



The AMA History Project Presents: History of the CAMERON DRAGONFLIES R/C CLUB



Started in 1993 AMA Club Charter #3482

Written by CL (2015); Reformatted and edited by JS (03/2015)

The following was written by Curtis Ledbetter, Secretary/Treasurer of the Cameron Dragonflies R/C Club, and submitted to the AMA's History Project in 2015. Note: For a short time, the club was renamed "Wings Over Lathrop."

Radio Control, Airplanes and the Cameron Dragonflies

This story begins for me back in the middle- to late-1950s. My brother, Jerry, and I became interested in model airplanes. We made connections with a young man that had been flying U-Control models (or ukies, as they were called.) We were debating about what would be best to fly, and he said that an orange crate would fly if you applied enough power to it. He proceeded to disassemble an orange (or apple - not sure) crate, and nailed it together in the rough shape of an aircraft. He added control surfaces, an engine, and control lines, and proceeded to show us that it would fly in a circle. It occurred to me then that a rock tied to a string would fly if you swung it in a circle. Never the less, the orange crate did look like an airplane and it did fly under power. We were convinced, and our journey began.

A friend of mine interested in flying, but not in building, asked me if I would build him an "ukie". I said I would, and he brought me a balsa kit, an engine, and some fuel. I had heard that engines needed to be broken-in for max performance, so I ran about a pint and half through the engine rich on a test stand. As I recall, it took me the better part of a week part-time to assemble the kit with "Ambroid" glue, rubber bands, and straight pins (and much patience.)

The surfaces were covered with glued-on paper that was shrunk with water and dried. Then a layer of nitrate dope was applied to make it water- and fuel-proof. The engine was a McCoy Red Head .19; I don't remember what the plane was.

A group of circle flyers were going to gather at the flying field, so I took the plane to them. The owner of the plane had never flown, so I was anxious for all my free work. On the first circle, he decided to do a loop, which I considered an advanced feat. He and the .19 took the plane through the loop without a hitch, much to my and the crowd's surprise.

I later came up with a Navy seaplane for my own use, and flew it to some degree until the circle got too small, wires too long, and I crashed it.

I went off to college for a couple of years and forgot about model planes. I was in the Air Force ROTC program, and thought some about full-scale. Most of my instructors were Korean War vets, with lots of enticing stories about flying. I had taken and passed the test

for advanced ROTC, but dropped out of college. I married shortly thereafter, and proceeded into the workforce.

Models were on my mind, along with making a living. In my spare time, I built a vertical take-off model that looked like a rocket; .049-powered with a parachute for recovery. I kept it for a couple of residence moves, but lost it along the way. I never tested it.

Seven or eight years passed, and I built an "ukie" out of pieces from a garage sale. Looking back, I believe it wouldn't fly because it was tail-heavy. My 8-year-old son helped me witness the failure.

Life went on for several years and my brother Jerry acquired an RC airplane and some equipment. Neither of us knew anything about RC flying. After several unsuccessful attempts to take off in a grass field at his house, we laid out a runway made of galvanized sheet metal. He took off, reached an altitude of about 4 feet, and hit a fence. I remember his comment after we decided it was not worth repairing; "I am 50 years old and I will fly RC before I die." And he did.

He and a group of guys got involved in an RC club nearby. They were with them for a while and decided to start their own club. The Cameron Dragonflies R/C Club was organized in November 1993; it received its AMA charter the following January. There were about seven charter members, and most of us were novices. My brother secured permission from his brother-in-law and we flew on his farm.

Our runway was a giant circle with East/West and North/South legs. It was not conventional, perhaps, but versatile. We had great flying there, some great events and get-togethers, until we had to move.

When we started the club, those of us that didn't know how to fly learned the hard way. It was crash, rebuild, and fly again. At the time, Jerry mentioned buying props by the dozen. I remember driving a pickup and my brother standing in the back looking for an airplane in the high weeds.

At the fly-ins, we had hand-tossed gliders for the kids, bomb drops, spot landings, and best in show contests for the pilots. Lots of pictures and videos were taken. Crashes happened at intervals, but safety was always a priority.

As the years passed, member/flyers came and went, but there always was a core group keeping the hobby alive.

One of the members, Tom, had a hobby shop downtown where we went for kits and supplies. There was a room over the store where we had meetings and building demonstrations.

Membership varied over the years. At one time, we had 30-plus members and families. Over a period 20 years, we have had seven flying sites and a total of 85 different members. We opened our club bank account on November 10, 1993 with a deposit of \$50.00

The club was chartered with AMA as #3482. (In 1997, the club was chartered with the Sport Flyers Association (SFA) as #9859. The SFA shortly thereafter went out of business.) Our club's name was changed to Wings Over Lathrop, and the club location was moved from the Witt Road (Cameron) location in 2006. It was chartered under the same number in 2007, and stayed in Lathrop, Missouri until July 2012. It was then moved back to Cameron, Missouri, and re-chartered as Cameron Dragonflies R/C Club.

While in Cameron originally, the club participated in a variety of functions. In 2004, a public display was held in the Wal-Mart parking lot, with interaction and information for the public about aeromodeling and the club. We assisted several years with a hands-on learning program at the middle school where we held demonstrations of flying, building, and theory of aerodynamics and modeling. One member, Steve, headed a program at the school where a group of students set an altitude record with solid propellant rockets.

Another member, Gerry, explained the operation of helicopters and did demo flights. At one school event, a member brought in a fuse for a full-scale single-wing aircraft.

Over time, the club participated in mall shows (specifically East Hills Mall in St. Joseph, Missouri and Metro North Mall in North Kansas City), an auction in Kansas, and our own swap meets and auctions. The Muscular Dystrophy Association Benefit Fly-In in Taylor, Missouri was attended for several years. There was very impressive 3-D flying with smoke. A Korean trainer piloted by a female pilot did a low fly-by, and rides were given in a Cessna.

Also, events of other clubs in the area were attended, including those in Maryville (Missouri), St. Joseph, Fawcett, North Kansas City, Smithville, and Hiawatha, Kansas. The KCRC swap meet was a big event every year. The club did demo flying at Camp Farwesta, an outing for kids with cancer, and festivals at Osborn, Stewartsville and Lathrop, Missouri.

When the club first started, we participated in a "Frozen Fingers" event on January 1st, sponsored by the Flying Tigers Club in Plattsburg, Missouri. Our club has held two or three such events over the years.

We have participated in the Cameron, Missouri air show with booths and static displays of model craft.

Gerry flew with the Blue Angels in *Fat Albert*, their special C-130 at the St. Joseph, Missouri air show. At least two former Dragonflies members own full-scale private planes.

While we were at Lathrop, we had one member who flew turbine jet models. They are very impressive.

The trend to electric flight has changed our club considerably. We still fly nitro and gas, but a good percentage is electric. Cameras are definitely involved, and we have just started to touch on FPV. [First Person View systems] Electrics have contributed to more flying, learning, and innovation. It looks like they will be around for a while.

There have been a number of members who have been involved with full-scale aviation, including airline maintenance. One former member specialized in building and repairing Gee Bees, one learned to fly RC in the military, another trained RC fliers in Iraq, and three or four have flown private full-scale airplanes. One former member, Matt Kelly, gave his life in service to the country flying a helicopter in Iraq. Over the years, five members, including my brother Jerry, have passed on. They will be remembered.

RC airplanes are looked on by some as big boy toys, denying the contribution modeling has made to aeronautics, as well as the hours of enjoyment by participants, families and observers. The economic impact on the world is worth mentioning as well. Aeromodelers come from all segments of society, occupations, and nationalities. It is truly a universal pastime.

The club now flies at a field north of Cameron, Missouri. We have a Facebook group page under the name "Cameron Dragonflies." Our field has a lake where we float fly. GPS coordinates of the field and travel directions are on AMA site, as well as on the Facebook group's page.

Much more could be said about the Cameron Dragonflies. It is no coincidence that the local school sports team is the Cameron Dragons. The club name was chosen in a spirit of community harmony. We are very much interested in training new flyers, young and old, male or female.

We thank everyone who has contributed time, money, flying sites, information, and help for our club. I am presently the oldest member at 75. and plan on enjoying the hobby as long as I can.

Curtis Ledbetter, Secretary /Treasurer
Cameron Dragonflies R/C Club
Cameron, Missouri
AMA Club #3482

This PDF is property of the Academy of Model Aeronautics. Permission must be granted by the AMA History Project for any reprint or duplication for public use.

AMA History Project
National Model Aviation Museum
5151 E. Memorial Dr.
Muncie IN 47302
(765) 287-1256, ext. 511
historyproject@modelaircraft.org

