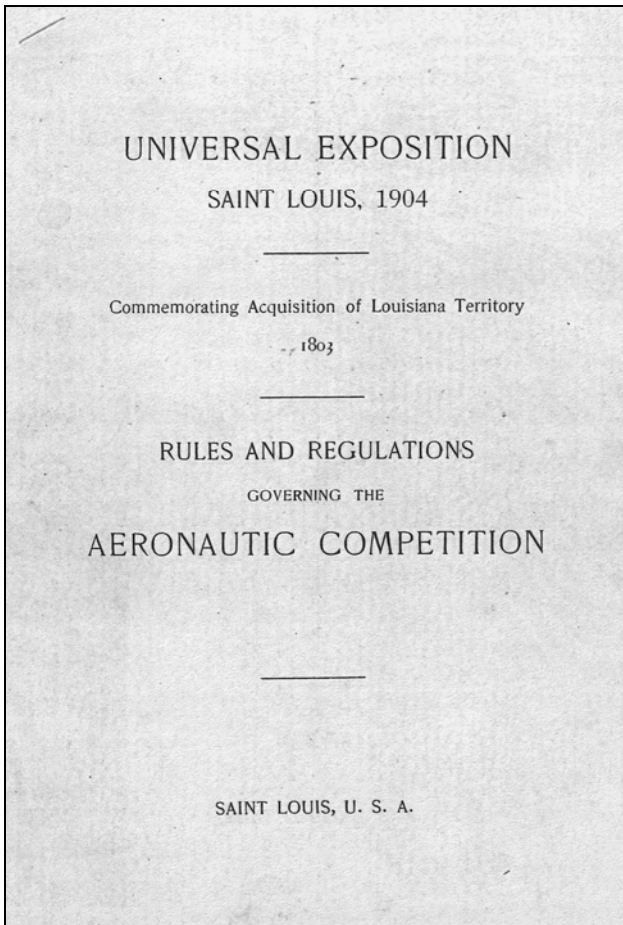


The 1904 St Louis Aeronautical Competition

Gary Williams

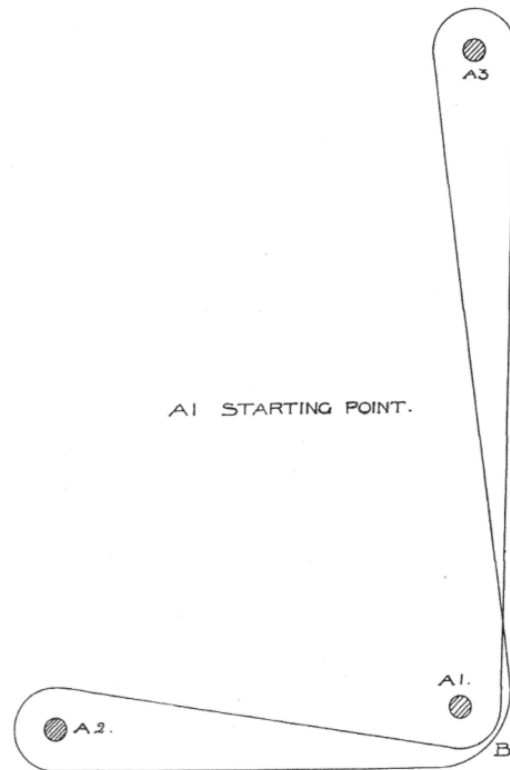
As an example of how anxious the world was to promote development and competition of demonstration flights and contests at air meets: The Wright Brothers performed the first powered, controlled flight of a heavier-than-air aircraft on December 17th, 1903, and only six months later the Louisiana Purchase Exposition held an air meet with events including flying a closed course and the winner would be the fastest to complete the course.

A \$250 entrance fee was required but would be refunded when the entrant set up for his attempt on the field. A final demand was that each prize winner must make three demonstration flights after September 30th, but the award of prize money would not depend on the success of these flights.



The rules and regulations of the event

The organizers came up with a whopping \$200,000; \$50,000 to run the meet, \$50,000 for minor prizes and a prize of \$100,000 to the competitor who completed the fastest three laps of the course. These three laps could be in three different flights. The course was L-shaped with "pylons" marked with captive balloons. The length of one lap was to be between 10 and 15 miles (to be decided by the opening date) and each had to complete the "race" with an average speed over 20 mph. Any attempt could be made between June 1st and September 13th.



The course layout

The whole event was premature. Aviation was not yet ready for such a competition. The only heavier-than-air craft to make flights at the exposition was William Avery who for two weeks made almost daily flights in a glider.

The only other "aircraft" to appear at the St Louis Aeronautic Competition were blimp-like craft powered with motor/propeller attachments. The time limit for the main event was extended at least twice and while a number of attempts were made, the grand prize of \$100,000 was not awarded.