

Michigan Every Day **By Patrick Sullivan and Carole Eberly**

Oct. 22, 1898
First flight or big hoax?

According to his own account, Augustus Moore Herring of Benton Harbor achieved what was thought impossible on Oct. 22, 1898 – he lifted off the ground in a flying contraption and briefly soared through the air using mechanical power. Herring forgot one crucial ingredient in his quest to be the first man to fly, however – there was no photographer on hand to document the flight.

Absent that, instead of accolades, all Herring found was skepticism. There was a reporter on hand for the flight, that was supposed to have taken place at Silver Beach in St. Joseph and there was a report about it in the Benton Harbor Evening News. Others maintain that herring was doomed to obscurity not for lack of proof but because his machine was not very good.

The compressed air engine could only keep the plane aloft for seconds and there was no way to steer the plane. What herring had was little more than a noisy glider. Newspapers reported that he remained aloft for 8 to 10 seconds. However, Herring was the first to receive a patent in aviation. He applied for a patent for his man-supporting, heavier-than-air flying machine in 1896.

Herring failed to become a household name and five years later Orville and Wilbur Wright took off in their airplane, photographer on hand, and flew into the history books.