

## A Pioneer Worthy of Aviator License No. 1

Written by Paul S. George, Special to the BT  
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### A view of our past from the archives of HistoryMiami



In the pantheon of Greater Miami's most influential citizens, Glenn Curtiss is seldom listed among the elite group that includes Julia Tuttle, George Merrick, and Henry Flagler. Yet his achievements both here and elsewhere are the stuff of legend.

Born in Hammondsport, New York, in 1878, Curtiss gained fame early in life through the manufacture and racing of motorcycles at recorded speeds not seen before. As he entered his 20s, he again set world speed records, but this time it was with automobiles before moving into aviation, which was then in its infancy. Again, Curtiss became a record holder, flying seaplanes while contributing hundreds of inventions, ranging from the design of new aircraft to the development of critical components for airplanes. In recognition of his achievements in early aviation, Curtiss was awarded Aviator License No. 1 in 1911.

In World War I, Curtiss aircraft factories in Buffalo built military airplanes under large government contracts. The Curtiss JN-4 "Jenny" was employed to train 95 percent of U.S. Army Air Corps pilots.

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Even before America's entry into the war in 1917, Curtiss had had his first brush with Miami, opening a flying school in today's Allapattah neighborhood. He also provided hydroplane instruction from a base located near Biscayne Bay.

When the United States entered World War I, Curtiss turned to training pilots for aerial combat, both in Hialeah, an area recently retrieved from Everglades swampland and, later, near Lake Palmer, lying close to the Miami Canal. By then, the aviator had met James Bright, a Missourian and dairyman who owned thousands of acres of land in today's Hialeah. Together the two invested millions of dollars in real estate, from which emerged the future communities of Hialeah, Miami Springs, and Opa-locka in the 1920s.

In the next installment of "Picture Story," we will examine Curtiss's role in the development of these boom-era communities.

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