



THE DAY ALBIN LONGREN FELL FROM THE SKY

AVIATION PIONEER CRASHED AT
DICKINSON COUNTY FAIR IN 1915

ABILENE COUPLE WITNESSES TO EVENT

NEW BOOK DETAILS LIFE OF
'MAN WHO FLEW BEFORE BEECH'

By LINDA MOWERY-DENNING
The Salina Journal

ABILENE — Chet and Evelyn Long were children when aviation pioneer Albin Longren fell from the sky on the third day of the Dickinson County Fair.

It happened at a time when air travel sparked excitement, especially in isolated rural Kansas.

"We had party lines in those days and someone would call and say there was a plane coming and to watch out for it," Evelyn Long said. "It was something to see a plane fly across the sky. You would watch it until it got clear out of sight."

It was even more exciting to be close to a plane. Chet Long was 9 years old when Longren brought his biplane to Abilene on Sept. 24, 1915. He was nearby when the plane crashed and Longren of Topeka broke his leg and suffered other injuries.

This is how Long tells the story in a book on Longren written by the Rev. Richard Taylor, an Enterprise native who now lives in Topeka:

"It was something (in 1915) to see a plane fly across the sky. You would watch it until it got clear out of sight."

Evelyn Long

Abilene resident who witnessed the crash of aviation pioneer Albin Longren at the Dickinson County Fair in 1915

After reading in the newspaper about Longren's planned flight, Chet Long and his father hitched up the horses and rode for more than an hour from their home, nine miles northeast of Abilene, to the fairgrounds. It was a windy day, and when they arrived, the crowd was unhappy because Longren was having second thoughts about the flight.

There were about 7,000 spectators in the grandstands. The aviator didn't want to disappoint them. He finally agreed to take off.

"Chester, along with many others, held back the airplane while Longren gave it full throttle. When his engine reached top r.p.m., Longren called for wheel checks to be pulled and yelled, 'Let her go!'" Taylor wrote from his interview with Long.

"He flew south into a strong wind. At some distance he turned around to the north. He was immediately in trouble, fighting to gain control of his craft. He crashed into an automobile. Mr. Fred Neiderheiser of Manchester was leaving the fairgrounds, saw the plane coming, stopped his car and ran for his life."

The plane caught the passenger side of Neiderheiser's automobile. Longren was pinned between the two machines.

Evelyn Long, who was at the fair with her mother in



TOM DORSEY / The Salina Journal

When they were children, Evelyn and Chet Long, Abilene, witnessed the plane crash of aviation pioneer Albin Longren at the Dickinson County Fair in 1915.

the old agricultural building, didn't see the crash — Longren's biplane fell about 200 feet — but she remembers the news spreading through the crowd.

"We all ran to the door and there were men saying, 'Stay back. Stay back,'" she recalled.

Chet Long was among the first to arrive at the crash, but, like his future wife, he was ordered to "stay back" so a doctor could treat Longren, who was unconscious.

The plane Longren flew that day is now owned by the Kansas State Historical Society. It was on display in the organization's downtown Topeka museum for many years.

Taylor, who has waged various campaigns over the years to preserve Kansas history, wrote the book so the story of Longren would be remembered.

Taylor considers the aviation pioneer "the Ford of the Air" when it came to design, engineering and quality of production.

"He's not even in the Kansas Aviation Hall of Fame. You talk about forgotten. He's ignored and he manufactured aircraft before Cessna and flew before Beech."

Longren's first test flight was made Sept. 2, 1911 — only months after Clyde Cessna attempted his first air trip

in Oklahoma. The difference was that Cessna crashed and Longren managed to travel six miles.

In 1921, Longren developed a small folding-wing biplane with a round, molded pressed-fiber fuselage that attracted U.S. Navy interest, but he was never able to attract enough capital to manufacture the craft in the required quantity.

A year later, the New Longren, which weighed 550 pounds and was capable of carrying 500 pounds, arrived in Salina for a race. According to a news report included in Taylor's book:

"N. D. Trimler of Topeka, in a Longren plane, took first place in the 100-mile airplane race at the American Legion meet here this afternoon. His time was 1 hour, 5 minutes and 30 seconds ... The air was filled with planes most of the day and all Salina and surrounding territory have stiff necks from watching the performances of the machines and the men upon them. The attendance at Kenwood Park, where the meet took place, was 3,000."

Longren died in 1950 and is buried at Leonardville, north of Milford Lake.

"Henry Ford of the Air" is available for \$10 from Taylor, 4831 SE 61st Street, Berryton 66409.