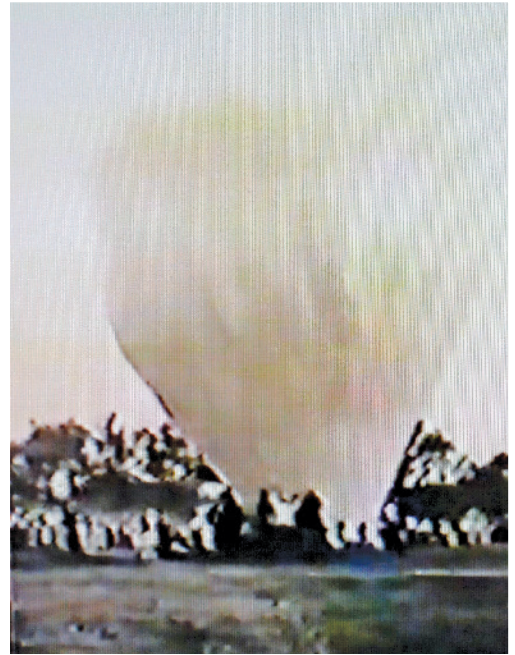




Bill Klingenberg speaks to EAA members in 1985 about his balloon adventure.



In 1927, this cloth balloon took a short flight in Barrington.

LIFT OFF: A CENTURY APART

AERONAUTICS ENTHUSIAST BILL KLINGENBERG'S JUMP FROM THE SKY

IN AN AGE WHEN BILLIONAIRES are taking day trips to the edge of outer space, and the eyes of the world ride along as they weightlessly float around in their precision engineered capsules, it is inspiring to time travel back to the years when dozens of experiments to "slip the surly bonds of earth" were happening in small towns across America.

One of those towns was Barrington, Illinois, and its daring young man was William H. (Bill) Klingenberg, Jr. Born in 1904, Bill loved aeronautics, becoming a mail pilot and barnstormer, flying his own plane. An enthusiastic local audience was witness, when on July 4, 1927, Bill accepted \$175 to make a parachute jump from a hot air balloon floated from Spinners Park on North Hough Street, where the 101 West apartment building on Liberty Street now sits.

The committee failed to bring in a big-name jumper, so Bill took on the assignment without telling his family. The Barrington Review published a glowing account of that day's events, and years later, in 1985, Bill colorfully described his adventure to a packed house of Barrington Chapter 790 members of the Experimental Aircraft Association.

There was no jet-fueled rocket, no computer-driven instruments, but some shovels, a fire-pit, and yards of cotton cloth. "To inflate the hot-air balloon, a trench had to be dug, 18 feet long and 1 ½ feet deep with a fire-pit on one end and the balloon draped over a frame on the other. Sheet tin was placed over the trench to keep the heat and smoke from escaping. Wood was used as fuel at the start to create smoke to seal the pores in the cotton fabric. As the canopy was completely filled, kerosene was doused on the fire to create a lot of heat. It took about one-half hour to fill it. The word then was given for everyone holding the balloon to let go. The balloonist was sitting on a strap-swing, and, in a matter of seconds it would rise to an altitude of two to three thousand feet. This was a safe altitude for the balloonist to jump with his cotton parachute and return to earth."

According to the July 7, 1927 Review, "He roared aloft to about 2,500 feet, then cut loose and dropped about 300 feet before the parachute opened. He guided his parachute almost exactly west to a safe landing in Hart's field west of the village."

Bill lived until 1989, often chuckling as he recounted some of his perilous flying adventures, but joining us all in awe as men first walked on the moon. Given the chance, would he have gone to the edge of space with Richard Branson or Jeff Bezos on their July 2021 missions? You bet he would! 