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Harold E. Morehouse Flying Pioneers Biographies Collection - Johnstone, Ralph

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Ralph Johnstone
Early Wright Exhibition Pilot

[[image]]

Ralph Johnstone was born at Kansas City, Missouri on September 18, 1880. At age 14 he ran away from home and joined a circus, where after a time he developed a trick bicycle act and gained fame for his daring feats awheel. He traveled abroad extensively with this act and later went into vaudeville in the United States. For some time he rode an old fashioned high wheel cycle down a long flight of stairs at the Hippodrome in New York.

During this period he met Roy Knabenshue exhibiting his airship at a western carnival and friendship developed. After Knabenshue became Exhibition Manager for the Wright Company he persuaded Johnstone to leave his theatrical profession to join the new Wright flying team being formed to do exhibition work. As a result Johnstone became a member of the first class of civilian students at the newly formed Wright Flying School at Simms Station, Dayton, Ohio about June 1st, 1910. Frank Coffyn also started his instruction at the same time. Hoxsey and LaChapelle, who had already received part of their instruction, were still being tutored to complete their course. Walter Brookins was the instructor of this class of four, assisted

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