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### Harold E. Morehouse Flying Pioneers Biographies Collection - Sommerville, William E.

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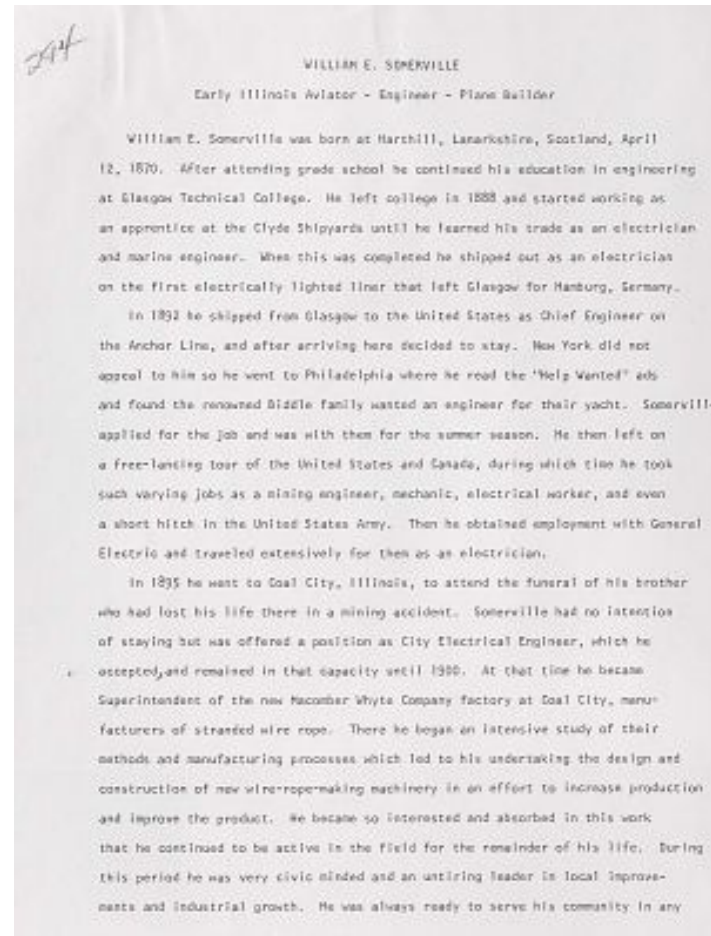
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**WILLIAM E. SOMERVILLE**  
Early Illinois Aviator - Engineer - Plane Builder

William E. Somerville was born at Harthhill, Lanarkshire, Scotland, April 12, 1870. After attending grade school he continued his education in engineering at Glasgow Technical College. He left college in 1888 and started working as an apprentice at the Clyde Shipyards until he learned his trade as an electrician and marine engineer. When this was completed he shipped out as an electrician on the first electrically lighted liner that left Glasgow for Hamburg, Germany.

In 1892 he shipped from Glasgow to the United States as Chief Engineer on the Anchor Line, and after arriving here decided to stay. New York did not appeal to him so he went to Philadelphia where he read the "Help Wanted" ads and found the renowned Biddle family wanted an engineer for their yacht. Somerville applied for the job and was with them for the summer season. He then left on a free-lancing tour of the United States and Canada, during which time he took such varying jobs as a mining engineer, mechanic, electrical worker, and even a short hitch in the United States Army. Then he obtained employment with General Electric and traveled extensively for them as an electrician.

In 1895 he went to Coal City, Illinois, to attend the funeral of his brother who had lost his life there in a mining accident. Somerville had no intention of staying but was offered a position as City Electrical Engineer, which he accepted, and remained in that capacity until 1900. At that time he became Superintendent of the new Macomber Whyte Company factory at Coal City, manufacturers of stranded wire rope. There he began an intensive study of their methods and manufacturing processes which led to his undertaking the design and construction of new wire-rope-making machinery in an effort to increase production and improve the product. He became so interested and absorbed in this work that he continued to be active in the field for the remainder of his life. During this period he was very civic minded and an untiring leader in local improvements and industrial growth. He was always ready to serve his community in any



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