

Hello Chris,

My great grandfather, John D Watkins, worked for the Winton Motor Carriage Company in Philadelphia in 1903 and it is my understanding that at that time he taught the owner or chauffeur of a purchased car how to maintain and rebuild the car on the road. He was also the mechanic on one or more of the Winton Bullet cars that set speed records at that time either on a wooden track in New York, the beach in southern New Jersey or Daytona Beach at that time. One of them is still at the Smithsonian with his name on it.

He was hired away to become a Chauffeur himself for Clifford Harmon who was a real estate developer and was responsible for purchasing and developing land in Brooklyn New York in anticipation of the Brooklyn Bridge being constructed. He was later responsible for developing Croton-on-the Hudson and Pelham New York and Philadelphia where they likely met. In 1906 they traveled to Europe and purchased a Panhard et Levassor right from the Paris Auto Show and proceeded to tour Europe, attending boat races on the Thames and crossing the Alps near Geneva and eventually attending the Grand Prix in Le Mans.

Harmon was an avid balloon racer who set many records for hours aloft and the instant that airplanes existed they traveled to France and purchased a Farman Bi-plane and proceeded to set records with in in and around Garden City, Long Island in 1910 with my great grandfather as the mechanic. Harmon was awarded the sixth pilot's license to fly issued by the United States right after Orville and Wilbur Wright.

As an aside, in 1904 Harmon married Louise Adele Benedict, daughter of E.C. Benedict of Greenwich, Connecticut on whose estate he famously crashed his plane attempting to land after being the first person to fly across the Long Island sound. EC Benedict's yacht, the Oneida was where President Grover Cleveland had a secret surgery performed to remove palette cancer in 1893. Harmon created the International League of Aviators and The Harmon Trophy of aviators that has been awarded to the likes of Wiley Post, Howard Hughes, James Doolittle and Chuck Yeager over the years.