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Harold E. Morehouse Flying Pioneers Biographies Collection - Kirkham, Charles B.

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bicycles. After experimenting unsuccessfully with one or two small engines Curtiss visited the Kirkham shop later that year to see if they would make the parts for the small single-cylinder motorcycle engine he had in mind. The Kirkhams agreed and Charles assisted in its design and construction, his first engine project. When completed the engine was successful and Curtiss soon started to sell motorcycles. This business grew rapidly, then in 1902 the Kirkham-Curtiss combination designed and built a more powerful twin-cylinder Vee-type engine which successfully went into production - the first of its type in the American motorcycle industry.

Soon Charles' father put him in charge of this new engine business, assisted by his younger brothers, Clarence and Percy. As they outgrew their first small facilities they moved the shop to Bath. This growing business continued until October of 1905, when Curtiss formed the G.H. Curtiss Manufacturing Company in Hammondsport, at which time he made plans to produce his own engines.

Even before this Charles had been looking ahead, and in 1904 made a four cylinder air-cooled engine for possible use in automobiles. With the loss of the Curtiss business in 1905 the Kirkham brothers turned their entire attention to engines for the growing automobile industry and brought out two water-cooled engines for vehicular use, the first with four cylinder, followed by one with six cylinders. These may have been the first automobile engines of this type in the United States. At some point during this period the Kirkham Motors Company was formally organized.

In 1906 they made a completely new experimental automobile for the Pullman Car Company of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, using their six cylinder engine. This was produced for four years. Kirkham became an expert driver and enjoyed speed which led to his engaging in auto road racing to some extent. At this time he was determined to make the engine business his life work. Their small business grew and eventually they supplied engines to several automobile manufacturers.

Kirkham's interest in aviation began with the first reports of the Wright brothers and their experiments, then when Curtiss and the Aerial Experiment Association began their pioneer aviation experiments at Hammondsport in 1907-1908, he took

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