas was certified as a pilot.³⁵ Many of the region's pilots were subsequently trained by Dr. Thomas and his wife Margaret of Brimfield, or by those who had been trained by them.³⁶ In 1977, Clayton Thomas and his daughter Wendy brought their balloon to Court Square in Springfield as part of a Springfield Central event entitled "Campanile Days."³⁷ Throughout Western Massachusetts, hot-air balloons became a regular feature of 4th of July events, local fairs and celebrations. Several entrepreneurs, such Paul and Judy Sena of Worthington, began offering balloon rides for paid passengers.

1980s: J. MICHAEL WALLACE & THE REVIVAL OF GAS BALLOONING

Meanwhile, Springfield gas ballooning (as opposed to hot air ballooning) remained a rare event. Since the early efforts prior to World War I by Charles Jasper Glidden and Charles T. Shean, very few pilots even attempted it other than Dr. Clayton Thomas or his most advanced students. One of those students was J. Michael Wallace. Wallace revived interest in balloon racing in Springfield and Western Massachusetts when he conceptualized and organized Springfield's first annual Hot-Air Balloon Classic in 1988. Wallace caught the competition "bug" when he brought his hot air balloon, "Eagle Aloft," to Battle Creek, Michigan to race as part of the Springfield-Battle Creek breakfast competition promoted by the non-profit Spirit of Springfield organization. Wallace organized the three annual Springfield Hot-Air Balloon Classic Competitions from 1988 to 1990.³⁸ In 1991, Wallace purchased his first gas balloon, the "Spirit of Springfield," and began competing in both U.S. and international competitions. He soon became the region's premier gas ballooning pilot. Over the succeeding twenty years, Wallace's gas balloon carried the name of his home city throughout the world.

Wallace has competed in more Gordon Bennett Gas Balloon Championship races than any other New Englander. A veteran of over 750 balloon flights, Wallace also became the first person from western New England to serve as the President of the Balloon Federation of America. In 1995, Wallace and his co-pilot Kevin Brielmann of Cheshire, Connecticut were piloting the leading balloon in that year's international Gordon Bennett Gas Balloon Championship race when they were forced down by

the Belarusian military into a live-fire missile range in Belarus. It became a huge international incident when one of the competing balloons piloted by Wallace's good friend Alan Fraenckel was shot down by a Belarusian military helicopter, causing the deaths of Fraenckel and his co-pilot John Stuart-Jervis.³⁹ (Belarusian authorities claimed that the balloon had strayed too close to a military airbase and missile-launch site and had failed to respond to radio calls. The International Aeronautical Federation responded that Belarusian authorities had known about the race and had authorized the route. Belarus expressed regret over the tragedy but did not issue a formal apology.) Despite his experience in this tragic incident, Wallace returned the following year to compete with his co-pilot. He remained one of America's top gas balloonists for the next two decades.⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

From the very beginning of balloon flights over American skies, the public became fascinated with the possibility of humans taking flight. For the first few decades of balloon aviation, the people of western New England could only read about ballooning exploits in Europe and in other parts of the United States. Just prior to the Civil War, the local populace finally had opportunities to view ballooning first-hand. During the Civil War men of Springfield's 10th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment were detailed to assist with the balloon reconnaissance of the Union's U.S. Balloon Corps. The interest in ballooning grew after the war years and balloon exhibitions were often a feature of regional fairs and public events.

The situation began to change at the turn of the twentieth century when Charles Jasper Glidden and America's premier balloon-maker Leo Stevens promoted the Aero Club of America. Western Massachusetts was selected as a viable area to launch gas balloons with Pittsfield, North Adams, and Springfield creating aero



Charles Jasper Glidden
(1857-1927)

Republican file photo.

fields adjacent to their gas plants from which to launch gas balloons. Glidden helped create local chapters of the Aero Club in each of those communities.

As the home of the first successful gas-powered automobile, and home to several early automobile companies, Springfield often provided the “chase” vehicles for the early balloonists of the Aero Club. This connection focused Glidden’s attention upon Springfield. He enlisted his partner Leo Stevens in developing a grand scheme of creating the world’s largest gas ballooning aero field. The “City of Firsts” was on the brink of a new achievement when the poor lift quality of the gas from the Springfield Gas Works failed to properly inflate Glidden’s balloon, to his great embarrassment. It was a lost opportunity; ballooning wasn’t to become more than an occasional local experience until after 1970 when Bob Waligunda, Clayton Thomas, and J. Michael Wallace brought Springfield and regional ballooning to international attention once more.

HJM

Notes

1. Jean Pierre Blanchard, *The First Air Voyage in America, January 9, 1793: A First-Person Account* by Jean Pierre Blanchard (1793 pamphlet).
2. Tom D. Crouch, *The Eagle Aloft: Two Centuries of the Balloon in America* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983), p. 218.
3. Coal gas is a mixture of hydrogen, methane, and carbon monoxide obtained by the destructive distillation of coal and formerly used for lighting and heating; see Crouch, p. 219.
4. Wayne E. Phaneuf, “Looking Backward: An Early Space Effort,” *Springfield Daily News*, July 30, 1976; and “Historical Sketches of Springfield... No. 111,” *Springfield Sunday Republican*, Feb. 14, 1954.
5. “Mons. Petin’s Balloon Ascension,” *Springfield Republican* (hereafter abbreviated as *Republican*), Oct. 1, 1852, p. 2 (4).
6. Crouch, *The Eagle Aloft*, pp. 218-219.
7. “Celebrations of Independence Day,” *Republican*, July 6, 1855, p. 2. [Author’s note: Reynauld’s name often appears as Reynard in local newspapers].
8. “How Our Fathers Celebrated,” *Republican*, July 6, 1890, p. 5.
9. Alfred S. Roe, *The Tenth Regiment, Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry 1861-1864: A Western Massachusetts Regiment* (Springfield, MA: 10th Regiment Veterans Association, 1090), p. 174.

10. Wayne E. Phaneuf and Joseph Carvalho III, *A Not So Civil War: Western Massachusetts at Home and in Battle*, Vol. 1. (Springfield, MA: Heritage Book Series, The Republican, 2015), pp. 85-6.
11. Roe, *The Tenth Regiment*, p. 201.
12. "The Great Stone & Murray Circus," *Republican*, May 3, 1871, p. 1.
13. "Great Attractions at Lake Pleasant: The Famous Aeronaut Ned Hathaway," *Republican*, Aug. 21, 1888, p. 1.
14. "Event of the Year, 50th Annual Fair," *Republican*, Sept 20, 1894, p. 1.
15. "Important Dates in Gas Ballooning History," Balloon Federation of America website, accessed January 23, 2021.
16. Clay Perry, "Balloon Flight in Dalton Saturday Recalls Exciting Events a Half Century Ago," *Springfield Sunday Republican*, July 17, 1955, p.16B.
17. Bill Deane, "Pittsfield's Aero Park," Stories of the Berkshire Hills Website, accessed May 20, 2016.
18. "Invites Local Autoists," *Republican*, Nov. 8, 1906, p. 3; Augustus Post, "A Fall from the Sky," *The Century Magazine* (Oct. 1908), pp. 935-46.
19. "Aero Club to Have a Balloon to be named the 'Springfield,'" *Republican*, Sept. 30, 1908, p. 4; see also Crouch, *The Eagle Aloft*, p. 537.
20. "Lost Balloon was Once Owned Here/ 'Springfield' Was Originally the Property of the Local Aero Club," *Springfield Daily News*, June 13, 1914, p. 5.
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22. Nason H. Arnold, "Every Town a Landing Place in Old Springfield Ballooning Days," *Sunday Republican*, Oct. 16, 1927, p. 2F.
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26. Peter M. Bowers, "Captain of the Clouds," *Airpower*, Volume 2 (4) (July 1972), p. 33.
27. "History of Ballooning," National Balloon Museum website, accessed Jan. 19, 2021.
28. "FAA Finds Not Everyone Can Fly Those Balloons," *Springfield Union*, July 11, 1962, p. 7.
29. "Conn. Flying Grandmother Missing in Balloon Race," *Springfield Union*, Jan. 20, 1964, p. 1.

30. "Balloon Firm Punctures Ruling By Fire Marshall," *Springfield Daily News*, July 18, 1970, pp. 1-2.
31. "Balloonist Soars Over West Side," *Springfield Union*, July 25, 1969, p. 25.
32. "Our Man in the Air Is on the Air Waves," *Springfield Union*, October 7, 1971, p. 42.
33. "Weather a Factor in Balloon Flights," *Springfield Union*, Sept. 23, 1972, p. 9.
34. "Balloon Taxes Hot Air Story," *Springfield Union*, July 7, 1974, p. 6.
35. "Dr. Clayton Lay Thomas: The Dare Devil Doctor of Dingley Dell," U.S. Ballooning Hall of Fame biography, National Balloon Museum website.
36. Dr. Thomas was the nation's acknowledged medical expert on Toxic Shock Syndrome in women. He worked for the locally based Tampax Company. See "Clayton Thomas of Brimfield Inducted into U.S. Ballooning Hall of Fame," *Republican*, Jan. 12, 2014.
37. "Learning the Ropes," *Springfield Union*, Aug. 31, 1977, p. 10.
38. *The Wallace Interviews*, "Business, Community, and Flying," April 2014, Part 2, p. 47 (Watershops Studio, Springfield, MA).
39. Brian Melley, "Pilot Lives to Tell Tale of Belarus," *Republican*, Oct. 1, 1995, p. 1; "Racing Balloon Is Shot Down by Attack Helicopter in Belarus," Flight Safety Foundation (July 1996); Carol J. Williams, "Ill-Fated Balloonists Shared Passion for Flying," *Los Angeles Times* (September 15, 1995).
40. Ray Kelly, "Area Balloonist to Revisit Europe," *Republican*, Sept. 14, 1996, p. B2. The full story of Wallace's career in ballooning has been detailed in Joseph Carvalho III, *A Ballooning Life: The Nine Lives of J. Michael Wallace* (Springfield, MA: The Republican, 2021).