

## CORRESPONDENCE

*To the Editor of the JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL AERONAUTICAL SOCIETY.*

SIR,—In my paper entitled “The Langley Machine and the Hammondsport Trials,” published in the *AERONAUTICAL JOURNAL* of December, 1921, I stated that the machine, after the Hammondsport trials, was returned to the Smithsonian Institution at Washington, D.C., and the original portions still remaining were utilised in the reconstruction of a facsimile of the original Langley machine. This reconstructed machine is now exhibited in the U.S. National Museum with the following inscription:—

ORIGINAL LANGLEY FLYING MACHINE, 1903.

THE FIRST MAN-CARRYING AEROPLANE IN THE HISTORY OF THE  
WORLD CAPABLE OF SUSTAINED FREE FLIGHT. INVENTED, BUILT  
AND TESTED OVER THE POTOMAC RIVER BY SAMUEL PIERPONT  
LANGLEY IN 1903. SUCCESSFULLY FLOWN AT HAMMONDSPORT,  
N.Y., JUNE 2, 1914.

Since 1921 I have visited the U.S. National Museum every year in order to observe any correction or change in this incorrect inscription, and last month (January, 1927) I again visited the Museum and observed that the label had been changed to the following:—

LANGLEY AERODROME.

THE ORIGINAL LANGLEY FLYING MACHINE OF 1903,  
RESTORED.

IN THE OPINION OF MANY COMPETENT TO JUDGE, THIS WAS THE  
FIRST HEAVIER-THAN-AIR CRAFT IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD  
CAPABLE OF SUSTAINED FREE FLIGHT UNDER ITS OWN POWER,  
CARRYING A MAN.

THIS AIRCRAFT SLIGHTLY ANTEDATED THE MACHINE DESIGNED AND  
BUILT BY WILBUR AND ORVILLE WRIGHT WHICH, ON DECEMBER 17,  
1903, WAS THE FIRST IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD TO  
ACCOMPLISH SUSTAINED FREE FLIGHT UNDER ITS OWN POWER,  
CARRYING A MAN.

This new inscription is a step towards the truth, for it changes a statement of fact into one of opinion. In view of the fact, however, that the opinion arrived at is clearly incorrect, it is evident that those forming it were not competent to judge.

In smaller print, the label then continues as follows:—

“The aeronautical work of Samuel Pierpont Langley, third Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, was begun in 1887. By fundamental scientific research he discovered facts, the publication of which largely laid the foundation for modern aviation. Langley designed large model aeroplanes which repeatedly flew in 1896 with automatic stability for long distances. The U.S. War Department, impressed by his success,

authorised him to construct a man-carrying machine which was completed in the Smithsonian shops in the spring of 1903. Attempts made to launch it on October 7 and December 8, 1903, failed owing to imperfect operation of the catapult launching device. In these trials the wings and control surfaces were badly damaged and lack of funds prevented other tests at this time. The aeroplane was left by the War Department with the Smithsonian Institution for further experiments. In 1914 (following the foundation by the Smithsonian Institution of the Langley Aerodynamical Laboratory) the experiments were resumed, using all available parts of the original machine. The frame and engine were the same as in the first trials; the reconstructed wings were used without the leading edge extension; the control surfaces were reconstructed; and launching pontoons with necessary trussing were substituted for the original catapult. Thus equipped, and weighing over 40 per cent. more than in 1903, with Glenn H. Curtis as the pilot, it was successfully flown at Hammondsport, N.Y., June 2, 1914. With a more powerful engine and tractor propeller it was subsequently flown repeatedly. These tests indicated that the original machine would have flown in 1903 had it been successfully launched. After the Hammondsport flights the machine was restored in accordance with the original drawings and data under the supervision of one of the original mechanics, using all original parts available. In 1918 the machine thus restored was deposited in the National Museum for permanent exhibition. Its 52 horse-power gasoline engine was designed by Charles M. Manley, who superintended the construction of the machine and piloted it in 1903."

The above added paragraph is misleading and incorrect in many particulars, which will be evident to anyone reading my original paper in the *AERONAUTICAL JOURNAL*.

I hope to continue my visits to the U.S. National Museum and to report at some future date a further change in the inscription, when it will be acknowledged that the machine which was tested at Hammondsport was not the original Langley machine, but was merely a part of the frame, with the newly-built remainder of the machine altered in design in many respects to conform with later aeronautical knowledge. The new inscription will also acknowledge that a system of lateral control, unknown to Langley, was introduced into the Hammondsport machine.

I am, Sir, your obedient Servant,

GRIFFITH BREWER.