

CHAPTER XXXIII

FIRST FLIGHTS IN THE AIR

Soon after the first large passenger plane (the Curtiss Eagle, seating eight passengers) was completed in 1919, a representative of The Curtis Publishing Company's New York office, Frank Lovejoy, suggested that he could get an invitation for Grandfather and himself to go up. Grandfather gladly accepted.

The flight of half an hour was taken, flying not very high over Manhattan Island, following Broadway up from the Battery to beyond Grand Central Park. Do you not think that it was thrilling to look down into the canyons of New York and see the automobiles and the trotters (in that day, dearios, there were horses trotting up Broadway. Can you imagine it?) moving so slowly in comparison with our speed.

Incidentally, it appeared to Grandfather some years later that this had not been very safe. The plane had only one motor, was the first plane of its kind built and if anything had gone wrong, there would have been no place to land.

This same day Mr. Lovejoy and Grandfather went up again in an Oriole - a two passonger open plane. Grandfather felt much like the lady in a cartoon who, riding in an open plane, tapped the pilot on the shoulder and said, "There is a terrible draft back here. What are you going to do about it?"

A few weeks later the Curtiss Eagle stopped at Philadelphia en route to Florida, and the Curtiss Airplane Company suggested that Grandfather should invite some of the leading officials of The Curtis Publishing Company to take a ride in the plane. Grandfather never knew how busy the officials of The

Curtis Publishing Company were until he invited them to take this trip. They all deeply regretted that on that particular afternoon they were just too busy to go - not one accepted. Grandfather tried the lesser executives with the same result. They were exceedingly busy that particular afternoon - they were so busy that not one of them accepted.

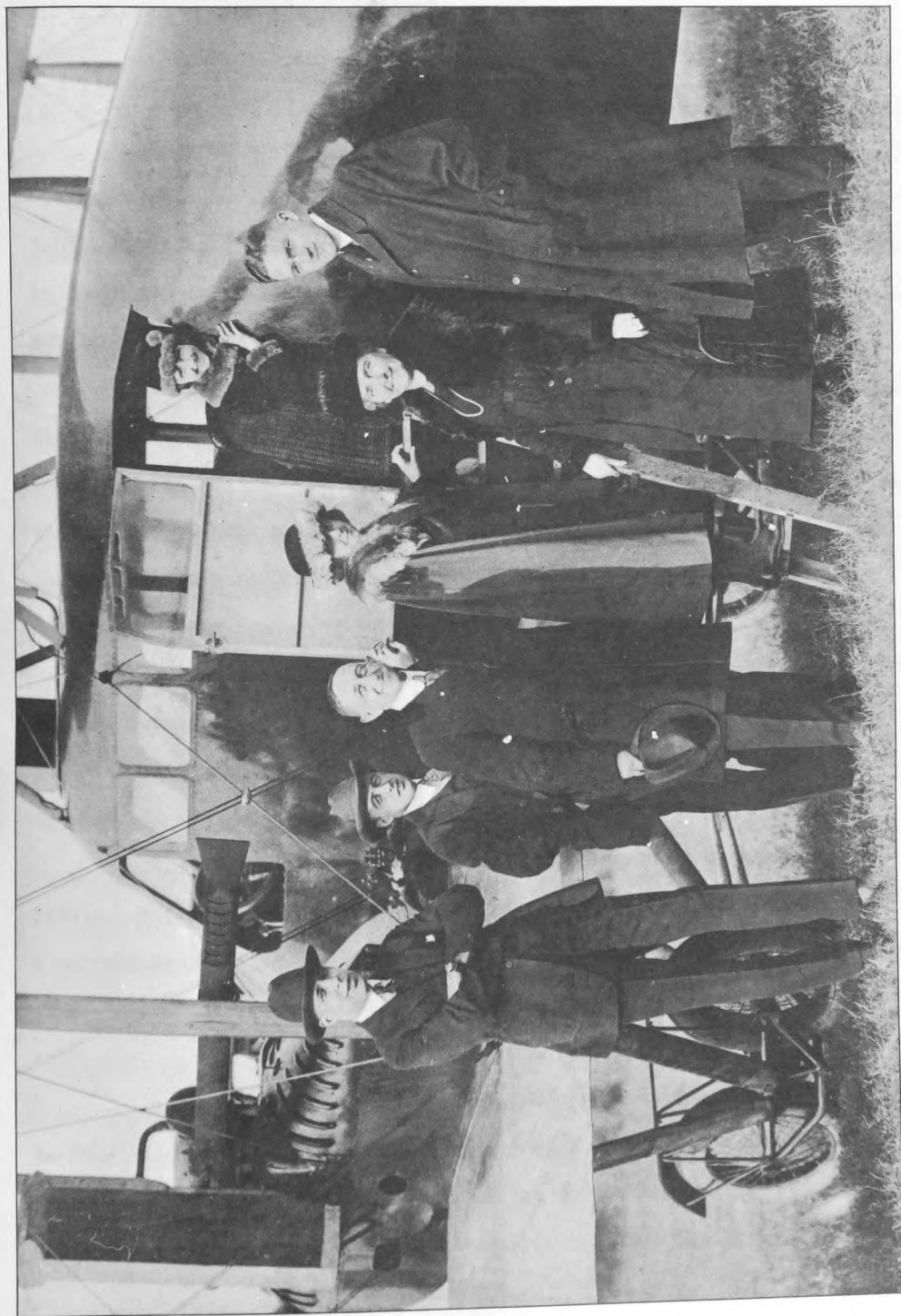
Grandfather then telephoned home. Grandmother and the girls would be delighted to go. The boys were at the University of Pennsylvania and could not be reached. So Grandmother, Aunt Ruth, Aunt Grace, William R. Boyd, who happened to be in Philadelphia, Mr. Kinney, who was one of Grandfather's assistants, and Grandfather made the party, to which the Curtiss Airplane Company added two guests of their own.

The pilot was Bert Acosta, and he gave the party a half hour ride over Philadelphia suburbs. Grace was said at the time to have been the first young girl in America to have gone up in a passenger plane. She was then seven years of age. A newspaper photographer snapped her as she looked out the door beaming happily before the start, and the picture appeared in the Public Ledger. Grandmother, Ruth and Grace all greatly enjoyed the ride, but looked upon the adventure more seriously when a little later in Florida the plane crashed, killing the pilot (not Bert Acosta but another) and all the passengers.

A few months later Grandfather, upon arriving in Dayton to make a speech, found that the speech was scheduled for 2:35 p.m. and that by a coincidence the last train which would get him to Philadelphia for an important appointment next day left at 2:35 p.m. He was unable to shift the hour of either appointment, but Mr. Kettering, head of General Motors Research Laboratories, for whom the talk was to be made, came to the rescue by offering an airplane.

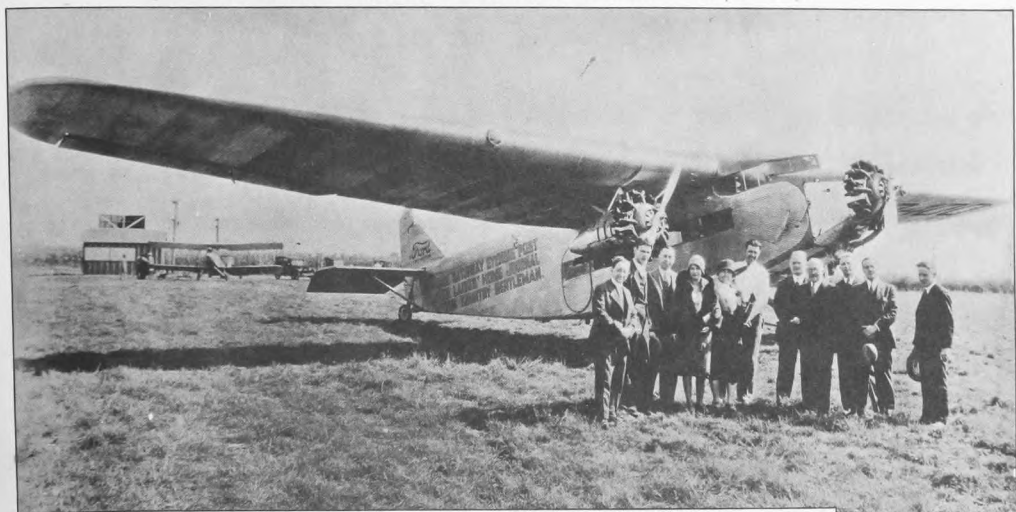
So Grandfather went on the platform at 2:35 p.m., spoke for an hour, was rushed to the airport, placed in a closed two-passenger plane with an Army pilot and took after the train. We passed the train at Columbus and when, a little later, from the plane Grandfather looked down upon an airport which seemed from a considerable height to be not much more than a couple of rods square, and a tiny taxicab waiting at the gate, it seemed to him like real service. Grandfather caught the first section of the train and a wire gave the convention a real thrill, for in those days the use of a plane for a practical purpose was unusual. Do you not think that was a lot of fun?

A little later Grandfather discovered that none of his accident insurance (he was carrying at that time at double indemnity for death in a public carrier about \$80,000) would cover an accident in an airplane and he decided to stay on the ground until the insurance situation changed. Some years later George, on a trip to Europe, flew from Paris to London on a stormy day, and the account he gave of his experience did not make the family enthusiastic about further adventures in the air.



Curtiss Eagle—First Large American Passenger Plane—October 23, 1919

The Curtis Publishing Company's Tri-motored Ford—1929



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