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Harold E. Morehouse Flying Pioneers Biographies Collection - Johnson, Walter

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Apparently Johnson severed his connection with the Thomas Brothers Company at that time and made plans to go into the flying school business for himself. He proposed to start a winter school in Florida at once, then return to New York State in the spring for summer operations. After purchasing a Thomas Flying Boat he left for Florida in January, 1914, where he operated a school and carried passengers during the winter months at Jacksonville. He returned north in the spring and in early May made daily flights at Greenwich, Connecticut for two weeks. On May 30th, 1914 he started the Walter E. Johnson School of Aviation at Conesus Lake, Livonia, New York, using a dual control Thomas Hydro and the flying boat he had been using in Florida. With him in the venture were his former Thomas students C. A. Herrmann and W. H. Minnerly. The school started with five students and the prospects of a promising summer resort passenger carrying business. Johnson also took on some exhibition work that season and flew at Owasco Lake, Auburn, New York on June 30th and Indington, Michigan July 3rd and 4th at a Harbor Celebration.

Johnson continued to operate his school and passenger business at Livonia through the 1914 season, but evidently discontinued it that year, for during the early spring months of 1915 he became a pilot for the Curtiss Company at Hammondsport. During 1914 Curtiss had made some short test hops with the original Langley plane which had been sent to Hammondsport from Smithsonian Institution to see if it would fly and to determine its flying and handling characteristics. Floats had been attached and brief hops made by Curtiss with the original Manly engine. With the added weight of the floats it would barely rise from the surface of Lake Keuka, being considerably underpowered. As a result, later in 1914 a Curtiss 80 H.P. engine was installed, and during the late fall further test hops were made by Doc Wildman and Gink Doherty. This work was resumed in the early Spring of 1915, the pontoons were removed and skids attached. With this combination Johnson made several flights with the Langley plane from the ice during March, 1915. Later that season both Johnson and Doherty made many additional flights with this historic plane

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