THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF LLEWELLYN GUY MECKLEM

(son of Archibald M. Mecklem and Laura B. Smith)

transcribed from a bound manuscript in the collection of the Seattle Public Library

many thanks to Anya Woodhouse for transcribing the text

bracketed corrections and footnotes are by Todd Mecklem; obvious typos have been corrected, but L. G.'s capitalization and punctuation have been preserved

photo of L. G. at the controls of an airplane from the collection of the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies (wing of airplane is visible at upper left, and radiator is above and behind L.G.)

Photo of L. G. with his brother Austin courtesy of Merrill Mecklem Piera and Sarah Greer Mecklem

Chapter One

Born – Yes

When – June 1, 1882

Why – I don't know

Where – On a homestead between Pullman and Colfax in Whitman County, Washington Territory

I do not remember much of the first two or three years of my life except one or two incidents that my mother told me after I got a few years older. My father had come west from Iowa and taken up a homestead and secured a job teaching in a little country school several miles from the homestead and had then sent word east for mother to come. She came to San Francisco, thence by boat to Portland, Oregon, and then by stage to Colfax where father met her and took her out to the homestead.

The country was sparsely settled and neighbors were few and mother would get quite lonesome at home all day while father taught school. One day she was startled by a loud rap on the door and when she opened it, was confronted by the, to her, terrifying spectacle of four naked, painted Indians on ponies, one of whom attempted to ride his pony right into the house, but couldn't make it on account of the door being too narrow and low, so they dismounted and all came in and demanded food. She was very much frightened; she fed them and then they amused themselves by looking over and handling all of her few cooking utensils and personal belongings. One emptied a bottle of violet water. Finally finding her one and only little hand mirror, evidently the first one they had ever seen, they took turns looking at themselves and making faces into the mirror and laughing. They then made it known to her that they wanted the mirror, so she gave it to them thinking that that she might be scalped if she refused. They also took along the dipper out of the water bucket, which was shiny like a mirror. They finally left after having been in the cabin about four hours. Mother was badly frightened so

Father got a neighbor girl who lived several miles away to come and stay with her daytimes until the end of the school term.[1]

We then moved to Colfax, the County seat, where Father became principal of the school, and where I started attending school. From this time on I must have led a charmed life as so many things happened to me that could have proved fatal. There was a time when we boys, seven or eight years old, used to play along the river bank and kill snakes. It was not until we had killed a number of them that our parents learned they were rattlesnakes.

About this time Mother hired an Indian woman whom we called Lucy, to come to the house several days a week and help with the washings and ironings and housework. She would bring her little papoose strapped to a board and set him up in a corner while she worked. Through my acquaintance with her I gained access to the Indian village on the banks of the river and spent many happy hours there playing with the Indian kids. I will always remember how the Indians treated one of their number who was sick. They had one tepee near the river in which there was a pit about four feet deep. They would heat large rocks the size of footballs on a big fire just outside of the tepee, then roll the rocks into the pit and cover them with green branches from pine trees. The patient was put inside stark naked. Then they would bring pails of water from the river and throw it over the branches; this caused a terrific amount of steam. After a half-hour of steaming, the patient was led or carried to the river and put into the cold water for a few minutes and then wrapped in many heavy blankets and taken back to his own tepee and to bed. Somehow they all survived.

In winter we used to skate on the river, and in the early part of the winter, while the ice under the bridge was very thin and rubbery, it was considered quite a feat to be the first to skate under the bridge. One winter I determined to be first. The ice was too thin and I went down and came up under the ice on the other side of the bridge. Some of the larger boys ran around the bridge and broke the ice with poles and fished me out. I was not allowed to go skating any more that winter.

On the Fourth of July another boy and I took a toy cannon which used real powder, into the end of a prospector's hole or tunnel in the hillside above Colfax and fired

[1] L. G.'s parents were Archibald McDanel Mecklem and Laura B. Smith. Archibald, later in his life, worked as an insurance solicitor, a union organizer for the Woodmen of the World, and in 1910 was appointed as Washington State Railroad Commissioner.

it off in there. The concussion caused a cave-in at the entrance and we spent a frantic half-day digging our way out with just our fingers for tools. We were both sick for several days from the smoke, gasses and fatigue.

One night there was a lynching in Colfax and in the morning there was one corpse hanging by his neck at the end of a rope from the upstairs courthouse windows. This sight made a terrific and lasting impression. This man's name was Charley Hall and he apparently had been too free with his branding iron.

One day while in swimming, the rest of the boys were on shore around the fire when I decided to try a back flip into the water from the springboard. I struck my head on the springboard and was just conscious enough to know that I was drowning, going up and down several times but unable to help myself. I finally came to rest on the bottom of the river. About that time one of the big boys noticed that I was missing and dove in and got me out. His name was Arthur Bridle. He had one of the other boys get down on his hands and knees and put me across the boy's back as if over a barrel and somehow or other got most of the water out of me, and in an hour or so I was recovered enough to take another swim before going home.

We boys used to play Cowboys and Indians. The boys from the south end of town were the Indians and from the north end the Cowboys. Every night after school we would have battles on the hills above the town, at first using bows and arrows and slingshots, finally graduating to air guns and, as the feud grew more bitter, several boys used 22 caliber rifles. One boy got shot in the neck and I got it in the abdomen. I did not tell my parents. I suffered a little discomfort for several days, and, as far as I know, the bullet is in there yet.

About this time something happened that completely shook my faith in humanity. I attended Sunday school regularly and one Sunday morning was seated in the very front pew with a Jewish boy of about my age sitting in the same pew several feet away. The collection was taken and the deacon who had passed the plate saw fit to place it on the seat between us and directly in front of the minister, after which we went to our respective classes.

Soon after this some of the money that had been on the collection plate was thought to be missing and in front of the whole Sunday school I was asked to remain after the others had left the church. I was accused by the minister of taking the money and my pockets were searched. When nothing was found, I was told to

go home. My feelings were hurt and I was mad. I suspected who had taken the money and caught up with the Jewish boy who was the son of the richest merchant of the town. I accused him of taking the money and he hit me so hard that I fell in a puddle of water. We fought until we both were bloody and also muddy from rolling on the ground.

We finally had enough, and about this time his father came out and asked what it was all about. The kid wouldn't talk so I told him that if he didn't tell his father I would fight him every day I caught him outside of this yard. About this time a couple of other boys, who had been to Sunday school, came along and they told the father that his boy had taken money from the collection and that I had been blamed for it. The father asked him if that was true and the boy admitted that it was. His father took him by the hand and said, "We are going right down to the preacher's house and you are going to return the money and tell him that you are sorry." This they did.

Next Sunday at Sunday school I asked the preacher to please tell the class that he had been mistaken and that I had not taken the money. He refused, saying that when struck I should turn the other cheek. As if I hadn't had it struck enough times the Sunday before, to say nothing of the licking I got for ruining my Sunday suit. I felt that a great injustice had been done and I never went to Sunday school again, though it was several months before my folks learned that I was not going. I would leave home but, instead of going to the church, I would go to Chinatown and sit in the Chinese laundry until Sunday School was out, then go home again. In the meantime my parents had learned the truth of the fight episode and, when they learned that I was not attending Sunday school, my father told my mother that he was not going to punish me, as he thought probably he would have done the same as I was doing, had it been he instead of me.

The Chinese laundry held a strange fascination for me, partly because the Chinks would not allow any of the other boys in there and this gave me a sort of prestige and I liked to watch them work. When they would sprinkle the clothes prior to ironing, they would fill their mouths with immense quantities of water and squirt it over the clothes in a loud, noisy spray—probably not very sanitary, but exceedingly fast and effective. Sometimes they would have me deliver some laundry for them and in payment would give me litchi nuts, firecrackers and Chinese candies. I often watched them smoke opium in their bunks in the back room.

It must have been about the spring of 1892 that I decided that I must have a bicycle. There was a beautiful new style "Safety" offered to any boy or girl who would sell four or five hundred cans of baking powder. I canvassed the town thoroughly but was far short of having disposed of enough to secure the bicycle. I explained this to my Chinese friends and they bought several cans each. (I learned later that they had thrown the baking powder into the river.) My father bought the rest and the bicycle came on the 1st of July. On the Fourth of July I entered the bicycle race down the main street and won first place: $2.50 in cash and $2.50 worth of fireworks. From that time on I enjoyed any kind of competition and especially races of any kind.

An epidemic of diphtheria struck. Dr. Pocock managed to pull me through it, though he lost his own son who was one of my best boyhood friends. Four or five other schoolmates died at this time.

During vacations I would often go out to the ranch, or homestead, where I was born and which was now operated by my Uncle Gid.[2] He secured a fine little Indian cayuse for me. She was a buckskin and very fast and could be ridden without saddle or bridle and could be made to go in the direction you wanted to go by knee pressure or by simply leaning to one side or the other.

The next ranch to the north was owned by some people by the name of Savage. They had several boys who had horses. They also had a large fish pond in which they raised carp which we used to catch with hooks baited with dough balls. They also had a large flock of peafowl from which they would harvest the great, long tail feathers every fall. This was where we boys fitted in with our ponies; we would run them down. At first they would get up and fly a half mile or a mile, and by that time they would be getting tired. The next flight would be shorter; pretty soon they could not fly any more at all. We would then herd them back to the farmyard corral and pluck their tail feathers, which were shipped to St. Louis to be wholesaled to millinery firms.

I fished quite a bit in the Palouse river, which ran through Colfax, catching small trout and shiners. Then one day up the north fork of the river at the north end of town I caught my first real fish. It was a large trout, probably five or six pounds, and was the most beautiful fish that I have ever seen. At Todds mill one day the men who worked on the log pond, selecting the logs to go up into the mill to be

[2] Samuel Gideon Mecklem, older brother of L. G.'s father Archibald.

sawed, hooked a large sturgeon with their pike poles and hauled him up into the mill with the chain that pulled the logs up. The fish was about eight feet long and was taken up town to the butcher shop where it was hung outside and split open. The next day you could see its heart slowly beating though it had been hanging there twenty-four hours.

1896 was a depression year and times were really bad. We moved to Seattle that year and by this time I was fourteen years old. I got a paper route carrying the Seattle Times and later carried the P. I. too, walking about seven miles every morning and another seven or eight every evening, attending the Rainier School during the day. At this school I got to know one of the strongest boy [sic] that I have ever seen, Gordon Duncan by name. He could chin the bar five or six times with either hand. He could cross the entire basement of the school by gripping the floor joists with his fingers and swinging along almost as fast as the rest of us could walk across. He could also throw a baseball a tremendous distance. Maybe it was because I was small for my age and had somewhat of an inferiority complex that made me adopt him as my idol and inspired me to become as nearly like him as was possible. I bought Indian clubs, dumbbells and other so-called muscle builders and exercised regularly and, along with the long walks mornings and evenings delivering papers, I achieved a certain amount of success.

At this same school there was another remarkable boy, a colored boy by the name of Amon Davis,[3] who was an excellent dancer, singer and a wonder on roller skates. Some years later I took two young girl cousins of mine[4] to a Pantages vaudeville matinee in San Jose, California. We sat in the third or fourth row from the front and a colored troupe came out and did some songs and dances and then,

[3] Amon Davis appeared in the musical play "How Come?" at the Apollo Theater on 42nd St. in New York City, which ran for 40 performances during April and May of 1923 (musician and composer Sidney Bechet also was in the play). Davis was also in "Blackberries of 1932," a revue at the Liberty Theater, also on 42nd St., in April of 1932, and "Darktown Revue," a variety film by African-American director Oscar Micheaux featuring musical sequences and comedy. According to the book "Straight Lick: The Cinema of Oscar Micheaux" by J. Ronald Green, Amon Davis's performance in Darktown Revue was "a spoof on the 'hardshell' sermon, a skit [Davis had made] famous on the vaudeville circuit during the age of ragtime, twenty years before his appearance in Micheaux's film."

[4] These cousins must have been Wilda and Zoe Mecklem, the daughters of John Franklin Mecklem and Laura Mitchell Mecklem. John was a younger brother of L. G.'s father Archibald M. Mecklem. Laura had been married to Samuel Gideon Mecklem, the older brother of John and Archibald, but she left Gideon for John, and John and Laura moved to California, residing first in Alameda, and later in San Jose. Wilda and Zoe never married, and they lived in San Jose together until Wilda's death in 1981; Zoe died in 1983.

just before the finale which was a skating act, the leader of the company came directly to the front of the stage and said, much to the mortification and embarassment of my cousins, "I would like to see you after the show, L.G." It was my old schoolmate and the next morning we had a nice visit together, but my cousins could not get over the idea that I would talk to a colored person.

My mother wanted me to learn to play the violin, so I got one and started taking lessons from Professor Vaughn Arthur, giving up one of the paper routes in order to have more time for practicing. However, on Saturdays I shined shoes downtown in the entrance to the Collins Building. I entered high school, which was located at eighth and Madison, joined the Cadet Company and wore a uniform topped with one of those old fashioned flat-topped caps of Civil War times. After a couple of years in the Cadet Company, I joined the National Guard. One time we were having a sham battle with a Tacoma Company in Wright's Park in Tacoma when we were given the order, "Charge Bayonets" down a very steep little hill. The old Springfield rifles with the bayonets attached were very long and most of us ran them into the ground at the bottom of the hill, which threw us to the ground where we were easily captured by the enemy.

I graduated from carrying papers and became an elevator operator from three till ten p.m. and all day Sundays working in various buildings, including the Collins, Burke and Alaska.

Summer vacations were spent fishing for trout in Lake Washington and for Tom cod and salmon in Elliot Bay. At that time my particular pal, Ike Fisher, and I did quite a business in squabbing and crabbing. The squabs we would get from nests on the beams under the docks on the waterfront by using a boat at high tide. We sold them to Maison Barberis, a Frenchman who operated a restaurant at Second and James Streets. The crabs we caught in barrel-hoop nets from the West Seattle railroad trestle and cooked them in an old wash boiler and peddled from house to house at five and ten cents each. One day we put our nets down and caught more crabs than ever before. We cooked and ate some and then started catching more. As the tide went out and the water became shalower, we saw a great mound of crabs below us and then we though we saw a foot sticking out from one end of the pile. At that time there was a reward of ten dollars for anyone that reported finding a corpse. Ike walked back to Seattle and notified the Coroner and came back with him in his light spring wagon drawn by a pair of horses. We asked for our ten dollars, but he said that we would have to help him get the corpse into the large wicker basket that he had brought along before he would pay us. We climbed down

to the mudflats and spent the next hour picking crabs off of and pulling crabs out of that badly decomposed body. We threw the crabs as far away as we could and they came right back. Finally, we got most of them off and the remains into the basket and helped the man carry it back to the wagon. Then after it was all over and we had time to think about it and talk about it, we both realized that we had eaten some of those crabs. We both became nauseated and gave up crabbing for good. It is only in the last few years that I have started eating crabmeat again.

Ike Fisher and I did quite a lot of hunting together and one day we set out for Green Lake to shoot ducks but got lost in the brush and never did find the lake that day. At that time Green Lake was entirely surrounded by woods. Another time I was following Ike through some woods when his shot gun, which he was carrying on his shoulder, went off and shot my hat right off my head and also some hair with it--one more instance to prove that I have led a charmed life. Another time we were returning from a duck-hunting trip across Lake Washington to Mercer Slough. We hitch-hiked a tow behind a scow-load of coal, passing the painter or rope from our rowboat around a post on the back of the scow. When out in the middle of the lake, a crosswind came up and our boat suddenly began to revolve like a trolling spoon and we were both spilled out. Luckily the rope broke, freeing the boat to which we swam and finally righted, bailed the water out with our caps and rowed home. We lost our camp equipment and guns.

In the early days when Lake Washington was considerably higher than Lake Union, there used to be a wooden flume at the Portage just south of where the University is now. This flume was used to shoot logs down from Lake Washington to the mills on Lake Union. It was great sport to shoot this flume in a canoe until one day there happened to be a log in the water right where we made the six-or eight-foot drop from the end of the flume. It broke the canoe's back and nearly broke ours too.

I quit school and secured a job at a boathouse at Leschi Park at the Lake Washington end of Yesler Way. This was a twenty-four hour a day job and I lived on the boathouse. My job was renting and repairing rowboats and operating launches. Leschi Park at that time was an amusement park operated by the streetcar company. It had a zoo, dance hall and a bandstand and on Sundays was especially well attended. In order to draw bigger crowds and thereby swell the Transportation Company's receipts, they would occasionally hire a special attraction such as a carnival or a balloon ascension and a parachute drop.

One day there was to be a balloon ascension and at the very last minute the aeronaut was badly burned while throwing gasoline into the furnace used to inflate the bag with the hot air that carried it aloft. There was a call for a volunteer rider and I asked for the job as I had always envied the man with the pink tights who soared aloft performing on the trapeze that dangled far below the huge cotton bag and parachute, while the band played and the crowds applauded, and then cut loose the parachute that lowered him gently to earth again--only sometimes he lit in the water instead of on the ground.

On this, my very first ride, the cutoff line got fouled up with some of the shrouds and I was unable to detach the chute from the balloon, and, though I had made a beautiful take-off and ascension, I floated ignominiously down with the balloon into the middle of Lake Washington, where there was a launch waiting for me. In spite of a rather drab first ride, I liked it very much and decided to make balloon riding my career, little knowing how little money and how much work there was attached to it. The owner of the outfit was confined to the hospital a long time with his burns and I made ascensions three times a week, weather permitting, for five months. This was only about a mile from where my parents lived and they often saw the balloon in the air, but did not know that I was riding it until the end of the season. I was always afraid that they might learn of it and put a stop to it. I received $2.50 for each ride and at the end of the contract the owner gave me $10.00 extra and tried to get me to promise to work for him the next summer.

Ira Leo, a schoolmate of mine, came to me one day and asked me if I would like to go on a little cruise on the Sound in a steamboat. His father owned a boiler works and had put in new flues in the boiler of a small towboat, the owner of which could not at the time pay for the job, so the boat was tied up pending payment of the debt. So we took the boat, towed it over to the coal bunkers with a rowboat after dark, promoted some coal, fired up and ran it over to Port Orchard just across the bay from Bremerton, where we anchored and went to bed. About three a.m. we were unceremoniously dumped out of our bunks onto the floor by the boat turning over on its side. We had anchored over a mudflat and the tide had gone out and left us high but not dry. The incoming tide filled the boat before we could do anything about it. When the tide when out again, we pulled on the tackle and raised the boat as it regained its buoyancy. We secured some more supplies and set out on a trip clear around Vashon Island, stopping occasionally to dig some clams or catch some fish. At one place we came across a half-dozen logs which we took in tow and the next day sold to a sawmill operator, later learning that the

logs belonged to him in the first place. After having been out nearly a week we headed for home, running mostly at night and without lights as we feared that it might be just possible that the boat might have been missed and was being looked for. Sure enough, a steamer came up behind us. Ira tied down the safety valve and I objected, fearing that the boiler might blow up, but he said that he had heard his father tell the owner of the boat that after he had repaired the boiler it could not be blown up as long as there was water in it. We put in coal and more coal until fire came out of the smokestack. We were booming along knots per hour but the other boat still gained on us and finally hailed us through a megaphone saying that they were a revenue cutter and for us to stop. We pretended that we could not hear them and headed for a convenient for bank. This was the first and only time that I was ever glad to see fog. Our boat could turn quicker than the longer government boat and, by twisting and turning, could just keep out of their reach. Finally, just as we were getting into the fog, they told us to stop or they would fire on us. We both got down below in the engine room and were able to guide by handling the tiller ropes. Sure enough, they did put a couple of bullets through the pilot house. Then the fog closed in and we felt safe. We set a compass course for Seattle and arrived early in the morning and tied the boat up where we had gotten it, plugged the bullet holes and painted over them so that they could not be seen and went home. We never heard that the boat had ever been missed. For a vacation this was one of the hardest week's work that I had ever done. We learned later that the revenue cutter had been after us because we were running at night without lights and they thought we were smuggling Chinese.

I secured a job in Courts new theater as usher and later as switchboard operator, controlling all the lights on the stage and in the theater, and was called on several times to sub for actors who were sick or too drunk to go on.

Then roller skating became the vogue and a chap by the name of Frank Randell and I skated a lot and began to think that we were pretty good. We entered some races but there were some other fellows a little faster than we were so we teamed up together and one of us would beat the gun and jump out in front of the faster skaters and keep in their way while the other would go ahead and win the race. This was dirty skating and got us lots of falls and fights, but we did win lots of prizes; these were amateur races and instead of money we got watches, fountain pens, skates, sweaters and other merchandise.

Chapter Two

I heard that Mr. Benjamin the local deep sea diver, wanted an understudy and assistant so I went to see him. He said that I was too young and too light but, as he could get no one else, he would give me a trial. He had a job inspecting the pilings for worm damage under a dock just about where Iver's Acres of Clams is now, at the foot of Madison street. I got into the suit and put on heavily lead-weighted shoes and found that I could hardly lift them, and then they put a lead-weighted belt around me and by this time I could scarcely move. They finally got me over the side of the scow and lowered me to the bottom. We had no telephone in the suit and all signaling had to be done by the so-called life-line. It was very dark and the electric light would show only a few feet around me. I sank nearly to my knees in the mud and it was tremendous effort to move at all. The tide was quite strong and would pull the air hose and life-line way to one side of me and I was fearful that they would get twisted around some of the piling. However, I did manage to examine several rows of piles and found some eaten entirely off. I was glad when it was time for me to give the three jerks on the life-line, which was the signal for them to pull me up. Mr. Benjamin said that I had done very well for a little squirt and to come back tomorrow; but I didn't. That was my first and last dive in a diving suit. I was still tired the next day.

I then went to work for Mrs. Bartlett, who operated a boathouse at Madison Park. There were two of us working there, the other fellow being a young Canadian whose name I have forgotten. One afternoon the wind was blowing very hard and Mrs. Bartlett decided to go downtown, telling us before leaving, "not to let any boats out, not to make any trips with the launches no matter how badly the customers might want to go; and, lastly and above all, not to let the old sailboat out." This latter admonishment suggested to us that it might be a good time for us to take a little sail just around in front of the place and have the boat back in its

place long before she could return—so we hoisted the sail and started out. The boat was a very old cat-rigged boat with several tons of cement in the bottom for ballast and should have been condemned long before. We were out a half-mile or more before we realized it and sailing along at a great rate when an unusually strong gust of wind struck the sail and ballooned it right up around the top of the mast. The pressure was too great and the whole front end of the boat opened up and she dove like a submarine for the bottom. We removed our clothes and shoes and started swimming home. We had been in the water about an hour and were making little progress on account of the wind and big waves, when a launch from Bellevue came along and, after much difficulty, managed to get us aboard and landed us at the boathouse just a minutes before Mrs. Bartlett arrived home. We did not have to tell her what happened; she already knew. Someone who lived near Madison Park had seen us go out and the boat go down and had taken a streetcar for town, found Mrs. Bartlett and told her all about it, including the fact that we both had been drowned. After she had seen to it that we got into good dry clothing and had given us a good hot supper, we were all sitting in the living room. The atmosphere seemed rather tense and she said, shaking her finger at us, "All right, you two, you work the next month for nothing," which we did. That was all she ever said about it. She was a very fair and fine old lady and one of the nicest persons that I ever worked for.

Ainsworth and Dunn, fish packers on the waterfront at Seattle, wanted a launch operator and, because it was a naptha launch and I had never run one of this kind, I applied for and got the job. The boat was about thirty feet long, all enclosed in glass, and was used mostly to take officers of the company on inspection trips to their fish-traps and canneries. The naptha engine is very much like a steam engine except that, instead of water in the boiler, alcohol is used and the vapor operates the engine and is then condensed and used over and over again. Gasoline or naptha was used for fuel. The boiler and stack were all brass and beautiful pieces of machinery when polished regularly and well. The fires made a roaring sound which is rather terrifying until one becomes accustomed to it.

I needed some supplies for the boat and Mr. Dunn said to go uptown and get whatever I needed; so I tied the boat up to the dock, forgetting that I was back on

salt water again, and when I returned there was the boat with the bow hanging by the line and about six feet out of water. The stern line had already broken. I rushed inside the dark building, grabbed a fire axe and chopped the line letting the boat slip back into the water, much to the amusement of the onlookers. After getting the thing steamed up I thought I would take it out for a trial run. The engine is reversed by grasping a wooden wheel rim that is just in front of the flywheel while it is revolving and giving it a violent twist in the opposite direction. The boat had been out of commission for some time and everything was very stiff. It started off backwards and I could not reverse it to make it go forward, so I backing in under the docks and made my trial trip running backward and tried to dodge some of the many pilings. The engine had to be completely torn down to remove the rust that had accumulated during its long period of idleness.

Several months after mastering the fine points of operating a naptha launch, I tired of it and befan to look around for something more exciting, so bought a racing sailboat called the "Roaring Gimlet." She was sloop-rigged and about eighteen feet long and drew about five feet of water. I entered the sloop races on the Fourth of July and, in order to get more speed, borrowed the sails and mast from a larger boat and stepped the mast on deck using sidestays and backstays to hold it up. Everything was going fine in the race and I was about half a mile ahead of the nearest competitor when rounding the barge "Skookum," on which the judges were stationed, and just a short way from the finish line, the "Gimlet" did exactly like the boat had on Lake Washington. A small boat put out from the "Skookum" and picked me up. That was that.

I was now broke again with winter coming on, so secured a job driving a delivery wagon for Connor Bros. Grocery on Second Avenue in Seattle. This was pretty heavy work as I weighed only about 100 pounds at that time, had to get up at five o'clock in the morning, feed and harness the horses and be at the store at seven-thirty, haul heavy loads of groceries, including 100 pound sacks of potatoes, many of which had to be carried up endless flights of steps, getting through way after dark every night. I stuck it out till late spring and then decided to build a balloon and go into business for myself, giving exhibitions at fairs, carnivals, festivals or any place that an attraction of this kind would be desired.

So I quit my job on the grocery wagon and bought a huge quantity of cotton cloth and a sewing machine and went to work, soon finding out that I should have stayed in school a little longer as there were many problems in higher mathematics involved in the laying out and the construction of a bag of this size. I went to night school for a time and was soon able to construct a model of the balloon, and from this was able to lay out and cut the gores which, when sewed together with what seemed miles of seams and hundreds of spools of thread, eventually merged into a huge bag some thirty-five feet high and twenty feet through at the greatest diameter. I got the plans for a parachute from an aeronaut in New York through an advertisement in Billboard. The chutes of those times were not the packed silken or nylon affairs with which most of us are familiar today, but were generally made of the same cotton or muslin used to construct the bag and were a large canopy affair twenty-two or twenty-four feet across with a hole or vent in the center. The size of this vent could be changed by a drawstring arrangement allowing the operator to open it for a more direct and quicker descent over a good landing place, or to close it for a slower and partially guided descent. The guiding was done by pulling in the shrouds or ropes on one side and side-slipping toward favorable terrain.

The aeronaut or rider generally was not fastened to the chute in any way but rode on a trapeze some twenty feet below the chute, and did various stunts on this bar while in flight as an added thrill for the spectators. To detach the parachute from the balloon, a cut-off block was used. This consisted of a block of wood about four inches square and eighteen inches long. One end of this block was attached to the balloon shrouds and the chute was fastened from its top to a small rope which ran through a small hole in the lower end of the block. This rope could be cut by a razor-sharp blade pivoted or hinged in a slot in the block. When the top or ceiling of the ascent had been made, the rider would give a sharp tug on the cutoff rope and gently float away from the bag, which would then turn over from the weight of another block of wood or small sandbag attached to its top by a short rope. This allowed the smoke or hot air to escape quickly and the bad would generally beat the parachute back to earth, wheras, if it did not turn over, it might continue to rise and float miles away before coming back to earth, entailing a long search and

a long haul back to the scene of operations. The softest place a parachutist could land was in the water, but it was always messy and sometimes cold and the operator had to give up part of his take to a boatman to pick him up. Then there was the problem of drying out the bag and chute.

Finally I got all the equipment together and advertised for a job and got one right away, making Sunday rides at Hillman City near the south end of Lake Washington for C.D. Hillman, real estate operator extraordinary, who wished to attract crowds to his newest development. I took this job at $150.00 per ride for four Sundays, hired a helper and set up the gin-poles used to suspend the balloon over the inflating chimney which consisted of a barrel at the end of a tunnel that extended horizontally to a point ten or twelve feet outside or away from the balloon. At the outside end of this tunnel was the fire pit where the smoke and hot air was made that was used to fill the bag.

A new balloon made of cotton cloth has very little lifting power the first few times that it is inflated, as the cloth is so porous it allows most of the smoke and heat to escape. Even though we had smoked this one all day Saturday, to get the pores of the cloth impregnated with soot, I could not get it to lift me on Sunday even though we used fifteen gallons of gasoline. I forgot to say that during inflation it is necessary for one man to stay inside the balloon all the time to watch for sparks and to shout out how high the flames are going when the gasoline is thrown into the fire. It is thrown into the fire with a dipper and it is very dangerous work.

There were many disappointed people that Sunday and Hillman said that I had better make it be good the next Sunday, or else--. By smoking that bag all the next week and turning it black in the process, I was able to make a low ascension of ten or twelve hundred feet the next week and made up for the poor showing of the week before by doing acrobatics on the trapeze and hanging head down by one foot (safely fastened in a loop at one end of the bar which could not be seen by the crowd). I finished that engagement and by that time was established as an “Aerial Daredevil” and plenty of engagements were offered. Hillman paid one half the promised fee. I took a job at Spokane and twice narrowly missed landing in the river so was glad when that job was completed. I met another balloonist. He was

a dapper little fellow by the name of Sylvon from Victoria, B.C. He had his two upper gold front teeth set with a good sized diamond in each and he wore very, very sporty clothes that he said he had tailored in London where he had come from a year or two earlier. He was working with a carnival show both as a balloonist and escape artist. His carnival showed in Tacoma at the same time that I had a contract there with some local improvement association; so we timed it so that we were both in the air at the same time. The Great Sylvon made his ascent securely locked with leg irons and handcuffs by a committee from the crowd and escaped from them in time to cut off the parachute. He even went up once in a straight-jacket and chained to the trapeze. To offset this added attraction and showmanship on his part, I had to do extra acrobatic stunts and I also set off several dynamite blasts high in the air using five sticks of forty-or sixty-percent dynamite for each shot. The sticks were bound together and a one minute fuse attached and were attached to a reel with about fifty feet of line on it. The free end of the line was attached to the trapeze and, after lighting the fuse, the reel and dynamite were dropped to the length of the line, generally about fifty feet, where it exploded with a terrific crash that sometimes gave me quite a jar. I never saw The Great Sylvon, as he called himself, again; heard that he had failed to unlock or escape from the handcuffs at Calgary or Lethbridge and had been dragged by his parachute and badly injured.

My balloon was getting old and rotten and had many patches on it so I bought one from a man by the name of Frank Woods who said that he had been working his balloon in Alabama and the South. He had bought a store in Renton and was giving up the balloon racket. I had a couple of jumps to make at Portland and on the very first bomb explosion that balloon that I had just bought opened up a tear horizontally right across the middle about twenty feet long, from the concussion. However, the parachute dropped free from the crippled bag, but I had to get rid of the other five sticks of dynamite, so had to explode it in a hurry. I landed in a swamp and the bag came down in a lady's chicken yard. She said that I could not take it away until I paid her for all the setting eggs that had been ruined by the balloon scaring her setting hens. I was so disgusted losing the next day's job, as the bag could not have been repaired in time, and being covered with mud from the swamp, and being gyped into buying an old bag that was not as good as the one I had discarded, that I took the train back to Seattle and left the whole outfit right

where it lay. I often wondered, tough, how Woods had ever gotten that old bag so clean and white that he fooled me into believing that it was almost new.

Arriving back in Seattle I was told by an old schoolmate, Harold Lincoln, that there was going to be a strike by the Street Railway Operators Union and that we could get a job operating a streetcar carrying U.S. Mail to mail carriers in various parts of the city and to Lake Washington to a steamed that delivered around the lake and that this would not be a strike-breaking job. Sensing that this might prove exciting, we took the job, he as conductor and I as motorman. It did not prove as exciting as expected, though we did have a few rocks thrown through the windows, trolley ropes cut several times and were derailed a couple of times. As no fares were charged we did a big business. The strike soon fizzled out and we were offered permanent jobs. We chose the Yesler Way cable line and, as I was a little light for a gripman, we changed ends and Lincoln took the front end and I became a conductor. Being on this line allowed us to live at Yesler Park on Lake Washington where his home was and where I had formerly lived on the boathouse when working there and where we both had lots of friends. Including all of the other streetcar men, we were the youngest operators working for this company. We liked the work and did our best to please the passengers, sometimes waiting for passengers when we saw them coming a block away, assisting the ladies onto the car with their packages, grips, children and babies and taking care of the baby buggies, sometimes having several buggies on the back fender and one or two in the gripman's standing place. It wasn't long before the women with babies would wait for our car and the extra service that we gave and our car became known as the babies' special. We received many gifts of cakes and candy and sometimes pie. One time a big fat colored mammy got on with a cute little pickaninny and it was time for it to have its dinner, but for some reason or other it didn't want to take it, so she pushed its mouth up against her very large bosom and said, "Now you better take this, Honey. If you don't, I'se goin' to give it to the conductor." Well, my gripman spilled that at the car barns and the other conductors told their passengers and even the manager ribbed me about it. It took me a long time to live that one down.

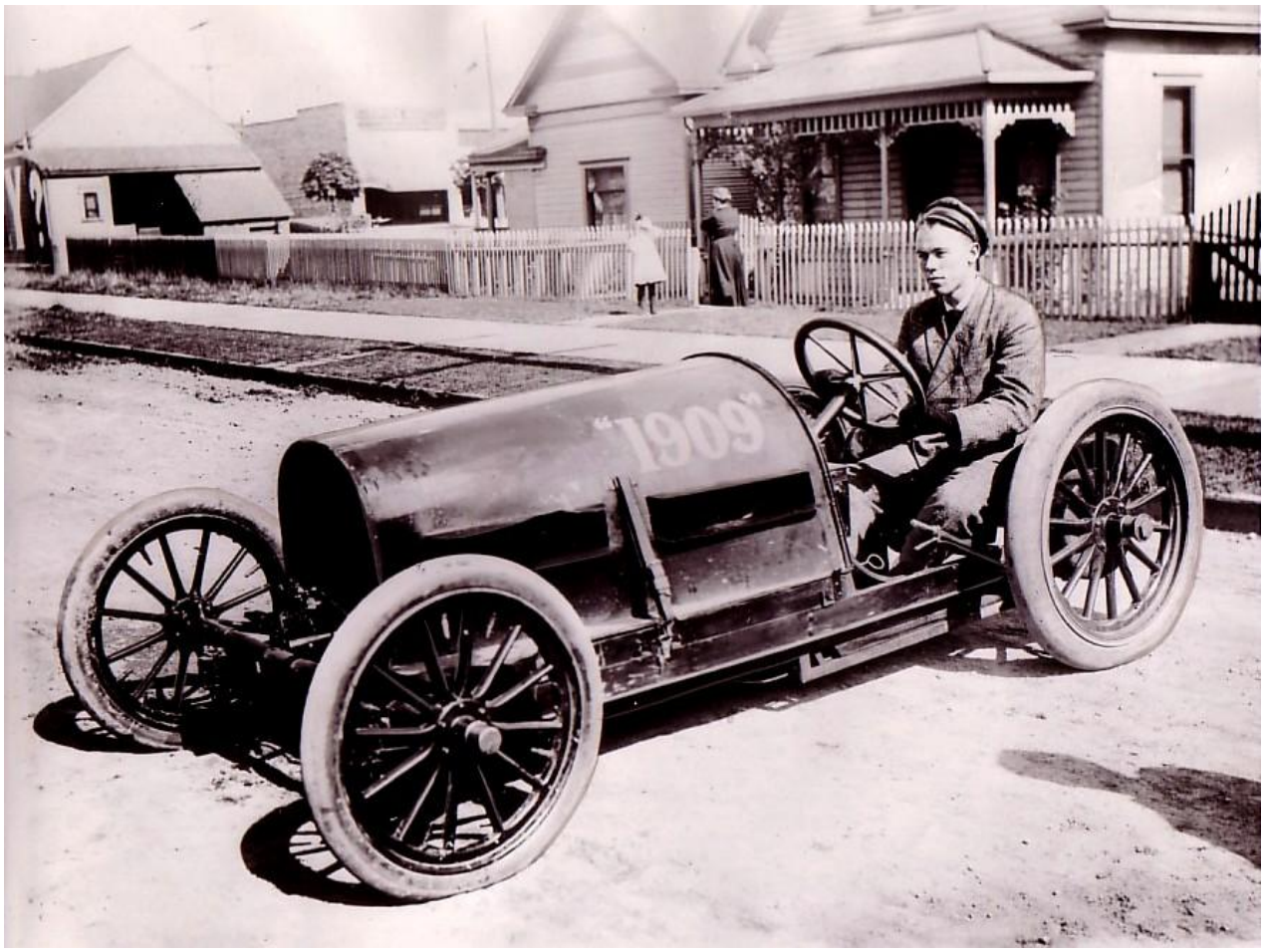
I had been on the cable line about a year and a half and was on the No. 2 daytime run, which meant arising at five a.m., getting the car out of the barn and starting the first trip at about five thirty. One morning I awoke when the alarm went off but found that I could not move hand or foot or even talk out loud. My gripman, Harold Lincoln, came over when I did not show up and threw some pebbles at my second story window thinking I had overslept. I heard them but could not let him know what the trouble was. At about ten thirty in the morning Mrs. Thorne, my landlady, came into my room and immediately called a doctor. He said the trouble was inflammatory rheumatism with fever. I moved back to my parent's home on Thirty-third Avenue. Dr. Lyons, who was the doctor for the City of Seattle at that time and he lived next door, took my case and came in to see me every morning before leaving for his office. I got so bad that I could hardly stand the vibration of anyone walking across the floor and one had swelled up as big as a small ham. I had to take codeine to get any rest at all. Dr. Lyons sent clear to Paris, France, for some new highly concentrated medicine that he thought might be of some help. After quitting all medicine I began to improve just a little. One morning Dr. Lyons did not come in. I supposed that he had been called out of town and did not think much more about it, but when he did not show up the next morning, I had my mother call over the back fence to Mrs. Lyons and ask about the doctor. She said, "Doctor is very sick with rheumatism. He gets it every summer about this time in the head, neck and shoulders. We have to keep ice packs on his head and eyes all of the time."

About a month later we had both recovered enough to sit out on our respective front porches, so one day I hobbled over to his porch and asked how much I owed him. He figured it up and said it came to $180.00. I had already paid for all of the medicine, so I joked with him a little about charging so much for trying to cure me when he got it every year himself and had several of his brother doctors and a couple of trained nurses to look after him. He said, "Well, we doctors don't know too much about this rheumatism and if you will doctor up my car, which is suffering from general debility and lost manhood, I will tear up the bill and we will call it square." I did and he did.

I decided to go up to Green River Hot Springs up near Stevens Pass where they were reported to be having success in relieving some rheumatism cases. When I went there, I walked in under my own power but six weeks later was carried out to the train on a stretcher. Every night at nine o'clock all of the walking cases would line up in the lobby and be given a large red capsule, after which they were ordered to bed as quickly as they could get there. One night they asked me if I had been dizzy after going up to bed after my capsule, and I replied that I had not; so that time they gave me two. In order to get to my room I had to cross the lobby and climb one flight of stairs. In the center of the lobby there was a large fountain and fish pond with fish in it. Well I didn't make the stairs, got dizzy and fell right into the fountain. After they got me to bed I just lay there and hung on while the bed did loops for hours.

I went back to Seattle, rested up a while and set out for Solduc Hot Springs on the Olympic peninsula, which were reported to have made fabulous cures among the Indians who inhabited the region at that time. It didn't help me much but at least I did not get any worse.

I decided to go to Lake Elsinore, California, where I heard they gave mud baths that extracted rheumatic aches and pains very successfully, so I embarked on the lumber schooner "Narwood" on her maiden voyage from Seattle to San Francisco. She was a small wooden vessel built to carry about three-quarters of a million feet of lumber. Her house and stack were in the center of the boat and she had accommodations for about thirty passengers and I think the fare was twelve dollars. Her skipper was a big, raw-boned Swede who, in order to make a good impression with the owners, put an overload of lumber on this, her first trip. She had huge deck-loads both fore and aft and they were lashed on with chains that went clear around the bottom of the boat and over the top of the lumber. She set so deep in the water that the decks were just about awash. I drew a stateroom with a miner from Alaska who went to Arizona to mine in the winter when it was too cold to work in Alaska. We had a very mixed passenger list of people who could not afford the fare on the regular passenger ships running to California. Included in this group was one very amorous couple who boarded the vessel at Port Townsend.



L. Guy Mecklem joined the Northwest Auto Track Association and raced in at least eighteen different cities, winning a number of races in his Franklin Spider. In a series of races in Vancouver, B.C. in August, 1907, Guy drove his Spider as well as something called a "Wayne Steamer." Most of his racing was done in 1906 and 1907, though he also raced in Portland in 1909 (see newpaper article excerpt below) and did some racing in 1911.

The man was supposed to be a Methodist minister and the lady was supposed to be his wife.

We got into the Straits of Juan de Fuca and the ship was so heavily loaded forward that she would not steer properly. My roommate and I both remarked about it and he spoke to the captain about it, but he just said, "Oh, yu go tu bed, She bane all right." So we went to bed and a few hours later in the middle of the night we both slid out of our bunks into about three feet of water in our cabin. We heard lots of yelling and there were no lights. The boat had tipped partly over and we were on the lower side, our suitcases were floating around. The miner lit some matches and we got some clothes on, pulled open the door and waded waist-deep around to the high side. The lashings had broken and the deck-load had fanned out over the ocean so that you could have walked a hundred feet from the ship on the lumber holding the vessel over on her side. The engine room was flooded and the fires put out, but there was no danger of sinking with all that lumber. There was some danger of going on the rocks at Cape Flattery, as we could hear the surf plainly.

The crew got busy with axes, saws and canthooks trying to cut the lumber free and allow the vessel to right itself, but they could not accomplish much in the dark. The next morning the minister went berserk and was going to jump overboard, so the captain ordered him tied up to a stanchion where he cursed the rest of us for the rest of the day. Toward evening they got enough of the lumber cut away to allow the ship to partially right itself. The cook got his galley going and everyone had hot coffee and sandwiches. The minister simmered down and was freed and returned to his lady love, who didn't seem to think so much of him after his performance of the night before.

All the next day the crew continued to clear away the lumber. I still had rheumatism and was still using codeine so was not much help in clearing away the wreckage. However, I was able to help the engineer repair a steam donkey engine on the forward deck that had its valves knocked out of their correct timing when the lumber went overboard. All of the rest of the engine room crew were working at getting the wreckage cleared and the vessel righted as we were nearing the breakers by the hour. One large steamer passed us but we were too near shore for

her to offer any assistance. We got the steam donkey so it would run, though it stood at a cockeyed angle, and the engineer salvaged a small generator from the engine room and we dried it out in the galley and belted it to the flywheel of the donkey. That night the men had an arc light to work by, and the next morning the wreckage was cleared and the ship once more rode on an even keel though very low in the water. The water was pumped out by hand until it got low enough for a fire to be started under the boiler, after which the steam pumps quickly finished the job and the captain gave the signal to go ahead.

We got out two or three miles and suddenly felt a jolt or jar go through the entire ship and the engine started to race madly. What had happened was that one of the long chains was still dangling from the side of the boat and had washed back and wrapped around the propeller and broken off the marine coupling to the engine. The engineer made some huge iron hooks which were attached to steel cable and lowered over the stern and manipulated until the chain was hooked, then by use of the steam donkey it was finally unwound from the propeller, or "compeller" as the Swede Captain called it. All of this took two more days and nights and we were again nearly into the breakers. By this time the engineer had the coupling repaired and we again started slowly for San Francisco where we arrived just fourteen days after leaving Seattle.

The captain had a huge Swiss watch that was equipped with a full set of chimes and played on the hour, half-hour and quarter-hour. He thought almost as much of this watch as he did of his ship. During all the turmoil and excitement it had stopped running and he wanted to know if anyone on board could make it go again. I told him that I would try, so I opened it and, as I expected, found some moisture inside. Securing some naptha from a bottle in the galley, I dunked the watch and then dried it out for a day over the range and then lubricated it by holding it over the fumes of some boiling kerosene and it started running again. The captain was tickled and showed me many favors the rest of the trip, such as eating at his private table and allowing me free access to the pilot house at all time.

The minister proved to be a glutton at the table with the manners of a hog. He would straddle the bench (we did not have chairs) and reach for all of the choicest

dishes, fill his own plate and give some to his lady, and the rest of the passengers got what was left. One day they ganged up on him and persuaded the cook to make up a batch of cookies and put a dose of red pepper in each cookie. They were placed on the table and, sure enough, the minister grabbed them first and stuffed his pockets. Then he ate one and got up and ran out of the room shouting curse words that even the crew had never heard before; but the next meal he was back again with his same greedy manners. So the next day the cook baked a cake and doped it with croton oil which he swiped from the captain's medicine chest. All the passengers knew about it, including the lady who was booked as the preacher's wife. Well, he swallowed the bait hook line and sinker and from then on, until we reached 'Frisco, he was a very busy man and did not return to the dining room. When we docked at San Francisco, there was a very angry man on the dock waiting and, when the minister came down the gangplank, this man pulled a gun and would have shot him had not a dockworker grabbed the gun away from him. However, he did knock the minister down with one lusty blow square on the nose. He lay there and squealed like a stuck pig and said, "Don't let him kill me! Don't let him kill me!" It seems that the preacher had run off with the other man's wife. The man took his wife by the arm when she came down the gangplank, walked her over to where a crate was setting on the dock, seated himself on the crate, placed his wife over his knee and proceeded to give her an old-fashioned spanking, much to the amusement and satisfaction of the other passengers and crew. He said that he had come all the way from Seattle to do this; then he began to look around for the minister again, but he had left while the going was good.

The Marine Inspectors were at the dock to meet the ship also, and all the passengers who would agree to remain and testify at a hearing that was to be held were sent to a hotel and all expenses paid. The hearing lasted three days. I received a twenty-five dollar check for having had my suitcase and contents ruined. The next day I left for Lake Elsinore and the mud baths. They turned out to be just about as effective in my case as Green River and SolDuc, so I took a train for Arkansas Hot Springs—same results there.

I came back to Los Angeles and sailed on a lumber sailing schooner for Acapulco, Mexico, on my way to Mexico City, where I had heard there was a wonderful

doctor who was curing lots of rheumatic cases. The trip down the coast of Lower California was uneventful, with the exception of seeing large schools of whales and sometimes very close to the boat. Arrived in Mexico City late at night and tried to find a room for the night. I finally found one that did not look good, but decided that as it was so late I would stay there anyway for the rest of the night. There was no lock on the door, so I propped a chair under the door knob and went to bed. I woke up after awhile and, in the dim light that seeped in through the dirty window, could make out the dim outlines of a man sitting on the side of the bed and exploring under my pillow with one of his hands. Though still having plenty of rheumatism, I raised up suddenly and let out what I intended to be a very loud yell but which really came out as sort of a soft squeak. The Mexican then acted like he was drunk and went out through the door, which I don't know how he had managed to open. He did not get anything from me as I was wearing what little money I had left in a money belt around my waist. The next day the American Consul told me that I had stayed in one of the worst dives in the very worst part of Mexico City and that I had been very lucky to get out of it as well as I did.

The Consul directed me to the doctor I was looking for. His name was Dr. Vander Vogen[5] and he was the doctor for the Mexican Central Railroad at that time. He sent me out to a sort of rest home or hospital near a lake where there were lots of other patients and I started taking his medicine and also the mineral water baths that were given all the patients at that place. I stayed there about a month and got no better so, when I had just money enough to get me back to El Paso, Texas, I bought a ticket and landed in El Paso broke. I bummed my way via box car and cattle cars back to Los Angeles where I earned two meals a day at the Salvation Army wood yard. The Salvation Amy was very good to me and they finally got me a job as bus boy at the Angelus Hotel, where I got one dollar a day and a meal. I soon learned that to supplement our meal we were expected to eat any choice morsels we could glean that had been left by the customers, from the dishes to we took to the dishwashing room on our carts. We secured much better food by stealing some from the orders when we wheeled them through the pass-pantry back to the waiter. I still had rheumatism and it was only by leaning on the four-wheeled

[5] Probably the Dr. W. M. Van Der Volgen listed in the Standard Medical Directory of North America for 1902.

carts that we used for transporting the dishes that I was able to stick it out at all. Finally I got it in the legs so bad that I had to quit. I had to get a pair of crutches to get around.

The Angelus Hotel about 1905. Located on the southwest corner of Fourth and Spring streets in downtown Los Angeles, the Angelus opened in 1901, and in 1956 it was torn down and replaced with a parking lot.

I saw an ad in the Times one day where they wanted someone at the Kinetescope to sing illustrated songs. Silent pictures were just becoming popular at that time and it was the practice between the one-reelers to have colored slides illustrating popular songs while someone came out on the stage at the side of the screen and sang. My parents had practically forced me to take violin lessons and I had sung a little bit with Bill Linton who had worked on boathouses with me; so with this background I applied for the job and got it after trying out a couple of days. I had to sing twice in the afternoons and three times in the evening and I got $2.50 per

day. I was in the money now, as that much in those days would buy nearly as much as ten dollars will now. The audiences must have felt so sorry for me limping out on crutches that sometimes they would throw money on the stage when I finished. Of course, it might have been because I had finished. Sometimes when the silver shower was slow in starting or did not start at all, I would have one of my friends or the piano player throw some, to sort of get them started, and it worked. It's funny how much people are like sheep in some things. One will do something and right away all the rest want to do it too. I can still remember the words of some of those choruses. One very sad affair was entitled, 'Twas Only a Message, and went like this: "'Twas only a message from far o'er the sea. Only a line, yet it brings sorrow to me, For one whom I loved so has now passed away." The letter reads, "Your mother, Jack, died here today." Another was entitled "Little Miss No one" and went like this: "Nobody knows her number, Nobody knows her name. Nobody knows who buys her clothes, but she wears them just the same. She circulates hither and thither. You meet her here and there—This little Miss No One from nowhere Knows everyone everywhere."

About this time I became acquainted with a man named Jensen who ran a Bernaar McFadden[6] health restaurant, and he said that, if I would do exactly as he said, he could cure me of rheumatism in ninety days and it wouldn't cost me a cent. First thing on the program was a three-day fast. All I could have was water and lots of it. I got by the three days all right and then for two weeks I was put on a vegetable and fruit diet. Following this came a seven-day fast. This time I really got hungry and would have to cross the street to avoid passing in front of a restaurant or even a grocery store. I got weaker but had a little less rheumatism. I was put on a six-week diet, mostly goat milk and fruit juices. I wanted to quit it several times but Mr. Jensen would talk me into sticking it out. After the six weeks were up came a two-week fast. After the first two or three days I did not feel hungry at all any more but did get very weak, and my knees would shake when I came out on stage to sing my songs. I got so thin and looked so terrible that

[6] Bernaar Macfadden, born Bernard A. McFadden in Mill Spring, Missouri, was a proponent of body-building, fasting, vegetarianism, and sexual activity as a healthy physical activity, not merely for procreation. He founded *Physical Culture* magazine in 1899, and eventually built a publishing empire. Macfadden's attempt to start a religion, "cosmotarianism," based on physical culture, ended in failure.

the audiences threw more nickels and dimes than ever and I was doing alright financially. When the two week fast was over I had less rheumatic pain and swelling than at any time since I had first been stricken with it, and Mr. Jensen was as pleased as I was. However, he said that this was the critical time and I had to be very careful in starting in to eat again, only a little orange juice several times a day for the first few days but always a lot of water. Soon I got a little thin broth and one vegetable a day. In a few weeks I was back on a limited vegetarian diet. I was not entirely free of the rheumatism but was so much improved that the crutches were discarded and I joined the Bernaar McFadden [Macfadden] gymnasium for a course of body building.

Chapter Three

One day a friend of mine came to me and said, "Say, you used to ride balloons didn't you? Well, there's a guy over at Chutes Park that has a great monster balloon and he's afraid to ride it and wants to hire somebody to go up with it. I told him about you and he wants me to bring you over to talk to him."

Chutes Park was an amusement park and zoo at about Twelfth and Main, in what is now metropolitan Los Angeles. They had a Chute, from which the park derived its name, a roller coaster, funny house and some shoes and many concessions and games, also a few mangy animals and some ostriches.

This man who had the balloon was a bartender who had always wanted to be a balloon rider. He had signed a contract with the management of the park to make tri-weekly rides and parachute drops, and now he had a very bad case of cold feet. He said that he would give me a half of what he got if I would ride it. I went over to look at the bag, which was already suspended between the gin-poles and over the furnace. The size of it nearly took my breath away. It was advertized as being seventy-five feet high and the top like a skyrocket and said that was to make it go

up faster and higher, though I could not see how that shape could make it go any higher. The chute was a monster twenty-nine footer (and made of silk). This was on Saturday and the first ascent was booked for the next day (Sunday). I had no time to have tights made so he said that I should use his, which he had paid $75.00 for. They were of green plush silk with white trim and he was very proud of that outfit. Well, he weighed over two hundred pounds and had a big beer belly, while I weighed at the time just a little over a hundred, so there was quite a little slack in the suit to be taken up. This was done in the back and fastened with safety pins. The time finally arrived to take off and this great monster was tugging at her ropes when I gave the signal to Let Her GO! I was whisked off the ground like an autumn leaf in a tornado and then got the surprise of my life for, instead of ascending straight up, the peculiar and unorthodox shape of this monster caused it to shoot off first to one side and then to the other and the effect on me was like being the cracker on the end of a whip. It finally took its last dive and was lying there fairly quiet when I heard the pistol shot that the bartender fired as a signal for me to cut loose and start down. The canopy or chute was so big that it took longer to get down than it had taken to go up and as my weight was not enough to keep a chute of this size steady, it oscillated wildly and I had little control and was unable to choose a landing place. A little square cottage with a sloping roof and chimney sprouting out of the center seemed to act as a magnet for that huge parachute. As it was a very quiet day, I found that I would land only a few blocks from the park and the crowd had gathered long before I got there. Sure enough, I landed near the top of the gently pitched roof, but it was just steep enough to keep me from being able to hang on and I found myself slowly sliding toward the edge. The bartender was there and gave me the big horse laugh and said that I was a h—l of a parachute rider when I couldn't even miss a house. Just about then I slid over the edge and his beautiful green tights caught on a protruding shingle nail and were torn from the sitting contact area right up to the neck. This was not so funny to him and it was my turn to laugh, though I did have to drape the parachute over my back to kind of cover up on the way back to the park. As this balloon became seasoned or sooted up so that it retained the hot air better, it went higher and higher but still with that original erratic flight that it had on its first trip.

A postcard view of Chutes Park in Los Angeles, showing a toboggan flying into the air after coming down the chute and hitting the pond. The amusement park, which opened in 1887, closed in 1914.

I made about sixty rides there at Chutes Park that season making several hazardous landings, once on the telephone wires between two telephone poles and it took the fire department to get me down; once in the water in Westlake Park, and several times fifteen or twenty miles out in the country. In the evenings I did another act called "the Human Meteor." It consisted of riding a heavily weighted bicycle down the chutes and taking a header into the water. The gimmick consisted of an asbestos pad on my back which was soaked with a pint of gasoline and ignited just as the ride started. It made a flame about twenty feet long and a big roar and was a real thriller. For me it was much more dangerous than a balloon ride, as there was always danger of the bike slipping on the wet chutes and spilling me off and my getting burned, though there were always a couple of men posted along the route with fire extinguishers.

I enjoyed my season at the park—the excitement, crowds and the balloon rides, especially as I had no worries about getting the bag back to the park, and the inflating and a thousand other details. All I had to do was grab the trapeze and soar aloft and then descend via that amazing parachute. It was so large in proportion to my weight that several times it would ride on an updraft and actually ascend hundreds of feet higher than the balloon had taken us.

There were several ostriches in the park zoo which the management had purchased from the Cawston Ostrich Farm at Pasadena. The zoo-keeper, Fred Brown, told me that one of them, a large male called Tom, was broken for riding and asked me if I wanted a ride. So, I climbed aboard from a platform and Tom obligingly raised his wings until I was seated and then clamped them down over my legs which gave me a peculiar feeling of helplessness. He started off all right, but I guess he had not been ridden for a long time because his steering was bad and he wouldn't turn when I wanted him to. Finally I got him into high gear and he took off like he was jet propelled, went right out the front gate and down Main street at miles per hour, the fastest ride I had ever had up to that time. After a while he tired and I got him headed back for the park when all of a sudden he saw a child with an orange. He walked right over and took the orange and swallowed it whole. A little farther along he took a fancy to the ornaments on a woman's hat and before I could do anything, snatched it right off her head along with a handful of hair. Then a bulldog came barking at us and Tom lifted him ten feet in the air with a lightning like front kick. We finally got back to the park and he began helping himself at the concession, drank all of the lemonade at one stand, grabbed popcorn at another and was filling up on hot dogs when Fred Brown came up behind him and entangled his legs with a bolo which he threw. (This bolo consisted of a piece of small rope about ten feet long with a wooden ball attached to each end.) We had left a trail of destruction behind us and the park's lawyer had to settle a few damage cases. My legs were numb for several days from the pressure put on them by the ostrich's wings.

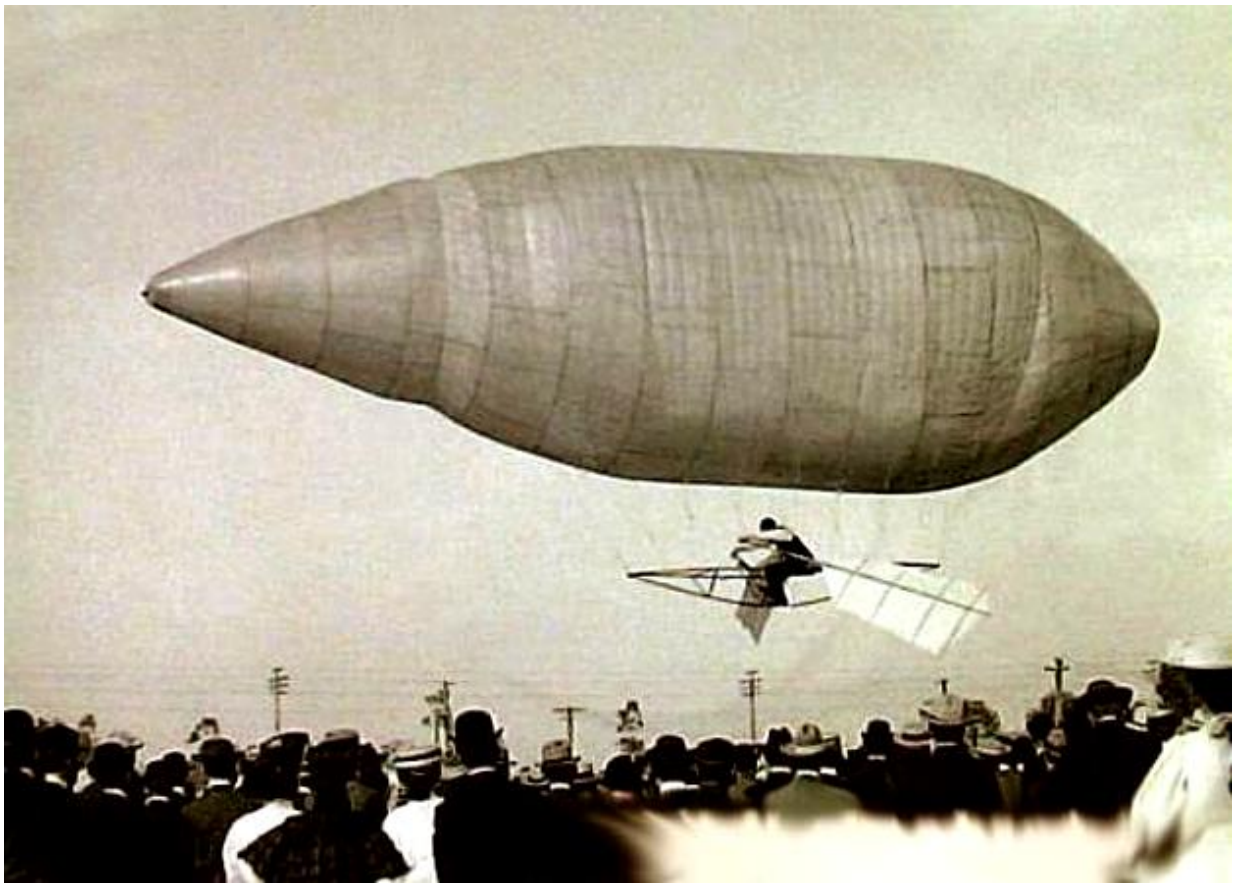
After the park season we got a few balloon jobs at several small towns and real estate developments, one at Venice on the day of the grand opening; also at Playa

del Rey and Santa Monica. These were all beach towns and there was always the danger of alighting in Santa Monica Bay where there was generally a strong undertow and it was a really dangerous piece of water for a parachutist to fall into. Sometimes an offshore wind would blow the balloon far out over the water and then, at a higher altitude, another current of air from off the ocean would blow it back over the land again and it was always a gamble as to whether or not we would land in the water or on land. One day at Santa Monica I was making a descent into the residential area had a pretty good breeze was blowing. Suddenly I found myself landing on the top of a huge pepper tree at the edge of a backyard that had a small greenhouse in the center of it. A lady came running out of the house and said, "Don't you dare come down on my greenhouse!" But just then the wind caught the chute and slid me right off the top of the three and I landed ankle deep in the flower beds inside the greenhouse and broke many panes of glass in doing so. The lady was very indignant and said, "I told you not to light on it!" She would not let us remove the chute until we had paid her her rather high estimate of the damages.

Always looking for new thrills both for myself and the spectators, I hit upon the bright idea—and maybe it was not so bright—of making an ascension hanging by my teeth. I had seen performers in circuses hanging by their teeth and it did not look too hard. I had a mouth-piece made of leather and started in practicing at the gym which I still attended, soon learned that it was not as easy as it looked and had to set about developing the neck muscles, finally felt that I was ready. I attached the mouth-piece to the trapeze with a swivel in between to allow me to spin, this adding to the attractiveness of the act. This swivel pretty near proved my undoing as I got so dizzy that I was almost unable to pull myself back up on the bar when it was time to cut loose. My neck and jaws were so stiff and sore that I had difficulty eating and could not turn my head at all. The next ride I left the swivel off and it was not quite so bad. The act was a real thriller and got me a lot of headlines and good publicity. However, it wasn't much fun for me and, after a few more rides, I gave it up with a view of living longer.

A man came to Los Angeles by the name of Baldwin,[7] obtained a contract with The Chutes to exhibit and make flights with a small dirigible balloon that was to be rowed with a pair of oars like a boat. I was much interested in this machine, which consisted of a silk gas–bag about thirty-eight feet long and fifteen feet in diameter, with a light bamboo framework suspended beneath and a pair of bamboo oars with silk blades on the ends. The bag was full and blunt at the front end and tapered off to a point at the read. This point was really the neck of the bag and was the inlet for the hydrogen gas which was to lift it. After inflation the neck or end was folded over and held with a large rubber band. In case of over-expansion, which might occur in a hot sun, the band was suppose to fly off and release some of the gas, thus acting as a safety valve.

[7] Thomas Scott Baldwin, a pioneer balloonist said to be the first American to parachute from a balloon. Baldwin, born in Missouri in 1854, was a former railroad brakeman and circus acrobat who added a motorcycle engine to a hydrogen-filled balloon to create a dirigible that he named "California Arrow." The Arrow made the first controlled circular flight in the United States on Aug. 3, 1904. Baldwin built a larger dirigible which he sold to the U.S. Army Signal Corps for $10,000. He has been called "Father of the American Dirigible." Baldwin began designing and flying aircraft, and on Sept. 10, 1910 he made the first airplane flight across the Mississippi River, watched by a huge crowd. Baldwin continued improving his airplane and dirigible designs, developing the "Baldwin Red Devil" series of airplanes made with steel tubing (aircraft had been made mostly of wood up to that point) which could reach a speed of up to 60 miles per hour. During World War I, Baldwin had the rank of captain (and, later, major) in the U.S. Army Signal Corps, and was made Chief of Army Balloon Inspection and Production. Thomas Scott Baldwin died in 1929; he is buried at Arlington National Cemetery.



L. G. Mecklem rowing the Baldwin airship through the sky at Chutes Park in Los Angeles in 1905.

Baldwin was an old balloonist and was a large man. He had overestimated the lifting capacity of the bag and it would not lift him, so I was offered the job of flying it. It would lift me and about ten pounds of sand ballast carried in a canvas bag tied to the frame near the seat. The theory was to balance the balloon or gas-bag with the addition or removal of sand until it would carry me and neither rise nor fall. The take-off day arrived and I climbed into the flimsy framework and attempted to manipulate it. The sun got hotter and the hydrogen expanded and it started slowly up and nothing I could do with the oars would stop it. It went up higher and higher and the safety valve did not work. I tried to row it back down after it stopped going up, but one of the oars broke and there I was stranded a couple of thousand feet in the air. The machine drifted slowly inland across the

Puente Hills and, when the sun went down and the gas contracted, we landed gently in an orange grove at Pomona. The next day we rigged up a wire between two posts about three hundred feet apart and attached the balloon to the wire by means of a light line and a ring that slid backward or forward along the wire. I then practiced rowing for two solid weeks before attempting another free flight. On a real calm day we could put on a pretty good show, ascending a few hundred feet, throwing my hat or handkerchief overboard and paddling down and retrieving it; or rowing the nose of the bag right at some pretty girl seated in the grandstand and then, when she dodged, back away quickly again. Sometimes we would bomb the audience with bags of peanuts or popcorn. If there was any breeze at all the thing was unmanageable and I now carried a reel of light line with a weight on the end of the line so that if it got out of control, I could drop a line to the ground and get assistance in landing.

One night after all the customers had left the park and there was no one there except the caretaker or watchman, the gas bag exploded with a roar. We never learned what set it off.

At the close of the racing season in the fall of 1906, I decided to do something that I had been wanting to do for a number of years and that was to build and fly a dirigible of my own design; so I cast about for a place to build it and a remunerative contract for exhibiting and flying it. I rented a hall in South Seattle from Mr. Fred Newell, a mill owner for whom I had once time worked for as a chauffeur, in which to construct the machine. I made a contract with Mr. A. Loof [Looff], owner and operator of Luna Park at Duwamish Head, West Seattle, for exhibitions the following season. My brother Ray,[8] who at the time was working as storekeeper on a ship operating between Seattle and the Orient, was commissioned to purchase 360 yards of Japanese silk, and a Mr. Frank Jacobs, who operated a trading schooner to the Society Islands, promised to bring me some pure para gum from the island of Morea. At that time this was the finest gum obtainable. It was to

[8] Raymond Smith Mecklem, who was a purser on steamships and cruise liners during a long career at sea. Ray was a U.S. Navy lieutenant commander during World War II, serving as messing officer on the troop transport ocean liner U.S.S. West Point.

be used, cut with naptha, as a coating or covering of the silk gas-bag to close the pores in the silk and make it tight enough to hold the hydrogen gas with which it was to be inflated.

In due time the materials arrived and, with the help of two seamstresses and their sewing machines, the huge silken bag began slowly to take shape. I had expected to make the bag sixty feet long but for some reason or other when it was completed, it was only fifty eight feet in length, even though it was built exactly in proportion to the paper scale model that it had taken me many hours to design and build. After several months and hundreds of spools of thread and hundreds of feet of seams the bag was completed. A relief valve of my own design and an inflation neck were attached and the first layer of dope applied and allowed to dry. After several layers of dope, the bag was inflated with air by means of a blacksmith's forge blower and then, as the silk was somewhat transparent, the places where not enough of the dope or para gum had been applied could be seen and more put on. This applying or painting on the dope was a very tedious and somewhat dangerous job as the gum and naptha had to be heated and, although this was done in a double boiler, there was always danger of the fumes becoming ignited from a spark from the wood stove or from a spark of static electricity from friction of almost anything against the silk. After the bag or envelope had been treated with seven coats of the dope, it was ready to have the netting fitted. The netting completely covered the bag and was used to attach the framework that carried the motor and operator. The framework was of an entirely original design and was made of spruce. It was triangular in shape, with a car in the center for the motor and operator. All other frames up to this time had the motor at the forward end and the operator straddled the frame at the rear end. Although thirty-six feet long it weighed only thirty-eight pounds. I built four or five frames before getting one strong enough to carry the engine and yet light enough to be lifted by the gas bag. In testing them I would suspend them from the ceiling by the same number if cords that would support them when attached to the bag; then I would climb aboard and start the motor and in a few minutes the vibration would show up the weak places.

I was trying to make the complete outfit so that it could be packed into small packing cases for easy transportation, as I intended to go on a barnstorming tour if

the machine was a success. The frame telescoped into one package about eight feet long, and the little car or box carrying the motor and clutch was about two by three feet. The whole thing was braced by 200-pound-test piano wire and one-sixteenth-inch turn buckles.

The motor was purchased from the Curtis Manufacturing Company and was an air-cooled V-shaped two-cylinder with a large diameter lightweight fly wheel. The bore and stroke was 3 1/2 x 3-5/8 and it weighed 51 pounds. All the bearings were roller bearings and it turned up about 1400. The propeller was another innovation, being 4 1/2 feet in diameter and could be used either as a broad two-blade or a narrow four-blade. There was a friction cone clutch built for me by Mr. Joe Anderson (Seattle Automobile Company mechanic) between the engine and propeller, something that no other dirigible outside of a Zeppelin had used up to this time. The bag, netting, and empty sand bags were packed into a box about 28 inches square and weighed a little over two hundred pounds and the frame and car and motor weighed, crated, a couple of hundred more.

Finally summer came and the whole outfit was moved to Luna Park where a canvas hangar seventy feet long, thirty feet wide and thirty feet high, was provided. The gas plant was set up and preparations made for the first inflation. The gas or hydrogen generating plant consisted of two four-hundred gallon wine casks which were lined with carbon, one fifty-gallon ice barrel for cooling the hot gas from the generating casks, and one twenty-five-gallon barrel full of unslacked lime to remove or absorb any excess acid or impurities from the hydrogen gas which, if allowed to enter the silk gas bag, would soon eat it full of tiny pin holes.

After the outfit was all set up and ready, I ordered two 1600 pound drums of sulfuric acid from The Stuart & Holmes Drug Company in Seattle and it was sent over to Luna Park by means of a horse-drawn dray belonging to the Eyres Transfer Company, and which went to West Seattle on the ferry and thence to Luna Park, an amusement park built on piling out over the water, which had the very usual collection of concessions and rides and shows. When the dray arrived with the drums of acid, the driver and his swamper did not bother to put up a plank to roll them own onto the deck, but adopted the easier method of simply rolling them off

the back end of the dray and allowing them to drop. Although it was only about eighteen inches, they happened to land on the planks midway between two stringers and their great weight (the drums were lead-lines) broke the planks and deposited them both in the mud of the tide flats beneath. It took four days and over a hundred dollars to get them back up again and involved a messy job with chain blocks and a couple of hundred railroad ties that I borrowed from The Northern Pacific. This and several other unforseen expenses used up all of my capital, so I went to Joe Anderson, the mechanic, and asked him to lend me four or five hundred dollars. He pulled open a drawer in his workbench and took out twenty twenty-dollar gold pieces and said, "Here, if this ain't enough come back." There was no note, no security, no nothing.

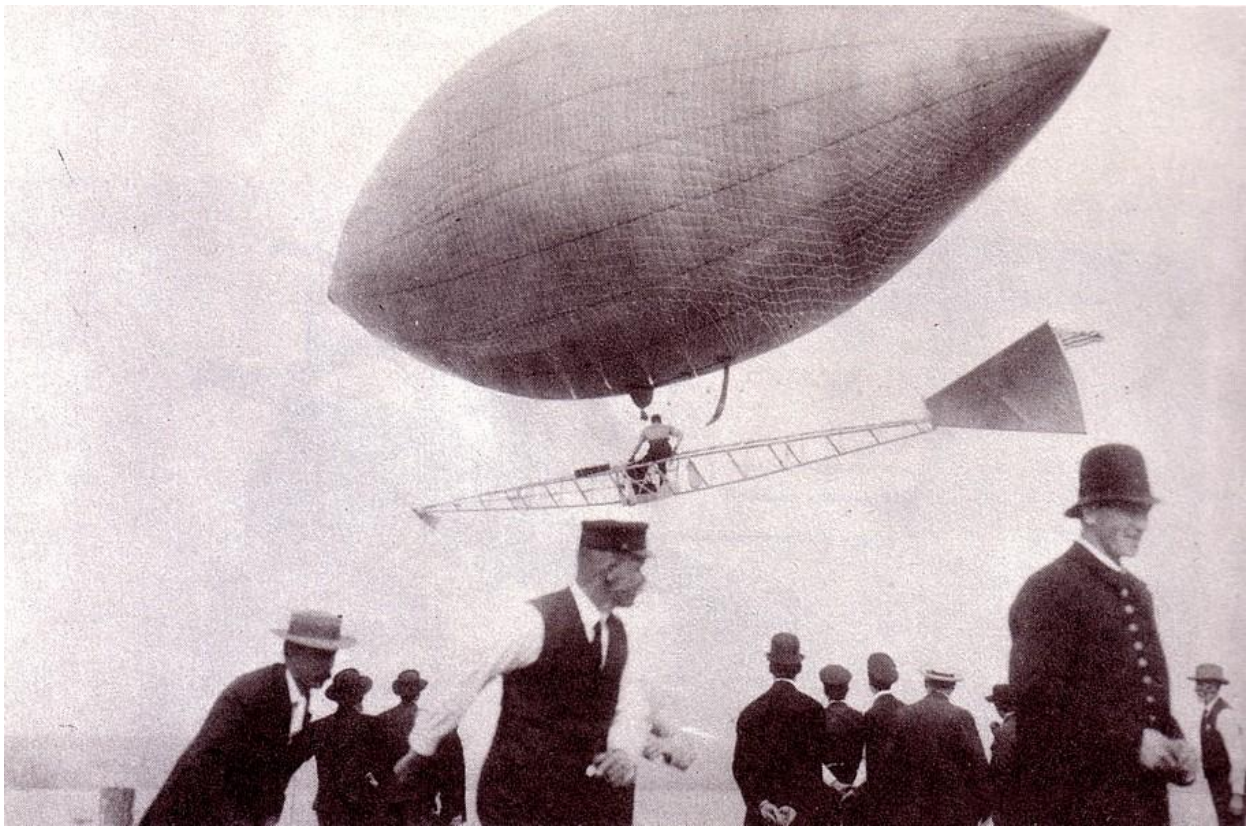
I had estimated that to generate 7500 cubic feet of hydrogen would require about 2000 pounds of sulphuric acid, 2500 pounds of clean castiron shavings, 300 pounds of ice and a barre of lime and would require from forty-eight to sixty hours. I had a young fellow by the name of Uker working for me. We got the stuff all assembled and put in a charge, and then the fun began, Uker went back to Seattle on the last ferry and I had a cot in one end of the hangar, I was awakened by a terrific thumping noise about midnight, and it came from the generators which were synchronizing or tramping. First one would make a big bubble of gas and a few seconds later the other would do the same. They were in perfect rhythm and going so strong that they were fairly dancing up and down. There was a wooden safety plug in the top of each one that was supposed to blow out in the case of too much pressure. I was afraid the casks were going to burst so I got a hammer and knocked the plugs out and was immediately covered with hot acid which shot high into the air. I ran for the end of the dock and drove into the bay. Luckily the tide was in. The salt water was not at all soothing to the burns that I had received on the head and shoulders. I swam around in the dark until I found a ladder, climbed up onto the dock where several of the performers and ride operators had been attracted by the noise. Someone smeared me over with vaseline. I continued generating gas but used only one generator. After a few days the bag was filled and we tested it for lift and found that the lift was ample to lift me and about twenty pounds of ballast in the form of sand in a canvas bag. A trial trip was advertised for

June 27th. A large crowd was there when we took the trim little dirigible from the hangar.

Announcement in the Seattle Star newspaper for 27 June 1908 about L. G. Mecklem's flight attempt that day (and other Luna Park attractions).

This was the first airship ever seen north of San Francisco and was different from all others in this way; It was sharp at both ends, or a true spindle in shape and the idea was that it would enter the air easier and would have little drag behind it, which should make for more speed and easier operation and maneuverability.

After balancing the ship so that it would neither rise nor sink by the removal of sand ballast, and making a few minor adjustments, I climbed into the little car, started the engine and told the men that were holding it to “LET HER GO!” They did, and the ship took off beautifully. It responded to the rudder and circled the park several times and then I headed in the direction of Seattle.



L. Guy Mecklem makes the first powered flight over Seattle,
ascending from Luna Park, 27 June 1908

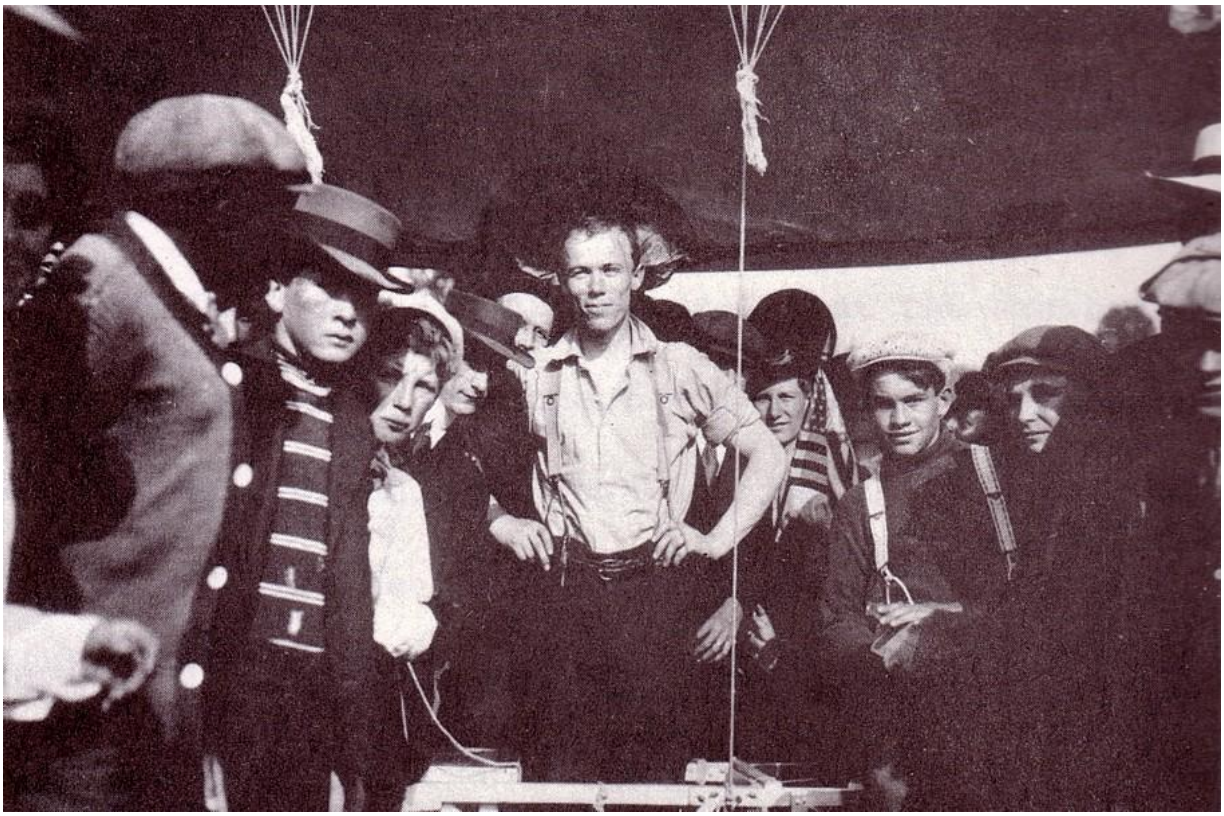
By this time it had gone up to about two thousand feet, according to the aneroid barometer in the car, and began to experience a little carburetor trouble, probably due to the difference in barometric pressure at the higher level. While trying to adjust the carburetor, the hot sun was getting in its licks and was heating up the gas bag, causing the hydrogen to expand and, before I could valve out some and

relieve it, the bag burst open along the seam in the bottom and right over and only a few feet above the motor, which was shooting out flames from the exhaust. I grabbed both sides of the tear in my hands to keep it from tearing farther and at the same time pushed the switch off with my foot and stopped the motor. Why the gas had not ignited at this time I will never know as I could feel it on my head and body. The only explanation possible is that it must have turned upward within inches of the exhaust and thus missed igniting. I clibed up on the framework and was very busy for a few minutes jabbing holes through the silk with my jackknife and tying the rent together with cords cut from the rigging, I hit the water pretty well over towards QueenAnne Hill. The bag still contained enough gas to keep the frame on top of the water, and I only got my feet wet though the frame had hit hard enough to pull some of the bolts right through the wood and required quite a bit of fixing up. A tugboat that I had hired to stand by, just in case, picked up me and the ship and took us back to Luna Park.

I hired a couple of girls, one of whom became my wife,[9] to sew up the tear in the gas bag. This, of course, was a hand-sewing job and one of the girls got sick from the gas. However, it was finally finished and Uker and I patched up the car and framework and made ready for a flight to be made on the Fourth of July which was being advertised as the first race ever to be run between an airship and an automobile. The automobile was to be driven by H.P. Grant, the pioneer automobile dealer of Seattle, and Dr. F. A. Bryant as passenger.

The race was to be from Luna Park to The Meadows, a race track about eight or ten miles distant. We got off to a good start. The carburetor functioned perfectly and I kept the ship at a low level, about five hundred feet up. When crossing the valley south of Seattle, the airship at one time was directly above the automobile, so I shut off the engine and talked with them for awhile, then started again and, by taking a few shortcuts that the auto could not take, easily beat them to the race track, where we landed and caused a near riot both among the race horses and the spectators.

[9] Louisa Norstrom, daughter of John E. Norstrom and Johanna Norling, natives of Sweden. Louisa, born in 1883, died in 1963. L. G. remarried in 1965; his second wife was Ivy Stratton, born about 1899 in Aldingbourne, England.



L. G. Mecklem triumphant after winning his July 4, 1908 race
in his airship against an automobile in Seattle.

That night we tied the ship to the top of a launch and started down the river for the bay and thence back to the amusement park. This was one of the most dangerous trips I ever made. It was Fourth of July night and many places along the river, skyrockets narrowly missed the big bag full of hydrogen. Once a ball from a Roman candle made a direct hit but to our great relief bounced harmlessly off. The drawbridge tender had gone home for the night, but a nurse from a hospital up on the hill saw us and rushed down and opened the bridge just in time.

After this, whenever the weather was favorable, flights became just routine. Many visitors who visited the park on days when there was no flight wanted to see the airship, so we charged ten cents admission. One day a man about thirty-five years old came to see me. He proved to be one of the most remarkable characters that I ever knew. He said that his name was Maloney and that he had just been released from the penitentiary at Walla Walla. He was about five feet, eight inches tall,

weighed one hundred eighty pounds and had an 18 1/2 inch neck and a remarkable set of perfect teeth. He wanted a job as a spieler for our airship exhibit and said that, if he did not get more people into our hangar in the next week than we had had in the two previous weeks, we need pay him nothing. I told him, "Mr., you've got yourself a job." He said, "When do I go to work?" I said, "Right now." He then turned away from me and walked over to the ice cream stand about one hundred feet away, and I thought, "that's funny; guess he was just kidding me."

At the ice cream stand he ordered an ice cream soda which in those days was served in a tall thin glass in a metal holder with a handle on it, and with a long slender spoon to eat it with. Straws were not yet in use. He ate the ice cream soda then chewed up the long spoon into a ball of metal, which he passed to someone in the crowd that begun to gather, then proceeded to chew up and eat the glass and finished by chewing the metal holder into a worthless hunk of metal. By this time he had a large crowd around him and he invited them to come over to the airship hangar where he put on the best spiel that I had ever heard and told them things about that machine that I had never known before, although I had built it. The result was that nearly the whole crowd bought tickets. He then secured a large packing case which he used as a platform on which he gave a wide variety of exhibitions that attracted the crowds away from the other shows and concessions. He chewed up lamp chimneys, electric light bulbs, tacks, nails, knife blades and various articles of hardware and swallowed them. He would invite doctors and dentists to come up and feel around in his mouth and make sure that it was not a trick.

For variety he sometimes would put on a strong-man act using a length of chain attached to a leather mouthpiece which he would place in his mouth and then would invite three or four men to get hold of the chain. By using his great strength and also by catching them off-balance, he would drag them around the planks. He would also put a chain harness around a fifty-gallon barrel full of water and standing on two chairs and straddling the barrel would lift it with his teeth and swing it back and forth, finally letting it go to the deck with a terrific crash. Sometimes he would invite two ladies to sit on a wooden park bench. He would grasp the back of the bench in his teeth, raise it up and parade it around with the ladies generally considerably embarrassed by their undignified position.

He never told me much about his prison life and I never pried into his past life, but he did say that he had worked in the prison jute mill four years and every day of that four years he had put in three hours of muscle building and physical culture

exercises in his cell.

Some of the concessionaires and the athletic show operators in the park tried to hire him away from me by offering more money than he was getting, but he turned them down – told them that I had given him a square deal and he would stick with me till the end of the season, which he did.

At the end of the season he bought himself a swell outfit of clothes and props and secured an engagement on Pantages Vaudeville Circuit. Several months later I read in a paper where he had entered a hospital in San Francisco and was opened up and more than two hundred articles removed from his stomach. A couple of years later an Associated Press dispatch read, "Maloney, the Human Ostrich, dies of stomach complaint."

There was a high diver at the park, a slender man of about fifty, who jumped from a high ladder (billed as being one hundred fifteen feet high and actually about sixty-five) into a canvas-lined tank about twelve feet square and six feet deep. This tank sprang a leak one night and he landed in only four and a half feet of water instead of six and was badly injured. No one realized that he had been hurt until the next night when he did not show up for his act. He lived alone in a little tent on the beach near the park, and when we went there we found him unable to move; he was much worked about his act and wanted to know if any of us would carry on for him. I with my usual penchant for rushing into things, volunteered. When I climbed that flimsy swaying ladder the next night and looked down at that small shallow tank which looked no larger than a handkerchief in the dim light far below, I thought, Mecklem your big mouth sure got you into something this time. I was really scared. Aireal had told me that if the wind was blowing I should aim at the windward edge of the tank, I was to enter the water feet first. I had made jumps like this in swimming pools, but never from a height greater than fifteen or twenty feet. This was different and, when an extra puff of wind came and the ladder swayed, I almost decided to climb back down the ladder. However, finally, I did manage to get up enough nerve and jumped, aiming for the edge of the tank and luckily landing in the center. I struck the bottom hard, first with my feet and then my posterior, and was very badly jarred. Someone pulled me out of the tank and told me that I had made a fine dive, but I knew better, The next day I had the ladder moved to the edge of the dock so that I could jump into the bay. I guess diving into the bay looked too easy and no one seemed to care much about seeing that. The crowds are always biggest where there is a good chance of someone getting killed or at least badly hurt. I made only a couple of jumps into the bay and

decided to live longer, giving up diving and sticking to riding balloons or dirigibles or something less dangerous. Aireal died in his little tent a short time later of a broken pelvis and internal injuries. When his body was removed, they found $17,000 in currency and gold in his pillow which he had been saving toward buying a farm and retiring. There was a note also that read, "If anything happens to me, the money is to go to the Catholic Church," which it did. The Amusement Park was closed for a day and all of the employes and actors attended the funeral.

It was getting along close to the close of the summer season and I was feeling the rheumatism again, probably brought on by the dives into cold water and riding the airship clad in only the thinnest of clothing, so when some of the ride operators and show people said they were going to pay the Southern fairs through the winter, I decided that was for me too. Answering an ad in Billboard Magazine, we got contracts with the Texas State Fair at Dallas. I liked my carnival friends. They were fine people, very friendly and loyal. I especially enjoyed the little parties and suppers we would sometimes have after the park had closed at midnight. The fat lady who really did weigh four hundred pounds would eat almost nothing at all, while the living skeleton ate like a horse. Maloney would do lots of marvelous card tricks; and Dirty Dora (advertised as "Dirty Dora, she eats mud and she is the dirtiest girl on earth") and who was really a beautiful, talented young lady, would sometimes play the electric organ and we would have a dance right out in the open air; Mr. Loof [Looff] the German owner of the place would come and join us.[10] The bearded lady would sometimes make a wonderful mushroom omelet, and the engineer of the merry-go-round, which was run by a converted fire engine, could play the guitar and sing cowboy songs that would have received top billing on any radio program today.

[10] Charles I. D. Looff (1852-1918) was a master carver, born in the Duchy of Holstein in present-day Germany (at the time of Looff's birth it was part of the Kingdom of Denmark). Looff immigrated to the United States in 1870, first working as a carver at a furniture factory, then beginning to carve carousel animals in his spare time. He built the Coney Island's first carousel in 1876. After building numerous carousels for East Coast amusement parks, Looff and his family (his children went into the business with him) moved west to Long Beach, California, where Looff built a factory and bought property at the Pike amusement park, where he built an elaborate carousel and other attractions. With his son Arthur, Charles Looff built a carnival onto the municipal pier at Santa Monica, part of which remains today and is a National Historic Landmark. Though the Long Beach Pike is gone, there is still a "Looff's Lite-A-Line" Fascination-style "casino game of skill" at 2500 Long Beach Blvd. in Long Beach. Though it's no longer located on the site of the old Pike, the new Looff's does feature a small, free museum about the Pike.

"Dirty Dora" attraction at a carnival in Anaheim, California in 1911.

As we had several weeks before opening in Texas, I decided to pick up a little extra cash by making a flight in Butte at some mining celebration they were having. Tehy had agreed to pay me $800 for one thirty-minute flight, So Uker I packed up the ship, told our friends we would see them in Texas, and set out for Butte, where we inflated the ship and then were unable to fly on account of adverse weather conditions, so we deflated it and packed up again and entrained for Dallas, with a net loss of $500 for inflating materials, transportation and hotel bills. We arrived in Texas and the weather was ideal, got located and on inflating the gas bag found it leaked badly. It seemed to be full of tiny pin holes. I decided they had been made by something in the fumes from the smelters in Butte, so had to deflate again and hire a hall and put on two coats of hot dope.

I made some good flights here and several not so good--too much wind and I could not return to the fair grounds under our own power, so would have to be ignominiously towed home after dark by a blindfolded horse and if the wind was blowing it would take a team. Found some of our carnival friends again and moved into the same motel with them. Autograph hunting was a popular fad among the young people at that time and I was continually beseiged. They would bother me all day at the fair grounds and then come to the hotel lobby and dining room in the

evenings. I was known as Captain Mecklem at that time. The "Captain" being one of Maloney's brain children. Uker would sign lots of the autographs whenever he could make them think that he was me. One evening a gushy young thing came to my table where several of us were eating and wanted me to sign her book, and I asked her, "Just why do you want my name in your book?" She replied, "My father says that you won't be riding that rubber cow around much longer and it's liable to blow up any day, and when it does, then I will have the autograph of a dead man." For some reason this stuck in my mind and bothered me more than anything along that line that I had ever heard before.

I got quite a kick out of cruising around low over the terrain around Dallas and scaring the cattle, which would run in all directions and send up great clouds of dust, until one day an irate farmer sued me and the Fair management for stampeding his cattle. The management settled it out of court for both of us and I stayed away from the cattle after that.

Each day we would have to add some gas to the bag, so on cross examination from a ladder Uker found three bullet holes in it. Patching the bullet holes proved to be quite a job as the bag had to be rolled over on its side, which necessitated disconnecting the frame from the netting. We found it hard to make the patches stick with the pressure of gas on the inside tending to push the patches off before they would form a union with the silk bag. With three holes going into the bag, of course there had to be three holes where the bullets came out, making six patches altogether. During the patching process the hydrogen inside the envelope got badly diluted with air, thereby losing some of its lifting power, so that on my next attempted ride I could carry no ballast and upon striking a slightly cooler strata of air the ship slowly descended to the ground about six miles from the city. There was nothing else to do, so we valved out the gas, hired a team and wagon and hauled it back to the fair grounds. As the Fair would be over in a couple of days more, we packed up and went over to El Paso on the Mexican border for a one-week engagement.

During the week at El Paso, there was too much wind to fly on every day but one, and on this one day we picked up another bullet hole. Deciding that the hospitable Texans were just a bit too free with their guns, we again packed up and began looking around for another engagement.

We went across to Juarez one day to see an alleged bull fight. What we really saw was some poor old decrepit, blindfolded horses get gutted by some pain-maddened

small but long horned Mexican bulls. It made us both rather sick to our stomachs and Uker says, “If that is the Mexican national pastime to H--- with it; let’s get out of here!”

At Dallas there had been an airplane that had been brought there to make exhibition flights, but it only did ground loops and when the temperamental engine would run. (Most generally it refused.) The plane would not leave the ground. However, it was the first one that I had ever seen up close and I was much interested in it.

Learning that there was to be an air show at Los Angeles, advertised as the “First Air Meet Ever to be Held in the United States.” There were to be captive balloons, free balloons, dirigibles and airplanes. I decided to go there as a spectator.

The San Domingo Air Field was just a sandy piece of desert with a grandstand on one side and was located about where Compton is now. Upon arriving and making myself known to the management I was immediately signed up to give exhibitions and enter a race with the other two dirigibles which were twice the size of mine.

On my first attempted ride and before a very large crowd, the wind drove my ship into the top of a flagpole on the grandstand. The flagpole punctured the envelope, allowing all the gas to escape and leaving me hanging onto the framework and dangling some twenty feet above the grandstand. Some ladders were secured and I made an ignominious descent, much to the joy and ill-concealed satisfaction of the other aeronauts and pilots. Uker and I packed the debris and shipped it to Seattle.

I was deeply interested in the four airplanes that were exhibited, three of which would fly, The one that we had seen in Texas was here and, although it was the best looking plane on the field, it still refused to take off. Of the three other dirigibles, one had engine trouble, one had a porous bag and could not be inflated,while the other made some really beautiful flights. Of the planes, the most interesting was a Farman biplane, from France that looked a little like a huge box kite. It was of the pusher type and had a five-cylinder rotary two-cycle Gnome motor. It was quite unique in that the cylinders revolved around the crankshaft, which was stationary. The crankshaft was hollow and the carburetor was attached to the front end. The two propeller blades were attached directly to the revolving cylinders. It was lubricated with pure castor oil and would leave a trail of stinking white smoke several miles behind it. The pilot sat in a little seat just in front of the

landing edge of the lower wing. The rudder was operated by a rudder bar on which the pilot's feet rested. The elevator out in front was operated by one lever by the left hand and the flaps used for banking were operated by another lever by the right hand, and the throttle was beneath the seat. This may all seem very complicated but the plane was very easy to fly. This machine took off at about thirty-five miles per hour, had a top speed of about forty-five, would stay in the air at thirty and land at twenty-five, and I know of no present-day plane that can land that slowly. It was very stable and could be flown with both hands off the controls. The pilot was a little Frenchman by the name of Paulhan who was an ex-waiter. In order to become better acquainted and this learn more about his plane, I moved into the Rockwood Hotel where he was staying, and, by slipping the head waiter five bucks, got placed at the same table in the dining room. When the headwaiter introduced us, Paulhan said, "Oh yes, you are ze pilot what make like a bird and land on top ze flagpole. Ve-e-e-e-re, ve-e-e-e-re fonney, ve-e-e-e-re fonny – ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

Louis Paulhan takes off in his Farman III biplane at the
1910 International Air Meet at Dominguez Field.

Louis Paulhan (1883-1963), early French aviator, who won all prizes at the January 1910 Los Angeles International Air Meet, despite the presence of the Wright Brothers and their lawyers attempting to prevent him from flying. Paulhan reportedly gave 46-year-old William Randolph Hearst his first airplane ride during the meet, but disappointed a 28-year-old William Boeing when Paulhan left the meet before taking Boeing on a flight as he had agreed to. In April of 1910, a few months after the L.A. air meet, Paulhan won a £10,000 prize offered by the Daily Mail newspaper to the first person to fly from London to Manchester in less than 24 hours. Paulhan made it in 12, spending less than 5 of those hours in flight. Paulhan earned the croix de guerre during World War I, flying over both northern France and the Serbian front, and he's credited with the first-ever "medevac" for flying Milan Štefánik, Slovak scientist, aviator, and diplomat, to safety when Štefánik became seriously ill; in October of 1918, Štefánik became Czechoslovakia's first Minister of War.

Both Paulhan and his manager, a New Yorker by the name of Voight, were giving me the horse laugh and plenty until I told Paulhan, it wasn't nearly as funny as when that girl slapped his face yesterday morning in the lobby of the hotel.
He said, "She wanted one hundred dollars just for sleeping with me – pouf – she should pay me!" Then he stuck out his hand and said, "Meckie, you are all right. Let us be friends," After all, that is what I had been working for when I had moved into the Rockwood and paid the waiter five bucks to place me at Paulhan's table.

I practically became a member of Paulhan's staff, (without pay) and was allowed to help gas up and also give it its daily dose of castor oil. He seemed delighted to learn that I new a little about gasoline motors and never seemed to tire of explaining the Gnome motor and the controls of his ship. I wanted desperately to take a ride in it, but I knew that it would not carry double and it was too much to ask to be allowed to take it up alone. One evening after a late dinner in the Rockwood dining room and while the orchestra were getting their dinner, Paulhan walked over to the piano and started playing "The Merry Widow Waltz." I picked up the violin from the top of the piano and played with him. Then Mr. Voight came over and started in on the cello. We played several other pieces and, by that time, quite a crowd had gathered and one of the regular orchestra members took a plate from a table and placed it on the platform and dropped a quarter in it. (I think this may have been subtle sarcasm.) At any rate the crowd took the cue and there was soon quite a collection in the plate. Paulhan was delighted and said, "Now we shall have a party," and invited everyone present, including the waters, and he personally took the orders for the drink, showing us how he had done when he had worked as a waiter in Paris not long before.

I ordered a milkshake, Mr. Voight a glass of milk, and Paulhan drank a lemonade which he loudly proclaimed was an insult to his "What do you call it? –bellee?" But his contract with Voight allowed him to drink no liquor. We were the only ones who did not drink cocktails or champagne. One morning just two days before the close of the air meet, Paulhan did not show up at the breakfast table. His manager said that he was very sick, with a temperature of 105, and they were both much worried about being unable to make their flights at the air show. As the big Farman plane and Paulhan were really the whole show, it was quite serious.
At noon Paulhan was no better and Mr. Voight said they had been discussing the possibility of my being able to take the ship up. Paulhan had been against it but finally agreed, providing I did not go more than three feet off the ground the first time.

There was a big crowd that day, and they were disappointed when they learned that Paulhan was not going to fly. However, when Mr. Voight explained that they had been fortunate in securing the services of a famous Scotch auto racer and who could also fly and that he would make a flight only a few feet off the ground which was the most dangerous kind of flying, they responded with applause. We took the machine to the end of the field and I went over all of the controls, turnbuckles and wires – revved up the motor several times, motioned for the men who were holding the plane to let her go, and I started off on a course that paralled the grandstand. It was even easier than I expected and it really took off by itself. I found it easy to hold the plane close to the ground as the elevator way out in front was very effective. I went in front of the grandstand with the wheel barely off the ground, turned at the end of the field and came back the same way. The second flight was made at about two hundred feet elevation and returning I flew with both hands off the controls the same as Paulhan did. This flew on just as steady as a boxcar. Of course, this was not nearly the show that Paulhan put on but it pleased the crowd and the management was satisfied. That night when we returned to the hotel was the first and only time that I ever got kissed by a man. Paulhan was overjoyed and felt much better, but the doctor would not let him fly the next day, so I finished the engagement.

This excitable little Frenchman was a precision flyer if there ever was one. He could fly past the grandstand, throw out his handkerchief and on the return pass, pick it off the ground with a wire hook attached to the end of the lower wing. He could go up to four or five hundred feet, cut the ignition, then stall the plane, allowing it to start down tail-first. After gaining speed, he would elevate the tail and stall again and start forward, repeating the maneuvers until making a dead-stick landing in front of the crowd. At the close of the air meet at Los Angeles, Paulhan and Voight wanted me to return to New York with them and possibly go on to Paris. However, it did not appeal to me. One of the men who had a dirigible at Los Angeles and who had been able to make only a few flights was disgusted with it and offered it to me at a ridiculously low price, so I bought it. Uker and I took it to Santa Barbara to fulfill an engagement that the former owner had secured.

Santa Barbara, being surrounded by mountains and the prevailing winds at that time of year being from the ocean, was a bad place to try to operate a dirigible. We were able to make only one flight, and the ship proved to be very unmanageable and the motor, very temperamental. The only thing good about the whole thing was the hydrogen generator which was much better and had a much greater capacity

than mine. I lost money on this job, as it was on a no-fly-no-pay basis. We packed up and went to San Francisco. Being unable to secure a favorable contract there and being more or less afraid of the unwieldy ship, I decided to get rid of it.

I advertised it in the papers and sold it to a man that claimed he had operated a dirigible in the East. He took it to Fresno, California, inflated it and was just taking off when it exploded just a few feet above the heads of the crowd, killing him and burning many of the spectators, some of whom died later. We returned to Seattle, where I paid Joe Anderson $400 that I still owed him.

I patched up my old ship and sold it to a man who used it as a captive balloon on a rope, carrying huge advertising signs on its sides. He used coal gas to inflate it and had the mistaken idea that he could smoke cigars while inflating it. He struck a match to light his cigar one day and puff! No more airship. Fire had always been one thing that I had been afraid of when exhibiting the dirigible and, when we were allowing people to see it up close inside the hangar, we always insisted that they throw away their cigar or cigarette if they happened to be smoking, before allowing them to enter.

Back in Seattle again, I wangled a half interest in a Hamilton biplane with an anaemic motor with what little money I had left. Every flight we made in this machine ended in a crackup. I hopped across Lake Washington one day and landed in a Jap's strawberry patch on the hill back of Bellvue. After two days of patching with bamboo, green alder, hay wire and string, I was able to fly it back to South Seattle.

Brothers Austin Mecklem (an artist who lived in Woodstock, N.Y.) and L. G. Mecklem, probably in the 1940s. Austin and his wife Marianne Appel Mecklem traveled to Alaska as part of the Alaska Art Project of the W.P.A. in 1937, and painted a mural in the Wrangell, Alaska post office in 1943. Austin's painting are in a number of museums, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum. He died in 1951.

[The following is an additional, much shorter biographical essay by L. G., probably written earlier than the longer essay.]

PIONEER RACING DRIVER

by [Llewellyn Guy] Mecklem

The racing car threw up a cloud of dust as it skidded around the flat oval. The ear-splitting roar of the racer's twin engines subsided as the car slowly came to a halt. I got out of the machine and strode over to the timekeeper.

Fifty-one seconds for a mile run on a flat, dirt track was pretty good in 1906 and old cigar chewing Barney Oldfield couldn't have done much, if any, better. Maybe 70 1/2 miles per hour doesn't sound very fast in this modern jet age, but in 1906 when I was driving my wooden-frame, light-weight racer, it was a sensation, The little machine had neither clutch nor transmission and was powered by two 12 HP Franklin air-cooled engines.

In 1880 my father left Pennsylvania and settled in Washington Territory. My mother came from Iowa, arriving in Washington a year later. My dad was a schoolteacher in the country near what is now Pullman, Washington,

The Palouse Indians frightened my mother when one nearly named and painted young buck of a party of three rode his pony right into the small two-room cabin and made motions that they wanted something to eat. The Indians finally became intrigued with their reflections in Mother's bright new tin dipper and a small looking glass. Mother didn't mind losing her dipper and mirror but she didn't want to lost her scalp, so she refused to stay there in that lonely cabin any longer.

They moved to Colfax where Dad became principal of the school. I was born in 1882 and had more than the usual number of childhood escapades. During the depression of 1896, for economic reasons the family moved to Seattle. Carrying papers, mowing lawns and shining shoes were occupations I became acquainted with.

Dad bought a Jersey cow for $25. Her name was Lady and we staked her out in vacant lots and on parking strips. She contributed much to our welfare. Some days we would walk downtown from 23rd Avenue and go on the tide flats back of Yesler's Mill at the foot of Yesler Way, where we would dig clams, catch tomcod and crabs to help out with the eats at home. Dad made a trolling spoon from a tablespoon and sometimes the watchman at the mill would let us take his rowboat

and we would catch a salmon.

I finally quit school and went to work full time. One of my jobs was at the Leschi Park boathouse, where I learned to operate gasoline and naptha launches. Leschi Park was an amusement resort on Lake Washington, with summer band concerts, a zoo, and sometimes balloon ascensions.

One Sunday there was to be a balloon ascension and parachute drop. The aeronaut was badly burned while inflating the bag. A call was made for a volunteer to sub for the injured daredevil. I offered to go up, but the aeronaut said that I was too light. However, no one else wanted to venture with the birds, so I got the job. It would sound nice to say that my first flight was a great success, but it wasn't.

It was a flop. I was unable to cut loose the parachute and parachute, balloon and I ended up in Lake Washington with me underneath. The aeronaut had been badly burned and since it would be some time before he could again leave the good earth, he hired me to fulfill his contracts, which I did three times a week when the weather permitted and for which I received the magnificent sum of $2.50 a ride. The next year I constructed a balloon of my own and went on a barnstorming tour.

Slow moving vehicles soon lost their appeal. In 1904 I became the owner of the second motorcycle in Seattle. It had a tiny little motor and would make it up First Avenue if the wind was blowing the same direction. This mean of excitement was soon discarded and in 1906 I began driving my eight-cylinder racing car which weighed only 998 pounds, I joined the Northwest Track Association and raced in eighteen cities.

The Zeppelins were beginning to operate, so I decided to build a dirigible or airship, which was the first on the Pacific Coast. The first flights were made from Luna Park at the north end of West Seattle.

On the Fourth of July 1907 I had a race with H.P. Grant, Seattle's first automobile dealer. By cutting corners with the airship, I was able to best Grant to the Meadows, a horse-racing track which was located where Boeing Field is now. In

this flight, I pioneered the air over Boeing Field. After exhibiting the 58-foot dirigible in Washington, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Utah, I headed for Texas where I had a contract to appear at the Texas State Fair. The open ranges of Texas were the feeding grounds for great herds of cattle. The strange craft with its noisy 10 HP Curtiss motor was an awesome experience and caused many a steer to stampede in terror. Texas cattlemen didn't seem to care much for having their cattle frightened. Anyway that is how I interpreted the meaning of the potshots that were taken at me and the airship.

I decided that I was no longer wanted in Texas, so I deflated the gas bag and headed for Los Angeles where the first Air Meet to be held in the United States was to take place. The meet was held at San Dominquez where the city of Compton was later to be built. On my first flight there you might say that I walked back. However, it would be more accurate to say that I used a ladder to get down. The bag got caught by a breeze and draped around a flagpole on top of the grandstand, Obliging firemen used ladders to help me down from the flagpole. Damages to the airship were too extensive to repair before the meet was over.

At the airmeet I saw airplanes for the first time. There were two of them, one owned by a Frenchman by the name of Paulhan. It was particularly interesting because of its power plant. The plane, a Farman biplane, had a 59 HP Gnome engine the cylinders of which revolved around a stationary crankshaft. I spent most of my time helping Paulhan service and repair his plane. When Paulhan was taken to the hospital with pneumonia, his manager asked me to take up the ship. The low take-off and landing speed made the ship fairly easy to fly. It used castor oil for lubrication, and would leave a long trail of stinking, white smoke. The flights in the fragile old Farman opened the door to many other adventures.

Finally I had a plane of my own and went on to give exhibitions or barn storming in the Northwest and British Columbia, where my plane was seized for infringing on some alleged Canadian patents.

I tried some hi-diving with a carnival outfit and later took up deep seas diving with O.J. Benjamin, Seattle's first deep sea diver.

When I got married, it changed my ideas concerning making a living and staying alive. After trying my luck at dairy farming and then chickens, I finally turned to fruit growing. For twenty-eight years my wife and I grew an average of 6 1/2 tons of gooseberries per acre. We also had 1,000 Montmorency cherry trees and 1,876 Filbert trees.

In 1950 I practically went blind. However, sight was partially restored by a doctor in Bellingham.

In 1955 I wrote a story poking fun at our various government inspectors, such as fruit, chicken, nut and dairy, using language and spelling such as farmers were popularly known to use. The story was for a contest run by a farm paper published in Chicago. I won second prize, which was a trip to Hawaii. I like Hawaii and have been over there nine times.

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L. G. and Louisa Mecklem moved to Everson, Washington after L. G.'s flying career ended, and for 28 years they operated a berry farm there; there is still a Mecklem Road in Everson commemorating them. After Louisa's death, L. G. moved to Bellingham, Washington. In 1965, he married Ivy Stratton. Both L. G. and Ivy died in 1973; L. G. was 90 years old.

In the early 1970s, L. G. Mecklem was interviewed by historian Donald D. Ecklund. (It was around this time that L. G. wrote his autobiographical essays.) Ecklund's booklet "Washington's 'Wild Scotsman': The Early Aeronautical Adventures of L. Guy Mecklem, 1896-1910," was published in 1974. It focuses on L. G.'s flying career, and leaves out some of his other adventures, but it contains many photos and is highly recommended. Copies were available as recently as 1997 from the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, Goltz-Murray Archives Building, Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA 98225-9123.