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Harold E. Morehouse Flying Pioneers Biographies Collection - Parmelee, Phillip O.

Extracted on Mar-29-2024 01:53:46

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PHILIP O. PARMELEE

Early Wright Exhibition Pilot

Phil O. Parmelee was born at Matherson, Michigan March 8, 1887. At age 3 his parents moved to Grand Rapids, then Baldwin, Michigan, later to Denver, Colorado for a brief time, then back to St. Johns, Michigan. There he attended local grade and high school, then graduated from the University of Michigan.

His first business venture was with his father making gas engines in Marion, Michigan. In 1908 he started to work for the Buick Motor Car Company, Flint, Michigan, as a road tester. He loved automobiles and soon became one of their expert test and development men, also doing some road racing for the company. While on test work for Buick in the south during the early months of 1910, he "discovered" the first Wright flying school in operation at Birmingham, Alabama, and became very interested. In April he met and talked with Orville Wright, who was teaching the first group of civilian students, and witnessed the flying and training activities for several days. Parmelee was very impressed and later became fully resolved he wanted to learn to fly.

He contacted the Wrights about becoming a student and, as a result, joined the school at Simms Station, Dayton, Ohio, about July 1st, 1910. The Wrights were just entering the exhibition business and Parmelee was taught to fly by Walter Brookins and Al Welsh as they could find time between exhibition engagements.

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