Air Craft

Elderly citizens of Jacksonville remember seeing balloon ascensions when they were children, and memory easily recalls the flight made here in 1905 by an air gas-bag propelled by oars; but the first flight in this vicinity without artificial aid, was that of a huge box-kite aeroplane at Atlantic Beach during the automobile races, April 9, 1906. Chas R. Hamilton was the aviator, and he attained a height of 250 feet, from which elevation he suffered a "nose" dive, escaping death by a miracle. On the 14th, Israel Ludlow in a similar accident sustained injuries that paralyzed him for life.

On February 1, 1908, Lincoln J. Beachey made the first flight in an airship propelled by motor, in East Florida. The flight was made in South Jacksonville, in what was known as Beachey Airship No. 6. This was a dirigible shaped like a cigar, with rudder behind and propeller in front. It was equipped with a 4-cylinder, 10 h.p. gasoline engine weighing 82 pounds; the total weight of the ship was 240 pounds. In this flight Beachey was in the air 12 minutes. On Feby. 3d, he crossed the river and flew over Jacksonville, circling with perfect control several times, to the great amazement of the inhabitants.

The first flight made in Jacksonville of a heavier-than-air machine was that of Charles K. Hamilton in a Curtiss biplane, May 21, 1910. The flight was made at Moncrief racetrack and was the first of a series of exhibitions, one of which was a race between the bi-plane and a Cadillac-30, driven by Dexter Kelly. Owing to unfavorable wind conditions, the Cadillac won.

Earle Dodge's School of Aviation opened at Black Point (State Camp), December 4, 1916, and the Curtiss aeroplanes of modern type soon became familiar objects in the sky in this vicinity. This school for training aviators was in operation until the summer of 1917, and an outstanding feature connected with it was that no fatal accidents occurred.

Aeroplanes had now ceased to be a novelty to the people of Jacksonville, but the final word in spectacular air "stunts" was yet to come. It was during one of the Liberty Loan campaigns that an aerial circus, participated in by American, French and English planes, held spellbound the population of Jacksonville gathered on the housetops. No such exhibition of "air stunts" was ever seen here before, or since.