

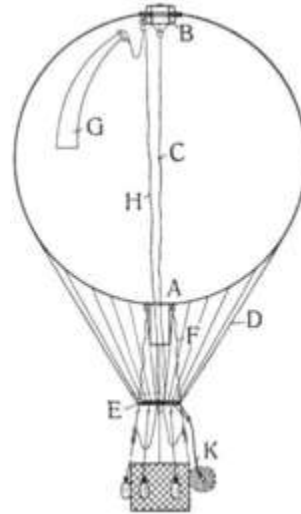
John Wise (Balloonist)



John Wise was born in Lancaster PA on February 24, 1808. He started as an apprentice cabinetmaker and also spent some time making pianos.

In his teens he became interested in balloons after having read about them in a newspaper. In 1827 he decided to build his own balloon. He designed his balloon and built himself, using muslin sheets. To make them airtight he coated them with a suspension of birdlime in linseed oil. On May 1, 1835 he made his first flight in this balloon in Philadelphia. At first he did not use his balloon for commercial purposes, preferring to use it to satisfy his scientific curiosity.

One of his early innovations was a balloon designed so that if it was ruptured or deflated, the bottom half would fold into the top half forming a parachute, thus allowing a safe landing. Other innovations included the use of drag lines for stabilization and a rip panel that allowed controlled deflation of the balloon upon landing, so that it would not be dragged on the ground.



John Wise invented the gas balloon rip panel (here labeled G)



On August 17, 1859 he made the first local airmail delivery in the US flying his balloon from Lafayette IN to Crawfordsville IN.

His scientific curiosity led him to realize that the heating effect of the sun increased the buoyancy of his balloon. He was also the first to observe the jet stream, which he described as a “great river of air which always blows from west to east”.

On September 28, 1879, while flying a balloon in the jet stream, he disappeared over Lake Michigan. Neither his body nor his balloon were ever found, although the body of George Burr, his passenger was found in Lake Michigan.



Launching John Wise's balloon in Lancaster PA