

Testimony

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On H.R. 4199, a Bill to Amend the Boundaries of the Dayton Aviation Heritage
National Historical Park

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Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the opportunity to represent the Wright Family and the Dayton community in support of H.R. 4199, a bill which would amend the boundaries of the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park to include both The Wright Company factory and Hawthorn Hill, the Wright brothers' family home. I have 5 minutes today to plead my case, but that is an eternity when you consider the fact that Uncle Orv and Uncle Will changed the course of human history in only 12 seconds, when their flying machine lifted us all from this earth and connected us to the rest of the world like no other technological achievement in human history. The Wrights' scientific exploration of manned flight set off an explosion of modern engineering technology that continues to change history every second, every minute, every day. The aviation and aerospace industries are significant influences on both the American and global economies, attracting, challenging, and captivating the imaginations of the most brilliant minds of our time.

My purpose this afternoon is two-fold. First, I want to help you understand why these last two sites are critical to finishing the story of the Wright brothers' achievements. And secondly, I want to assure you that we are prepared again to be strong partners for the NPS with the addition of these new sites.

Can you imagine Yellowstone without Old Faithful or Independence without the Liberty Bell? This is the kind of scenario we would have in Dayton without the inclusion of The Wright Company factory and Hawthorn Hill in our National Park. The Wright Company factory is the site where Orville and Wilbur Wright located the first manufacturing facilities in this nation specifically designed for the construction and sale of aeroplanes. These simple structures are the very birthplace of America's aviation and aerospace industry and the visitor experience of walking through the restored, original buildings will turn the clock back to the very beginning of our Nation's aerial age.

Hawthorn Hill, the Wright Family home, built in 1912 addresses my favorite piece of my great grand uncles' story, and that is the personal one. The house was built with the proceeds of Uncle Orv and Uncle Will's new company, so it was a landmark to their success. But, more importantly I think, the home tells the story of the men, not the flying machine that changed the world. When a visitor walks through the threshold of Hawthorn Hill, he is in the company of pioneering genius because he is taking the same steps of Orville Wright's friends Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh, Thomas Edison, just to name a few. But the visitor also learns of the family's interesting experiences there... tin cockroaches, weddings, moving mashed potato bowls, and engineering "improvements"

to the household that drove outside repairmen mad. Hawthorn Hill was built for the Wright brothers, sister Katharine, and father Milton, but in the end...it was occupied by only Orville Wright, practical joker, military aviation consultant, tinkerer, and yes, first man to fly. Hawthorn Hill is the final and most human chapter in the lives of Orville and Wilbur Wright.

The Wright Brothers' achievements continue to inspire young and old across the planet. And today, we have a wonderful opportunity to complete our National Park with the addition of The Wright Company factory and Hawthorn Hill. Our community is committed again to working with the NPS to finish telling one of mankind's greatest stories. With The Wright Company factory's buildings in tact (with high integrity) and Delphi committed to giving back our Nation's history, the community is considering a plan to not only build early aeroplane replicas and interpret the birth of the aviation industry, but to house a campus for a modern aviation school. Other partners, in private business and local government, are exploring economic development ideas adjacent to the historic factory that would bring cutting edge technology back to the neighborhood where it all began. Our history and the future, side by side...

The Wright Family Foundation plans to be a full working partner with the NPS to restore, preserve, and promote Hawthorn Hill as one of our Nation's jewels in the National Aviation Heritage Area. We are committed partners of the NPS in the management, operations, visitor experience, and yes, building of financial support for this unique asset.

On behalf of the Wright family, I want to thank Congress for its foresight by establishing the Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park in 1992. By doing so, Congress made a commitment to preserving the most important sites related to America's priceless aviation heritage and to honoring the memory of Uncle Orv and Uncle Will. In 1992, there were sound reasons for not including Hawthorn Hill and The Wright Company factory. However, in the decade and a half since the creation of the park, the community vision now fully incorporates these two critical sites. The Wright family and the community ask Congress to complete the park with this boundary change, telling the full story of the Wright brothers' extraordinary world contributions.

I also wish to thank Congressman Mike Turner today for his support of all of America's historic places, and his introduction of H.R. 4199 on behalf of the people of the Dayton Region.

And finally, two weeks ago in Milan, I accepted an award on behalf of my great grand uncles. While it was given by an Italian foundation, I thought it worth sharing with you for it expresses a sentiment descriptive of so many who have brought unprecedented change to the world. It reads, "To Orville and Wilbur Wright, men who showed intelligent courage and courageous intelligence..." This is an award worthy of not only my great grand uncles, but of the nation and national park that call them "sons". Thank you very much, and I would be pleased to respond to any questions.

