



THE Flyer

P. O. Box 1903, Kitty Hawk, NC 27949
www.firstflight.org • Ph. 252-441-1903

Spring 2005



The Wright brothers' grand niece, Janette Yoerg and her son Keith, enjoy an evening with Gerard Bollee (center), the grand-nephew of Leon Bollee, who, like William Tate of Kitty Hawk, welcomed Wilbur Wright to Le Mans, France in 1908. (photo by Lisa Loy)

Le Mans to Celebrate in 2008

By Lisa Loy

If you thought the 2003 Centennial of Flight celebrations were a big deal, just wait until 2008 when the good folks in Le Mans, France celebrate the centennial of Wilbur's exhibition flights in their fair city. It will be an event that lures Outer Bankers in good number as well as members of the Wright Family, and aviation buffs from around the world.

While the Wrights' 1903 flight from Kill Devil Hill is considered the birth of powered flight, they were not recognized by the world until five years later, 1908 to be exact.

You can expect the French celebration in 2008 to rival our 2003 centennial celebration here at Wright Brothers National Memorial. On the excitement scale, we can look forward to a perfectly wonderful "10." To me, the 1908 flights gave birth to what we call "The Golden Age of Aviation,"

when feats of derring-do and new innovations were introduced in rapid-fire succession. 1908 was solid gold.

To give you some sense of the enormity of the impact Wilbur made on the Europeans, let's try and visualize the period—other planes were being built and flown, but in short distances or hops, and generally in a straight line. The state of aviation was not much more than a novelty. Behind the scenes however, the Wrights were in high gear despite their avoidance of the public eye until they achieved their patent goals. Many people wondered if they had achieved any flights at all. The *New York Herald* ran the headline, "Flyers or Liars."

Now imagine Orville and Wilbur, emerging from the background to demon-

Continued— Please see Le Mans on page 3

Time Capsule Buried at Monument

"I can't imagine the excitement the people are going to feel when they open that time capsule," First Flight Society President, Bill Harris said at the recent ceremony held at the Monument to a Century of Flight in Kitty Hawk.

As part of the First Flight Centennial Celebration on the Outer Banks, Icarus International constructed the monument adjacent to the Aycock Brown Welcome Center on US 158. The First Flight Rotary Club collaborated with Icarus in arranging the insertion of a time capsule at this site.

A call for submissions, which was overseen by KaeLi Spiers, Curator of the Outer Banks History Center, resulted in a collection of documents, photographs, souvenirs and letters that were placed into a stainless steel cube and buried at the Monument to a Century of Flight in Kitty Hawk in April.

Some of the buried items include refrigerator magnets, T-shirts, a pilot's scarf, the key to the town of Kitty Hawk, an Apollo 11 flight crew patch, photographs, a fireman's badge, lapel pins, flags, dozens of tourist brochures, a ceramic rotary clown sculpture and 4,050 documents. The First Flight Society also included copies of *Visions*, the Official Centennial Program, the Society's 2003 membership list and its list of charter members. It is hoped that the time capsule will be opened in 2103.



State Senator Pro Tempore Marc Basnight with Lisa Loy and her children, Alexi and Pierce Holian, following the dedication of the Monument to a Century of Flight in 2004.

2004 Celebration ReCap

By C.T. Halfhill

Imagine, a 70-degree day, gentle winds, comfortable, warm seats, and no rain, sleet or snow for the annual celebration at Wright Brothers National Memorial on December 17th. That's what we had this year, believe it or not! For the first time in history, the annual commemoration was held inside the spacious Centennial Pavilion donated by Northrop Grumman Aviation that was built for the 100th anniversary of powered flight. The complex houses a variety of exhibits and a large auditorium; everyone enjoyed the change.

Planning for this big event, as well as other events throughout the year, is a year-long effort by the First Flight Society's Program Committee. Already meetings have been held for 2005. As you read in last year's newsletters, the Tuskegee airmen from WW2 were honored and another magnificent painting by Gregory Kavalec joined all the other portraits that line the walls of the museum surrounding the latest replica of the 1903 flyer. The First Flight Society has received many complements for the fine program from the several Tuskegee airmen and their family members who were able to attend.

One of the original members of their group sang the National Anthem and the crowd gave MSGT. Ezra M. Hill (Ret) a well-deserved standing ovation. Super Bowl and others take notice! The Northeastern High School band from Elizabeth City entertained the audience before and after the ceremony and did their usual outstanding performance; I believe they were at their best. (Must be

the warm conditions.) From the same high school, the Air Force Junior ROTC presented the colors. Many other dignitaries on stage gave interesting speeches. They were covered in previous newsletters. At 10:35 a.m. the huge doors at the end of the Pavilion were opened and the monument on the hill was visible as four F-15's from Seymour Johnson Air Base streaked overhead to herald the outdoor entertainment. Those who wished were able to stay inside and still see some of the aircraft flying by. But to see the amazing aerobatic show, you had to go outside. There was a parachute team of Green Berets that defied gravity for quite a while before making soft landings. One flying group we always depend on regardless of the weather was the Coast Guard located in Elizabeth City. The Candy Bomber C-54 made an encore flight, and several civilian aircraft also flew. Book signings by Dr. Tom Crouch of the Smithsonian and Tuskegee airmen took place, and some of the pilots were also available for conversations.

This is just a brief description of all the activity that goes on every year and to those of you who have never made the trip, well, you are missing a great experience. It's all followed by the annual luncheon and brief meeting of the Society, and the Anniversary Ball that night. All of these activities are open to the public, but advance reservations are required for the Luncheon and Ball. On the night of the 16th, The Man Will Never Fly Memorial Society International gives its annual dinner and entertainment. You'll all come!

First Flight Sculpture

By Joe Hardman

The latest major attraction of the Wright Brothers National Memorial is a life sized sculpture in stainless steel with bronze statues, depicting the moment of take-off of the first heavier-than-air powered flight.

Dedicated during the 2003 First Flight Centennial celebration, the sculpture is located to the south, or back-side of the main Kill Devil Hill, which supports the Wright Memorial Pylon at its top.

A gift of the people of the state of North Carolina at a cost of \$250 thousand, Stephen Smith's work is "a welcome and beautiful addition to grace the Memorial grounds," said NPS Superintendent Lawrence Belli.

The life-sized work of art is the creation of Stephen Smith, noted Carolina artist from Marshville, NC. The sculpture reflects and recreates the famous photo of the world's first powered take-off, with John T. Daniels, surfman, at the camera, and Wilbur Wright running along the plane's right wing, as the craft lifts off the launch rail with brother Orville Wright at the controls. The stainless steel craft, weighing 10,000 pounds, is irresistible to visitors, especially children, who climb aboard and relive the moment.

The sculpture not only commemorates the instant of that first flight, but also is designed to inspire the imaginations of future generations.

Plans are currently underway to add additional figures of the five witnesses to the first flight.

New Wright Brothers Multi-use Path Dedication

A beautiful, breezy day in Kitty Hawk was complimented by the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Wright Brothers Multi-use Pathway in Kitty Hawk. On October 1st, 2004, officials, volunteers, and enthusiasts gathered at Wind Grass Circle Park to usher in a new era and honor a past one.

Kitty Hawk Mayor Harris has been a driving force in restoring this historic landmark

and creating a beautiful, safe and fun public area for the townspeople. It reestablishes the old sound front route used to connect Kitty Hawk, Kill Devil Hills, and Nags Head and enables pedestrians and bicyclists to travel safely along residential byways and multi-use paths from Southern Shores to Nags Head. The path is also

designed to support emergency equipment and provide an emergency route to authorized personnel when other routes are totally inaccessible.

The path is located along Kitty Hawk Bay between West Tateway Road and Beacon Drive and is open from dawn till dusk. The view of Kitty Hawk Bay is much the same as it was for the Wright Brothers. Windgrass Park is an excellent place to put in your kayak or canoe, relax on the deck, or walk your dog. Parking is provided at Windgrass Circle Park, and a few places along Beacon Drive.

Continued— See Wright Path on page 4



Society President and Kitty Hawk Mayor, Bill Harris (center), with new Society Director and Kitty Hawk Mayor Pro Tempore, Doug Seay (right), lead the walk that followed the ceremony.

Le mans continued

strate, almost simultaneously, on both sides of the Atlantic (yes, they had a pretty cool marketing strategy), flights that broke all boundaries. Orville went to Ft. Myer in Virginia to woo the U.S. Army into buying their planes; Wilbur traveled to Le Mans.

France was a natural choice. The French had already demonstrated their passion for flight. They can even boast that they organized the first aviation club in the world. Its existence pre-dates even the 1903 flights.

In Le Mans, Wilbur became acquainted with a car manufacturer

named Leon Bollee. Think of Bollee as the French version of Kitty Hawk's William Tate. He gave Wilbur warehouse space to assemble his plane, gave him food, and provided lodging. The two even over flew the area in a balloon on July 26 before transferring the plane in the night to the hippodrome, (their horse track) August 4. The two became great friends, and the notoriously thin Wilbur also discovered the joys of French cuisine. He gained 15 pounds in 6 months.

In August of 1908, Wilbur Wright flew 1600 meters (about a mile) before a modest crowd over the horse track. Aviation pioneer, Louis Bleriot was a witness of the flight where Wilbur used a pylon with a 700-kilo counterweight to catapult his airplane into the sky. The word was out. When he flew again on September 21, more than 10,000 people showed up, including several kings from across Europe. Wilbur's flights were a stunning, turning point for the Wrights as audiences witnessed sustained, controlled distance flights with Wilbur banking the plane as he turned the aircraft numerous times above their heads.

The good folk of Le Mans never forgot Wilbur. In fact, the first monument to aviation in the world is located there and it ranks second, only to the racetrack, as a

major tourist destination of the city. The sculpture raises a few eyebrows however—some say its Wilbur in the buff. But truly we don't know the identity of that naked guy on the top. I believe that he represents mankind embracing the sky. At the base of the monument however, there is a fairly dashing relief of Wilbur Wright, fully clad, in the cockpit with tributes to Leon Bollee and Orville.

Now fast forward to February 13, 2005 when a 6-member delegation from Le Mans, including Gerard Bollee, the grand nephew of Leon Bollee, arrived at

Kelly's Restaurant and Tavern in Nags Head for a reception and dinner hosted by the First Flight Society. Wright family members, Janette Yoerg and her teenage son Keith traveled to the Outer Banks from their home in Minnesota to personally welcome the delegation.

"It was such a joy to meet with the French delegation," Janette Yoerg said, "As a Wright I am thrilled that the French are dedicated to preserving the entire history of what Uncle Orv and Uncle Wil accomplished. It is always important to celebrate the success of 1903, but there is so much more to the story." Keith and I are pleased that there are people who are as proud as we are and are dedicated to preserving that legacy. I was impressed with all the delegation but as I said at the dinner, there will always be a special place in my heart for Mr. Bollee. The Wrights and the Bollee families will always have a bond and Keith and I will always honor the words Wilbur wrote to Leon:

"We do not forget that you expended much time and gave yourself much trouble in order to be of assistance to us and that you rejoiced with us in our success and grieved with us in our troubles. For these things we do not attempt to pay with money, but we cherish them forever in our hearts."



Lois Smith (2nd from left) with husband Bryan (2nd from right) welcome members of the French delegation. Lois has become a driving force in membership and fundraising for the Society. She is the granddaughter of witness and photographer of the first flight, John T. Daniels. (photo by Lisa Loy)

Hail & Farewell

Susie F. Von Suskil

Originally from Alexandria, Virginia Susie is a graduate of Virginia Intermont College and James Madison University. She came to the Outer Banks on vacation in 1982 and never left. She started at the Wright

Memorial selling air tour tickets for Kitty Hawk Aero Tours. Her husband, Paul John, was a Pilot there who flew over 7000 hours at First Flight.

Susie received her real estate license in 1984 and has been selling land and homes on the beach for 20 years and works with Prudential Resort Realty. She served the Outer Banks Association of REALTORS as Secretary, 3-Year Director, and many committees.

Susie brings her enthusiasm and planning skills to the organization and is excited to serve as Director with the First Flight Society. She is already hard at work planning the Society's annual ball and is seeking volunteers. If you're able to lend a hand, please contact her at susie.von-suskil@resortrealty.com



Lawrence Belli

The National Park Service has transferred Outer Banks Group Superintendent Lawrence Belli to the Southeast District Office in Atlanta, Georgia.

"Larry did a fine job in planning and directing the Wright Brothers event," Southeast Regional Director Patricia Hooks said in a prepared statement. "However, it has been determined that it is in the best interests of the park service to make a change immediately."

Philip A. Francis, the deputy superintendent of Great Smoky Mountains National Park, will be acting superintendent until a successor is named.

As superintendent, Belli has actively served the First Flight Society as an ex officio Boardmember. The Board of Directors wish to extend their appreciation to Larry Belli for his efforts and best wishes for a successful assignment in Atlanta.

Wright Path--continued

The Wright Brothers used this route extensively on their visits to the Outer Banks. They transported their equipment from the small pier that was then located on Moore Shore Road near Beacon Street to their camp in Kill Devil Hills. They may have been the first to bicycle over this roadway. On their third visit to the area, they brought a specially built bicycle with wide tires that enabled them to ride on the loose sandy roadway between their camp at Kill Devil Hill and the village of Kitty Hawk to pick up supplies and mail.

From 1750 to 1963, the sound route was the main thoroughfare for small settlements from Nags Head to Currituck Inlet near Penny's Hill. When the Beach Road was paved, the sound front road fell into disuse. In 1963 Dare County closed the road and allowed Kill Devil Hills to build a subdivision on it. Mayor Bill Harris said it was one of the saddest days of his life. He recalled fond childhood memories of biking down the path, and swimming and

fishing in the shallow sound waters off Kitty Hawk Bay.

In the 1980's Kitty Hawk Town Council gave away the Town's right of access to the pathway. Intense development of the area and the resultant flooding of the bypass and the beach road reminded the present Town Council of the value of the historic route. Town Attorney Norman Shearin, acting at the direction of Town Council, fought for and reinstated the Town's right of access.

The multi-use path is a private/public partnership. The \$100-thousand path was funded by the Visitors Bureau (\$50,000), BD&A Construction (\$25,000) and the Town of Kitty Hawk (\$25,000).

The foregoing information and photography appear courtesy of www.kittyhawk-freepress.com

The Flyer is the Newsletter of The First Flight Society

2005 Board of Directors

President, Bill Harris
First Vice President, W. J. Jack Overman
Second Vice President,
Melvin R. Daniels, Jr.
Third Vice President,
James E. Red Smith
Secretary, Joe Hardman
Treasurer, Henry B. Frazier, III



Newsletter Editors
Tom Halfhill and Lisa Holian Loy

Office Secretary, Pat Morrison
www.firstflight.org
Telephone 252-441-1903

First Flight Society Membership Application

Members of the First Flight Society come from all walks (or flights) of life, but we all share a common bond: our love of aviation. The purpose of the society is to foster and promote a public awareness of, and widespread interest in, the origin, history and future of flight, in all its forms, and to memorialize Orville and Wilbur Wright, first in the world to successfully achieve powered flight in a heavier-than-air machine, December 17, 1903, near Kill Devil Hill, at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. Join us by completing the information below and mailing your membership check made payable to the First Flight Society.

Name _____, Address _____,

City, _____, State _____, Zip _____ Phone _____, E-mail _____

(Mail to The First Flight Society, P. O. Box 1903, Kitty Hawk, NC 27949)

\$35.00 Renewal \$35.00 New Member \$50.00 Family \$200.00 Business \$350.00 Lifetime Members



First Flight Society
P. O. Box 1903
Kitty Hawk, NC 27949

Return Service Requested

Non-Profit
PRSTD STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Kitty Hawk, NC
Permit No. 1903