

☞ We find in the San Antonio News, a call made by Mr. J. Brodbeck, of that place, upon the people of the United States to aid by Stock Subscription in the construction of an Air-Ship, constructed on new principles. As Texas inventions are novelties in the world of art and science, we hasten to lay the call before our readers and the world at large:

For more than twenty years I have labored to construct a machine which should enable man to use, like a bird, the atmospheric region as the medium of his travels. First, trying empirical experiments, without a guiding idea, I soon satisfied myself that the means heretofore used were hopeless. I left this barren field and took up the way which had been so successfully followed in modern times by natural science. I studied the flight of birds, examined into the mechanical laws, governing these wonderful structures, and observed the various peculiarities of the air, and so in the year 1863, I was at last able to construct a machine, which, requiring comparatively little power, imitates the flight of birds. Inasmuch as it makes use of the same peculiarities of the air, and moves with the same celerity in every direction, with the wind and against it, not resembling however in form a bird, but being constructed like a ship, which has caused me to call it "AIR-SHIP."

A small model constructed in that year proved by successful experiments the correctness of my principles; later experiments, with some improvements in the model, resulted still more favorably.

The blockade, and the state of the country during the war, prevented me from progressing in my invention and from opening a new era in intercommunication by a larger ship, arranged for practical purposes, but now I hold it to be my duty, after those impediments do no longer exist, to follow without hesitation the path shown me by Providence and the spirit of progress.

The construction of a large Air-Ship requires more means than I possess, but this surely should not be an insupportable difficulty. Should I not be justified to call upon the aid of my fellow-men who will be all, directly or indirectly, benefitted by the result of my invention!

I have therefore concluded to collect subscriptions, in order to build, under the protection of a U. S. caveat, a large air-ship, and then to take out a patent. These subscriptions I shall not ask as donations, but as shares, to be refunded together with a part of the proceeds of the sale of the patent right, or the sale of air-ships, as the case may be. I have put the price of one share at five dollars. Every shareholder will receive a certificate, securing to him a proportionate interest in the proceeds of the enterprise.

I will give a few ideas indicating generally the character of the air-ship, and what it will be able to accomplish.

The Air-Ship consists of three main parts?

1. The lower suspended portion, formed like a ship with very short prow to cut the air; it serves to hold the aeronaut, as also the power producing engine with all the steering apparatus. This portion is shut up all around to prevent the rapid motion from affecting the breathing of the man within. In this, as low as possible, lies the centre of gravity of the whole structure, so as to steady the motion. At the back end of the ship there is a propeller screw which will make it possible to navigate the water, in case that by any accident the aeronaut should have to descend, while he is above water. In this case the ship can be detached from the flying apparatus.

2. The upper portion, or flying apparatus, which makes use of the resistance of the air, consists of a system of wings, part'y moveable, partly immovable, presenting the appearance of horizontal sails, but having functions entirely different from the sails of vessels.

3. The portion producing the forward motion consists either of two screws, which can be revolved with equal or unequal motion, so as to serve the purpose of lateral steering, or of wings of a peculiar construction. The preference to be given to one or the other depends on the nature of the motive power. Another apparatus regulates the ascending motion.

The material is so selected as to combine the greatest strength with the least weight.

When the air-ship is in motion, the aeronaut has in each hand a crank, one to guide the ascending and descending motion, the other the lateral steering. Immediately before him is the compass, while a barometer with a scale made for the purpose, shows him the approximate height. Another apparatus, similar to the ball regulator of a steam engine, shows him the velocity, as well as the distance passed over.

It is self-evident that the speed of the air-ship depends upon the motive power and on the direction and force of the winds; according to my experiments and calculations it will be from 30 to 100 miles per hour.

*J. Brodbeck*

# Fredericksburg, Gem of the Hills

## SOMETHING ABOUT ITS EARLY STRUGGLES

(Editor's Note:—This is the first of several articles on Fredericksburg and Gillespie county written especially for The American-Statesman by George D. Barber. The next will be on Gillespie as a diversified county and will appear in these columns at an early date.)

BY GEORGE D. BARBER

**FREDERICKSBURG, Sept. 19.**—Other than close students of early Texas history, it is likely few people knew, until recent months, that the quaint little city of Fredericksburg is one of the oldest settlements in the Lone Star State. Semi-isolated in the heart of the picturesque Hill Country, 80 miles west of Austin, its citizens have been content to follow the quiet demeanor of their way and let the outside world pass by. But the metropolis of that wonderfully diversified county of Gillespie is awakening to its varied opportunities and is throwing wide its portals. Its records of interesting bits of Texas history are now open to the public.

The first settler arrived on the present site of Fredericksburg in May, 1846, having come from Germany by way of Galveston and New Braunfels. In a few months Fredericksburg, named in honor of Prince Frederick of Prussia, had a population estimated at 1000. They were brought to the new country in the west by a German emigration company, the officials of which entered into an agreement with each emigrant. Upon the payment of \$120 by each single man and \$240 by each married man, the company was to bring the emigrants to Texas, furnish free transportation from the place of landing to the colony, furnish a rude dwelling to be built on each emigrant's land, give each single man 160 acres and each married man 320 acres of land, and furnish a store where farming implements and rations could be drawn until a crop was made. But the company went broke and thousands of German men, women and children suffered the tortures of exposure, hunger, illness and death.

### Emigrants Had Hard Time.

Beginning life in a new country with only a town lot and ten acres of land, instead of the quarter and half section as promised by the emigration company, these hardy and determined people overcame difficulties that would have appalled many even in that day of brave frontiersmen. They were left in the heart of a hostile wilderness with a few crude tools and implements to provide shelter and produce crops. They were miles from the nearest settlement, and no means of transportation and communication. There was not a mile of railroad in the state and only a few dim wagon trails, these being widely separated. There was no place to which the German colonists could go for assistance, counsel and sympathy. An ideal climate and fertile soil were their greatest assets as offered by the new country.

### First Treaty With Indians.

When the Germans arrived in Fredericksburg, they were in the center of the Indians' favorite hunting ground. It is remarkable that they were not seriously molested, although the first treaty was not made until the early part of 1847. The Indians were not unaware of the paleface invasion, but upon learning the new settlers were Germans, they are reported to have given assurance of friendship. The how or why of this has not been explained, but it is a historical fact that few citizens of Fredericksburg and Gillespie county met death at the hands of marauding Indians.

The colonists followed the style of architecture common in the Fatherland and began the erection of stone buildings, the material for which was plentiful and nearby. Some of them were stone masons, and the type of structures they erected were so substantial that many of these earlier buildings are standing today. One of these, erected in 1857, is an excellent example of the versatility of the early settlers. The building is a masterful piece of work from the foundation to the top walls, each of the stones fitting perfectly. The walls are about 14 inches thick and show no signs of giving way to nature's destructive elements. Every piece of furniture was made and hand-carved by the owner. Native hackberry, black walnut and cherry were used in the two beds and wardrobe. Only a most painstaking expert could have constructed such a dwelling, and only a master artist and cabinet maker could have made such furniture. It is said the present owner has refused fabulous sums for these bits of antiques.

### Historic Hotel.

The old Nimitz Hotel, another of Fredericksburg's landmarks, stands today a monument to Nimitz family, which has owned and operated it continuously for 79 years. Undoubtedly one of the oldest hostleries in Texas, it has sheltered many famous people of the past, including General Robert E. Lee, at that time an under-officer engaged in keeping Mexico across the Rio Grande. Its super-structure is in the shape of the upper deck and bridge of a steamboat, the elder Nimitz having previously been a sea captain.

Gillespie county was created out of Bexar county by an act of the state legislature. It was organized by vote of the citizens and the first county officers elected in the summer of 1848. The first court house was erected seven years later and stands today on the corner of the present court house square. It has been used by officials to house the county government, a public school, the postoffice, and is used now jointly by the sheriff and county agricultural agent.

### First County Officials.

The office of county judge was known in the early days of Fredericksburg as chief justice, the first of whom was Wm. Keidel. The

first county judge elected after the office was changed to that name was Wm. Wahrmond, elected in 1876. Other first officers of the county, so far as the records disclose, were: Lewis Martin, sheriff; J. M. Hunter, county clerk; R. W. Cecil, tax assessor; Daniel Weiershausen, treasurer.

One outstanding point in the political affairs of Gillespie county is the utter disregard of religious faith and political affiliations. All the voters demand of a man is honesty and efficiency, and the excellent condition of county affairs from the first is evidence of the kind of service they have been getting from public officials.

What is believed to have been one of the first attempts made to fly on American soil was by W. Brodbeck, one of the original colonists. An educated man and of an inventive turn of mind, he designed and constructed an airship. He provided the necessary requisites—rudder, propeller, wings and body—but the absence of sustaining power made his efforts a failure. Long before the days of gasoline engines, he used strong springs for motive power. But when the springs unwound and his propeller stopped, the inventor and his machine crashed into a tree. Brodbeck's financial backers withdrew their support and he had to forego further attempts at flying.

### Got Railroad in 1913.

After many unsuccessful attempts had been made by Gillespie county citizens to interest capital in the building of a railroad from Fredericksburg Junction into the town of Fredericksburg, each of these attempts costing them considerable money, they finally succeeded in getting the present line completed

in November, 1913. It is only 24 miles in length, but traverses some of the most rugged and beautiful country in the state. A few miles south of Fredericksburg, it goes under a mountain through a tunnel 810 feet in length, the only railroad tunnel in Texas.

Although a majority of the 10,000 people who comprise Gillespie county's citizenship are either native Germans or of German descent, this county in the Hill Country furnished a total of 860 men in the recent world war. It is a matter of record that the first American officer killed overseas was Lieutenant Louis J. Jordan of Gillespie county. Its citizens also subscribed liberally to every issue of Liberty Bonds and War Savings Stamps.

The original citizens of Fredericksburg started life in the new colony in poverty, isolation and distress, but they left heritage of honesty, frugality and adaptability that has builded a clean, healthy and beautiful little city.

August 11, 1928

TEXAS FARMER MADE FIRST AIRPLANE FLIGHT

Gillespie County Pioneer Built and Actually Flew an Airplane Before the  
Wright Brothers Even Were Born  
Ruel McDaniel

Lady

Had it not been for an inopportune frown from fickle/Luck the name of a Texas farmer might have gone down in history as the first man to fly a motor-power aircraft, and thus possibly Texas would have had its own Lindbergh long before the present generation of flyers had seen the light of dawn. Except for the menacing frown, aviation would have been at least a quarter of its present status, and Texas probably would have long been the air capital of the world.

All of these things could have been, except for the fact that a Gillespie county farmer's first flight ended in disaster for the airplane and near-disaster for the inventor himself. Even though this Texas Pioneer farmer did not make the first successful heavier-than-air machine flight, he at least earned the distinction of being one of the first men in the world, if not the first, to be injured in the fall of a motorpowered aircraft.

DATE OF FLIGHT

This man's name was Jacob Brodbeck, and he owned a farm in the old South Grape Creek community, which is now the Luckenback community, about 15 miles from Fredericksburg. Mr. Brodbeck flew his airplane sometime during 1868, although the exact date of the flight disaster is not definitely known. Peter Kleck, now living in Fredericksburg, but in those days a neighbor of the inventor, says that the flight was made sometime during the fall of that year.

Just how near Mr. Brodbeck became being one of the world's foremost inventors may be seen by the fact that the Wright Brothers did not make their first flight until 1903, and they are credited with having made the first successful heavier-than-air craft flight. Thus Jacob Brodbeck was thirty-five years ahead of these pioneers. It is true that there had had been successful "flights" made prior to 1868 in gliders, balloons, and other craft which did not depend upon an engine for their power, but no motored plane had made a successful flight prior to 1903 when the Wrights rose from the ground and alighted safely again at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina

It was difficult indeed to secure any definite information regarding

Mr. Brodbeck's experiment. The reason for this scarcity of information is obvious in the explanation of Edwin Brodbeck, son of the inventor, who still lives in the same community where his father made his experiments.

"In those days," says Mr. Brodbeck, "naturally people thought anyone who believed that it was possible to fly was crazy. At first my father would talk to the neighbors about his invention: but he soon realized that to mention it to them would only mean that they sympathized with him for his foolish ideas so he finally got to where he would say nothing about it to anyone. He never would talk to us kids about the airplane. He seemingly did not want it to be known that he had experimented and failed. I suppose he thought we boys would think him crazy, too.

For that reason very few people even in Fredericksburg know of the venture. It was from Peter Kleck, now seventy years old and a curious-minded boy when Mr. Brodbeck was working on his airplane, that most of the information regarding the experiment was obtained.

#### OBTAINED FINANCIAL BACKING

"He made a model of the airplane," explained Mr. Kleck, "and with that he convinced a number of wealthy men in San Antonio that there was something in the idea, and they put up a part of the money to finance the building of the first real machine. Mr. Brodbeck sold his farm and put everything he got from it into the building of the first airship. My father bought the farm from him."

Mr. Kleck does not remember just what the model looked like; but William Brodbeck, grandson of the inventor, who teaches school in Gillespie county, says that his grandfather shot a large buzzard and used its wings as wings for the model. He used a spring as motive power, winding the spring in much the same manner as you wind a clock. The model would fly perfectly until the spring ran down.

The real machine, however, was constructed on a different scale. The same principle of flight was used, the wings being built in the shape of a fowl's and so constructed that they would "flap" like those of a bird.

"He built the airplane," continues Mr. Brodbeck, "and then crated it up, and with several of his backers from San Antonio, he took it to Washington, D.C. He wanted to give it a test in the presence of Government officials, so that if it worked he would have actual and authentic proof of its flight.

# 'First Airman' Honor Slated in Pilgrimage

Jacob Brodbeck, builder of the first motorized "airship," will be honored by the historical group of the American Association of University Women Saturday.

The group will conduct a pilgrimage to his home in Gillespie County to lay a wreath on his grave designating Brodbeck as the "Father of U.S. Aviation."

Dr. Dorothy Harrison, professor of German at Our Lady of the Lake College and author of a book on Brodbeck's accomplishments, entitled "1865—Wings Over Texas," describes the former San Antonio school teacher as the first aeronaut, and inventor and builder of the first aircraft.

Called an "airship" because of its boat-like shape and ability to land on water, the craft will be reconstructed by the Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce using the exact measurements and details of the original, located by Dr. Harrison during her research. The replica will be on display during HemisFair to call attention to Texas and Gillespie County as the home of U.S. aviation.

Tyrus Cox, president of the Historical Society of Fredericksburg, will be host to the visiting group during a visit to the home of Brodbeck and other historical sites in Gillespie County, to be

followed by a German lunch and tour of the LBJ Ranch. Entertainment during the luncheon will be furnished by German students from Our Lady of the Lake College.

Miss Emma Sowell, Chairman of the AAUW Historical Group, is in charge of arrangements for the tour. The public is invited to join the pilgrimage and those wishing to attend should contact Dr. Harrison at Our Lady of the Lake College, 434-7255.

NATIVE TEXAN

# Sculptor seeks to honor Hill Country pioneer of early aviation

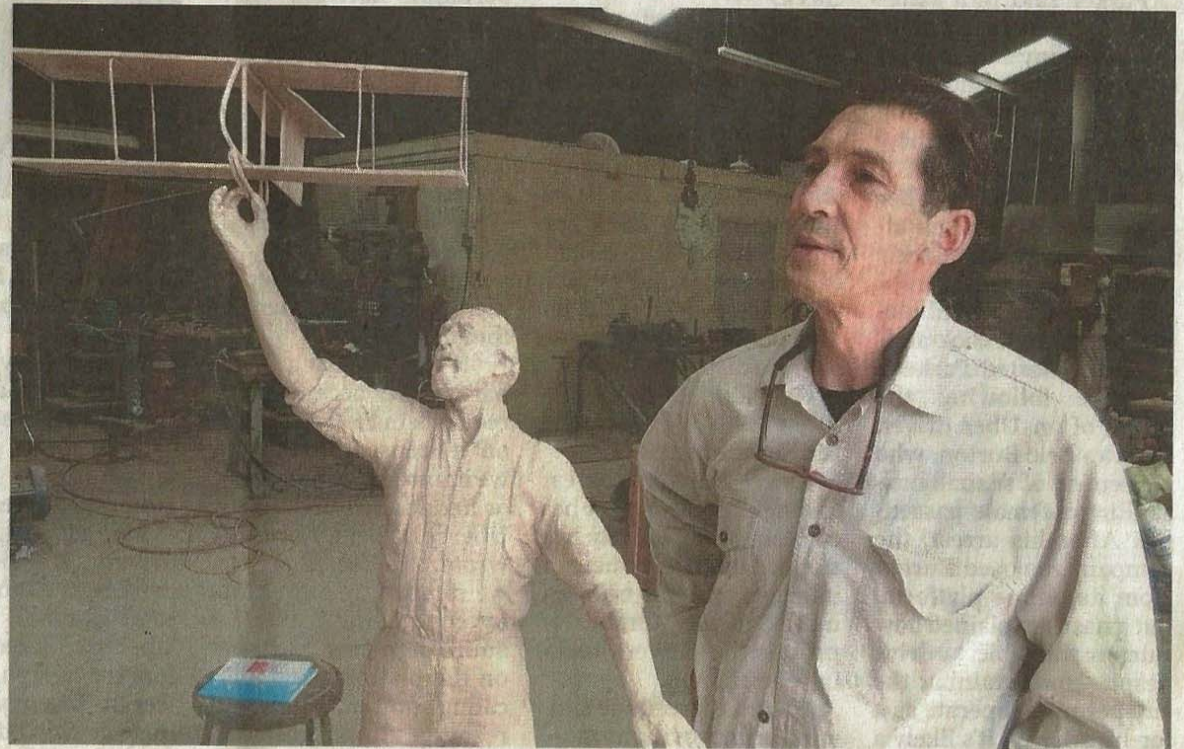
FREDERICKSBURG — So here's the question: Did a fellow from our state's quintessential German town get high in nearby Luckenbach long before Willie and Waylon? Or, to ask it another way, did he get a manned flying machine off the ground decades before the Wright brothers soared over the sands of Kitty Hawk?

Houston sculptor Eric Kaposta believes he did. He's convinced that a German-born school teacher-turned-inventor named Jacob Brodbeck flew his airship over a pasture near Boerne or a field near Luckenbach, or both, nearly 40 years before the Wrights lifted off the ground in 1903. Unlike most of us who visit Fredericksburg, Kaposta during a visit last year happened to notice the bust of Brodbeck in a little grove behind the Vereins Kirche and was inspired to work on a statue commemorating the man and his machine.



JOE HOLLEY

Declared "the Father of American Aviation" by Gov. John Connally in 1967, Brodbeck must have been an impressive individual, regardless of whether he ever flew. Born in the duchy of Wurttemberg, Germany, in 1821, he and a younger brother made the arduous voyage from Antwerp to Galveston and ultimately to Fredericksburg in 1846. According to his great-granddaughter, Anita Tatsch, he recalled in later years a conversation he had with John O. Meusebach, the brave and resourceful leader of the Fredericksburg settlement who made peace with the Comanches. According to a little book she published about her great-grandfather in 1986, Brodbeck had this to say: "In the many weeks we were at sea, *Holley continues on B4*



Joe Holley / Houston Chronicle

**Sculptor Eric Kaposta is convinced Fredericksburg, where "the Father of American Aviation" Jacob Brodbeck settled, is the right place for a statue honoring him and his flying machine.**

## CITY | STATE

# Holley: Aviator was inspired by seagulls

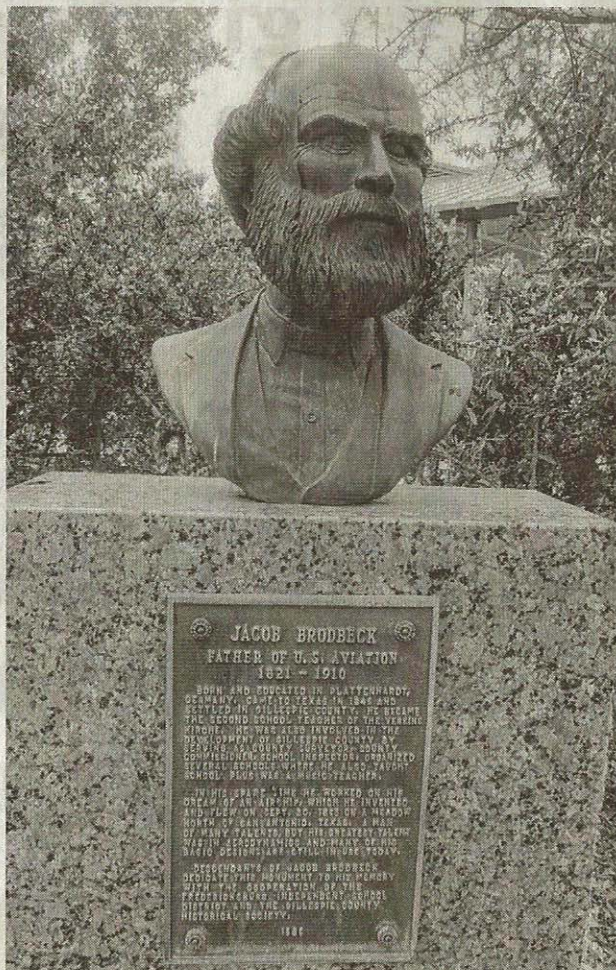
*Holley from page B1*

my thoughts wandered in many directions. One thought struck me with a deep conviction — that Providence had made this all possible for me. With my inventive and creative ability, I should be able to develop a much safer way of travel for man.”

He told Meusebach that he watched the seagulls as they glided over the water and noted how their wings controlled their angle of flight. “I thought to myself, ‘Why not let me build an airship, so it can use the atmosphere instead of battling those terrible ocean waves?’”

## From model to reality

Meanwhile, he had to make a living for his wife and growing family. He became a teacher at the Vereins Kirche in Fredericksburg and at other schools in Gillespie County, all the while holding tightly to his airship obsession. By 1863, he had developed a model that actually flew, powered by a clock spring and mechanism. He decided to move to San Antonio, where he hoped to find investors in his scheme, even though his wife was not pleased that he was leaving her and their three small boys. He went anyway, and for



Joe Holley / Houston Chronicle

**A bust honoring Jacob Brodbeck as the “Father of U.S. Aviation” is on display in Fredericksburg.**

the next six years supported himself as a school teacher, piano instructor and piano tuner while his wife ran the family farm near Luckenbach. (The Brodbecks eventually had 12 children, so presumably they made up.)

By August 1865, according to an article in the San Antonio News, he had enough investors to build his “air ship” and demonstrate that his coiled-spring system of propulsion would work. In September, friends

and investors gathered on a ranch near Boerne owned by Dr. Ferdinand von Herff (now part of the Cibolo Nature Center and Farm) to see whether Brodbeck’s full-sized airship would fly. Among them was his Fredericksburg friend, Charles Nimitz, whose grandson Chester Nimitz Jr. would become commander in chief of the Pacific fleet during World War II. The elder Nimitz had tried to persuade the government that Brodbeck’s invention had military potential.

## “Then down I crashed”

His neighbors had helped Brodbeck build a platform about 20 feet high and on the day of the flight helped him hoist the craft to the top. “I was tied down in such a way that all I had to do was cut it loose when I was ready to take off,” Brodbeck said, according to Tatsch. Nimitz and a few others made remarks, and then this unlikely Chuck Yeager said a few prayers for himself “as I crawled into the aeronaut’s chamber.”

According to published reports, the air ship managed to skim along about 12 feet off the ground for maybe a hundred feet before the coil came unwound and it crashed into a chicken coop. Brodbeck was slightly injured

physically, perhaps more so psychically. The crowd and his investors drifted away, and he moved back to Luckenbach.

According to Tatsch, Brodbeck flew his contraption one more time, in 1874. A granddaughter of an alleged eyewitness told her that the ship took off from the roof of Brodbeck’s workshop and flew in a straight line before landing in his brother Johann Georg’s cornfield. Tatsch quotes her grandfather: “I looked forward to flying like a bird again. My ship took off and I sailed around until the power of the coil spring gave out again after a few minutes of flight. Then down into the corn field I crashed, but I was not badly injured, only bruised from head to toe.”

Brodbeck, who also invented an ice-making machine and served as a Gillespie County commissioner, continued tinkering with his airship into the 1890s. He lived until 1910, seven years after the Wright brothers’ epoch-making flight.

Houston sculptor Kaposta, whose works appear at Toyota Center, NRG Stadium and Minute Maid Park, is hoping to persuade Fredericksburg’s mayor that her town would be the ideal place for a seven-foot-tall rendering of Brodbeck. In

the model he’s completed, Kaposta has him looking into the distance, his arm drawn back, a scale model of his airship in hand and ready to fly.

## Just one of many

John Lienhard, emeritus professor of mechanical engineering and history at the University of Houston and the founder and radio voice of “Engines of Our Ingenuity,” knows more about the history of manned flight, including pre-Wright brothers flight, than anyone I know. He told me earlier this week that Brodbeck probably deserves the recognition Kaposta proposes. Despite sketchy documentary evidence, Lienhard believes Brodbeck probably did invent some kind of flying contraption and perhaps even flew it.

The thing is, though, the man from the Texas Hill Country was one of many, many would-be inventors throughout the 19th century, in America and elsewhere, who were obsessed with soaring into the heavens. He was one of many who managed to solve at least a portion of the puzzle, one of many who, in Lienhard’s words, “got airplanes off the ground.”

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