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# JACOB BRODBECK'S FLIGHT

Nearly forty years before the Wright brothers took off on their historic flight at Kitty Hawk, Jacob Brodbeck piloted his spring-powered airship across a field near the town of Luckenbach, Texas. Brodbeck's craft rose about 12 feet, some say, and traveled about 100 feet before crashing. While Brodbeck survived, his aircraft was destroyed.

Other than a plaque and a bust in San Pedro Park in San Antonio, Texas, that commemorates the flight, Brodbeck gets little credit as a pioneering aviator who got a jumpstart on the Wrights. In part, this might be because the flight wasn't nearly as successful as Orville and Wilbur's ascent across the plains of Kitty Hawk. Moreover, Brodbeck just made one flight. The Wrights made several successful flights.

Additionally, the details of Brodbeck's flight are sketchy at best. No record of witnesses seems to exist, and even the date and location are disputed in accounts passed down of the flight. Some say Brodbeck's flight took place in Luckenbach on 20 September 1865. Others say it was later in 1865 in San Antonio or maybe even 1868. The only detail that accounts of the flight share is that Brodbeck's craft was destroyed in the crash.

What little is known might have faded away had Brodbeck not made

a name for himself in Gillespie County, Texas, as a surveyor, school administrator, and a part-time inventor. Born in 1821 in the duchy of Württemberg, Brodbeck seems to have been an aspiring DaVinci with a propensity for self-powered gadgets. In Wurttemberg, he attempted to invent a self-winding clock. After emigrating to Texas in 1846, he kept tinkering with self-powered machines. At one point in the 1860s, he designed an ice-making machine, as well as a powered washing machine.

Self-winding clockworks seemed to fascinate him, as evidenced from his airship's design, one he tinkered

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# SEARS: THE AMAZON OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Today Americans watch in horror as malls close by the thousands. According to "Business Insider Media", 25% of America's malls will shut down by 2022, largely because of store closures.

It's easy to see the relationship between the Internet and this twenty-first century phenomena – especially as we watch the phenomenal growth of Amazon. At its founding, in 1994, Amazon sold books. Today, they are known as the world's largest online marketplace.

We may think this problem is unique, but it's not the first time a retail company has been responsible for shutting down established businesses. In 1886, Richard Sears did it by selling watches – not on the Internet – but by mail-order catalog.

Two-thirds of the population lived in rural areas. General stores were high-priced with little selection. So Sears developed the catalog business to give America's farm families more options at a lower cost.

A master at catchy phrases, Richard Sears called his 1894 catalog the "Cheapest Supply House on Earth". From its 500 pages, rural Americans could purchase items like clothing, wagons, fishing tackle, furniture, firearms, and bicycles – all by mail.

Both companies relied heavily upon the USPS for shipping. Because the USPS considered the catalog an "aid in the dissemination of knowledge", Sears' cost for mailing it was only one cent per pound. Rural Free Delivery of 1896 was also a great boost to Sears as their catalogs could be delivered

to each home.

Today, the USPS works with Amazon by receiving packages in bulk, then itemizing and delivering them via Rural Free Delivery. Despite being a federal agency, the USPS is not funded by tax dollars and is allowed to act as a third-party shipper to balance its books.

Both companies grew exponentially by expanding into new ventures. Between 1908 and 1940, Sears sold 75,000 "pre-fab-kit homes" by mail order. Mass-produced materials lowered manufacturing costs so that consumers could purchase a small bungalow for as little as \$450.

Later, Sears developed the Kenmore washing machine and vacuum cleaner. In the 1970s, they introduced Kenmore refrigerators, freezers, and air conditioners.



Bust of Jacob Brodbeck located in Fredericksburg. Image available on the Internet; included in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107

with for nearly twenty years. Two years before his flight, he designed a model of his craft featuring a coiled-spring powered propeller as well as an enclosed space for the pilot or aeronaut (Brodbeck's term), and as a just-in-case – a water propeller to prepare for a water landing. He showed the model off at fairs in the San Antonio area, where he had moved to work as a school inspector. While showing off his model, Brodbeck persuaded local investors to put up the money for a piloted version of his airship.

On paper, Brodbeck's design seems sustainable. His clockwork airship had two motors. As the springs on one unwound, in theory, the second motor would engage and rewind it. In practice, of course, nothing of the sort happened. Both motors unwound, and Brodbeck and his airship crashed.

After the crash, Brodbeck never pulled together more funding to continue his aeronautical adventures. His initial investors grew skeptical after his crash and brushed him off. A cross-country fund-raising campaign also failed after his papers were allegedly stolen during a stop in Michigan. No drawings or other material have ever been recovered regarding his aircraft. Brodbeck died in January 1910 on his ranch in Luckenbach, a little over six years after the Wright brothers' flight at Kitty Hawk. *Em*

— Todd Glassock

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Newspaper advertisement for Sears watches from 1888 from the Winchester Journal, January 5, 1888. Sears Watch Advertisement. Public domain, created prior to 1926

Another popular Sears brand is Craftsman. They began selling Craftsman tools to farm communities in 1927 and later branched out to sell Craftsman lawnmowers and portable power tools to their growing suburban base.

Sears went on to start the Allstate Insurance Company. Allstate offered

low rates on auto insurance through the Sears catalog. They added financial services to their repertoire in the 1980s with the Discover Card. It became wildly popular. Within four years, 20 million people had acquired a Discover Card.

Amazon, in addition to expanding their sales to nearly everything Sears once sold, went on to produce "Prime and Amazon Web Services", offering internet access through the cloud. They also added Amazon brands such as Amazon Fresh, Prime Pantry, Prime Now, and Amazon Go.

As rural America moved to the cities and suburbs, Sears began opening department stores. Sears Roebuck became a staple in the suburbs and was often the first store in a newly established mall. In 2017, however, as Amazon was acquiring "Whole Foods Market" as its first retail store, only 695 Sears stores remained. In 2018, they went bankrupt. *Em*

— Linda Beach