

Octave Chanute

Engineer and aviation pioneer (1832 – 1910)



Chanute was a French-born American railway engineer and aviation pioneer who provided the Wright brothers with help and advice. He was widely considered a brilliant and innovative railroad engineer and during his career he designed and constructed the country's two biggest stock yards: the Chicago Stock Yards (1865) and Kansas City Stockyards (1871). He designed and built the Hannibal Bridge, the first bridge to cross the Missouri River in Kansas City, Missouri in 1869.

Chanute was elected to the Century in 1875, the same year that he became interested in aviation during a visit to Europe. When he retired from his engineering business in 1890, he decided to devote his time to furthering the new science of aviation. He published a series of articles in *The Railroad and Engineering Journal* from 1891 to 1893, and collected together in *Progress in Flying Machines* in 1894. This was the first organized, written collection of aviation research.

Although he was too old to attempt to fly himself, Chanute worked in partnership with younger experimenters, including Augustus Herring and William Avery. In 1896 and 1897 the three tested hang gliders. Chanute was in contact with the Wright brothers from 1900, when Wilbur Wright wrote to him after reading *Progress in Flying Machines*. Chanute helped to publicize the Wright brothers' work, and provided consistent advice and encouragement, visiting their camp near Kitty Hawk in 1901, 1902 and 1903.

Chanute freely shared his knowledge about aviation with anyone who was interested and expected others to do the same. His open approach led to friction with the Wright brothers, who believed their ideas about aircraft control were unique and refused to share them. Despite the friction, when Chanute died in 1910 in Chicago, Wilbur Wright delivered the eulogy at his funeral.