



HENSON'S

1843 STEAM-DRIVEN AIRLINE

Serious and sustained interest in heavier-than-air flight was triggered in 1840 by the success of the steam engine applied to transportation systems. Railroad construction was booming as were ocean-going steamships. Jumping on the bandwagon, in 1843 an ambitious English inventor William Samuel Henson patented an "Aerial Steam Carriage for conveying letters, goods, and passengers from place to place".

Basing his ideas on Cayley's published research, Henson imagined a monoplane with a cambered wing for extra lift, a rudder and tailplane for control, and two pusher propellers. It was to be powered by a 30hp steam engine in the fuselage.

Henson's grandiose plans for an Aerial Steam Transit Company momentarily attracted the interest of investors- the proposal for passenger flights spanning the globe was rendered credible by fanciful illustrations of the Steam Carriage soaring over exotic locations. But doubt and ridicule soon followed and although Henson built a small model of his aircraft, he couldn't find anyone ready to put up the cash for a full-size version. As ambitious as the Aerial Carriage was, the design was, nonetheless, one of the important stepping stones between the theories of Cayley and the reality of flight in the 20th century.

