

Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park

A Non-Traditional Park Takes Off

The title of a 1992 article that appeared in *CRM* asked: “The Birth of Aviation in Dayton, Ohio: Is a New NPS Unit About to Take Off?” As of March 1999, it has! Designated on October 16, 1992 (PL. 102-419), Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park (hereafter referenced as Dayton Aviation) has noted giant strides during the intervening years in the areas of planning, resource management, interpretation, partnerships, and community outreach. This non-traditional park based on underlying partnerships in Dayton offers an additional dimension to the birth of aviation story previously interpreted only peripherally at Wright Brothers National Memorial in North Carolina, a national park system unit since 1933.

Dayton Aviation consists of four noncontiguous sites managed by four legislated entities scattered throughout the metropolitan area. The National Park Service (NPS) manages the core unit in West Dayton featuring The Wright Cycle Company building, the Hoover Block (also referred to as the Wright Brothers Print Shop), and lands between; nearby, the Ohio Historical Society operates the Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial; Wright-Patterson Air Force Base takes the lead at Huffman Prairie Flying Field just east of Dayton; Carillon Historical Park owns the 1905 Wright Flyer III housed in Wright Hall south of downtown.

Despite its small size, Dayton Aviation can be likened to a “resource buffet.” The park interprets the technological development of the airplane, a restored fully functioning plane, and the first aviation test field. Additionally, the park celebrates the literary achievements of African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, a business associate and friend of Orville Wright. This core unit in West Dayton interprets the personal and social dimensions of the neighborhood associated with the Wright brothers.

Besides the resource managing partners cited above, the NPS has had the support and direct involvement of several other key players. During the general management plan (GMP) preparation phase, the park developed and enjoyed a close working relationship with the federally chartered Dayton Aviation Heritage Commission (DAHC), a 13-member appointed group that provided much input to the GMP process. The DAHC collaborated with The 2003 Committee, a local entity considered the park’s godparent. This cooperative relationship was especially noteworthy in the area of transportation links between the park’s four units, a long-term need outside the immediate purview of the park. Congress gave the DAHC primary responsibility to “assist federal, state, and local authorities and the private sector in preserving and managing the historic resources in the Miami Valley, Ohio, associated with the Wright brothers, aviation, and Paul Laurence Dunbar” outside the

The Wright Cycle Company.



boundaries of this very small national park system unit. Under the park's 1992 legislative mandate, the DAHC was charged with producing a preservation and development plan for the Miami Valley. Beyond all this, the state of Ohio created the Wright-Dunbar State Heritage Commission to work on economic and community development issues outside the scope of the park and federal commission. The state commission's clearly defined legislated (but not realized) responsibilities include preparation of a management plan for properties that should be "preserved, restored developed, maintained, or acquired," emphasizing redevelopment and revitalization of the Wright-Dunbar neighborhood of West Dayton. This plan will be prepared in cooperation with the city of Dayton, which is currently implementing a unique redevelopment plan for the neighborhood.

Without the herculean efforts of Aviation Trail, Inc., a pioneering local aviation history entity, there would be virtually no Wright Brothers resource base in West Dayton. In the mid-1980s, Aviation Trail acquired and restored The Wright Cycle Company building and mothballed the nearby Hoover Block. Following the park's 1992 designation, Aviation Trail sold the two buildings to The 2003 Committee which, in turn, donated the structures to the NPS in 1995. (These buildings became the park's resource base in the West Dayton anchor.) Aviation Trail is continuing its public spirited work near the park as it moves toward completion of the Setzer building project. The original Setzer building, next door to the Hoover Block but outside the park boundary, collapsed in 1992—only its original facade remained extant. Aviation Trail built a contemporary structure behind this facade for its museum and to serve as the group's corporate headquarters. Once this new building is fully operational, the park will lease space to serve as a shared visitor center for interpretive and support activities to complement the historic Hoover Block. Aviation Trail constructed an attractive outdoor plaza linking the bicycle shop with the

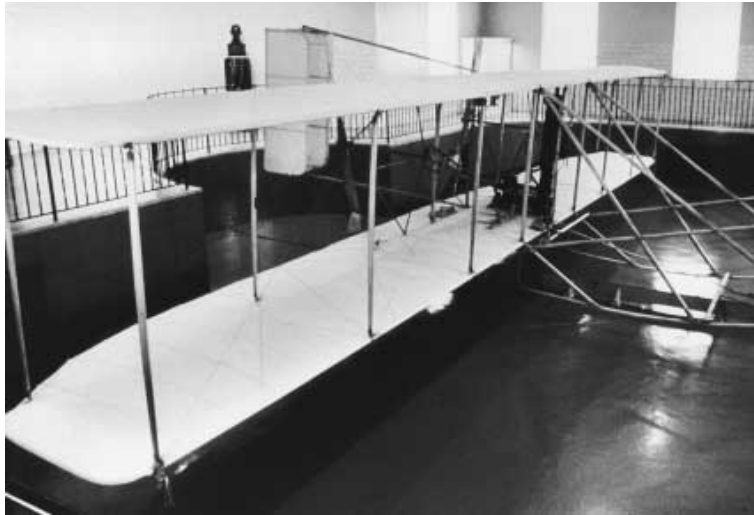
Hoover Block and Setzer building to serve as the central gathering point for park visitors.

At the NPS core area, additional preservation work has continued on The Wright Cycle Company building. Enhanced security devices, new doors, structural support of floors, interior plaster and painting, exterior brick wall drainage improvements, and new roofing projects have been completed. To date, the Hoover Block has been given minimal preservation maintenance treatment to maintain weather and security integrity. Major rehabilitation work will commence in spring 1999 to have the structure ready for the 2003 centennial of flight. Preparations to celebrate the Century of Flight is being coordinated by The 2003 Committee in cooperation with the states of Ohio and North Carolina, highlighted by the recent appointment of a federal first flight commission.

Park partners are advancing their own preservation projects to get ready for an expected surge in visitation. At Carillon Historical Park, a new structure has been erected linking the bicycle shop replica with Wright Hall, giving more exhibit space and helping preserve the Wright Flyer III in a climate controlled environment. A multi-purpose visitor center is under construction. The Ohio Historical Society is completing extensive improvements at the Paul Laurence Dunbar State Memorial. A comprehensive site improvement program has resulted in a multi-purpose building constructed adjacent to the Dunbar home and incorporates adjacent historic residences as library, study center for writers and visiting artists, and restoration of Dunbar's urban barn. Work continues at the Huffman Prairie Flying Field. Wright-Patterson Air Force Base is making the historical resources accessible to visitors with a vital connection to a community wide recreational trail as well as entrance, roadway, and parking improvements. A new interpretive center will be erected by Wright-Patterson near the Olmsted designed Wright Memorial on Wright Brothers Hill. This east anchor to the park will interpret the story of the Wrights' work at the

Addendum

In *CRM* Vol. 21, No. 11, "The 2003 Centennial of Flight," by Roger D. Launius should have noted that Ohio is represented on the Centennial of Flight Commission. The chair of The 2003 Committee serves alongside the president of North Carolina's First Flight Centennial Foundation, the director of the National Air and Space Museum, the administrators of NASA and the FAA, and one representative of an aviation/aerospace association.



Wright Flyer III.

nearby flying field and the impact their work had on Miami Valley's aviation heritage. Current planning is underway to include NPS interpretation and staffing at these linked resource sites. Physical connections are being improved via a community based signage system to guide travelers along the Aviation Trail, an initiative to mark and interpret the diverse aviation resource sites along the trail in the Miami Valley.

While many supporters and friends of Dayton Aviation entertained enthusiastic expectations that the new park would be more expansive than reality warranted, local leadership has had patience—to co-exist with the more deliberate movement dictated by the federal budgetary process. In terms of neighborhood revitalization in West Dayton, the core unit has served as a symbolic catalyst for other public and private partners. The city of Dayton has been a major player by building fourteen units of affordable housing in a traditional style that complements existing historic housing stock. The city has designated the area as the Oak and Ivy Park. Eighteen existing owner occupied structures have been rehabilitated with five more in progress, and seven vacant houses have been redone with an additional seventeen in progress. New neighborhood infrastructure including improved signing, plantings, sidewalk paver stones, restoration of limestone curbs, historic-style lighting, and rerouted streets have come online. Today, the Wright-Dunbar area is providing attractive housing in a near-downtown setting with a unique historic character.

The federal DAHC has contracted with the National Trust for Historic Preservation Main Street Program and the city of Dayton to bring

commercial revitalization to the West Third Street Historic District. Additionally, the city took the lead in rehabilitating a commercial building near the park to house the Innerwest Priority Board, one of Dayton's neighborhood based planning entities. Community services have been allocated to highlight this neighborhood renaissance and community based policing has helped remove previous negative images of the long overlooked West Dayton neighborhood. The public sector is working with property owners, developers, and the local business sector to foster commercial revitalization based on the historic community of the Wrights and Dunbar, anticipated to serve both the community and national park visitors in the 21st century.

Due to its legislative mandate, the congressionally appropriated revenue stream for the park will continue long after the initial capital intensive Hoover Block restoration project and further work at the bicycle shop are completed, with normal operations and maintenance funds allocated on an annual basis. Then too, as a major player, the state of Ohio deserves large credit for allocating several million dollars earmarked from the capital improvement funds for direct use at the park's core unit, the Aviation Trail building, Carillon Historical Park, Wright Brothers Memorial at Wright Brothers Hill, and other aviation related projects in the Dayton area.

Today, in the development and management of nationally significant cultural resources, there is much buzz about partnerships that sound good in principle but stop short when it is time for partners to allocate the dollars to fund capital intensive development projects. The Dayton model proves it can be done with a mix of federal, state, city, and private dollars, provided there is the will and commitment for all partners to step forth. In Dayton, local and state government as well as semi-private funding was available up front to get this project off the ground. New parks do not arrive in full flower, but require a necessary planning and development phase to "take off." When the park's documented administrative history is written, the record will credit a diverse group of public and private sector individuals and organizations with spending endless hours, both paid and volunteer, to get the new park fully operational and to implement community improvements in the area. Now that the solid foundation provided by the NPS planning, design, and construction requirements is being

translated into bricks and mortar reality, Dayton eagerly awaits a grand centennial celebration in 2003.

Based on the Dayton area Aviation Trail commemoration, there is compelling rationale for the designation of a national aviation trail to link key extant sites celebrating the birth of aviation. Sites could include the pioneering aviation innovations of the Wrights, Chanute, Langley, Curtis and others. This could be accomplished through reviewing existing landmark theme studies, additional survey and evaluation of extant sites, preparation of a comprehensive historic resource study linking the sites in a thematic framework, sharing of information between existing recognized sites, and the preparation of a trail brochure and guidebook for individuals and organizations wanting to visit the sites. The National Aviation Trail could focus on the two national park units in Ohio and North Carolina; the birthplace of Wilbur Wright near Milan, Indiana; Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, which displays the boyhood home and a bicycle shop structure (relocated from Dayton in the 1930s); Fort Myer near Washington, DC, where Orville tested a plane for use by the Army, and other early aviation sites.

The challenge to the NPS is to meld non-traditional parks with the bureau's long-standing management, operations, resource stewardship, and outreach policies. The NPS has been a major presence in a number of non-traditional urban areas for well over 20 years. There is a growing cadre of trained and committed personnel and

managers to operate these parks. While some of the new parks such as Dayton Aviation have a small traditional landbase and, due to their size and mission, may not attract recreationally oriented visitors, their importance and impact to the host communities transcends the acreage size, annual operations budget, or attendance figures. Non-traditional NPS units give communities such as Dayton, Ohio, an overarching sense of local pride. Communities realize that a park is not only important to the local scene but the entire nation. Similar to the societal thrust for urban areas to attract major league sports franchises, non-traditional urban parks help give identity to a community. A park like Dayton Aviation attracts the attention of local civic organizations, citizenry, and the media. Aviation Trail saved the resource base. The 2003 Committee advocated NPS status. Early in the process Dayton area private sector opinion leaders supported the creation of the new park for diverse reasons including heritage preservation, economic development, and urban renewal. Aviation history supporters in Dayton and elsewhere are to be applauded for their continuing support for the recognition and development of the new park, support which transcends the legislated contributions made by the federal sector. Dayton Aviation National Historical Park is a true non-traditional park and a proud partnership.

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Photos courtesy NPS.

SOS! Cash

Save Outdoor Sculpture! (SOS!) is offering cash awards to state and local agencies and non-profit organizations to conserve local outdoor sculpture as a gift to the new century. SOS! Assessment Awards (\$850) fund an on-site condition survey by a conservation professional to determine conservation needs. SOS! Conservation Treatment Awards of up to \$40,000 to each state and the District of Columbia help to conserve public sculptures. SOS! Maintenance Training Awards of up to \$7,000 help to train government personnel or volunteers in low-tech maintenance of up to four outdoor sculptures. SOS! Achievement Awards recognize local achievements in outdoor sculpture awareness and preservation with up to 12 cash awards. SOS! partners with the Girl Scouts to implement the SOS! 2000 Patch Program to encourage scouts to become involved in preserving their local heritage.

SOS! is a joint project of Heritage Preservation and the Smithsonian's American Art Museum. Deadlines for these awards vary. For more information, visit their web site at <www.heritagepreservation.org> or contact Susan Nichols at 888-SOS-SCULP or 202-634-1422.