

Flying Pioneers

By HAROLD E. MOREHOUSE

C. R. "SINNIE" SINCLAIR

C. R. Sinclair was born at Chandlerville, Illinois April 8, 1888. During boyhood he lived on a farm with his parents and attended school at Jacksonville, Illinois, then the University of Illinois.

He became interested in aviation when Captain H. B. Wild and Otto Brodie of Chicago put on a flying exhibition at the University campus during the "Spring of 1910" annual track meet. Brodie made the first flight in a Curtiss pusher, but crumpled a wing in landing. "Sinnie" who was taking a woodworking course at the time, asked his teacher if they could bring the damaged wing into the wood shop for repairs. The request was granted and Sinnie and his colleagues soon had the plane back in commission. Further flying caused a more serious smash-up, and when Brodie and Wild left for Chicago to make major repairs on the wrecked plane, they told Sinnie if he ever came to Chicago he should look them up and they would treat him to a ride for his kindly help.

His interest in flying was so thoroughly aroused that Easter vacation found Sinnie in Chicago to get his promised ride. Brodie kept his word and took Sinnie up in his old French-built Gnome-motored Farman biplane. The plane did not have a second seat so Sinnie rode astride the gas tank behind the pilot and held on. Brodie circled the field two or three times, zoomed up and down over the house tops and landed. As he taxied up to the starting point and switched off, the engine back fired and caught fire. Sinnie "lost no time" getting down off the gas tank and Brodie's mechanic, Shortie Schroeder, beat out the fire with his jacket.

After Sinnie's first ride he became so intensely infected with the "flying bug" that he fully resolved to make aviation his lifetime career. During summer vacation in 1911, he decided to go to St. Louis, Missouri and visit the aviation activities at Kinloch Field.



C. R. Sinclair: Early Bird, Instructor, Transport Pilot

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There he had his second ride, with Tony Jannus, in payment for his help in building a new pontoon. During the summer months of 1912-1913 Sinnie worked as a mechanic with Max Lillie's Flying School at Cicero Field, Chicago, Illinois. While there, he also helped build a second "Model B" Wright plane for school use. In 1914 he became mechanic for Joseph Pendhayn on exhibition work throughout the middle west. Pendhayn, an Austrian, was stationed at Cicero Field and flew a Day tractor biplane with Kickham engine.

By 1915 Sinnie decided he really wanted to learn to fly, so took a part-time job as mechanic with Partridge and Keller, well known Cicero plane builders, for flying instruction. His instructor at Cicero Field was Elmer Partridge, but by mid-summer that celebrated flying field was about to be abandoned so Sinnie was told to find some other place to continue his lessons. He found and arranged for a new site which later became Ashburn Field, and was the FIRST to fly from those grounds. That season, after 2 hours, 50 minutes instruction, Sinnie soloed on November 15, 1915 at Ashburn Field, Chicago, Illinois on a Partridge-Keller tractor biplane with 70 hp Maximotor engine.

Sinnie flew exhibitions until October 4, 1916 when he joined the U. S. Signal Corps, Aviation Section, as a civilian instructor at Ashburn Field. The Government planned to start extensive student training operations there and officially opened October 28, 1916 with several planes and instructors. In January 1917, the entire outfit moved south to Memphis, Tennessee for the winter months. The latter part of May all operations moved back to Ashburn Field, then on July 7th 27 civilian flying instructors, including Sinnie, flew to Chanute Field, Rantoul, Illinois. On December 19th he was transferred to Call Field, Wichita Falls, Texas, where he remained until April 1918 when he was sent to Detroit as an inspector on Liberty engines, remaining there until after the Armistic.

In 1919 Sinnie organized the Universal Aviation Corporation in Detroit, Michigan with Henry M. Leland of the Lincoln Motor Car Company as President. This company operated until 1922. Later that year he bought a Canuck and operated from a field on his father's farm, carrying passengers and giving exhibitions in that vicinity. In 1923 he joined the Marie Meyers Flying Circus at St. Louis, Missouri, putting on exhibitions throughout the mid-west. In 1924 Sinnie joined his old friend, Shorty Schroeder, who was with the Underwriters Laboratories in Chicago, Illinois. On June 1st of 1925 Schroeder left to become Manager of Ford Airport at Dearborn, Michigan, and one month later Sinnie joined him as his assistant. In 1926, when the Ford Company received an air mail contract between Detroit and Chicago, Schroeder became Pilot No. 1 and Sinnie Pilot No. 2 on the mail runs, using Stout all-metal planes--single Liberty engine craft, first, and later the new tri-motored machines. During 1926 Sinnie flew his tests and obtained Department of Commerce License No. 624.

In July 1927, Sinnie left Ford and joined Trump Brothers of Minneapolis, Minnesota to start the Trump Airline, flying between Minneapolis, St. Paul and Duluth, with a new Buhl Air Sedan with Wright J-5 engine. That winter the run was discontinued due to severe weather and Sinnie took the plane to Hot Springs, Arkansas to carry passengers. The venture was not successful and the company went out of business.

In the spring of 1928 Sinnie joined Universal Airlines

in Chicago and was assigned the run from Minneapolis, Minnesota to Fargo, North Dakota, known as the Northern Airline, flying Ryan B-1 and Stinson Detroit planes. He continued on this run until January 3, 1929 when he and a second pilot, Bob Rentz, were sent to Brownsville, Texas, to look into the possibility of starting an airline from there to Mexico City, Mexico. After several trial flights the line was established, using Ford Trimotor planes. February 4th Sinnie made the Charter Flight carrying American and Mexican officials, and the line was under way. About March 1st the company started Sinnie on a combined publicity and barnstorming trip from Brownsville back toward Chicago, where he arrived on March 28th. He remained with Universal until 1935, during which time he flew their corporation Pratt and Whitney powered Fairchild Executive plane, and their Ford and Fokker tri-motors on the Chicago-to-Kansas City Chicago-to-Cleveland, Chicago-to-St. Louis and Chicago-to-Fort Worth regular runs. It was during this time the company reorganized, first as American Airways and then as American Airlines.

During the latter part of 1935 Sinnie left and returned to Ford Airport, where he worked in Operations, did some flying and inspection work until July 31, 1936, when he and a partner, Harry Ferris, opened a flying school at the Muskegon County Airport, Muskegon, Michigan. A year later he bought out his partner and formed his own company, known as the Sinclair Flying Service, which he still operates there. During World War II he secured a CPT training program, and among his students were some who made quite a name for themselves during the war. Since then Sinnie has continued to operate his flying service, doing instructing, charter work, some aerial photography, aerial ambulance trips and passenger carrying. He has also taken some extensive trips to deliver a plane to its new owner.

An active Early Bird and member of all the major aviation fraternal organizations, recipient of many well deserved honors and awards, here indeed is a most unusual Flying Pioneer. Still actively engaged in aviation, he has spent his entire life flying airplanes. His sincere faith in and devoted enthusiasm for flying has remained constant during his 45 years experience. Well known, he is a great ambassador of aviation and richly deserving of everlasting credit for the very major part he has played in the development and growth of American aviation.

OTTO W. BRODIE

Otto W. Brodie was born at Sheboygan, Wisconsin September 27, 1888. He attended schools there and at an early age became a jockey. He then turned his attention to trick cycle riding and did the loop-the-loop on a bicycle at fairs. After this he took up motoring and became a road man, driver and demonstrator for the White Automobile Company of Chicago, Illinois. This firm was owned by James Plew, who was one of the first men in Chicago to become interested in aviation, and one of the founders of the Aero Club of Illinois. Reportedly Brodie also did some ballooning about this time with the well known Chicago aeronaut H. B. Wild.

When Glenn Curtiss won the Gordon Bennett Cup at Rheims, France, in August 1909, Plew decided to take the agency for Curtiss planes in Chicago. Later that Fall final arrangements were made and Brodie was sent to Hammondsport to learn to fly as a demonstrator salesman. There, with a few verbal instructions from Curtiss, Brodie learned to fly a very early Curtiss pusher biplane, with a 4 cylinder 25 hp engine, by the end of December 1909. Charles K. Hamilton was also there practicing at the same time.

After a short period of practice at Hammondsport, Brodie returned to Chicago and a plane was delivered to Plew during the early Spring of 1910. From May 21st to 23rd, Brodie and H. Wild attempted to fly an exhibition

at the University of Illinois at Urbana, but had their troubles. The field was very muddy and with low power, combined with very little flying experience, Brodie had a smashup but fortunately was not injured. A group of manual training students, led by C. R. Sinclair, took the damaged plane into the school workshop and made the necessary repairs. A second flight attempt ended in another smashup when he failed to clear some trees on take-off. Brodie then shipped the damaged plane back to Chicago. He continued practicing at Chicago through the 1910 season and also made a few trial hops in a Montgomery-type monoplane that summer for Plew.

In February 1911, Plew sold this early Curtiss plane to James Ward, and that month Brodie was one of the incorporators of the Franco-American Aviation Company of Chicago with Walter R. Sollitt and Joseph W. Latimer. They purchased a French-built Farman biplane, with 50 hp Gnome engine, from the well-known New York sportsman aviator Clifford B. Harmon and started operations using a tent hangar.

This plane had an unusual historical significance. It had been brought to the United States by Louis Paulhan for the first Los Angeles Flying Meet in January 1910, and was used by him in that event, following which he exhibited at San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Denver, New Orleans and at Jamaica, Long Island before returning to France in March. At New York the plane was placed under control of the courts by injunction and was later sold to Harmon, who made several noteworthy flights with it before it was sold to the Franco-American Company. Reportedly, it was also the same plane Paulhan had previously used in many outstanding flights in both Great Britain and France during the Fall of 1909. The engine was stated to have been formerly owned and used by Claude Grahame-White. Thus Brodie fell heir to a most unusual aeroplane.

On April 9, 1911 Brodie carried Katherine Stinson and Mrs. Charles Coey as passengers, the first women to fly in Chicago. He continued to carry passengers that month and began booking exhibitions. In June Brodie was the most active pilot at the New Cicero Flying Field. On



Otto W. Brodie: Early exhibition pilot and test pilot.

June 30th he had a minor smashup when the engine quit as he was making a banking turn near the ground, but he was not injured. On July 4th he flew in a small local flying meet at Cicero. Also flying were Dan Kramer, Allan Lockheed, Harry Powers and Willie Lenert. Brodie remained very active at Cicero for the 1911 season and carried passengers extensively. On August 24th he flew at Independence, Missouri at a fair. During this entire period Rudolph W. Schroeder was Brodie's mechanic. Late in December Brodie and Harry Powers left to operate a winter flying school at St. Augustine, Florida. In addition to the school activities, winter resort passengers were carried and they reportedly had a Bleriot monoplane there in addition to the Farman.

They returned to Cicero in April 1912, and Brodie flew in the usual season's opening day meet on May 30th. Flying also for this event were Max Lillie, Farnum Fish, Paul Studensky, George Mestach, Lloyd Thompson and Andrew Drew. Brodie remained very active at Cicero during the 1912 season. On June 2nd he flew his pilot license tests at Cicero on his Gnome Farman biplane and on June 19th was granted License No. 135. In July he conducted the initial flight tests on the new Smith monoplane, with a 6 cylinder Smith radial engine, and continued to fly this plane occasionally for the balance of the season. He also flew a Curtiss biplane that Summer. During the Summer and Fall he engaged in exhibition flying at various suburban Chicago areas. Brodie entered and competed in the 1912 Chicago Flying Meet at Cicero in September, and that Fall started the Standard Aviation School at Clearing, Illinois, using the grounds which formerly served as the Gordon Bennett Race Course. Still flying the Farman, he had a small class which he continued to instruct as late as the weather permitted.

In the Spring of 1913 Brodie started school operations again and on April 19, 1913 was instantly killed in a crash at Clearing while making a check flight in the Farman before taking up a student. He had made one circuit of the field and was preparing to land when he nosed in from a low altitude. He was badly crushed under the engine which had torn from its mounting, killing him instantly. Brodie had planned to give up active flying soon and turn his attention to building planes and had one of his own design under construction at the time of his death at the age of 27. He was survived by his wife and two sons. Burial was in Montrose Cemetery, Chicago, Illinois.

Flying Pioneer Otto W. Brodie was one of our very first aviators, starting almost at the beginning of that early group who gambled on man's ability to fly. A brother of Steve Brodie of Brooklyn Bridge fame, he gave his life to further the progress of aviation.

W. REDMOND CROSS

William Redmond Cross was born in South Orange, New Jersey June 8, 1874. He attended Groton and Yale, where he was an outstanding athlete in football and rowing. After graduating in 1896 with a BA degree he spent two years with a London banking firm, then returned to join the staff of the Manhattan Trust Co. After a time there he resigned to become a partner in his father's banking business with Morton, Bliss and Co. When later this business firm dissolved, Cross became a partner in the firm of Redmond and Co. where he remained until his retirement from active business in 1920.

Always an active sportsman, Cross became interested in ballooning and the possibilities of flight during its early years, and in November 1905, he was one of the founder members of The Aero Club of America. During 1907, 1908 and 1909 he made some ascensions with the well known early professional balloonist, A. Leo Stevens. When the first public aeroplane flight demonstrations took place in New York during the summer and fall of 1909, Cross became very interested in flying. In 1910 he followed it closely and was one of the organizers and

a sponsor of the famed early International Aviation Tournament at Belmont Park October 22nd through the 30th. Cross was one of the vice-presidents of this early gala event where the world's most experienced pioneer aviators competed for flying honors. In December Cross was elected a member of the Contest Committee of the Aero Club. Following the Meet, he became very interested in learning to fly and in the spring of 1911 was a frequent visitor to the Long Island flying fields.

During the first week of June Cross had a ride at Nassau Boulevard Flying Field with Wright pilot, Al Welsh, who was just starting an eastern flying school for the Wright Company there. Cross was convinced and signed up for instruction. In the class with him were Edson Gallaudet, George Beatty and William C. Beers. Their instructor was Al Welsh. In early July Cross was flying alone, and on July 27, 1911 he obtained FAE flying license No. 35. During this interval he had ordered a Wright Model B aeroplane and by August 10 had his own hangar and was practicing actively on this new plane. During the month he won the first leg of flying necessary for the Rodman Wannamaker Trophy for the longest amateur flight by being up nearly one hour. He remained active in his flying practice for the balance of the 1911 season. On November 13 Cross was elected a Director of The Aero Club of America and on November 27 was elected to the Board of Governors, his term to expire in 1915. In December he represented The Aero Club of America at the Annual Meeting of the Federation Aeronautique Internationale in Rome, Italy.

In early 1912 Cross was elected a member of the Contest Committee of The Aero Club and Chairman of the Board on Licensing aviators. Later he was made a member of the Gordon-Bennett Aviation Trophy Committee. He was also one of three members to decide on giving Glenn Curtiss the 1911 Aero Club Trophy for his successful development of the hydro-aeroplane. During the spring and summer of 1912 Cross again did some flying for sport and still maintained his plane and hangar at Nassau. During the early summer he went to Chicago as The Aero Club representative to arrange for the Gordon-Bennett Trophy Race which was held at Clearing, Illinois on September 9th. In December he was made a Life Member of The Aero Club.

In January, 1913 Cross was again one of three members to decide on giving Glenn Curtiss the 1912 Club Trophy for his development of the Flying Boat. In the spring of 1913 he was married and decided to quit flying and sold his plane.

In later years Cross did some big game hunting and took an active part in civic affairs. In June, 1937 he became President of the New York Zoo and remained in this position until he passed away suddenly on November 16, 1940 at the home of his sister in Princeton, New Jersey after attending the Princeton-Yale football game. He had lived for many years at Bernardsville, New Jersey and was prominent in business and social circles of the Metropolitan New York area. He was survived by his wife, three sons and two daughters.

Early Bird, Flying Pioneer, W. Redmond Cross deserves much credit for his faithful interest and devotion to the early days of aviation in America. He was one of the real stalwarts of The Aero Club movement which contributed so much to promote and sponsor the early days of flying. Through his love of the sport he was one of the first business men to learn to fly and buy an aeroplane for personal use in the United States.

ABOUT THE SERIES: The JOURNAL is very proud to be able to run this continuing series telling of the men and women who brought aviation to the fore of man's activities. We are also deeply grateful to the continuing effort in research and writing put into the series by Harold S. Morehouse and his wife Marvel. Retired, they have spent endless hours seeking out photos and facts which are now fully filed in their new home.