

JEANNE (KLECKLER) GREVELDING, GUEST SPEAKER AT THE OX5 56TH REUNION

My father, Henry Kleckler was born May 14, 1881, three months after his father died. He grew up with 3 brothers and 2 sisters on a farm until age 14 when his mother moved the family to Bath so he could attend Haverling High School. After 1 semester, it became necessary to end his formal education. He worked for 3 years as an apprentice in his Uncles shop learning mechanics. Next Henry moved to Thompsonville, Conn. where he was in charge of all factory equipment and completed 4 years of electrical work at the Hartford Carpet Corporation



As a young man of 26 he moved back to Bath because his mother was alone. And while looking around for work he was told of a bicycle shop being run by Glen Curtiss – also motorcycles were being experimented on. It was Jan. 1907 that my father met Curtiss and took a job as night foreman. He built the engine for the bike on which Curtiss won the worlds speed record at Ormond Beach, Fl. a record which stood for many years.

My father designed all of the early Curtiss engines including the 30 horse power engine which powered the Redwing, the first plane to make a public flight in the U. S. on Mar. 17, 1908. Later he developed the “O” series of engines ending with the OX-5 which powered the Jenny and other planes.

Over the years Glen Curtiss asked my father to go with him and work together on many business ventures or be in charge of a plant or be chief design engineer. One of my father’s best memories was assisting Curtiss on setting up the flight from Albany to Governors Island on the Hudson River.

My father recalled that even in a theater.....Curtiss’ mind was on ways to improve the design of a plane; not the play ... or they would be going home in a taxi, and all of a sudden Curtiss would say, “I’ve got it Henry!” Curtiss hastily but skillfully drew sketches of his Ideas on paper. My father then took over and created the development of the sketch.

In 1921 my father formed the Aerial Service Corp., but two years later he was again working for his old friend and they were both happy. Their work was on what they called an “aerocar”.

In 1928 when a front wheel drive automobile design was completed but failed to sell because of the depression, my father set up shop at the rear of the home he had bought in Bath ... 226 Liberty St.

It was during this time that Curtiss died (1930) suddenly and unexpectedly, after an appendix operation. It was a severe blow to my father. They had been friends all the time since 1907. The strength of the bond was evidenced by the fact that Mr. Curtiss confided with my father often in his personal problems.

It seemed that they were always together at work and leisure ... they frequently went on hunting and camping trips together with their families. We have pictures of them at a lodge in the Adirondack Mountains. My father may have gone more for the friendship. I can’t imagine him shooting an animal ... he was always too soft hearted.

At a meeting of the OX-5 club in Amityville, N. J. Feb. 1957 ... Mr. Zimmerman remarked that Henry probably knew Glen Curtiss the man better than any other human being ... save, perhaps his wife Lena Neff Curtiss.