

Letter from Charles J. Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, April 18, 1916

AMERICAN SECURITY AND TRUST COMPANY INCORPORATED UNDER ACT OF CONGRESS OCTOBER, 1890 CAPITAL AND SURPLUS OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT CHARLES J. BELL \$5,000,000 PRESIDENT CORCORAN THOM, VICE PRESIDENT HENRY F. BLOUNT, VICE PRESIDENT H. S. REESIDE, VICE PRESIDENT JAMES F. HOOD, SECRETARY CHARLES E. HOWE, TREASURER ALFRED B. LEET, TRUST OFFICER WILLIAM W. KECK, ASST. TREASURER DAVID N. HOUSTON, ASST. TRUST OFFICER JOHN G. HOLDEN, AUDITOR ALFRED C. FLATHER, ASST. TRUST OFFICER **WASHINGTON, D. C.** April 18, 1916 Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell 1331 Connecticut Avenue City My dear Mabel:

I have delayed answering yours of the 10th instant expecting by every mail to have a letter from Curtiss, as I he promised I should hear from him by the 15th of April. However, nothing has come and I have to-day written him.

When I originally agreed to accept the trusteeship to hold the A.E.A. Patents I consented to do so purely for the purpose of acting as Trustee in only one capacity, namely, to take title to the patents. I cannot in any way become interested in the promotion of an Aeroplane Company, because it has always been against the policy of the American Security and Trust Company to be identified in any way with promotions no matter how good they might be, and for this reason I, as its President, could not undertake the organization of such a corporation.

I quite agree with you in regard to Mr. Curtiss, 2 I think his whole course of action not only towards the A.E.A. but towards others, is open to criticism. To my mind the great stumbling block in the way of considering a company for the A.E.A. is the fact, as I understand it, that the Wright patents have been declared by a court to be basic, and therefore any company

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attempting to manufacture machines and sell them in this country would immediately be enjoined by the Wrights and costly litigation ensue.

I hope you will understand my point of view and not feel that I am shirking any work in connection with my duties as Trustee, but I simply cannot and will not undertake to organize a company and get outside capital to come in.

Yours affectionately

April 10, 1916. Dear Charlie,

I am disturbed, because from our conversation Wednesday evening, I have gathered the impression that you really do not know very much about the A.E.A. patents or what the A.E.A. accomplished. This surely is of importance, because otherwise you cannot impress your friends with the proper idea of their value.

Couldn't you arrange for them and you to meet Alec some evening and let him tell you just what relation the inventions covered by the patents bear to the aeroplanes now in use abroad?

It seems hard that after working very hard for a great number of years and spending a great deal of money, Alec should have no part or lot in all the credit that is being given to the work of aerial invention and in the money that has been made. Neither Alec nor I want more than his fair share, but his share has been much greater than most people know or would have known, if Mr. Curtiss had been the broad-minded man we believed him to be.

It is possible (of this I am no judge) that Mr. Curtiss could prove that technically speaking he is not using any A.E.A. inventions on his present aeroplanes, but morally and in a larger sense he is, for he got all his start and his experience and his financial opportunity through his association with Alec and the other A.E.A. associates. The Junebug, with which Curtiss won the Scientific American prize was Alec's machine, made with Alec's money, and was

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but the third installment of the machines made jointly by him, Curtiss, Baldwin, Selfridge and McCurdy. It was just the improved form, which their experience with the Red and White Wings dictated.

All five Associates contributed to its building. Alec's money furnished the wherewithal, his private foreman oversaw the construction. Alec's generosity gave it later to Mr. Curtiss as a present and Mr. Curtiss transformed it into the Loon and made it the first seaplane, using for this purpose 2 the knowledge gained in Alec's laboratory, under Alec's direction, because Alec was convinced of the importance and practicability of this form before Mr. Curtiss or the others would deign to give any attention to it. The Loon was not put into the water until after Douglas reported to Mr. Curtiss the success of experiments Alec had made in Baddeck. Mr. Curtiss also saw Alec working at the idea in Hammondsport.

Now I do not know any specific details. I cannot point out what inventions covered by our patents are now being used extensively abroad. But both Alec and Mr. Baldwin know positively. I don't mean to say that these foreigners stole A.E.A. inventions. All I mean is that devices precisely or almost precisely similar, are now being used abroad and their value thus demonstrated.

Of course, there are difficulties in the way of introduction of our inventions, but that is the reason why capitalists are entitled to large shares in inventions which they did not invent. They have to take the risks of loss. No capitalist would look at the telephone at first. But there may be significance in the fact that while the Western Union refused to buy the patent for \$100,000.00, they were the first to put imitations of the telephone on the market. They may have recognized the value of the invention, but thought they could use it without having to pay for it. As a matter of fact, you know, the Telephone Co. had to pay them tribute, simply because they had the power to crush us.

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No one will touch our patents if we don't push them; they will just use our devices in some slightly modified form, perhaps and dare us to interfere because they have the money and we have not.

But perhaps if Alec could explain matters to you and your friends, you may feel that you have sufficiently valuable property to warrant going ahead and developing it.

Yours affectionately,