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Portland, Oregon.

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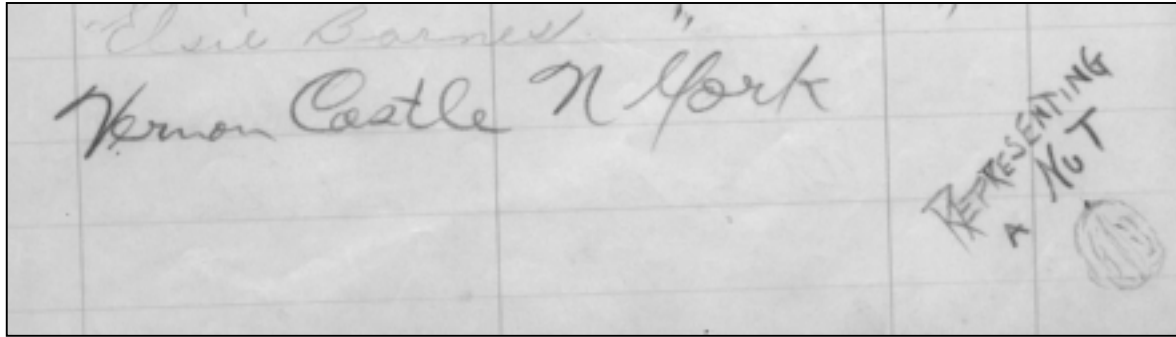
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VERNON CASTLE

R16-275

Signed Guestbook: August 16, 1916



The total number of guests in the Vernon Castle party is not clear. The names listed below that of Castle were on the following page, but are likely part of his party.

- Vernon Castle.....N York
- Mr. and Mrs. Clinton Gillins (sp?)....NY
- Clinton Gillins Jr. (sp?).....NY
- Margaret B. Gillins (sp?)..... NY
- J.W. Gillens (sp?).....NY
- Edward Hungerford.....NY
- R. H. Crozier.....Portland

(Note: The sketch of the nut drawn to the lower right of Castle's signature appears to belong to Castle. What do you suppose it represents?)

Vernon Castle Vitae:

Profession: Dancer, silent movie actor, aviator

Born: May 2, 1887 / Norwich, England

Died: Feb. 15, 1918 / Benbrook, Texas (age 31)
(airplane accident)

Age at Chalet: 29 years



The Dance Team of Vernon and Irene Castle

**DETAILED STUDY OF CASTLE ENTRY----->>
FOLLOWING PAGES**

DETAILS / VERNON CASTLE ENTRY

Dancing craze

Vernon and his wife Irene have been described as the most beloved dancers of the early 20th century, and dances that they created were popular around the world. The couple became international symbols of youth and beauty and millions of people followed their every move. Beginning at a time when dancing in the United States was minimally accepted and considered by some vulgar, the dance team of Vernon and Irene changed the public view with their graceful and polished performances. The couple's good looks and stylish dress added to the effect. Their inventive choreography introduced the public to new versions of some of the older dance steps and gave them many new ones. Dance steps such as the *one step - two step*, *Argentine Tango*, *Maxixe*, *Waltz*, *Fox Trot*, *Turkey Trot*, *Castle Walk*, *Cake Walk*, *Hesitation Waltz*, and others were widely accepted, and a dancing revolution took place. The Castles opened a number of dance studios and nightclubs and in 1914, co-authored a book entitled *Modern Dancing*. Their popularity soared and at the height of success, along came WWI. Both Vernon and Irene responded to the call - Vernon joined the Royal Air Force and Irene became a war worker. In effect, the war spelled the end of the dance team of Vernon and Irene Castle.

Vernon takes flight

On February 9, 1916 - about six months prior to Vernon's visit to the Chalet- he had obtained his pilot's license from the Aero Club of America. Not long after Vernon's Chalet visit, he was on his way to France. He was considered an excellent pilot capable of performing the most difficult of maneuvers. Before he returned from France, he had recorded 300 sorties over enemy territory and had destroyed two German planes. For his efforts he was awarded the French Croix de Guerre.

In 1917 he held the rank of Captain and was assigned as an instructor pilot and Commander of the 84th Canadian Training Squadron, Royal Flying Corps, assigned to Benbrook Field near Fort Worth Texas, a transfer that was not particularly to his liking, but it allowed him to be closer to Irene. At the base Vernon was extremely well liked and his associates idolized him. He was most dedicated to assisting his young cadets and empathized with what he considered to be their most miserable existence.

Crackup

On the fateful day of November 11, 1918, Vernon was in the front seat, the cadet in the rear, as they attempted to land at Benbrook field. At the same time another plane was coming in from an angle that made it difficult for the cadet to see it. When the danger became apparent, Vernon took control and attempted to evade the other plane by attempting a steep climb and turn, referred to as the Immelman maneuver. The Jenny stalled at low altitude and plummeted nose first into the ground. The cadet was unhurt but Vernon sustained massive injury - some newspaper accounts chose to graphically describe the extent of his injuries including the fact that part of his brains were oozing out and one foot was now backward. Attempts were made to revive Vernon but he never regained consciousness. The fact that he had flown in the front seat, leaving the less vulnerable rear seat for his cadet, was given wide publicity and the perception that he had given his life to save his cadet added poignancy to his death..

The loss of this greatly admired man was a shock to the Canadian Air Force and the world. Benbrook Field pilots washed out on the day of his death and the following Sunday - a washout referring to no flight activity. One day of washout at a military field was considered a rare occurrence. It was reported that 25,000 people lined the roadway in Fort Worth Texas when his body was transported to the railway

for transfer to New York State, where other large crowds massed around the funeral ceremonies.

Other

- One must appreciate the extreme danger associated with flying in those early days of flight, particularly at such training bases as Benbrook Field, where instructors were cranking out pilots at an astonishing rate. During one 13-month period, 101 instructors and trainees died at Benbrook and two other Texas airfields associated with Benbrook. This murderous rate translated to one fatality/1400 hours flight time at these three training facilities. Such a high fatality was attributed to the fact that inexperienced pilots were flying an aircraft that was inherently dangerous - the Curtiss JN4D Jenny - underpowered and nose heavy.
- Vernon had a pet monkey by the name of Jeff, which often flew with him while he was in Texas. Jeff was flying with Vernon at the time of the fatal crash - the monkey and the cadet survived. One must marvel at the informality that existed in the early days of military aviation that would allow a monkey to fly on a training session.
- Vernon's connection to silent movies largely escapes documentation, although a monument to Vernon, in Fort Worth, Texas, includes a statement that he performed star roles in early silent movies. The Internet/98 lists only one movie, *Whirl of Life* (1915) in which he is listed as an actor and writer. The Internet/98 lists a total of 13 silent films for wife Irene, beginning with *Whirl of Life* (1915), and ending with *Broadway after Dark* (1924).
- After the death of Vernon, Irene never returned to dancing. Both Vernon and Irene were devoted to animals and Irene built the still famous *Orphans of the Storm* animal shelter in Deerfield near Chicago. She raised many thousands of dollars for that institution. All through her life Irene continued to devote herself to animal causes, and at the age of 72, she announced to the public: "*When I die, my gravestone is to say HUMANITARIAN instead of DANCER. I put it in my will. Dancing was fun, and I needed the money, but Orphans of the Storm comes from the heart. It's more important.*" Irene Castle, humanitarian, died in 1969.
- Irene wrote two books: *My Husband* (1919) and *Castles in the Air* (1958)
- To many, Vern and Irene may be best recalled as the subjects of the popular movie *The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle* (1939), starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. In that movie, Irene is credited with writing the story and designing Ginger Roger's costumes.

Resource:

(1) *This Fabulous Century: 1910-1920*. Time-Life Books, New York. (1969)