



125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of  
**First Flight**  
1903 - 2028

*Kitty Hawk, North Carolina*



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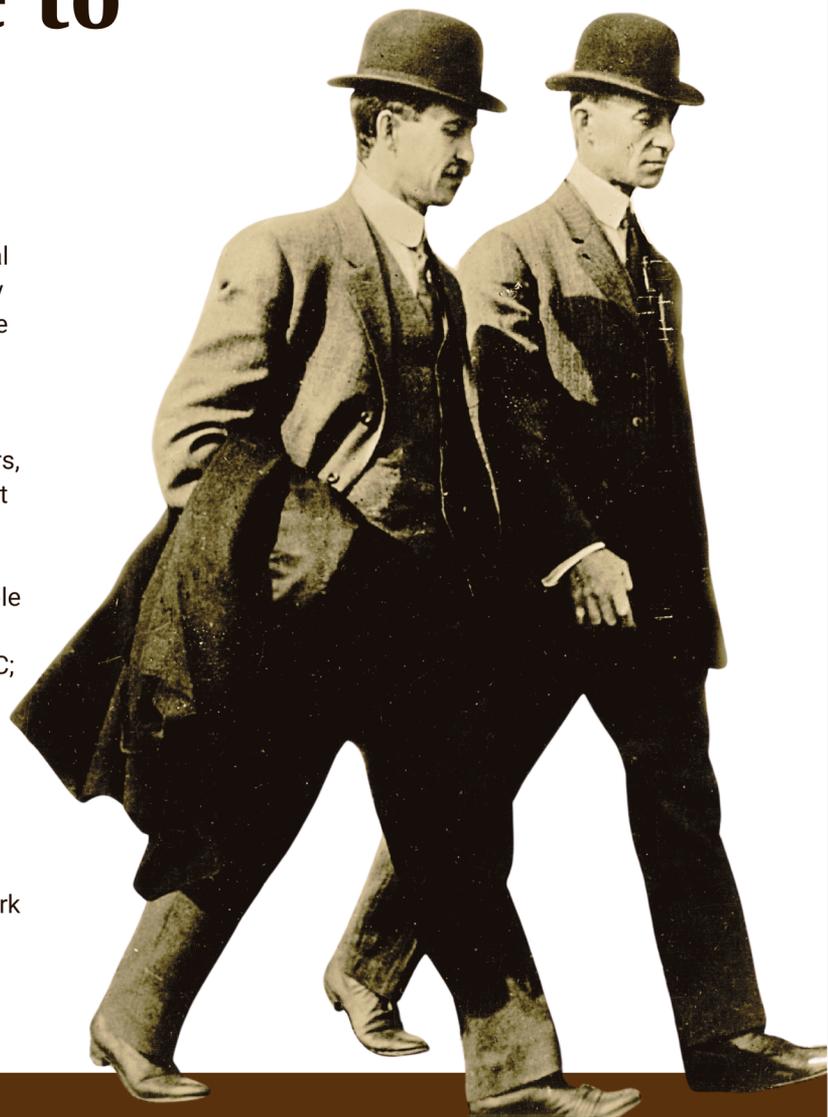


# Follow the Wright Family from Millville to Kitty Hawk

Annually on December 17th, the First Flight Society, in conjunction with the Wright Brothers National Memorial of the National Park Service, celebrates the anniversary of the First Flight. Traditionally, every 25 years since the First Flight on December 17, 1903, the celebrations are larger and more involved than the others.

The First Flight Society, in collaboration with its partners, is planning to have a 125th Anniversary celebration that will be the largest since the Centennial in 2003 and we want you to be part of it. This celebration will be different from most past celebrations, by having multiple sites in Millville, IN; Dayton, OH; Norfolk/Hampton/Virginia Beach, VA; Elizabeth City, NC; and Kitty Hawk, NC. A seven-day celebration in those locations leading up to the final day at the Wright Brothers National Memorial on December 17, 2028.

The First Flight Society is excited to have this opportunity to fulfill its vision to inspire people everywhere by the dauntless resolution and tireless work of the Wright Brothers, by having a celebration that extends beyond Kitty Hawk to many other parts of the country



# The Twenty-Fifth Anniversary

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In 1928, Kitty Hawk was still one of the most remote places on the East Coast. The celebrations began with a Washington, D.C. conference organized by the International Civil Aeronautics Conference and the National Aeronautic Association. A “pilgrimage” followed from Washington DC to Kitty Hawk, with more than two hundred individuals representing forty nations, including Orville Wright and members of the Wright family, Senator Hiram Bingham, Amelia Earhart, and Igor Sikorsky. The party boarded a steamer in Washington on December 15, landed in Old Point Comfort in Virginia on December 16, and visited Langley Field before heading to Norfolk. On December 17, the group took buses to Currituck Courthouse, greeted by William O. Saunders, the president of the Kill Devil Hills Memorial Association (which later became the First Flight Society). Cars then transported the party to Point Harbor on Currituck Sound, where they were transported over the Sound, and then automobiles took them to the celebration site at Kitty Hawk. There, the party was joined by several thousand people who had gotten to the site by other means.

Everyone trekked up the dune of Kill Devil Hill for a ceremony of laying the cornerstone of the national monument. The Assistant Secretary of War F. Trubee Davison presided, and there were speeches by North Carolina Governor McLean, Congressman Warren, and Secretary of War Davis. Orville Wright and three of the four eyewitnesses, who all died before the 50th Anniversary, participated in the ceremony. As usual, Orville Wright did not speak.

Then, everyone trekked down to where a silk parachute covered the boulder, marking where the First Flight took off. Given the shifting dunes, three witnesses and Bill Tate had determined the location as best they could. John Victory, the executive secretary of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, presided over the ceremony. Saunders and Tate made speeches, and Senator Bingham presided over the unveiling. Saunders laid a wreath at the foot of the boulder in honor of Wilbur Wright, starting the tradition of the wreath-laying ceremony.



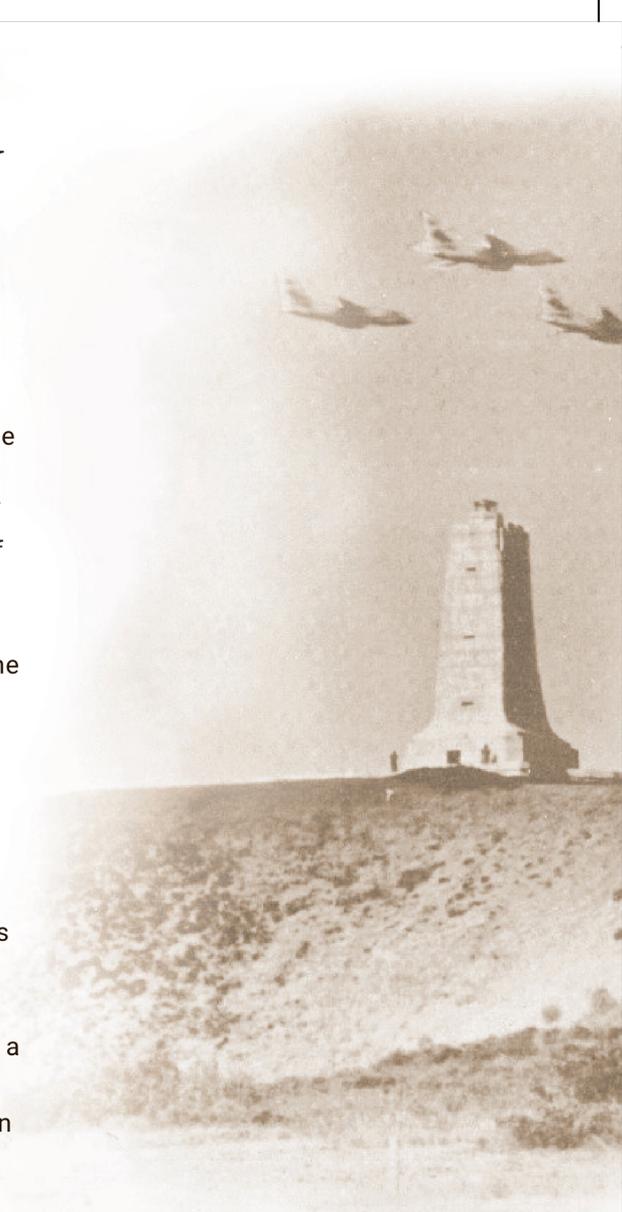
# The Fiftieth Anniversary

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The Fiftieth Anniversary was a four-day affair, with the themes being: December 14 Pioneers and Flyers Day; December 15 Industry Day; December 16 Defense Day; and December 17 Anniversary Day. Joint sponsors were the Kill Devil Hills Memorial Society (re-named from the Association) (later renamed the First Flight Society), the Air Force Association, the National Park Service, and the Fiftieth Anniversary of Powered Flight Commission (which was appointed by the Governor of North Carolina on June 18, 1953).

The celebration featured more than 200 aircraft doing flyovers over the four days (mostly the last three days due to bad weather on the first day). Granddaughters of the witnesses laid wreaths at the boulder. There were speeches by Frank Lahm, the second army airplane pilot taught by the Wright Brothers and the then-president of the Kill Devil Hills Memorial Society, Admiral Dewitt Ramsey, president of the Aircraft Industries Association, and Jimmy Doolittle (who was also chairman of the National Fiftieth Anniversary Committee). The crowds were around 2,000 on December 16 and 5,000 on December 17.

The Wright Brothers National Memorial received its official name just a few days before the Anniversary Celebrations. The Wright Brothers' 1903 hanger and living quarters were reconstructed and refurnished in preparation.



# The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary

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The First Flight Society and the National Park Service sponsored the Seventy-Fifth Anniversary. It was a seven-day event, with the last two days being the most important. On December 16, Paul E. Garber (historian emeritus of the Smithsonian Institution) and Charles Gibbs-Smith (Lindbergh Professor of Aerospace History of the National Air and Space Museum) made a presentation on "The Real Orville and Wilbur Wright."

On December 17, there was a crowd of 6,000. There were speeches by U.S. Attorney General Griffin Bell, U.S. Transportation Secretary Brock Adams, and U.S. Assistant Secretary of the Interior Robert Herbst. John Allison, president of the National Aeronautic Association, rededicated the boulder that the NAA had placed there 50 years before. Ken Kellett attempted to reenact the First Flight with a replica of the Wright Flyer, and almost succeeded on the third attempt. Then four F-105s flew over the celebration. The annual luncheon of the First Flight Society at the Sea Fare Restaurant followed.

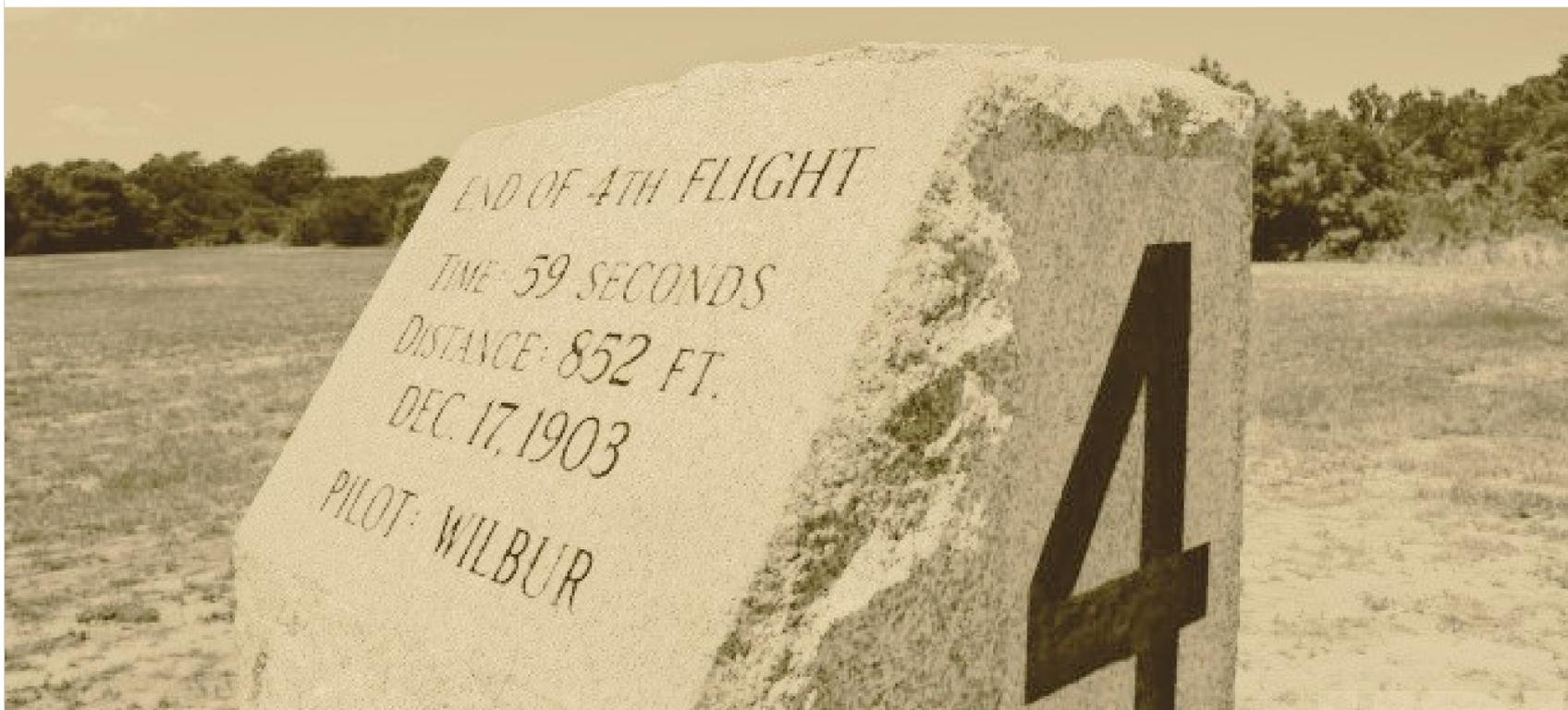
# The Centennial

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The Centennial was a massive event, taking place over six days. Planning began nine years in advance, when the First Flight Society requested that North Carolina form The First Flight Centennial Commission, which was charged with the organization of the event. A Steering Committee was formed, which was appointed by Dare County (North Carolina) Commissioners, to provide local input. A Centennial Planning Office was established in the summer of 2002 to provide a central planning location. The Centennial Planning Team was created in December 2002 to streamline the planning process. The organizational structure included the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, the National Park Service, and the North Carolina First Flight Centennial Commission.

Crowds ranged from 3,700 on the third day, with heavy rains, to almost 29,000 on the last day. There were many exhibits and programs throughout the six days, along with air shows featuring Patty Wagstaff and other aerobatic flyers, and fly-bys twice daily. Speakers before December 17 included Interior Secretary Gale Norton, North Carolina Lieutenant Governor Beverly Perdue, and North Carolina Governor Michael Easley. On December 17, speakers included the Master of Ceremonies John Travolta, Transportation Secretary Norm Mineta and Interior Secretary Gale Norton, astronaut Neil Armstrong, and President George W. Bush.

Nearly \$11 million was raised for the event, including funding from the State of North Carolina, the National Park Service, and the First Flight Centennial Foundation. Of this, around \$2 million was spent on improvements to the Wright Brothers National Memorial. There were over 120 sponsors, including many aviation and aviation-related companies.



# The Wright Route

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The Wright Route (<https://www.wrightroute.org>) was developed through a partnership with the National Aviation Heritage Area (based in Dayton, Ohio), Outer Banks Forever, the First Flight Society and the National Park Service to highlight the route that the Wright Brothers took from Dayton to Kitty Hawk, featuring the sites to visit in Dayton, then to Norfolk, Virginia, Elizabeth City, North Carolina, and Kitty Hawk & Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina. The 125th Anniversary celebrations take their inspiration from the Wright Route and expand upon it.

## The Wright Family

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Wilbur and Orville's father, Milton Wright, was first an itinerant clergyman in the Church of the United Brethren of Christ but eventually became a bishop in that Church. Milton married Susan Koerner, originally from Hillsboro, Virginia, but by then, she was living with her family on a farm in Indiana near the Ohio border in 1859. The Wright family made many moves between then and 1884, aligning with Milton's position as an itinerant preacher. Their first son, Reuchlin, was born on a farm about fifty miles from Indianapolis in 1861. Their second son, Lorin, was born in Fayette County, Indiana, in 1862. Wilbur was born on a small farm near Millville, Indiana, in 1867. Orville was born in Dayton in 1871 (following the births and deaths of the twins Otis and Ida, who died in infancy), and Katharine was born in 1874, but the family moved to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 1878. They moved to Richmond, Indiana, in 1881 and finally returned to Dayton in 1884, this time for good.

Milton had an upstairs library of theology books and an eclectic downstairs library filled with literature, history, and two sets of encyclopedias that the children devoured. Wilbur, in particular, used the library in 1886-89 while recovering from complications from a hockey injury. While Milton could not drive a nail straight, Susan had a mechanical aptitude for designing and building household appliances and toys. Susan was the one her boys came to when they wanted mechanical advice. Susan came down with tuberculosis in 1883, and her health deteriorated. By 1886, she was an invalid, and she died in 1889.

While oldest son Reuchlin set out west in 1889 and stayed, the next oldest son, Lorin, who had headed out west for a while, returned to Dayton in 1889 and remained in Dayton for the rest of his life. He married and raised a family, and his children spent much time with their uncles, Wilbur and Orville. Lorin worked at Orville's print shop for a while in 1893. He joined his brothers in Kitty Hawk in 1902 (and again in 1911). He was their designated press agent to notify the papers when they successfully flew a powered aircraft on December 17, 1903. He was their bookkeeper for their airplane business. He generally helped his younger brothers, especially Orville, after Wilbur died in 1912.

Katharine essentially ran the Wright household after Susan Wright died. She traveled to Washington and nursed Orville as he recovered from his plane crash at Fort Meyer in 1908. She accompanied Wilbur and Orville as they traveled Europe to adoring crowds in 1909 and again with Orville in 1910, 1911, 1912, and 1913.

In short, the Wrights were a family which greatly contributed to Wilbur and Orville's success.

# The One Hundred Twenty-Fifth Anniversary



Like the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary, the One Hundred Twenty-Fifth Anniversary will involve a pilgrimage, but this time it will start at Wilbur Wright's birthplace, in Hartsville, Indiana, and it will focus on the parents of Wilbur and Orville (Bishop Milton Wright and Susan Koerner Wright) and the rest of the Wright family. Aside from the final days' celebrations at Kitty Hawk, which the First Flight Society will coordinate with the National Park Service, the details of what will take place at each of the other locations will primarily be at the discretion of the local organizations.

Many people will only be interested in attending a single event close to where they live. However, a travel package could be put together that would allow those interested to do the entire event.





# Day One

December  
11, 2028

Wilbur's Birthplace

Only one place where the Wright family lived prior to settling in Dayton has been preserved: the house where Wilbur Wright was born, near Millville, Indiana. The [Wilbur Wright Birthplace Museum](#) includes the house and other buildings, along with a visitor center and community building. It has a full-size replica of the 1903 Wright Flyer. This is an appropriate place to begin the 125th Anniversary celebrations.

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# Day Two and Three

Dayton

December  
12 & 13,  
2028



Dayton, Ohio is where the Wright Brothers lived while they invented their airplane, and it is where they lived for the rest of their lives. Most of the organizations involved with Dayton and aviation are part of the National Aviation Heritage Alliance, which is the management entity of the National Aviation Heritage Area ([NAHA](#)). Its partners include the National Museum of the United States Air Force, the National Aviation Hall of Fame, the Wright Brothers National Museum at Carillon Park, Hawthorn Hill (the home built by Orville Wright), and the Wright B Flyer, among others. During the Centennial year, Dayton had its celebrations take place in July in a multi-day event.

# Day Four

December  
14, 2028

Norfolk/Hampton Area



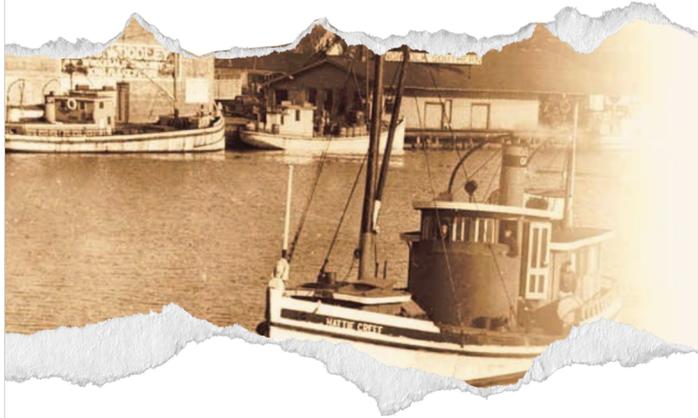
When Wilbur first traveled to Kitty Hawk, he took trains from Dayton to Old Point Comfort, by Fort Monroe in Hampton Roads, arriving in the evening of September 7. From there, he took the steamer Pennsylvania across to Norfolk. There, he bought white pine spars to be used in their glider, then took a train to Elizabeth City, arriving in the afternoon of September 8. Aside from Old Point Comfort and Norfolk itself, Hampton is of interest because of the [Virginia Air & Space Science Center/NASA Langley Visitor Center](#), and Virginia Beach is of interest because of the [Military Aviation Museum](#).

An alternative location in Virginia could be the Udvar-Hazy Center, part of the Smithsonian's National Air & Space Museum, and the nearby Hillsboro, Virginia, the birthplace of Susan Koerner Wright. Or Udvar-Hazy and Hillsboro could be added, making it an eight-day celebration.

# Day Five

Elizabeth City, NC

December  
15, 2028



Wilbur's trip from Dayton to Elizabeth City was the easy part. He then spent several days in Elizabeth City, while staying at the Arlington Hotel, trying to find someone who could take him to Kitty Hawk. He finally found Israel Perry, who was willing to take him there in his flat-bottomed fishing schooner. They took a leaking skiff to the schooner, carrying Wilbur, Perry, and a deck hand, Wilbur's heavy trunk and lumber. They sailed from the mouth of the Pasquotank River into Albemarle Sound, but strong winds came up and Perry maneuvered his craft to the North River over the night of September 11, then spent September 12 making repairs. They finally landed at a dock in Kitty Hawk on September 13.

Elizabeth City has assembled an [Aviation Trail](#), with nine markers established by the Elizabeth City First Leg of Flight Committee in 2000. The city is also home to Elizabeth City State University, which has a Department of Aviation Sciences, the only four-year collegiate aviation program in North Carolina.

# Day Six and Seven

December  
16 & 17,  
2028

Kitty Hawk, NC



The celebrations would culminate on the Outer Banks. Obviously, December 17th will primarily take place at the Wright Brothers National Memorial, and other events around the Outer Banks are planned for December 16th. We have the time to work out a plan that all the stakeholders can agree on.

## Plan to Get to the 125<sup>th</sup>

The initial plan has two phases. Phase One is to consult with stakeholders who will be responsible for putting on the events in each location, to agree on overall themes and plans. Phase Two is to begin fundraising for the celebrations based on those overall themes and plans. Each of the four state governments involved – Indiana, Ohio, Virginia, and North Carolina will be informed of the plans, and asked to help both with personnel and funding. The people and organizations who were sponsors for the Centennial celebration will be contacted for their assistance and experience. The fundraising plan will be developed.

Initial funds raised will go to marketing to increase awareness of the event and the Partnership, and then to putting together the infrastructure to begin the process of event planning and execution. Funds will also go to making each of the First Flight anniversary celebrations larger than has been typical, to increase excitement leading up to the 125th anniversary. Funds will eventually go to retaining a professional event-planning organization that will be able to work full time on the event, along with budgeting, accounting, and other functions necessary to make a successful event happen. As with the Centennial, funds may go to whatever capital improvements would help the Wright Brothers National Memorial host the event. Finally, funds will go to the actual events along the route.





## The First Flight Society

The First Flight Society was founded in 1927 as the Kill Devil Hills Memorial Association. Its initial purpose was to acquire the site where the Wright Brothers made their flights in 1903. After that was accomplished, and the land was transferred to the War Department for the construction of the Wright Brothers Monument (later transferred to the National Park Service), the Association continued to be involved in celebrations surrounding the First Flight, from the first celebration in 1928 up to the present day. Its name was later changed to the Kill Devil Hills Memorial Society, and in 1966 its name was changed to the First Flight Society.

The First Flight Society is a partner with the National Park Service at the Wright Brothers National Memorial. The First Flight Society and Wright Brothers National Memorial share in our missions and purpose resulting in the benefit of a partnership that has endured since the Wright Brothers National Memorial became a part of the National Park System in 1933.

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### Mission

One day people everywhere will be inspired by the dauntless resolution and tireless work of the Wright Brothers.

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### Vision

We tell the story of the Wright Brothers through community events, education, and the commemoration of the world's very first powered flight, in Kitty Hawk, NC.

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## Core Values

- **Guiding Principle** – We embrace the best traditions of the Wright Family – their dauntless resolution, tireless work, and courage – in everything we do.
- **Passion for Flight** – We are excited and inspired by all things aeronautical.
- **Trust** – We earn the trust of our members, donors, and partners through open communication, honesty, and accountability.
- **Respect** – We treat everyone with dignity, compassion, and integrity.
- **Partnerships** – We collaborate with others to get things done.

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# The Wright Route



**Wright Route  
Partners**





# Become A Sponsor And Share In The Legacy!



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