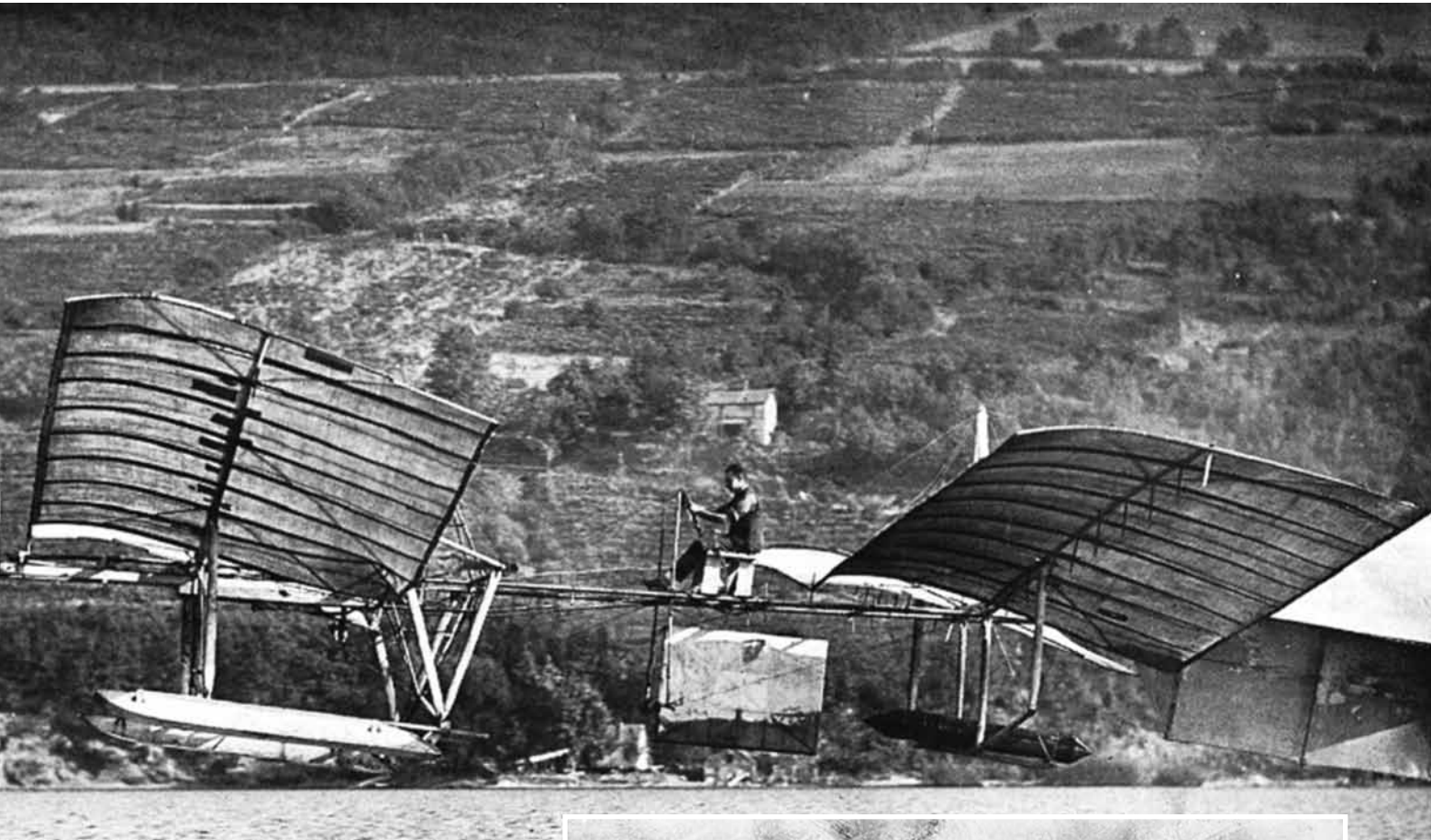


The Aerodrome Fraud



Samuel Langley, a Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, was a luckless pioneer in manned aviation. On Dec. 8, 1903, his manned "Aerodrome" failed for the second time, breaking up (inset) and crashing into the Potomac River. Nine days later, the Wright brothers' "Flyer" took wing at Kitty Hawk, N.C. Langley died in 1906. In time, though, his Aerodrome would fly—sort of. Glenn Curtiss, a Wright rival, sought to undercut their patent by showing the Aerodrome could have flown. In 1914, he took the craft to New York where it made a few short hops (above, piloted by Curtiss employee William Doherty). The Smithsonian then displayed it as the first manned, powered, heavier-than-air craft capable of flight. Orville Wright was outraged (Wilbur had died in 1912) and severed all contact with the museum. He sent the original Flyer to Britain for exhibition in the Science Museum. In 1942, the Smithsonian admitted that Curtiss had greatly modified the Aerodrome, even giving it a new engine for his flights. The museum recanted its claims for "Langley's Folly" and declared the Wright Flyer to have been the first capable of flight, after all.

