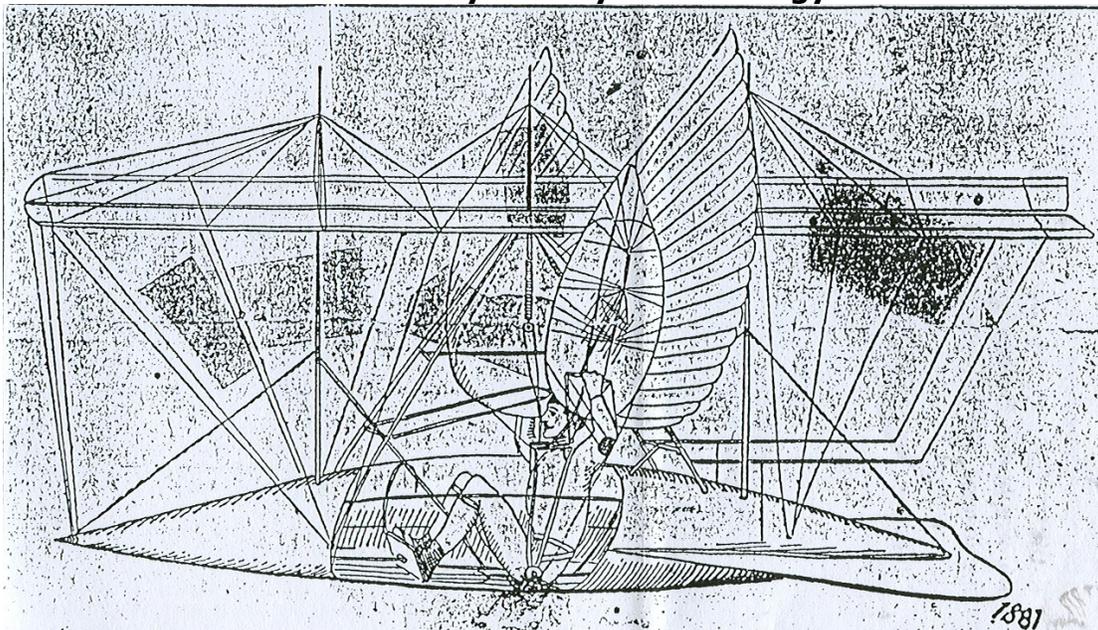


Across Oceans, Across Time® ...
Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center ...



A Dreamer and an 'Original.' -- In 1881 Danish immigrant Fritz Pries designed and built his version of a human powered-'flying machine.' This sketch of his device, later reproduced in the *Omaha Bee* in 1918, was initially displayed in the window of a downtown Omaha jewelry store for passersby to marvel at. The Danish term '*en original*' refers to a person who marches to a different drumbeat than most of us, and Fritz Pries certainly seems to have fit this description. -- Born Frederik Christian Pries in Viby, outside the city of Århus, in 1845, Fritz appears to have received an exceptional education for a forester's son and remained a reader and thinker throughout his life. He immigrated to America with his brother Adolphus around 1866, settling on 80 acres of government land in the Florence area near Omaha, where he proceeded to dam up an old river bed to make a lake, build a seven-room dwelling (in seven stories), farm and dream of flying. After building his machine, which used human arms and legs to flap various 'wings,' he called upon Adolph to make the trial flight. The flight resulted in a broken leg for his brother; a subsequent attempt dumped Fritz into his lake, but he didn't give up tinkering with this and other ideas. A peculiar notoriety seemed to follow the inventor. Some years later, having accidentally killed his brother while cleaning his gun, Fritz buried him in a particularly fine casket on his property. A decade passed and a sister died, but times had gotten harder and Fritz could not afford a casket. Recalling the one used for his brother, he dug it up, wrapped his brother's bones in a quilt, and reinterred them, and then reused the casket for his sister. When this attracted public attention both locally and nationally, the eccentric Dane expressed great surprise that anyone would care. -- Fritz Pries died in December, 1910, just a few years before flying machines were used in The Great War, fulfilling his prediction that such devices would become useful both commercially and for pleasure. He was buried in Springwell Cemetery in Omaha. For many years a popular picnic resort, Pries Lake is no longer found on local maps and this 'original' Danish immigrant is forgotten.

The Danish Immigrant Museum

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