



The AMA History Project Presents: Biography of JOSEPH HENRY EHRHARDT 1913 – 1978



Written by CDR and AMA Staff; Transcribed, edited & formatted by NR (08/2007); Reformatted, edited, updated by JS (03/2010, 05/2014)

Career:

- 1926-: Free Flight rubber power competition since age 13
- Club affiliation with the Stix-Baer-Fuller department store, which later became St Louis Thermaleers
- Records consult for NAA

Awards/Records/Honors:

- 1930 and 1931: Airplane Model League of America (AMLA)
- 1930-1931: Wakefield Trophy winner
- 1930-1931: A & B Stick
- National Aeronautics Association (NAA) National Outdoor Champion, Aero Cup
- Mulvihill Trophy Winner
- First prize, American Boy magazine
- (AMLA) trip to Europe for one month on steamer ship S.S. Montcalm
- (AMLA) Outdoor A & B Commercial
- Eighty Merit Badge Eagle Scout (Boy Scouts of America-1929?)
- Society of Model Aeronautical Engineers (SAME) Wakefield Record
- 1991: NFFS Hall of Fame
- 2009: Model Aviation Hall of Fame

Charles Dennis Rushing researched and wrote this biography. In his letter he stated, "I agree with your philosophy of preserving the history of individuals who have given their lives to aeromodeling. In the case of Joe Ehrhardt, he disappeared into the dustbin of time, before he aged beyond his teens. My goal has been, like yours, to preserve for history, the accomplishments of people who have made a contribution to aeromodeling, but who have been overlooked for their efforts."

Joe Ehrhardt is an enigma to model aviation historians, it's almost as if he never existed at all! Twice National Champion and twice Wakefield Champion! Joe who? Joseph H. Ehrhardt, of St. Louis, Missouri won the AMLA-NAA National Outdoor championship in 1930 and 1931, including the grand prize of a month's trip to Europe given by the *American Boy* magazine to all the winners of scale, indoor, and outdoor national championships.

While in England, Joe Ehrhardt, Bill Chaffee, and Ray Thompson entered and flew in the S.M.A.E. Wakefield International Trophy model airplane meet. All three Americans flew all balsawood-constructed model airplanes, a type unheard of in England. The Americans flew their four-ounce airplanes against the British Wakefield Team, whose models were built of hardwood, wire, and silk weighing up to twelve ounces. The contest was held at

Halton Airdrome on July 19, 1930 during a storm having wind gusts up to thirty miles per hour. Alex Imrie and Denis Fairlie, English historians writing in the August 1982 issue of *Aeromodeler* magazine, and also recalling in a letter dated February 23, 1997, "Furthermore, according to eyewitness B.K. Johnson, this Ehrhardt model didn't really fly 'properly', it blew along tumbling like a tissue bag in the stiff wind." Yet, Joe Ehrhardt's Wakefield had the highest total time of the day at Halton - 259 seconds, winning the Wakefield Trophy for the U.S.!

The following year the Wakefield International Trophy contest was held on June 30, 1931 at the U.S. Army Air Corps Wright Patterson Field near Dayton, Ohio, following the National Model Airplane meet sponsored jointly by the NAA and AMLA. This was the first time that the Wakefield contest was held outside of England. Joe Ehrhardt qualified for the first U.S. Wakefield Team trials. By making a flight of 264.8 seconds, he won the Wakefield Trophy to become the first two-time winner, and the only American to ever win the Wakefield International Trophy consecutively.

Today, as we look at Joe Ehrhardt's record of modeling achievements, it is hard to imagine that his memory has been swept into the dustbin of time. He was inducted into the National Free Flight Society's Hall of Fame through the efforts of Jim Bennett in 1991, but all traces of him seem to vanish after he competed in the 1932 Wakefield contest. Gordon Light wrote that he remembers Joe Ehrhardt after having flown against him in 1931 and 1932. In this letter, Gordon accused Joe of having put the first dent into the Wakefield Trophy.

Before writing this biography, I called the National Free Flight Society (NFFS), Society of Antique Modelers (SAM), and the Lee Renaud Memorial Library at the National Model Aviation Museum in search of background information about Joe Ehrhardt, but it was to no avail. Only Jim Bennett, who had written the NFFS Symposium's 24th Annual Hall of Fame nomination for Joe Ehrhardt's induction in 1991, and Ernst Johnson, who gave me the astonishing photograph of Joe at Halton in 1930, have helped clear up part to this mystery.

My only other resource has come from the 1982 Frank Zaic copy of the publication *Model Airplanes and the American Boy, 1927-1934*. From here, the trail of history concerning Joseph Henry Ehrhardt seems to vanish. Of course, the worldwide depression of 1929 had everything to do with the vanishing act of many business enterprises, including *The Youths' Companion* combining with *The American Boy* magazine and the AMLA. After 1934, they both vanish.

The AMA was only formed in 1936; therefore, I have no knowledge that the AMA assumed the records of the AMLA. The NAA may have records of the flying performances of model airplanes prior to 1936; otherwise, history almost ends in 1932 for Joe Ehrhardt's model airplane record.

As caretakers of aeromodeling history in the United States, we have this opportunity to keep Joseph Henry Ehrhardt's memory alive, by bestowing our medals of honor upon him

and inducting him into both the SAM and Model Aviation Hall of Fame. Joe Ehrhardt was as much a leading pioneer of model aviation as were Gordon Light, James Cahill, Dick Korda, George Reich, and Bob White. I know that each and every one of these past great American Wakefield champions would have wondered why Joseph Henry Ehrhardt wasn't standing ahead of all of them! Please, give this forgotten American Wakefield International Trophy winner and National Champion "All American Boy" his just honor.

Publications about Ehrhardt

American Boy magazine October 1930, March 1931, May 1931, and September 1931, Bowden, 1946
Model Airplane News, April 1953, History & Technical Development of Model Aircraft, Lt. Col. C. E.
SAM Year Book, No. 8, 1953, International Competition Handbook, G. Ritz
Wakefield International Cup: A History 1911 to 2011
Aeromodeler, Charles Dennis Rushing, August 1982
24th Annual NFFS Symposium, Hall of Fame inductee nomination, Alex Imrie, J.H. Bennett, 1991

Designer and Experimenter

Rubber-powered Stick, Cabin (Commercial), and Wakefield designs
First all-balsawood Wakefield winner
First freewheeling propeller, 1931
First to wind rubber motor outside of model, 1931
First to stretch rubber motor, 1930
Airfoil design (modified NACA 6409), testing of Wakefield design, 1928-1932

Leader

First American to win both U.S. Nationals and the Wakefield International Trophy
The only American to win the Wakefield consecutively, 1930 and 1931

Manufacturer/Owner

With brothers Carl and William, owned Ehrhardt Model Airplane & Supply Company

Lecturer & Speaker

In USA and Europe, spoke on design, construction, and flying model aircraft
Celebrity with introductions to the President of the United States Herbert Hoover, Orville Wright, Charles Lindbergh, and Lord Wakefield of Hythe

Education

Cleveland HS, Parks Air College, St. Louis, Missouri (1938)

-Written by Charles Dennis Rushing, March 31, 2007
Author of *The Wakefield International Cup: A History 1911 to 2011*



*Photograph of Ehrhardt from the Bertram P. Pond
Collection, #0071, National Model Aviation Museum
Archives, c. 1920s-1930s.*

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