

The First Fifteen Years: 1981-1996

A Fifteenth Anniversary

History of

Aviation Trail

A Continuation Of The Story Begun in
THE FIRST TEN YEARS: 1981-1991



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Text by MARY ANN JOHNSON

Cover illustration from the second edition of the Aviation Trail brochure.

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*As long as men fly . . . wherever they journey through space . . .
their flights begin in Dayton, Ohio, The Birthplace of Aviation.*

Aviation Trail: The Organization

The Dayton Aviation Trail grew out of a regional economic development conference held at the University of Dayton on November 18-19, 1980, which was co-sponsored by the Miami Valley Regional Planning Commission and the Dayton Area Chamber of Commerce. One of the ideas that came out of the conference was to use the area's aviation heritage to market the region by establishing two trails: a tourist trail to attract visitors and a business trail to attract companies.

The committee formed to carry out the proposal held its first meeting on February 25, 1981. Five months later, on August 3, 1981, the committee incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation named Aviation Trail, Inc.

The purpose of Aviation Trail, Inc. is: 1) to identify and preserve the Dayton/Miami Valley aviation heritage, 2) to engage in promotional and educational activities to create an awareness of the area's identification with aviation and of its place in aviation history and 3) to stimulate the area's economic development through aviation-related capital projects.

Aviation Trail, Inc. is governed by a Board of Trustees of no less than 15 members and no more than 20. A Board of Advisors with no membership limitation was established in 1982.

The incorporating trustees were:

Jim Alexander	J. H. Meyer, M.D.
Paul P. Brown	Amy Salaverria
Dick Baughman	Doris Scott
John C. Dussault	Gerald Sharkey
E. George Ferguson	Marian S. Simmons
Ed Hamlyn	Colonel Richard Uppstrom
Jim Jacobs	Read Viemeister
Harold Johnson	George J. Wedekind, Jr.
Mary Ann Johnson	Mel Weinberg

The Tourist Aviation Trail

The committee that preceded the formal incorporation of Aviation Trail decided that its first project would be to develop a tourist Aviation Trail to attract visitors to the Dayton/Miami Valley area, then to publish a brochure promoting the new trail. The initial research uncovered a wide range of aviation-related attractions and historically-significant sites - many more than could be included in a simple handout. Therefore, the brochure was limited to the ten sites considered to be of most interest to the general public.



Aviation Trail Inaugural Tour - July 13, 1981

Committee members (left to right):

John C. Dussault, Marian S. Simmons, Amy Salaverria, Mel Weinberg, E. George "Babe" Ferguson, J. H. Meyer, M.D., Harold Johnson, Gerald Sharkey and Paul P. Brown.

An Aviation Trail Inaugural Tour on July 13, 1981, introduced community leaders to the trail laid out in the new brochure. The 175 guests toured the sites in five special RTA buses. Sally Graubarth trained the tour guides accompanying each bus and arranged the details, including a costumed "Katharine Wright" waving to the visitors from the lawn of Hawthorn Hill, the Wright mansion in Oakwood, and airplane-shaped cookies served as refreshments on the buses. The Inaugural Tour and brochure were underwritten by the Dayton-Montgomery County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The Convention and Visitors Bureau also erected site signs with the Aviation Trail logo to further identify the trail. The logo, designed by Read Viemeister, features a likeness of the Wrights' 1903 Flyer I.

The success of the first project led to the committee's decision to incorporate as the not-for-profit Aviation Trail, Inc.

The current brochure is the fourth edition. It was produced by the Dayton Advertising Club, which also provided the major funding. Additional financial support came from the Dayton-Montgomery County Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Green County Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The self-guided tour in the latest edition covers 12 sites: *The Wright Cycle Company* and the *Dunbar State Memorial* in Wright-Dunbar Village, *The Old Court House*, *Carillon Historical Park*, *Kettering-*

Moraine Museum, Wright B Flyer, Inc. at Dayton General South Airport (now renamed Dayton-Wright Brothers Airport), *International Women's Air and Space Museum, Hawthorn Hill, Woodland Cemetery, Wright Brothers Memorial* and *United States Air Force Museum.*

In 1991, Aviation Trail organized *A Festival of Aviation History* to celebrate its tenth anniversary. The two-day event, held on September 14-15, featured special attractions at each of the participating Aviation Trail sites.

Aviation Trail, Inc.'s activities were focused on the Wright brothers neighborhood in Dayton's West Side. These included a visitors center in the Bank One branch office on West Third Street, guided tours of the restored Wright Cycle Company building on South Williams, a guided walking tour of the West Third Street National Historic District and a special van tour to The Wright Company factory buildings off West Third Street, now part of a General Motors plant.

Other festival participants included the Dayton-Montgomery County Public Library, Woodland Cemetery, Montgomery County Historical Society, The 2003 Committee, National Aviation Hall of Fame, Dayton-Montgomery County Convention and Visitors Bureau, Wright Memorial Public Library, Carillon Historical Park, Moraine Air Park, Wright B Flyer, Inc., International Women's Air and Space Museum, Huffman Prairie Flying Field, Wright Brothers Memorial, WACO Historical Society, Archimedes Rotorcraft and V-STOL Museum, Brookville Community Museum, The Engineers Club of Dayton, Kettering-Moraine Museum, Wright State University Library and The Miami Valley Regional Bicycle Committee, which sponsored a bicycle tour along the Great Miami River between Carillon Historical Park and The Wright Cycle Company shop on South Williams Street.

The Aviation Trail Guidebook

In order to publicize the complete list of aviation-related attractions and historically-significant sites uncovered during the research for the brochure, Aviation Trail decided to publish a guidebook. Titled *A Field Guide to Flight: On the Aviation Trail in Dayton, Ohio*, the book tells the stories behind the 45 sites that then comprised the Aviation Trail. It was written by Mary Ann Johnson and published by Landfall Press, Dayton, Ohio, 1986.

In connection with the publication of the guidebook, Aviation Trail erected a second round of site signs to further identify the enlarged trail. Then, a third round of signs was put up in 1991, with most of these being replacements for signs that were lost during street or other construction projects.

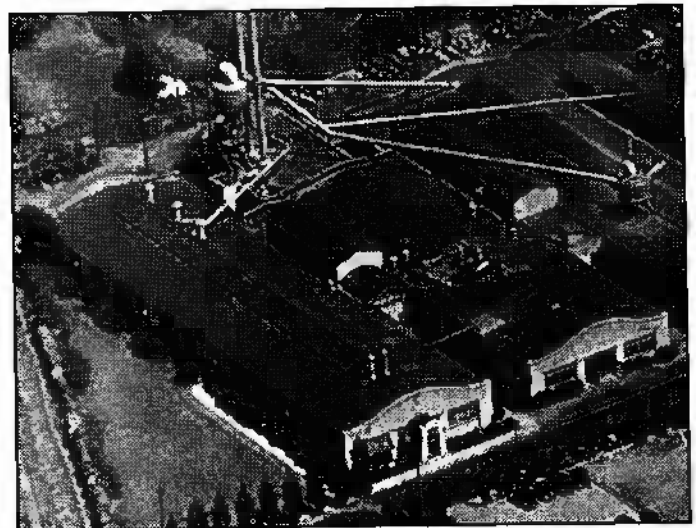
A revised edition of *A Field Guide to Flight* is due out by the end of 1996. It will provide updated or

new information about the 47 sites that now comprise the Aviation Trail. Changes in the list of sites are:

- The Dayton Convention and Exhibition Center was deleted from the Central Loop after a remodeling project eliminated the First Flight exhibit in the lobby and the National Aviation hall of Fame portraits on the mezzanine.
- The Aviation Trail Museum and Visitors Center, now under construction, was added to the West Anchor.
- The Wright B Flyer Hangar at Dayton-Wright Brothers Airport was added to the South Loop.
- The WACO Aircraft Museum in Troy was added to the North Loop.
- The International Women's Air and Space Museum moved into the Asahel Wright House in Centerville, which was already a site on the South Loop.
- And the National Aviation hall of Fame broke ground for its new museum, to be attached to the United States Air Force Museum, which is already a site on the East Anchor.

The Dayton West Side

During the research to establish the tourist Aviation Trail, a serious "hole" that was not being addressed by any in the community was discovered; that is, the neglected, deteriorating neighborhood on Dayton's West Side where Wilbur and Orville Wright lived and worked and invented the airplane. Eleven little-known historically-significant sites associated with the Wright brothers were found to be located there, including eight concentrated on, or near, a two-block area along West Third Street and two located elsewhere.



Former Wright Company Factory buildings in 1926. Now Buildings 1 and 2 at the GM Delphi Chassis Division Home Avenue Operations.

The two located elsewhere were onetime factory sites of The Wright Company, formed in 1909 by Wilbur and Orville Wright to manufacture their invention. Now part of two General Motors Corporation (GM) plants, they are:

- The site of the Speedwell Motor Car Company factory, where The Wright Company rented space while waiting for its new factory building to be completed. The world's first mass-produced airplane, the Model B, was manufactured there in 1910. The Speedwell building has been replaced by the High Bay Building of the GM Delphi Chassis Division Wisconsin Operations plant on Wisconsin Boulevard.
- The still-standing former Wright Company factory buildings, known as Buildings 1 and 2, at the GM Delphi Chassis Division Home Avenue Operations plant, located between Home Avenue and West Third Street. Building 1, completed in 1910, and Building 2, completed in 1911, were occupied by The Wright Company until 1916, when the company moved out of town. (Orville Wright sold the company in 1915.) At the time of their completion in 1911, the two buildings had the largest capacity of any airplane factory in the world at that time.

GM was unaware of the sites' association with The Wright brothers until they were contacted during the research for the guidebook. The outcome of this discovery was the erection of a commemorative plaque at each of the sites. The plaques were presented to representatives of the two GM plants by then-president of Aviation Trail John C. Dussault at a September 15, 1983, banquet celebrating the 75th anniversary of the founding of General Motors.

The Wright sites concentrated along, or near, the 1000 and 1100 blocks of West Third Street were:

- *The site of the Wright family home, at 7 Hawthorne Street.* Orville Wright was born in this house in 1871 and Wilbur Wright died there in 1912. The site has remained an empty lot since the house was purchased by Henry Ford in 1936 and moved to his outdoor museum, Greenfield Village, in Dearborn, Michigan.
- *The site of the first Wright and Wright job printing shop, at 1210 West Third Street.* The business, started by Orville in the family home, was located in a rented room in a building at this address from 1889 to 1890. The building was torn down in the 1950s. A junk yard business was located on the empty lot in 1981.
- *The Wright brother's first bicycle shop, at 1005 West Third Street.* The original building was incorporated into one end of a new building constructed by the Gem City Ice Cream Company in 1927. The Gem City Ice Cream Company building is still standing.

- *The Wright brother's second bicycle shop, at 1034 West Third Street.* The building was razed around 1980 after it was severely damaged in a fire. The lot was vacant and unkempt in 1981.
- *The Wright brother's second printing shop, at 1060 West Third Street.* Wright and Wright was located in a second floor corner suite of the Hoover block building from 1890 to 1895. The building was still standing and for sale in 1981.
- *The Wright brother's third bicycle shop, at 22 South Williams Street (behind the Hoover Block).* The brothers brought their two businesses together under one roof for the first time when they moved them to the two-story brick building in 1895. The building was still standing in 1981.
- *The site of the Wright brother's last bicycle shop, at 1127 West Third Street.* It was in this shop that the Wrights built all of their experimental aircraft, including their Flyer I, the plane that made the world's first man-carrying, controllable, powered flight, at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, on December 17, 1903. Henry Ford bought the building in 1936 and moved it to his outdoor museum, Greenfield Village, in Dearborn, Michigan. A one-story building constructed in 1951 occupied the lot in 1981.
- *Orville Wright's Laboratory, at 15 North Broadway Street (around the corner from the last bicycle shop).* Orville constructed the one-story building for his personal use after he sold The Wright Company in 1915. He occupied the building from 1916 until his death in 1948, three days after suffering a heart attack in his laboratory. In 1976, the building was torn down to make way for a gas station, which was never built due to changing conditions. However, the bricks from the facade were saved and put in storage at Wright State University. In 1981, the vacant lot plus the cleared land next to it up to the corner was for sale by the oil company that had planned to build the gas station.

The Aviation Trail Plan

After discovering the two still-standing Wright brothers buildings in the West Third Street area – the Hoover Block and The Wright Cycle Company – Aviation Trail decided to purchase and restore them; then use this commitment as a catalyst to bring back the surrounding neighborhood. To that end, the Board of Trustees adopted a plan in 1982 titled *Wright Brothers Innerwest Enterprise Zone*. The goal of the plan was to recreate a neighborhood reminiscent of the Wright brothers era.

The plan components consisted of proposed plans for the eight Wright brothers sites and a consideration of eight support elements. The latter included streetscape, transportation, safety, promo-

tion, spin-off effects, zoning, historic buildings and development incentives. The plan also envisioned a *Pathway to Flight* linking the Wrights' neighborhood on the West Side to their Huffman Prairie flying field to the east of Dayton, possibly through a reconstruction of the old Dayton-Springfield traction line.

The plans for the Wright brothers sites were:

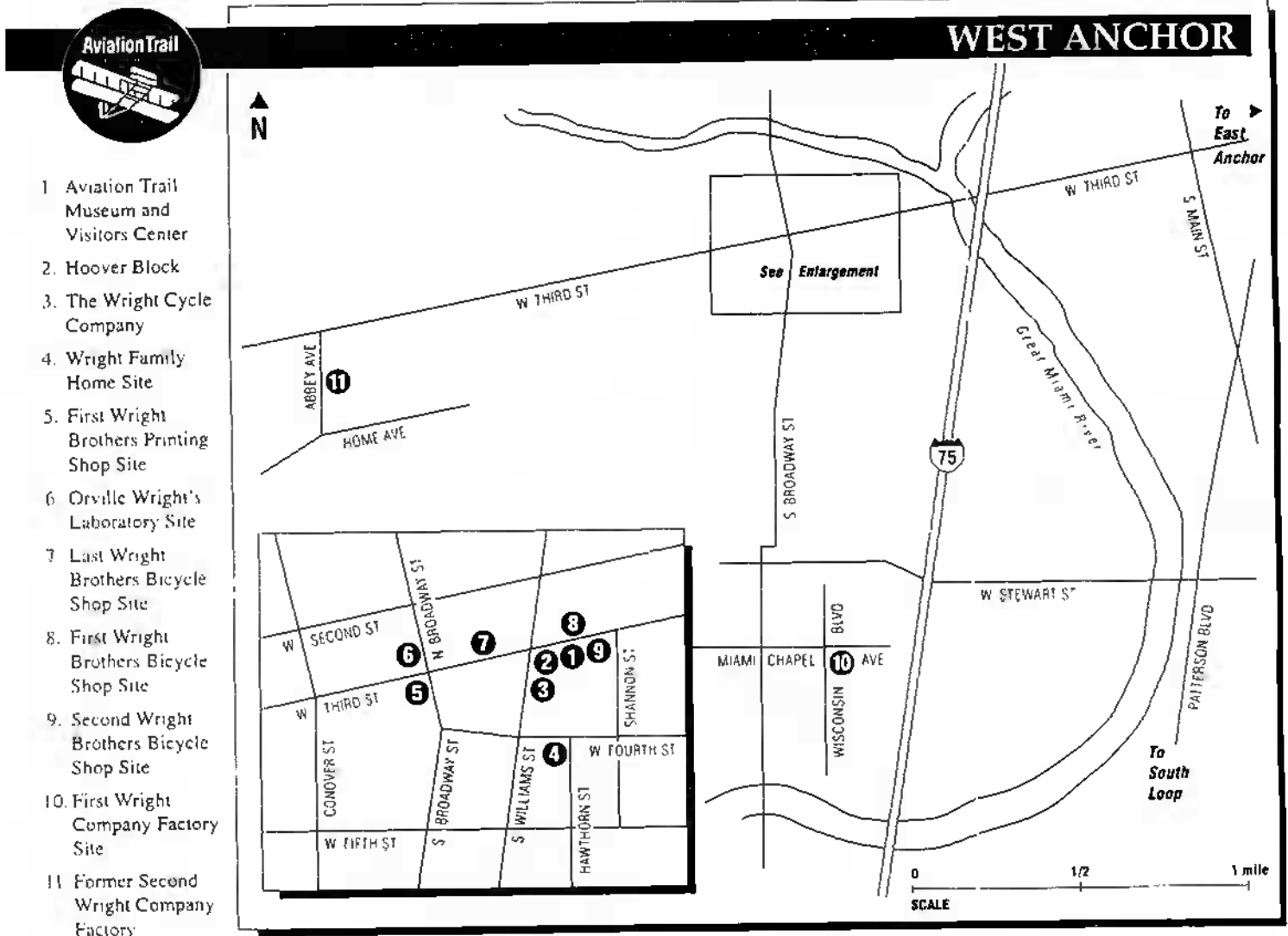
- The Hoover Block and Wright Cycle Company buildings would be restored and opened as museums.
- A replica of the bicycle shop in which Wilbur and Orville Wright built the world's first airplane would be constructed on the original site at 1127 West Third Street and a replica of the Wright family home on the original site at 7 Hawthorn Street.
- Orville Wright's laboratory at 15 North Broadway Street would be reconstructed incorporating the original bricks that are now in storage.
- The vacant lot at 1034 West Third Street where the Wrights' second bicycle shop once stood would be developed as a Wright memorial garden.

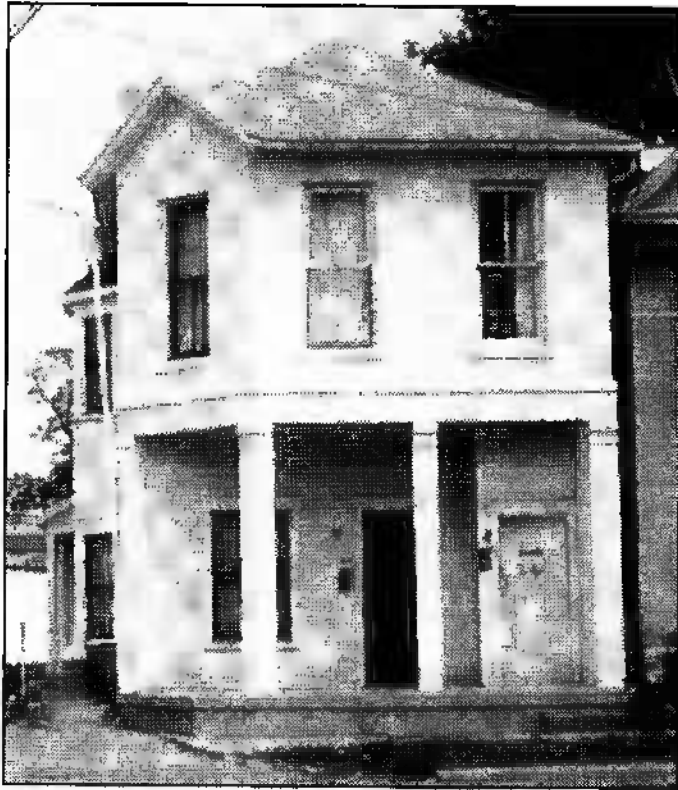
- Commemorative plaques would be erected on the remaining two sites: the vacant lot at 1210 West Third Street, site of the Wrights' first printing shop outside their home; and the Gem City Ice Cream Company building, which incorporates the Wrights' first bicycle shop building at 1005 West Third Street.

The Wright Cycle Company

The Wright Cycle Company, 22 South Williams Street, was discovered by Aviation Trail during the research for the tourist trail brochure. Wilbur and Orville Wright rented the two-story brick building from 1895 to 1897, using the first floor for their bicycle shop and the second floor for their printing business.

The building is historically important for several reasons. First, it is where the brothers first started on their search to unlock the secrets of powered flight, spurred on by the death of their hero, German glider experimenter Otto Lillenthal, in a glider accident in 1896. Second, it is where they first





*The Wright Brothers Bicycle Shop
at 22 South Williams Street in 1981.*

manufactured their own brands of bicycles, which taught them many of the skills they later applied in building the world's first airplane in 1903. And, third, their work on a gas engine to power their bicycle machinery gave them experience later applied in building the engine for their airplane.

Since no one was doing anything about the neglected, deteriorating building, Aviation Trail decided to acquire it with the objective of restoring it and opening it as a museum. To assure possession, the property was purchased in May 1982 by a private corporation owned by an Aviation Trail trustee, who agreed to hold it until Aviation Trail could raise the funds to buy it. The building had been converted into two rental apartments, with the first floor apartment occupied and the second floor apartment vacant at the time of the purchase.

A few weeks after the initial purchase had been completed, the trustees were surprised to find the building suddenly condemned by a City of Dayton building inspector, who cited a long list of violations of the city's building code. As a consequence, the first floor renters were forced to move out. However, after being made aware of Aviation Trail's plan to do an historic restoration, the city backed off from the demand to bring the building up to code and agreed to board up the building for the time being, thus saving it from the threat of demolition at a crucial point. Then, in June 1983, Aviation Trail was able to purchase the property in its own name with grants from the City of Dayton and Montgomery County.

The next step was the search for restoration funds. Here, the first breakthrough came in June 1983 when the Dayton City Commission released a \$25,000 grant previously dependent upon Aviation Trail obtaining matching funds. With this money assured, planning for the restoration began in earnest. A rare 1896 photograph of the building discovered by Marlin W. Todd served as the guide for the restoration of the outside. Research by the Cleveland, Ohio, firm of Gaded-Serne-Zofein, Architects, uncovered the original layout of the interior.

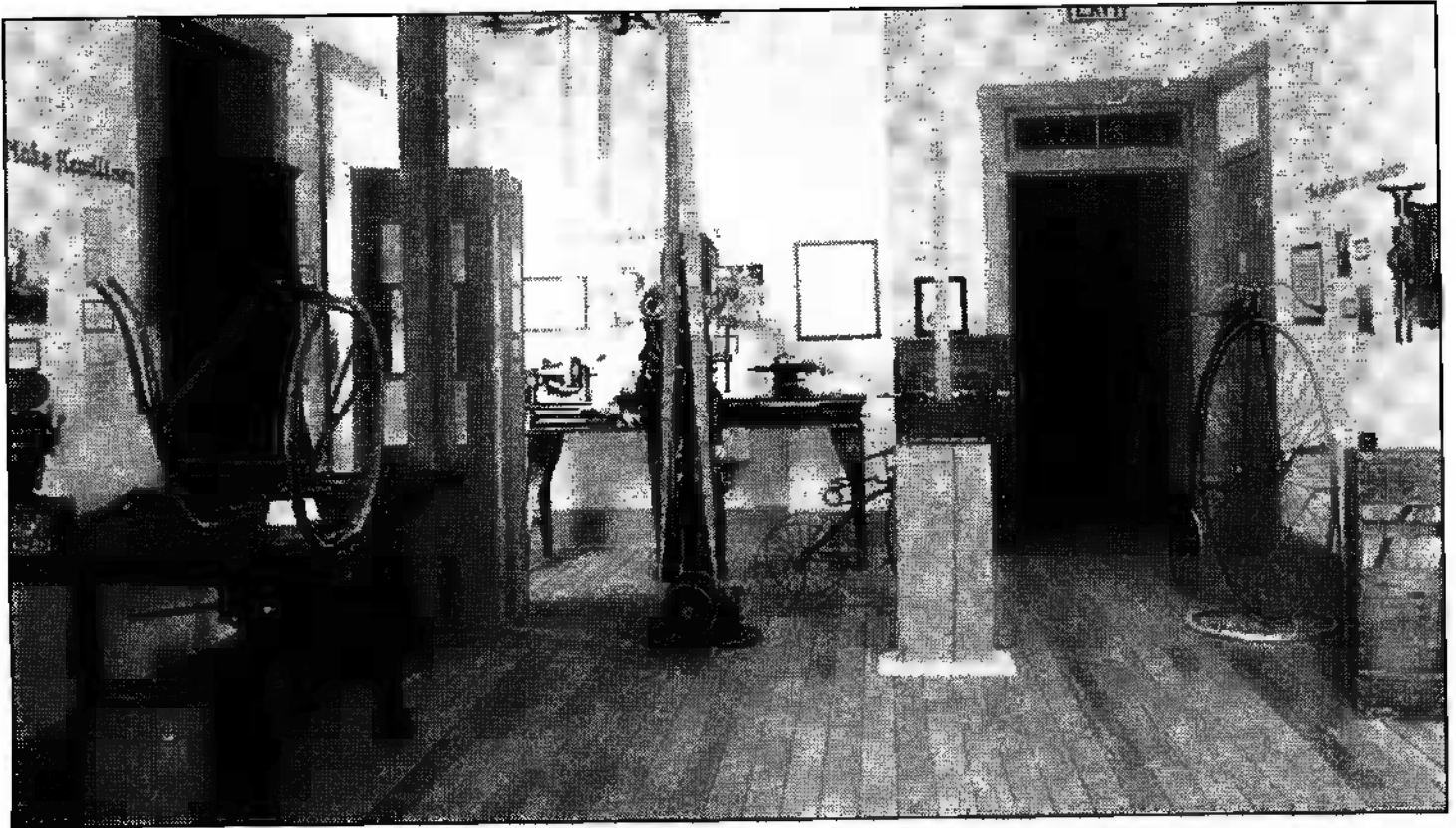
On December 10, 1983, Aviation Trail volunteers held a massive cleanup day, tossing out several truckloads of old furniture, broken appliances and fixtures, worn linoleum, and other debris left behind by former tenants. One interesting find was a wooden worktable discovered in the basement. Although there is no way to identify it positively, it looks very much like the tables in some of the Wright photographs taken in 1897.

A second financial breakthrough came in the form of a \$66,500 grant from the State of Ohio, spearheaded by State Senator Tom Talbot. Governor Richard Celeste presented a giant check representing the grant during a special ceremony at The Wright Cycle Company shop on August 29, 1984. According to one story, several members were disappointed when the bank refused to accept the facsimile, but were soon reassured when the real check arrived in the mail a few weeks later.

Once the state grant was received, work began on Phase I of the restoration, which consisted of the outside and first floor. The architect presented his plans to the Board of Trustees in February 1985. A contract with the construction company,



*The Wright Brothers Bicycle Shop at 22 South Williams Street
in 1991 after restoration by Aviation Trail, Inc.*



Bicycle machinery display in the first floor museum at the restored Wright Brothers Bicycle Shop at 22 South Williams Street, 1992.

Architectural Reclamations, Franklin, Ohio, was signed the following September. And an open house to show off the work in progress was held April 11 and 12, 1986. Later, a Grand Opening was held on June 25, 1988, after the major part of Phase I had been completed.

Other substantial contributions to the restoration financing came from the Dayton, Mead, Danis and Huff Foundations, the Miami Valley Regional Bicycle Committee, City-Wide Development Corporation and Mr. and Mrs. E. J. Nutter. Siebenthaler's Nursery donated the landscaping.

An unexpected problem arose in 1987 when the discovery of serious leaks precluded retaining the original roof as planned. Coming to the rescue were the students of the nearby MacFarlane Intermediate School, who held several fund-raisers to "Roof the Wrights". One of these was the sale of fragments of the original shingles, rescued from the dumpster by a group of energetic teachers. The students affixed a metal plaque to each piece, then sold them across the country through an article written by their teacher, Judy Haller, that was published in a national education magazine. The Iddings Foundation and the City of Dayton also were major contributors to the reroofing project.

Early assistance with the first floor bicycle shop museum came from the Miami Valley Regional Bicycle Committee, Monsanto and Wright State University. The Bicycle Committee awarded a grant to purchase a collection of original Wright brothers-era bicycles. And Monsanto awarded several grants

for Wright State graduate history students to prepare and mount a photographic exhibit about the Wrights and their businesses and to research the history of the property.

Later work on the bicycle shop museum was supported by various donations of goods, services and funds. Major contributors were:

- Roger McClure and Howard DuFour, who donated countless hours of labor constructing partitions, locating specific items, and restoring and installing the bicycle machinery.
- Elizabeth and Katharine Hamburger, who donated funds to purchase and restore an antique roll-top desk.
- Horace Wright, nephew of Wilbur and Orville, who donated an original Wright brothers drafting table, and his widow, Susan, who donated two original workbenches and a collection of tools from Orville Wright's laboratory.
- Wilkinson Wright, grandnephew of Wilbur and Orville, who arranged for copies to be made of a collection of original 1908-1912 political cartoons now owned by members of the Wright family, which add a personal touch to the display.
- Margaret Szypulski, of Greenfield Village, Dearborn, Michigan, who offered valuable advice based on her experience with the Wright bicycle shop at Greenfield Village.

Beginning in May 1987, the museum was staffed by a part-time manager supplied by the Urban

League under one of its programs. This allowed the museum to be open to the public on a regular basis on the weekends: 10 AM to 4 PM on Saturdays and noon to 4 PM on Sundays. Eventually, starting in February 1992, Aviation Trail took over responsibility for the manager, continuing the same open schedule as that started under the Urban League program. From April 1990 to December 1995, the Dayton Business and Professional Center donated telephone answering service to cover the hours the museum was closed. After the service was suspended, Aviation Trail installed an answering machine.

The Wright Cycle Company building has received local, state and national recognition. The Dayton Area Council of Historic Neighborhoods presented Aviation Trail an award in May 1987 for its historic preservation efforts. The Ohio Historic Preservation Office presented an Award of Merit in September 1990. And the building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986 and was designated a National Landmark in 1990. Also, in the late 1970s, before Aviation Trail was involved, it was listed on the Ohio Historic Inventory due to its architecture, which was described as "home is unusual to the area".

The creation of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park in 1992 ushered in a new era for The Wright Cycle Company when the enabling legislation designated the building as part of the new park's core site. The legislation also stip-

ulated the National Park Service was to acquire the property (but not the exhibits), which Aviation Trail had been developing as part of a Wright Brothers Museum Complex.

After the National Park was established, Aviation Trail completed the second floor of The Wright Cycle Company building to serve as the office of the park's superintendent, Bill Gibson. Originally meant to be completed as a caretaker's apartment, the space was adapted to the Park Service's needs, with the living room turned into a meeting room and a hidden emergency escape system installed in the hoisting platform outside one of the second floor windows. Upon moving into the building in 1993, the Park Service provided a ranger to keep the first floor museum open on a regular schedule, thus relieving Aviation Trail of this responsibility.

In January 1996, Aviation Trail turned The Wright Cycle Company property over to the National Park Service, with funds for its purchase provided by a State of Ohio grant.

Aviation Trail will continue to maintain an office in the building until it completes its new home, now under construction near the park's core site.

The Hoover Block

The Hoover Block is the second of the two still-standing buildings in the Wright brothers West Third Street neighborhood that were discovered while researching the tourist Aviation Trail



The Hoover Block in 1989.

Part of the restored Wright Cycle Company is visible behind it, on the right, and part of the Setzer building next to it on the left.

brochure. It is located across an alley from the Wright Cycle Company building, separated only by a vacant lot that is part of the Hoover Block property. When discovered in 1981, the building, including a closed grocery store on the first floor, was for sale.

The building is important because Wilbur and Orville Wright had their job printing business in a second floor suite from 1890 to 1895. One of their associates in the business was Paul Laurence Dunbar, later an internationally-famous black poet. Dunbar is said to have chalked this poem on a wall of the printing shop:

*Orville Wright is out of sight
In the printing business.
No other mind is half so bright
As his'n is.*

Since no one was doing anything about the vacant, deteriorating building, Aviation Trail purchased the property in 1982 with the objective of restoring it and opening it as a museum. The purchase was financed by a loan from City-Wide Development Corporation.

Aviation Trail's plans for the building included opening a Wright brothers museum on the first floor, restoring the Wright printing shop on the second floor and installing a parachute museum in the large third floor assembly room known as Hoover Hall. A combination park-parking lot in the vacant lot to the rear would connect it to The Wright Cycle Company to form the Wright Brothers Museum Complex. According to a master plan prepared by the architectural firm of Gaede, Serne and Zofoin in 1987, restoration costs would come to \$776,000.

Early work on the Hoover Block included several volunteer trash-removal sessions, demolition of an added-on structure and emergency roof repair. A timely grant from the Iddings Foundation funded stop-gap repairs to the roof. Other grants came from the Huffy and Standard Register Foundations.

Part of a \$100,000 grant from the State of Ohio in 1991 funded stabilization work on the outside of the building to prevent damage while waiting for the restoration to be funded. The outside restoration will be guided by an 1893 photograph published in a book at the Dayton Main Library that was discovered by Marlin W. Todd.

The Hoover Block is part of the West Third Street Historic District, which was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1989. Also, in the 1970s, before Aviation Trail became involved, it was listed on the Ohio Historic Inventory because of its architecture.

Aviation Trail's plans to restore the Hoover Block were put on hold after the legislation creating the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park

was enacted in 1992. The legislation designated the Hoover Block, including the vacant lot between it and The Wright Cycle Company, as part of the new park's core site and stipulated the National Park Service was to acquire the Hoover Block property.

In January 1996, Aviation Trail turned the Hoover Block over to the National Park Service, with funds for the purchase provided through a grant from the State of Ohio.

The 2003 Committee

The 2003 Committee, a not-for-profit corporation formed in 1989, takes its name from the year 2003, the 100th anniversary of the first airplane flight. It grew out of an informally circulated suggestion to establish a National Park in Dayton in honor of the Wright brothers and their invention of the airplane, an event that made Dayton the Birthplace of Aviation.

The conveners of the initial meeting to explore the National Park idea were Federal Judge Walter A. Rice, J. Bradford Tillson, publisher of the *Dayton Daily News*, and Jerry Sharkey, then president of Aviation Trail. The idea "flew" and the corporation was established soon after. As the organization grew, The 2003 Committee also assumed leadership of the local Centennial of Flight Celebration in 2003 and headed the Dayton Bicentennial Celebration in 1996.

Soon after the appointment of Madeline Iseli as Executive Director in 1991, the Committee established an office at The Wright Cycle Company building. Later, after additional staff had been hired, the office was moved to a larger space in a building owned by the City of Dayton at 1152 West Third Street.

The 2003 Committee was the main force behind the creation of a National Park in Dayton. Under the Committee's auspices, the National Park Service conducted two preliminary studies: an Historic Landmark Study and a Management Alternatives Study.

The Landmark Study evaluated the historic significance and integrity of the 45 sites described in the Aviation Trail guidebook, *A Field Guide to Flight*. It resulted in three sites being designated National Historic Landmarks: The Wright Cycle Company, the Wright Flyer III at Carillon Historical Park and the Huffman Prairie Flying Field. The Landmark plaques were presented to the three site owners by James M. Ridenour, Director of the National Park Service, at a ceremony at Huffman Prairie on October 19, 1990.

The Management Alternatives Study evaluated three alternative plans for managing the area's historic aviation sites. The plan chosen by The 2003 Committee formed the basis for the National Park legislation introduced in Congress.

The Committee's dream of establishing a National Park in Dayton finally was realized at the end of 1992 with passage of the legislation creating the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park

The Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park, established to honor Wilbur and Orville Wright and their friend, poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, is comprised of four scattered sites:

1. The core site, which includes The Wright Cycle Company, the Hoover Block and the land in between, all of which were owned and managed by Aviation Trail at the time the National Park was created.
2. The Dunbar House State Memorial, 219 North P. L. Dunbar Street, which is owned and managed by the Ohio Historical Society.
3. The Wright Flyer III and Wright Hall at Carillon Historical Park, which are owned and managed by Carillon Historical Park, Inc.
4. Huffman Prairie Flying Field, which is owned and managed by Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

The enabling legislation directed the National Park Service to acquire The Wright Cycle Company,

the Hoover Block and the land in between, the property owned by Aviation Trail. The other three sites would retain their present ownership and management, although they would be included under the new park's umbrella. The Aviation Trail property was turned over to the National Park Service in January 1996.

The National park's plans for the core site include:

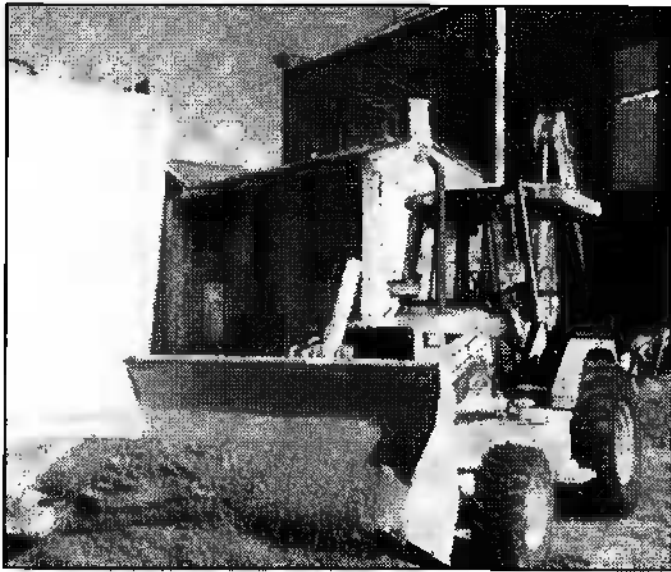
1. Maintaining The Wright Cycle Company museum much as it was under Aviation Trail ownership and keeping it open to the public on a regular schedule seven days a week during the summer and on weekends the rest of the year.
2. Stabilizing the Hoover Block until funds are available for an historic restoration of the building.
3. Developing the land between The Wright Cycle Company and the Hoover block as a plaza honoring Wilbur and Orville Wright and Paul Laurence Dunbar. The plaza is scheduled to be completed by the end of 1996.

The Aviation Trail Building

Once Aviation Trail realized the National Park Service was legally required to acquire the property it had been developing as the Wright Brothers Museum Complex (The Wright Cycle Company and the Hoover Block), the group began searching for a new home. After evaluating several options, includ-



The rear of the Setzer building after the collapse in 1992.



Trustee Harold Johnson taking the first "scoop" at the Aviation Trail building ground-breaking - November 3, 1995.

ing constructing a replica of the Wright family home on its original site at 7 Hawthorn Street, it was decided that the best solution would be to restore the Setzer building.

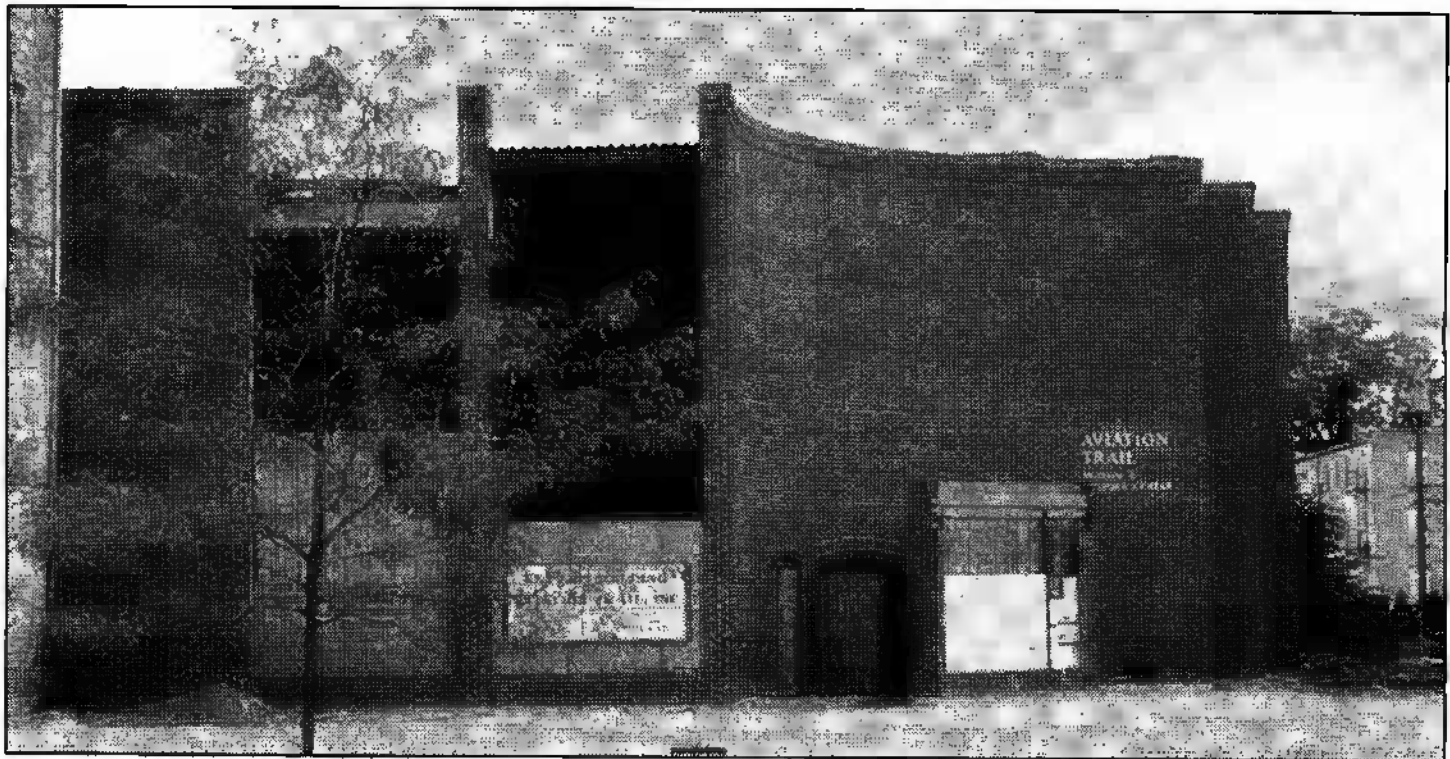
Aviation Trail had acquired the 1920s-era Setzer building as part of the deal to purchase the historic Hoover Block, which was located next to it on West Third Street. The owners had expanded their grocery store on the first floor into the adjacent Setzer building and wanted to dispose of both properties after they closed the business. Therefore, in order to obtain the Hoover Block, Aviation Trail agreed to purchase the Setzer building as well.

Unfortunately, the plan to restore the Setzer building had to be abandoned when the building suddenly collapsed in the summer of 1992. Several nearby workers were on their lunch break when they noticed the building disintegrating before their eyes, leaving only the facade and a few feet behind it still standing.

The collapse of the Setzer building left Aviation Trail with two alternatives: 1) raze the still-standing section of the building and clear the lot or 2) preserve the facade and consider erecting a new building behind it. The first alternative would have cost a lot less; the second alternative would preserve the streetscape of the West Third Street National Historic District. Pressure from preservationists outside of Aviation Trail, plus a proposed source of funds to cover the cost, led to the decision to preserve the facade.

The project to save the Setzer facade included installing a heating system in a narrow structure behind it to protect the fragile remnant during cold weather. The work was completed in 1994 at a cost of about \$150,000, most of which came from a State of Ohio grant through The 2003 Committee and the remainder from Aviation Trail funds.

In 1995, Aviation Trail used part of the proceeds from the sale of the Hoover Block to the National Park Service to hire Stephen Brown, Architects (now Brown and Bills) to develop plans for a new building behind the preserved Setzer facade. The remainder of the proceeds from the sale of the Hoover Block plus the proceeds from the sale of The Wright Cycle Company and a \$250,000 grant from the State of Ohio came to enough to put up the outer shell,



The new Aviation Trail building under construction - October 1996.

with an official ground-breaking ceremony held on November 3, 1995. A fund-raising campaign is now underway to raise the funds needed to complete the building. The new portion of the building will face on the plaza, now under construction, that will link the new Aviation Trail building to the Hoover Block and The Wright Cycle Company (the core site of the National Park).

When completed, the two-story Aviation Trail building will have a meeting room and offices on the second floor and a museum, visitors center and gift shop on the first floor.

The visitors center will serve as an orientation point and introduction to the Aviation Trail sites, including the four that comprise the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park. The National Park is considering providing a Park Ranger to staff the visitors center under a cooperative agreement.

The museum will include displays tracing the history of aviation in the Miami Valley. A major feature of the museum will be a parachute exhibit based on the Dave Gold parachute collection that was donated to Aviation Trail by the Gold estate.

The Dave Gold Parachute Museum

The original plan for the Dave Gold Parachute Museum was to use the Gold parachute collection as the basis for a parachute museum in the large assembly room on the third floor of the Hoover Block. This plan had to be dropped after the enabling legislation creating the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park stipulated that the National Park Service was to acquire the Hoover Block property.

The current plan envisions the Gold parachute display as a major focus of the Aviation Trail museum in the new Aviation Trail building now under construction.

The extensive parachute collection of parachute expert Dave Gold was donated to Aviation Trail by the Gold estate. The collection was inventoried in August 1986 by Dan Poytler, from Santa Barbara, California, president of the Parachute Industry Association. According to his report, the collection includes complete sets of every type of parachute gear, all with supporting documentation. He estimated the value of the gear at \$200,000 and the accompanying papers and films at \$50,000. The collection has been in storage in Dayton awaiting the development of a suitable display space.

Dayton is considered the ideal location for a parachute museum because the modern freefall parachute was developed at McCook Field in 1919, making Dayton the "Birthplace of the Parachute".

Wright-Dunbar Village

When Aviation Trail purchased The Wright Cycle Company and Hoover Block buildings in 1982, the hope was that this commitment to the Wright brothers neighborhood would act as a catalyst for the redevelopment of the surrounding deteriorating area, with the ultimate goal the recreation of a neighborhood reminiscent of the Wright brothers era.

As Aviation Trail's efforts became more visible with the restoration of The Wright Cycle Company building and its opening as a museum, others began to recognize the potential of the neighborhood - which, in addition to its link to history, is strategically located just across the Great Miami River from Dayton's downtown and is easily reached by several new, or nearly completed, transportation links.

Among those eventually attracted to the historic redevelopment effort was the City of Dayton, which up to 1986, had promoted demolition over preservation and had developed a plan to clear a large portion of the surrounding area for an urban renewal project. In 1987, the city officially designated the Wright brothers neighborhood and the Dunbar neighborhood (off West Third Street to the west) as Wright-Dunbar Village in honor of its three famous residents, Wilbur and Orville Wright and Paul Laurence Dunbar, an action signaling a change in policy; that is, to support preservation over demolition.

Since then, the city has stockpiled key properties as they became available; restored one of the original 1800s buildings along West Third Street for use as the city's Innerwest Priority Board offices; developed the Aviation Trail site next to it, the second Wright brothers bicycle shop site, as green space; developed a gateway park at the west end of the Third Street Bridge; completed a streetscape project along the 1000 and 1100 blocks of West Third Street (the National Historic District); and is now embarked on Phase I of an ambitious redevelopment plan for the entire Wright-Dunbar Village. The Phase I project will cover the area between West Third Street and West Fifth Street from the Great Miami River to Broadway Street. The goal for the mostly single-family residential neighborhood is to preserve and/or restore existing housing and to construct new houses designed to blend in with the existing houses on the in-fill lots.

Other supporters of the neighborhood redevelopment effort are Bank One, which has a branch office in the West Third Street Historic District, and The 2003 Committee, whose goals are similar to those of Aviation Trail.

Bank One purchased two Aviation Trail sites, Orville Wright's laboratory site and the first Wright printing shop site, with the intention of assuring they are put to uses consistent with the historic restoration of the neighborhood. The bank has

developed the laboratory site plus the other vacant land to the corner as green space. It has developed the printing shop site plus the other vacant land to the corner as a parking lot for its West Third Street branch office, which is across the street on the southeast corner of West Third and Broadway Streets.

The 2003 Committee recently completed the installation of murals on the outside of the Hoover Block and on a group of three city-owned buildings across from it on the corner of West Third and North Williams Streets. The murals depict what the buildings may have looked like in the Wright brothers time. The 2003 Committee also funneled much of the funds from two state grants it received into capital projects that support the National Park core site.

The Aviation Trail Trailblazer Award

The Aviation Trail Trailblazer Award was established in 1983 to honor individuals and organizations who have contributed to aviation in the Dayton area. The awards are presented each year at a banquet on April 16, the birthday of Wilbur Wright. Recipients of the Trailblazer Award to date are:

- 1983: Thomas H. Davis, head of Piedmont Airlines, which had a passenger hub at the Dayton Airport.
- 1984: John C. Emery, Jr., head of Emery Worldwide, which had a freight hub at the Dayton Airport, and Colonel Richard L. Uppstrom, director of the United States Air Force Museum.
- 1985: Ervin and Zoe Dell Nutter, founders of the Elano Corporation and aviation supporters, and



1985 Trailblazer Award recipients Ervin (left) and Zoe Dell Nutter with featured banquet speaker, balloonist Joe Kittinger, on the right.

James R. Wood, director of the James M. Cox Dayton International Airport.

- 1986: McCauley Accessory Division of Cessna Aircraft and Harold Johnson, aviator and aviation supporter.
- 1987: 2750th Air Base Wing, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and George J. Wedekind, Jr., director of the Dayton Air and Trade Show.
- 1988: Ivonette Wright Miller, author and niece of Wilbur and Orville Wright, and Dr. J. H. Meyer, aviation supporter.
- 1989: Wright B Flyer, Inc. and Floyd G. Koller, head of Auto-Valve, Inc.
- 1990: Hartzell Propeller, Inc. and the Hartzell family, founders of Hartzell Industries.
- 1991: NCR Corporation and John C. Dussault, founding president of Aviation Trail and former general manager of McCauley Accessory Division of Cessna Aircraft.
- 1992: General Motors Corporation and Hans von Ohain, co-inventor of the jet engine and Chief Scientist at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base Laboratories.
- 1993: Wright State University Archives and Special Collections Division.
- 1994: Congressmen Tony Hall and Dave Hobson, key legislators in establishing the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park.
- 1995: International Women's Air and Space Museum.
- 1996: Albert L. Nels, World Balloon Championship winner in 1987 and 1991.

Remembering McCook Field and Wright Field

In 1985, Aviation Trail was asked to take over responsibility for the on-going McCook Field Alumni Luncheon, traditionally held each year on August 19, Orville Wright's birthday. A highlight of the luncheon was the introduction of the alumni in attendance, with each making a few remarks about their association with McCook. McCook Field (1917 to 1927) was the country's first military aviation research and development center and is known as the "Cradle of Aviation" because of its many pioneer aviation developments.

Now that the number of living alumni has dwindled with the passing of time, the emphasis has shifted to remembrance of both McCook Field and its successor, Wright Field (1927 to 1948). Wright Field played an important role in World War II as an aircraft test site.

Celebrating The First Flight

In 1984, Aviation Trail was asked to take over the lead on the on-going community First Flight luncheon, traditionally held on December 17, the anniversary of the world's first man-carrying, controllable, powered flight. The luncheon follows a ceremony in the morning at the Wright Brothers Memorial, which is coordinated by Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

The memorial ceremony features wreath-layings by relatives of Wilbur and Orville Wright and a military fly-over at 10:35 AM, the time of Orville's historic 12-second, 120-foot flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, in 1903.

The 1993 luncheon, a special event honoring the ninetieth anniversary of the first flight, was co-sponsored by both Aviation Trail and The 2003 Committee. The featured speaker was Phil Boyer, national president of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, who flew his private plane to Dayton from an earlier engagement in the morning at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, carrying with him a special telegram to Aviation Trail from the Kitty Hawk group.

Educational Activities

Aviation Trail educational activities include illustrated talks and guided tours as well as publication of *A Field Guide to Flight* and other printed materials.

One on-going program that utilizes all three of the above is the annual Elderhostel at the University of Dayton (U.D.), first presented in July 1985. The subject of the week-long residential program is Aviation Heritage. The group takes tours to a number of Aviation Trail sites; several Aviation Trail members appear as speakers; and *A Field Guide to Flight* is used as the textbook.

In the fall of 1996, U.D. added an aviation history course to its Institute for Learning in Retirement program. Titled *The Story of the Wright Brothers*, the course is taught by six volunteers, all members of Aviation Trail.

One example of a school group taking advantage of Aviation Trail resources was a project at MacFarlane Intermediate School, located in the vicinity of Wright-Dunbar Village. Under the direction of English teacher Judy Haller, the students engaged in a series of activities centering around the Wright brothers and Paul Laurence Dunbar for Pride Week of 1987. The culmination of the activities was a public program at the school on March 18. A major highlight of this program was a walk back in time to visit the Aviation Trail sites in Wright-Dunbar Village. At each stop, costumed students enacted a skit or explained the significance of the site.

The latest educational project is a video introduced in 1995. Titled *On The Aviation Trail in Dayton, Ohio*, it tells the history of aviation in the Miami Valley through visits to 20 Aviation Trail sites. The video was produced by John Zampatti and written and directed by Mary Ann Johnson, both of whom volunteered their services. It was a Finalist in the Documentary-Public Awareness category of a four-state regional contest for public access TV stations.

Aviation Trail also has a speakers bureau, headed by Bill Ford, who is a popular speaker at area service clubs and other meetings.

Promotion

When the tourist Aviation Trail was first established, it received widespread media coverage, including a newspaper story picked up by a wire service that reportedly reached as far as the Philippines.

Later media coverage centered around apathy toward restoration of The Wright Cycle Company shop and other preservation efforts. This type included three cartoons by editorial cartoonist Mike Peters, published in the *Dayton Daily News* in July 1985, June 1986 and June 1988, which pointed out the folly of ignoring one's historic heritage.

Then, after the restored Wright Cycle Company building was opened as a museum in 1988, the media was attracted to that specific site because of its historical significance. Since then, the Wright Cycle Company site has been visited by a steady stream of out-of-town and foreign magazine writers and video crews.



Part of the Salem Mall Aviation Trail display in 1991.

There also have been various local promotions of the tourist Aviation Trail. An example of these is an elaborate display at the Salem Mall in 1991 that included display panels about the sites and a large scale model of a Wright Flyer "soaring" overhead.

A different type of promotional effort started about ten years ago by several from Wright B Flyer, Inc. reached a successful conclusion in 1996. This was the long-running campaign to put "Birthplace of Aviation" on Ohio auto license plates. Members of the Aviation Trail Board of Trustees joined the effort several years ago by soliciting support from local and county officials across the state. Legislation passed in May 1996 stipulated that "Birthplace of Aviation" will replace "The Heart of It All" when new Ohio auto license plates come out at the end of 1997.

Funding

In addition to donations of money, goods and services for specific purposes, such as those noted earlier, Aviation Trail receives general funding from Aviation Trail membership dues and several other sources, including donations from visitors to The Wright Cycle Company shop, other grants and donations, profits from annual events and gift shop sales.

Two of the sale items are unique to Aviation Trail: a pin and notecards. The pin is fashioned from a replica of one of the tiles in the First Flight mural formerly installed in the lobby of the Dayton Convention and Exhibition Center. The notecards feature a sketch of The Wright Cycle Company shop, which was donated by local artist David L. Smith in 1988.

Aviation Trail also receives royalties from the Wright Brothers Maple Tree, which is distributed by its West Coast grower. The patent on the tree was donated to Aviation Trail in 1982 by its local developer, Siebenthaler's Nursery. The tree is a sugar maple especially adapted to thrive in an urban environment.

Individual fund-raising events have included two Affairs-on-the-Square in Courthouse Plaza. The first, on August 19, 1982, was billed as a celebration of Orville Wright's 111th birthday. As a fitting climax, a giant cardboard birthday cake was wheeled out onto the square. When Harold Johnson, dressed in this "Red Baron" aviator's outfit, lifted off the top, "party girl" Babe Ferguson popped out of the cake. The second Affair-on-the-Square, on September 2, 1983, was billed as Orville Wright's 112th birthday party. This time the event was sponsored by the Greater Dayton Jaycees for the benefit of Aviation Trail.

A more recent source of income, starting in 1992, is the revenue from a pay telephone that happened to be located on a vacant lot on South Broadway



Left to Right: Marlin W. Todd, Susan Wright and Betty Geiger at the Aviation Trail Tenth Anniversary Membership Party in 1991.

Street that was donated to Aviation Trail by the owner.

Looking ahead to the future, Aviation Trail established an Endowment Fund in 1992. So far, the fund has been built up from Life Membership payments and donations from individuals, mostly Board members. As of October 1996, the fund totalled a little over \$20,000.

Membership

The Aviation Trail Association was established in 1982 as a non-voting membership support group. However, a change in the bylaws of Aviation Trail, Inc. in 1994 eliminated the non-voting Association and in its stead made all dues-paying members members of Aviation Trail, Inc., with the privilege of voting on members of the Board of Trustees.

As of October 1996, membership totaled 256. Of these, 29 were from 18 different states outside of Ohio and the remainder from Ohio. Also, 27 were Life Members and 5, partial Life Members.

All members receive a free subscription to the Aviation Trail newsletter, *The Wright Flyer*, which is issued three times a year. The newsletter keeps members up to date on Aviation Trail activities and also serves as a means of informing others about the organization.

Looking To The Future

Aviation Trail expects its major efforts in the next few years to be focused on completing the Aviation Trail building (next to the Dayton National Park core site) and opening it as a museum and visitors center.

In addition to this major effort, Aviation Trail will continue to coordinate with the Dayton National Park on projects and activities of mutual interest; to promote the tourist Aviation Trail and encourage coordination among the sites; and to continue the on-going events and projects it has been involved with in the past.

